

# AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

a case study of  
Some Villages of Cooch Behar West Bengal

**Thesis Submitted to The North Bengal University  
Raja Rammohanpur, Darjeeling, West Bengal for the  
award of the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in  
Arts ( Sociology and Social Anthropology).**

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The 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2001.

*BiJay bihari Som*  
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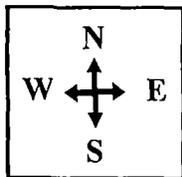
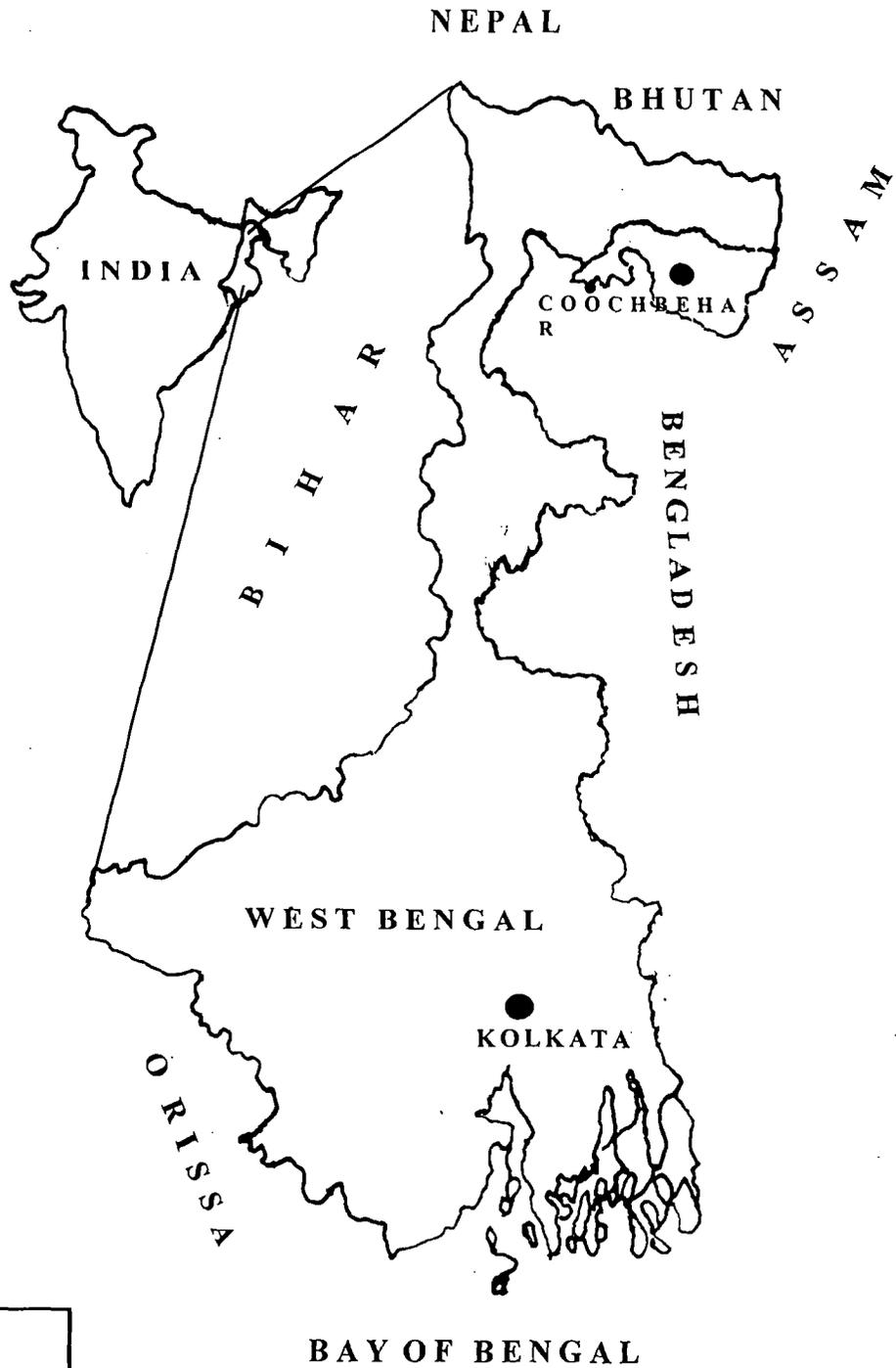
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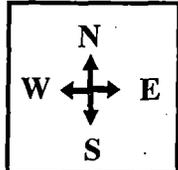
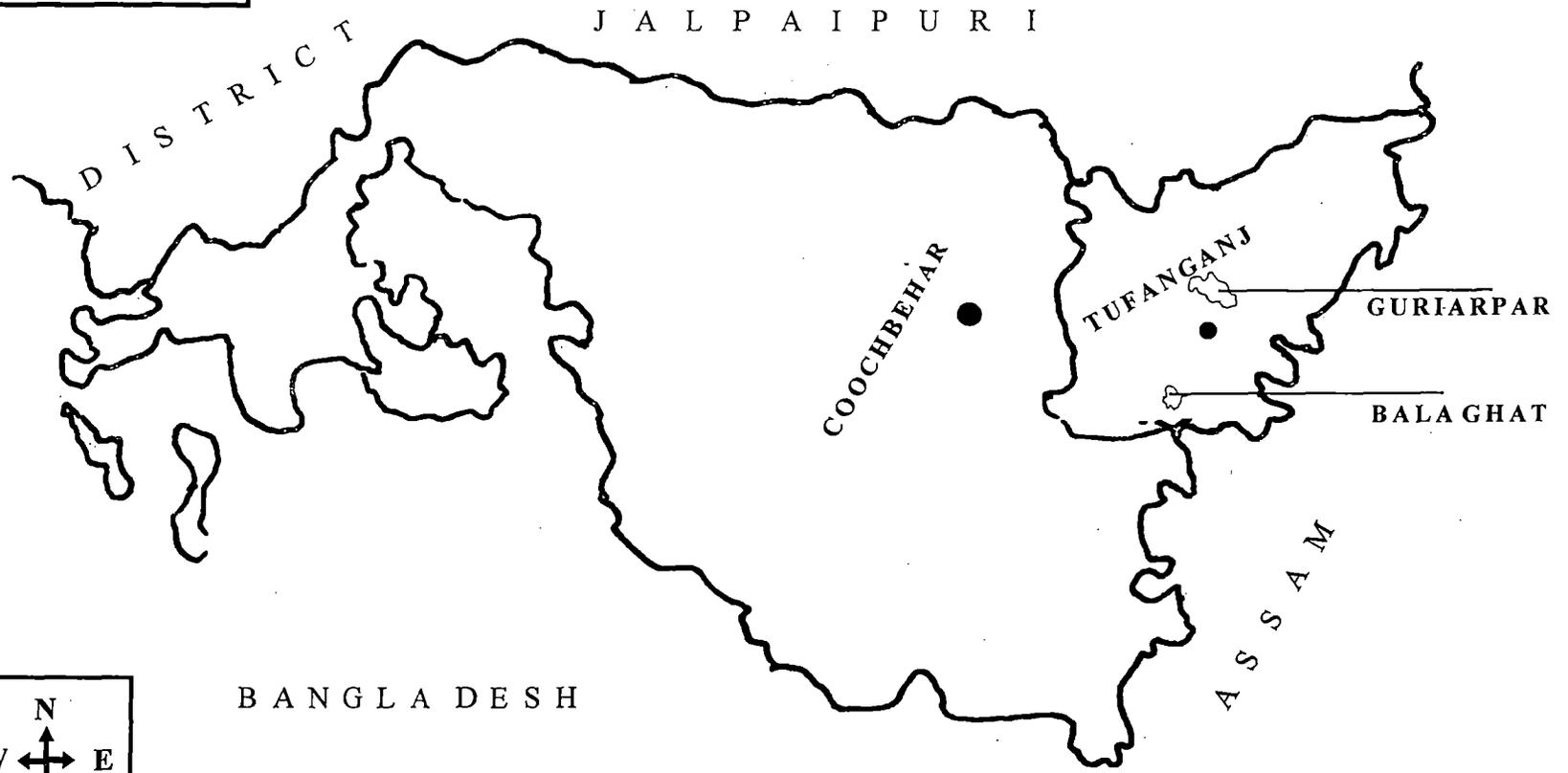
WEST BENGAL SHOWING THE STUDY DISTRICT COOCH BEHAR



Not to scale.

THE DISTRICT COOCH BEHAR SHOWING THE SUBDIVISION TUFANGANJ  
AND THE STUDY VILLAGES GURIIPAR AND BALAGHAT

WEST BENGAL  
DIST : COOCH BEHAR



NOT TO SCALE

# **Chapter - I**

## **Introduction**

# CHAPTER -I

## INTRODUCTION

### The Concept Agrarian Social Structure

The agrarian relations represent an important area of social life deeply rooted in the history of India since it is related to four basic questions. First, it is related to land - one of the principal sources of people's livelihood . Secondly , it is related to the producers - the peasants who form the major section of the population . Thirdly , the question of production, i.e. agriculture with its technology and methods, is also involved which is the genesis of human civilization. And finally, it involves the social relations between the producers and consumers-ultimately rural and urban areas. The concept " agrarian structure " is multidimensional; studied by political scientists, historians, sociologists and social anthropologists from different perspectives like productivity, development, technology, political movements, stratification, class structure and so on . The dictionary meaning of the word " agrarian " is briefly stated as pertaining to cultivated or agricultural land ( and its tenure ) related to or connected with landed property; relating to cultivated land or its management or distribution . The term ' structure ' has different connotations. Generally , a structure denotes articulation of a set or products which are mutually distinct but also interrelated to form a whole. Different scholars have defined the term " agrarian structure " in different ways. Agrarian structure refers to the institutional frame work under which agrarian operations are carried out and broadly covers the system of land tenure and land tenancy ( Chaubey : 1988 ). Agrarian structure means all mutual relations among the landlords, tenants and agricultural labourers ( Joshi quoted in Caubey 1988 ). Thorner ( 1981 : 8 ) expresses the same view. To him, "The agrarian structure is , after all, not an external framework within which various classes function, but rather it is the sum total of the ways in which each group operates in relation to the other group. We will find that some of these relations are defined and enforced by the law. Others are customary ."

In rural India, land plays a vital role in the means of production. On the basis ownership of land , social groupings are formed, and the interrelations of these groups are governed mainly by

the customary law of the society . The network of these relations are structure. Damle (1993: 2) defines agrarian structure as relationships between two groups - those who control lands and those who labour or use the land. To him, agrarian structure consists of different sets of relationships which in turn are influenced by different capacities and socio - legal statuses in which people holding them function in relation to cultivable land . Stein also views the agrarian structure as " an agrarian system being a social arrangement involving the uses of land and its products . It is to those persistent and normative relationships among social groups that one turn first " (Stein :1994 :63)".

The above definitions suggest that the central theme of agrarian structure is the relationships of the different social groups based on land and landed property. However , recently a broader view is expressed by Rogaly , Harriss - White and Bose ." By agrarian structure", they include the agricultural commerce both local and international , of bureaucracies of exchange , arrangements in land , water and labour as well as changing ideologies of gender, caste and ethnicity and, to institutionalise exchange arrangements for land lease and labour hire , an integral aspect of an expanded conception of agrarian structure ( Rogaly, Harriss- White and Bose 1995: 1862 ). Agrarian structure thus denotes the mutual relations between the different social groups engaged in the production process. In our present discussion we will present the agrarian social structure in terms of land tenure system, class structure and power structure.

## **The Problem**

Agriculture is the predominant occupation of the people of India. Not only the village people sustain their livelihood from agrarian products, but also many urban industries transform the agrarian products into industrial one. Thus agrarian economy plays an important role in the national economy of India .

Like any other society , Indian agrarian society was in a flux . There were certain myths about the Indian agrarian society .Srinivas (1993) views that " the completely self sufficient village

republic is a myth , it was always a part of a wider entity ". During the British period , some scholar- administrators identified Indian peasantry as a homogeneous category and the Indian village as a republic as well as a self sufficient unit . But plurality is an inherent character of Indian peasantry . Plurality is not only in regard to culture , ethnic composition , religion and language but also in the patterns of living , life styles , occupations, land holding , inheritance and succession and so on . Indian society had been a stratified society . Caste and *jajmani* system played an important role in the society. Hierarchy and inequality were deep-rooted in the Indian peasant society.

The peasants were the worst sufferers of the British policies mainly by their policy of land revenue and industry . The British tried to change the Indian subsistence economy into a market economy mainly for two reasons . First, with the introduction of a new kind of land management system , i.e, *Ryotwary* and *Zamindari*, the peasant producers had to pay land taxes to the state. They had to produce more for payment of land taxes. Second is the re-orientation of the objectives of agricultural production. This agricultural production had cater for the needs of the total community rather than a particular community. Moreover the home based rural industry had also suffered due to industrialization . The worst sufferers were the lower class peasantry in particular and peasantry in general . The Indian nationalist leaders mobilised the Indian peasantry to fight against the British imperialist power . Several peasant movements were organised during the pre-independence period .At that time, the study of Indian peasantry was basically initiated by Indian nationalist leaders. Of course a good number of social scientists also contributed to the same. However , the study of agrarian social structure did not emerge as a major area of research in Indian anthropology . It might be owing to their pre occupation with tribal society under the guidance of the British anthropologists.

Immediately after independence the problem of the agrarian society had drawn attention of the Indian Government . To promote the objectives of social justice among the Indian peasantry and to raise their standard of living , the question of land appeared as an important issue for the

Indian planners . Accordingly, they initiated various land reform measures like abolition of intermediaries, land ceiling, security of the tenants, and redistribution of surplus land etc. Since agriculture is in the state list , the state governments also took initiative in this regard considering their local situation. Land question thus emerged as an important area of research in social science after independence. To increase the productivity of Indian agriculture various technological measures like extension of irrigation, use of chemical fertilizer and cultivation of high yielding variety of seeds etc. had been introduced. Besides these, extension of institutional finance to the rural people had also been promoted . Distribution of all these packages were not uniform throughout the country. We find Punjab and Haryana appeared as a green revolution region . On the other hand, there were other states where cultivators cultivated their land with the same plough and bull as their forefathers used to do. Of course, ideology and values played an important role in adopting the new techniques. Caste system and *Jajmani* system played an important role in this regard . However , the development of capitalism or modernisation in agriculture helped not only to increase the productivity but also changed the social relations of production. That is why, it necessitates to study the agrarian society.

Historically Indian village community had developed a system of village panchayat or council of older which settled the disputes among the villagers. During the *Zamindari* period , the *Zamindars* were empowered by the British to govern the people residing under their jurisdiction. After independence with the introduction of new constitution , political equality had been ensured following the provision of adult franchise . The system of local self government i.e, *panchayat* system had been introduced . In Indian rural society land is the only axis on which power and class structure revolved. Moreover , other measures like education, communication, decentralization of power etc; have made a good impact on Indian rural society with regional variations . A major change took place in West Bengal after 1977 when the left front government resumed power . That is why, the agrarian society of West Bengal had drawn the attention of the social scientists of India and abroad . In 1977, ten parties headed by the C P I(M) , had won power in West Bengal . The people of West Bengal had always been inclined to left politics since

independence. The first non-congress government, the United Front Government was formed in West Bengal on March 2, 1967. It was in power for nine months only. The second United Front formed the government in 1969, had been in power for 13 months. However, the third united front in the name of Left Front Government (consisted of ten parties) won a two-third majority in the Assembly in 1977. The C P I (M) was able to secure an absolute majority. Till then, it has been reigning in West Bengal over more than two decades. The left front government initiated various programmes for agrarian development. They initiated such programmes mainly for the development of agricultural labourers, share croppers and, small and marginal farmers. Minimum wages, employment generation programme, housing, distribution of surplus land etc; are some of the important measures initiated for the upliftment of the agricultural labourers. Secondly, the share croppers in West Bengal faced inter alia, the problems of insecurity. Eviction was a common phenomenon in rural West Bengal during the congress rule. The programme '*Operation Barga*' was initiated for recording the names of *Bargadars*. Accordingly the Land Reforms Act 1952 had been amended. Thirdly, like the agricultural labourers and share croppers, small and marginal farmers were also given some benefits. These include among others, the removal of rent up to 4 acres for irrigated and 6 acres for non-irrigated land, supply of seeds and chemical fertilizer at a subsidised rate, extension of credit facilities etc. Empowerment of rural people by holding regular panchayat election, added another dimension to the agrarian society. Thus there has been a change in economic, political and social life of the agrarian society in West Bengal. Hence in order to understand the present reality of rural society in West Bengal, the present study was made.

## **Review of literature**

It is already pointed out that the concept 'agrarian structure' is multidimensional; studied by several disciplines in social science. In sociology and social anthropology, the genesis of agrarian study goes back to the village studies. In India, the village studies were first initiated during the period of first world war when the various dimension of economic misery of the rural people came up to the attention of Government and educated public in towns and cities. Initially, the need for

village studies was felt to gather facts and figures for an objective understanding of how the rural folks lived; what were their wants and why they were obliged to lead a subhuman existence (Mukherjee :1971). Later on the leaders of Indian National Movement felt its necessity to understand the social reality of the agrarian society as they required to mobilize the peasantry to make them participate in the Indian National Movement.

### **Pre-Independence Period**

During the British Period , the question on land had acquired a significant dimension. Baden Powell (1974 and 1977 ) in his work - *The Land System of British India and the Indian Village Community* provided a wealth of information on land management system and social groupings. Many British scholars also viewed Indian villages as a closed and isolated system ( Metcalfe : 1832; Maine : 1890 in Srinivas :1993 and others). They viewed Indian village as a republic and a self sufficient unit. Maine (1890) viewed ownership of landed property was on communal basis. To Metcalfe (1832) " The village communities are little republics, having nearly every thing they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations" ( Metacalfe in Srinivas:1993:23). But, Mukherjee (1957) in his work *Dynamics of a Rural Society-A Study of Economic Structure in Bengal Villages* viewed that Indian society was not static. It was very much dynamic. His study was based on a single village. He showed, how the economic structure dominated the life of the rural people not only in the economic sphere but also in the social and ideological spheres. He stressed the need for study of economic structure of the peasant society. In his other work *Six villages of Bengal* Mukhejee (1971) examined the process of change in the economic life of the people indicating its effect on social and ideological life of the people. The main objective of his works was to find out the relation between different institutions and groupings in the society. It was an intensive field study.

### **Post-Independence Period**

Immediately after independence the rural society draws the attention of the Indian planners and administrators for her development. Various developmental programmes were initiated for

agriculture. The Community Development Project and the National Extension Service were launched for many sided development of the rural people. A good number of village studies were made during the period of 1950s by the professional sociologists and social anthropologists (Marriott 1993 Rep.; Dube 1993 Rep.; Srinivas 1993 Rep. and others). Major interest of these studies was to understand the nature of social structure of India. These studies covered a vast range of data and experience from different parts of India. Srinivas (1993 Rep.) in his paper *The Social Structure of a Mysore Village* presented the structure of the Indian village in terms of different ties that bind together the village community. These include the physical features of the village, *panchayats* or council of elders, festivals, rituals, caste systems etc.

Gough (1993 Rep.) in her paper *The social Structure in a Tanjore Village* , presented the social organizations of a Mirai village in Tanjore district. She presented the social structure in terms of unity of the village community, caste system, village administration etc. Like Srinivas and Gough, Marriott (1993 Rep.) analysed the social structure in terms of village unity like caste, kinship groupings and economic organizations. Comparatively, he made a more detail analysis of economic organisation than Srinivas and Gough.

These studies were descriptive in nature. No effort was made to present data in qualitative terms. They helped understand the social realities of Indian village people. But, they did not highlight the formations of social groupings based on land which was the main concern of agrarian social structure. Dubey (1967) in his work *Indian changing villages* examined the human factors involved in the state directed programme of economic development and culture change in a technologically under developed society. Regarding the question of adoptability of Indian rural people, we find the works of Danda and Danda . In their single village study *Development and Change in Basudha* they discussed in detail the social, economic and political life of the Basuda. They observed that " the adaptation of innovations particularly in the Indian context, is a highly complex phenomena; each is governed by a number of factors simultaneously ..... before taking up any major programme for development and change a through understanding of the society

seems essential for achieving the desired effect " ( Danda & Danda : 1971 :121).

Initially, during the period of 1950s, village studies were made to gather facts on the village life. Social scientist had a comprehensive approach while studying the villages. These studies provided many new insight for formulating hypothesis about the agrarian society. Moreover, these studies helped the planners and administrators for taking decision regarding policy matters of rural development. Immediately after independence, our national leaders deeply felt the necessity of land reforms for agrarian development. During this period, the importance of agrarian society draws the attention of Indian planner and nationalist leaders since the peasant community took an active role in the freedom movement. Various peasant movements were organised against the imperialist policy of the British. Therefore to fulfil the aspirations of the Indian peasants, feudal system of land policy of the British ought be changed.

Thus we find that an agrarian reforms committee was formed by the Indian National Congress is December 1947. The Committee recommended inter alia, the following :

- ( i ) intermediaries should be abolished and land must belong to the tillers;
- ( ii ) tenant's right was to be ensured;
- ( iii ) ceiling on land was imposed;
- ( iv ) on the question on agrarian economy, the committee was in favour of cooperative joint farming and state farming.

The committee insisted that the land lord-tenant relations should be replaced by employer-employee relationship which was the main characteristics of large scale capitalist farming. However, the different five-year plan emphasised the need for land reform. Accordingly, following the main objectives of Indian constitution, the first five-year plan stressed the need for abolition of intermediaries, ceiling on land and cooperative village management. But, the first plan proposal had shown departure from the approach of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee on certain points. Since agriculture is in the state list in the Indian Constitution, the different state govern-

ments enacted various land reform measures considering their local situation as well as political ideologies. Many scholars reviewed the programmes of land reforms and their impact on Indian peasantry. A comprehensive report on land reforms in India was prepared by Joshi (1975). He in his *Land Reforms In India Trends and Perspectives* analysed the evolution of land reforms very broadly to understand the trend of changes in the class structure and class relations and of their impact on social and economic life of the people. He presented his entire works in two parts - studies in pre-independence and post-independence era. To him, land problems as an area of research was the gift of the British rule. He identified three approaches - Gandhian, Radical-nationalist and Marxist of the Indian nationalist leaders. Joshi opined that the study on the economic structure in general and of agrarian social structure in particular, did not develop into a major branch of Indian anthropology in the pre-independence era. He further continued to say that after independence the contribution of sociologists and social anthropologists was not so marked as that of economists. However, to him, after independence professional social scientists, government sponsored social scientists, political leaders, Journalists, non-academic institutions and also international institutions and international agencies contributed a lot in the field of agrarian study.

Joshi (1969) in his another paper *Land Reforms in India* discussed in brief the agrarian relations in India before and after independence. He highlighted the evolution of national agrarian programmes. Two main types of land tenure system were adopted by the British in India- Zamindari and Rayatwari. Under both the systems the rights of the British was supreme. In analysing the land reforms policy under the first and second five year plans, Joshi opined that they had proved to be favourable for the promotion of a class of capitalist farmers from the erstwhile landlords.

Koshy (1974) analysed in his article *Land Reforms in India under Plans* the state of operation of different land reform measures adopted under different plan periods from First to Fifth plan in different states under the 27 years of uninterrupted congress rule and its impact on agrarian structure and society. To him, following the objectives of the Indian constitution, i.e; to

establish a socialist pattern of society, the government enacted the land reforms acts to ensure economic growth and social justice. By citing the report on various agrarian reforms committees, he expressed that the programme of land reforms adopted since independence had failed to bring about the desired change in the agrarian structure. Koshy further pointed out that in four states - Bihar, Karnataka, Orissa and Rajasthan, no land had been declared surplus after the application of the ceiling laws. Only Kerala and West Bengal are the two states with lowest ceiling. To him the experience in Kerala and West Bengal proved that without the active cooperation and intervention of the peasantry, no land reform was possible. A powerful mass movement of agricultural labourers and poor peasants was a precondition for land reform. Many scholars opined that the land reforms programmes were not made success due to lack of political will ( Surjeet 1992; Raj 1995; Guha Roy 1995), Surjeet in his book *Land Reforms in India- Promises and Performance* pointed out that inspite of several land reforms programmes enacted by the centre as well as different state governments, the slogan *land to the tiller* still remains a battle cry. He conducted that land reforms have succeeded only in those areas where the organised peasant movement was able to put up strong resistance against the landlords, where through the united movement of agricultural workers and peasants who were able to force their will on the political structure ( Surjeet : 1992 :167).

Regarding the impact of land reforms programmes on agrarian society , most of the scholars expressed that the programme on land reforms after independence did not lead to any significant impact on the agrarian society. Appu in his works *Land Reform : Need for Re-orientation of Policies* observed " the programme of land reforms implemented since independence did not lead to any significant redistribution of land, or, the removal of all the obstacles to increase agricultural production " ( Appu : 1995 : 7). He pointed out that the reforms untouched the bottom layers of the agrarian society consisting of agricultural labourers, share croppers and rural artisans. They received little benefits from the land reforms.

The performance of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura among the state governments are

satisfactory (Koshy : 1974; Raj : 1995 ) In an editorial note of Kurukshetra ( 1995) it is observed that " it brought about great changes in the northern and eastern regions as also in states like Kerala and West Bengal under leftist governments. The laws for the abolition of intermediary interests were implemented fairly well. Land reform as a strategy of agricultural development for achieving the objective of an egalitarian pattern of society has made considerable progress." Dasgupta also shared the same view. He made an evaluative study on land reforms in West Bengal based on case studies in five different areas in West Bengal, and observed, " land reform has provided the people with a certain sense of self respect that was hitherto unknown and is still rarely seen in the rest of the country" ( Das Gupta : 1992 :28). Thonner (1981) in his *The Agrarian Prospect in India* pointed out that it took long time to promulgate the land reforms act after independence after completion of different formalities like formation of committee, parliamentary process, President's assent etc. Moreover, it had to overcome the barriers of court for effective implementation. In his view, in Zaimindery areas " the vast majority of intermediaries were transformed by the Act into a class of specially privileged agriculturalists" ( Thorner : 1981: 25) . On the other hand, in the Ryatwari areas the legislation has not created a new hierarchy but simply preserved the old one. His other work sharing with his wife Alice, *Land and Labour in India deals with* many issues of agrarian structure of India . While discussing the agrarian problems, Thorner and Thorner, pointed that " the land reform legislation in India has been defectively conceived; bills with major loopholes have been presented to the legislatures; which in turn have seriously weekend the original bills by adding ceiling amendments. ( Thorner and Thorner : 1974 : 8 ). To them, India has not yet had the kind of land reforms that could conceivably pave the way for a period of rapid agricultural development.

The above studies present the structure of agrarian society in terms of land holding and evaluates the impact of land reforms upon the agrarian society. But these studies have over looked the other aspects like formation of caste, class and power and their inter relationships which are the central theme of agrarian social structure.

During the period of 1960s to 1970s, a good number of studies contributed to the emergence of new substantive and theoretical concerns in the study on agrarian structure. Social awareness among the rural people concerning the issues of social mobility, justice, and equitable access to socio-political and economic resource, has been increased manifold which lead the social scientists to study the agrarian society on the question of stratification. Inequality and hierarchy gained importance in the discussion of agrarian society by the anthropologists as well as the economists. Beteille (1974) in his *Studies In Agrarian Social Structure* studied the patterns of inequality and conflict as arose from the ownership, control and use of land . The eight essays were presented in the book which might be grouped under three heads. The first two are of a general nature. Here conceptual problem, approach and methods to the problems have been discussed. The next three essays i.e., the social framework of agriculture, class structure and agrarian relations constitute the main part of the book deal with the nature of agrarian relations in the different parts of the country. And, the last three essays deal mainly with an specific issue i.e, agrarian unrest. Beteille, never defined the concept of "agrarian social structure ". But, he admitted that it could be analysed from a variety of angles. In discussing the agrarian relations, he analysed the concept of 'class'. By 'class', he wanted to make us understand the native economic categories by which the rural people made themselves differentiated from each other. Thus he observed, " if we take a close look at rural society in West Bengal, we will find that the people divide up their social universe not only in terms of the certain broadly economic categories. If we regard the first set as categories of the community type, we may provisionally regard the second as categories of the class type. To take a few characteristic example, we would have, among the latter, zamindar, talukdar, jotedar, adhiyar, mahindar and munish. What I am suggesting is that an analysis of each of these categories and of their mutual relations will provide a very fruitful approach to the understanding of the agrarian class structure" ( Beteille : 1974 :126) Beteille's concept of class can be best understood following Louis Dumont and Sartre's class concept. Dumont opined that a society can be best understood in terms of its own native categories . To Santre, classes are not given, men make them ( Beteille :1974 :125).

Thus if we view in this way, the concept 'class' will lose its universality since categorisation of people will vary from society to society. Secondly, Beteille failed to analyse the two important properties of class. These are conflicting interest and contradiction. He debarred from formulating the dichotomous divisions of agrarian society. However, he pointed out that economic and cultural ingredients should be taken into consideration while formulating class. Patnaik (1987) criticised Beteille's concept of class analysis. She demonstrated that dichotomies division of rural society was quite possible .

In his another work *Caste Class and Power - Changing Patterns of Stratification in Tanjore Village*, Beteille (1996) observed three important aspects of the social structure of Sripuram. Those were caste, class, and the power . The pattern of inter relationship of the three system had also been discussed. The caste status and class status were connected together. Beteille admitted that he had tried to understand the Sripuram not in terms of quantitative data but in terms of values and meanings attributed by the villagers themselves. Here Beteille tried to show how new forces were disrupting the existing pattern and producing economic and political system that no longer depend entirely on caste. In the context of agrarian social structure of traditional Sripuram, there was much greater consistency between the class system and the caste structure. The class system was largely subsumed under the caste structure. The ownership and non-ownership of land, and relations within the system of production, were to a much greater extent associated with caste than is the case today. The disintegration of village handicraft and the emergence of new 'caste-free' occupations have also contributed towards dissociating class relations from the caste structure ( Beteille : 1996 : 191) . Similarly, in traditional Sripuram, power was associated with caste. In the past, power was concentrated on the hands of Brahmins. But today the village panchayat is controlled by non-Brahmins. Moreover, power has also become independent of class to a greater extent than it was in the past. Ownership of land is no longer the decisive factor in acquiring power. Numerical support and a strategic position in the party machinery play an important role .Adult franchise and Panchayati Raj have introduced new process into the village society.

Bailey (1957) in his *Caste and the Economic Frontier* pointed out a dissociation between caste and land which was a chief source of wealth as well as the determinant of class position in the rural society. To him before 1885, the warriors of an upper caste owned almost all the land but today owing to the extension of the economic frontier and political changes, they (the warriors) own only 28 percent of the village's total land. Chauhan (1972) in his paper *Caste, Class and Power : An Analysis of the Stratification System in Rural Upper Assam* tried to analyse the relationship between the caste stratification on the one hand, and class and power on the other. He studied the three villages in the district of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar in 1969. The three determinant factors viz. land, income and education had been taken into consideration for analysing the relationship between caste, class and power. He observed that caste and class were strongly correlated with each other. But, caste status and power position had been dissociated.

Mencher (1978) in her work *Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu -Past Origin, Present Transformation and Future Prospects*, tried to explore in detail the complex relationship between agricultural practices and socioeconomic structure. The study was mainly concerned with the social forces that accelerated change. Her study was based on field research in ten villages of Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu during the period in 1963, 66-67 and 70-71. Mencher discussed in detail the agricultural practices, tenancy relations, caste, class and political structure. She opined that only radical measures of land reforms could solve the problem, Mencher had identified the social classes mainly on the basis of size of land holding and participation of family labour in agricultural operations. Thus she identified five classes viz., the landless, poor peasant, middle peasant or self sufficient peasant, rich farmers and capitalist farmers. She did not consider the labour exploitation criteria as used by Rudra, (1992) Bardhan( 1984), Patnaik (1987) and others in identifying classes from the Marxian point of view. Unlike Beteille (1974), she observed a correlation between caste, class and power. The landless class consisted of untouchable (Pariyans) and other low castes (Naicker), the poor peasant consisted of low castes and also fewer untouchable castes. Higher castes like Brahmins, Pattadars were in the group of capitalist, rich and middle peasant. And, in respect of political power, Mencher opined that "control

of land also implies political control, and the important local political figures- the panchayat presidents and the panchayat union chairmen, some of whom also hold higher -level offices such as MLA- are generally large land holders themselves, or in any case linked by class or by political strings to the land holding group " ( Mencher : 1978 : 286). There are also some works on agrarian studies centred on Land, Caste and Politics ( Singh :1988; Omvedt:1982 and Pathy :1982 ). <sup>On</sup> *Land, Caste and Politics in India -an Introductory Essay*, Omvedt (1982 ed) presented a theoretical as well as overall view of class and caste in rural India of today; its role in relation to both old and developing forms of agrarian relation of production. He analysed the basic structure of caste in feudal society of India and also highlighted the change that occurred under the British rule. He analysed the various forms of class struggle that took place in India. Finally, he analysed the new class structure and the role of caste in the rural areas in post-colonial bourgeois state with regional variations. He classified the rural households into three groups viz.; rich farmers, middle peasants and poor peasants including agricultural labourers. Omvedt opined that after independence, caste had been dissociated with class. He observed a new caste-class relations developed in India with regional variations. These were identified by him as semi-feudal, backward semi-feudal, backward semi-capitalist, mixed semi-feudal and semi-capitalist, high tenancy-capitalist and low capitalist zones. To him, West Bengal falls within mixed semi-feudal and semi-capitalist zone.

Pathy (1982) in his *Caste Class and Power in Rural Orissa* analysed the inter relationships between class and caste; and their influence on agrarian power structure. He studied three different tribal villages and observed that a broad stratification based on caste hierarchy is evident in all the villages. To him, the caste status is not congruent with class status.

Bose (1984) in his work *Classes in Rural Society : A Sociological Study of Some Bengal Villages* attempted to analyse the stratification of Indian peasantry in terms of class and tried to find out its relationships with economic and political structure of the society. His observation was based on field study of four villages in West Bengal. He presented a detailed analysis of

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economic, political and social structure of the four villages. Following the Marxist-Leninist model, he classified the Indian peasantry into five classes viz; landlord, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and peasant proletariats. To him, the caste is closely related to class. The real power rests on the hands of the economically powerful class. *The Upper Classes who also come from upper castes continue to hold power in the Villages* ( Bose : 1984 : 254) . Thus caste, class and power are correlated . The agrarian structure of the four villages under study exhibits the pre-capitalist characteristics.

There is another work of Bhadra (1991) on stratification. In his work *Caste and Class : Social Stratification in Assam* he made an empirical study in three different types of villages in Assam . The main objective of his work was to identify the structure and process of social stratification of Assam. Bhadra observed that caste and class were to a large extent dissociated with power. Class and power had also diffused among the individual families of the caste and the tribe. Although, ownership of economic resources was to a certain extent remained an important factor facilitating acquisition of power and prestige. Bhadra identified three broad classes viz. land-owner, share cropper and agricultural labourer with a number of subclasses in each category. Fourteen such subclasses had been identified by him. He neither defined the concept of class nor explained the important properties of class viz conflicting interest as well as contradiction with opposite class. How would Bhadra differentiate the conflicting interest of share cropper cum cultivator from cultivator ?

The Indian agrarian society had been changed with the development of Indian agriculture by adopting various measures like new technology, land reforms etc. To observe the changing aspect of the agrarian society; and also the possible impact of new technology upon the rural people, a good number of studies made by economists and sociologists during the period of 1980s -1990s ( Rudra : 1992 ; Bardhan : 1984; Rudra and Bardhan 1983; Patnaik : 1987 and Damle : 1993).

Damle (1993) made an important contribution in this field. In his work *Land Reforms And Changing Agrarian Relations*, Damle sought to examine the changing class positions of various sections and the changes in agrarian relations resulting from the implementation of land reforms and other developmental measure in agriculture. He made a comparative study in the two regions viz. subsistence and commercial. He selected four villages representing two from each zone for study. He observed that the impact of land reforms on agrarian relation was not uniform every where in Dakshin Kananda district. Caste factor played an important role in the land tenure pattern in both the settings. Generally, land owners belonged to the high caste groups. Some variations were observed in respect of tenancy relations, credit relations, and conditions of agricultural labourers. The conditions of agricultural labourers were relatively better in commercial setting than in the subsistence setting. Regarding tenancy in the commercial setting, the permanent tenancies ( Mulageni tenants) were widely prevalent along with temporary tenancies ( Chalageni tenants), whereas in the subsistence setting only the temporary tenancies were most common. The extent of utilization of institutional credit facility was more in commercial than it was in the subsistence. Generally, the big landowners in both the setting took advantage of institutional credit. Further more, the effective utilization of rural developmental measures like Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme was also found in the commercial setting.

On changing aspect of agrarian relations, we find a joint work of Sinha, Prasad and Pandey (1982). They studied in their paper *Changing Agrarian Structure and Relations in North Bihar- A Case Study*, the changing agrarian structure and relations of the 3- villages of North Bihar in 1981. They collected data from ninety households and observed that the land reforms measures did not make any radical change in favour of tillers of the land. That is why, land was unevenly distributed. However, they observed that number of absentee land lords had been declined since they sold their land to the middle peasants. The middle peasants were able to raise their agricultural productivity by hard labour and adopting new technology. The barter system had been declined . Commercialization of agriculture had also been started. Hence the middle peas-

ants were able to purchase land by increase their income.

On the question of applicability of Marxian model of agrarian class analysis in Indian peasantry, Rudra, Bardhan and Patnaik have made both empirical as well as theoretical contribution. Rudra and Bardhan (1983) made an attempt to study agrarian relations. They collected data from 110 villages. The result of their survey was presented in their work *Agrarian Relations in West Bengal- Results of Two Surveys*. Their main objective was to bring out terms and conditions of various formal or informal contracts involved in land-lease, wage labour and credit relations in agriculture. They made such an intensive and fairly large-scale survey in rural India in two phases in 1975-76 and in 1979. They analysed in detail the inter-linkages among the land and labour contracts, land and credit contracts, or labour and credit contracts between two agents (landlord-employer-creditor and tenant-labourer-borrower) which determined the nature of production in Indian agriculture.

On the question of agrarian class analysis as well as applicability of Marxist-Leninist model of class analysis in Indian agrarian society, Rudra (1992) made another work *Political Economy of Indian Agriculture*. Here he presented various dimensions of agrarian society, like efficiency of labour, market, money lending, small-farm, tenancy, strategies of agricultural development and finally, production relations. While discussing the production relations in Indian agriculture, he grouped first the Indian peasantry in the five class models following the Leninist model. Then he showed the Indian peasantry could be grouped into two classes considering the point of class interest. Thus he overruled the notion of non-applicability of two-class model in Indian peasantry.

Bardhan (1984) in his work *Land, Labour and Rural Poverty- Essays in Development Economics*, made an attempt to make some balance between theoretical and statistical testing as well as qualitative analysis of agrarian relation in India. On the question of agrarian class formation, he applied the model of Lenin -Mao - Roemer of agrarian hierarchy in five hundred sample villages in rural West Bengal. He collected data from the secondary source - the National Sample

Survey 1972-73 on employment and unemployment survey. He observed that " it seems capitalist landlords constitute 0.2 percent of all agricultural households in rural West Bengal, rich farmers 14.3 percent, family farmers 29.2 percent, poor peasants 8.7 percent, and landless labourers 35.9 percent "( Bardhan 1984 :168) . He further observed " in three districts of northern West Bengal, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur, agricultural productivity is lowest among all the districts of the state, and the importance of the family farmer class is the highest. All this seems to suggest an inverse relation between agricultural progress and the proportional importance of the family farmer class " ( Bardhan . 1984 : 179 ).

Patnaik, another marxist scholar, was critical on the works of sociologists and economists on the agrarian classes. In her work (1987) *Peasants Class Differentiation- a Study in Method with Reference to Haryana* she formulated and applied an empirical criteria for the grouping of agricultural households into social classes in the marxist sense. She observed that the concept "class" was not properly defined by Sociologists and Economists . Moreover, they failed to identify the proper criteria by which they can formulate different classes. She further rejected the notion pleaded by sociologists and economists regarding non-applicability of marxian concept of two tire model in Indian rural society.

Thus she criticised Beteille, Mukherjee and Kusambi . On the question of mode of production, she observed " the contemporary Indian agrarian situation is some where between that of china in the 1930s and the capitalist countries of the 1920s. Just as semi-feudal characterization does not apply in Punjab-Haryana. The capitalist characterization is inapplicable in the backward parts of Bihar or Madhya .Prodash" ( Patanik : 1987 :28). On the question of class analysis she grouped all the six classes viz. landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant, small peasant, poor peasant, poor tenant- labourer with land and finally, landless labourers into two groups viz. exploiting class and exploited class. The exploiting class formed with landlord and rich peasant since they used hired labour. The exploiter class consisted of poor peasants, poor tenants and labourers with or with out land as they mainly hired out their labour. And, she grouped middle and small

peasants into the category of self-employed. They were neither exploiters nor exploited as they were self employed. Shanin made significant comments on Patnaik's thesis regarding differentiation of peasantry. Shanin observed that Patnaik's thesis attained a "high ideological relevance". (Shanin in Sharma :1997 : 91)

On the question of mode of production, Patnaik (1971) in her another work *Capitalist Development in Agriculture - A Note*, observed that a new class of capitalist farmer was emerging in every region in India. The rate of capitalist development varied widely in different regions depending on historical conditions. Her observation was based on survey work done in 1960 among the sixty six big farmers scattered over ten districts in five states viz. Andhra Pradesh, Mysore, Madras and Gujarat. But Sharma (1997) in his paper *Agrarian Stratification : Old Issues and New Explanation, and New Issues and Old Explanation in Rural Society in India* criticised the Marxian model for agrarian stratification. To him, the mode of production thesis and the differentiation of peasantry hypothesis advocated by Marxist scholars like Rudra, Patnaik and others are insignificant for stratifying the Indian rural society. He urged an integrated approach of history, tradition, and Marxism for a deeper understanding of Indian society. He observed " history implies a philosophy of Indian history, tradition implies a dialectical nature of change in society, and Marxism imposes its adaptation in its ethos " ( Sharma :1997 :98). Sharma (1997) in his other work *Social Stratification and Mobility* highlighted the different dimensions of stratification. Both structural and cultural perspectives were used to analyse the caste, the class, the caste and class consciousness, occupational and social mobility, power structure and value orientation. Land tenure systems, land reforms, panchayati raj, educational achievements, occupational opportunities and net works were studied in particular in view of the multidimensional of social stratification and limitation of the caste model" ( Sharma: 1997:22).

The social relations of production had been changed due to commercialization of agriculture. A good number studies had been done on the issue by several scholars ( Breman;1993; Bliss and Stern : 1982; Harriss : 1982). Breman (1993) in his *Beyond Patronage and Exploi-*

*tation : Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujrat* studied the changing labour relations in rural south Gujrat under the impact of a growing market-economy. To him, the protective measures on the part of a democratic government play marginal roles in ameliorating the living conditions of the lowest rank of the rural poor. He observed that the traditional dependency and bondage relations had undergone a fundamental change. He called the process of freeing of agricultural labourers "depatronisation".

In his work *Capitalism and Peasant Farming : Agrarian Structure and Ideology in Northern Tamil Nadu*, Harriss (1982) explained the persistence of under development and poverty and of small-scale household production in a village in North Arcot in Tamil Nadu. It was a case study which highlighted theoretical questions about the capitalist transformation of agriculture. He observed the mutual dependency between landowners and labourers continued to exist insipid of green revolution which contributed to increase wage level and demand for labour. This was mainly for existence of inegalitarian and exploitative social structure. The ideology of caste helped to dominate the lower caste by the upper. That is why, full transformation to a capitalist system did not take place.

Changing agrarian relations with the introduction of modernisation in agriculture was highlighted by Jodhka (1994) in his paper *Agrarian Changes and Attached Labour - Emerging Patterns in Haryana Agriculture*. He studied three villages in Hariyana. He observed that development of capitalism in agriculture had been accompanied by a near total erosion of the ideology of patronage and loyalty. To him, the phenomenon of attached labour had been declining.

Economic structure of an Indian village was studied by Bliss and Stern (1982) in their work *Palanpur- the Economy of an Indian Village*. They studied various dimension of the village economy like efficiency of agriculture, farm size and productivity, green revolution, tenancy etc. On tenancy, they observed, the predominant form of tenancy was share cropper and percentage of share is 50 : 50.

## **Agrarian Studies on West Bengal After 1977**

The ten party led coalition government known as left front government headed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) assumed power in West Bengal in 1977. The left front government had initiated various rural developmental measures for the benefit of agricultural labourers, tenants and poor peasants. The West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 had been amended for this purpose. To ensure security of the tenant, a new programme "Operation Barga", had been introduced for recording the names of *bargadars*. With the introduction of operation barga and decentralisation of power, agrarian society of West Bengal has undergone a change. Hence to observe the impact of those measures on different social groups in rural West Bengal, a good number of scholars of different branches of social sciences studied different issues like *Panchayati Raj*, land reforms tenancy, credit relations, class structure, leadership pattern and so on. Thus Agrarian study in West Bengal gained a momentum after 1977. Lieten in his work *Continuity and Change in Rural West Bengal* evaluated the impact of the left front government on economic and social life in rural West Bengal. He studied land reforms, operation barga, various poverty alleviation and rural development programmes and so on. He studied a village in Birbhum district. In respect of land reforms, he observed that "the process of depeasantisation (with its implication of proletarianisation and immiserisation) had been halted; at least in the district which I have studied more closely" (Lieten :1992: 143). In his view West Bengal had been successful in implementing the programme of land reforms, operations barga and other poverty alleviation programmes. He concluded sharing with the views expressed by Westergaurd that "the changes set motion as regards the rural power structure are considerable" (Lieten : 1992: 189).

Webster (1992) in his work *Panchyati Raj and the Decentralisation of Development Planning in West Bengal* analysed the role of panchayats in rural development, class character of panchayats, impact of developmental programme on different social groups and others. His empirical study was based on twenty five villages from the two *gram panchayats* of Burdwan district. In his view, to some extent the economic conditions of the poor people of the rural West Bengal had been improved owing to successfully implementation of panchayati raj. To him, "

there is now significant representation in the gram panchayat from among the poorer and more marginal social groups ..... They have a presence and involvement in local government and development that they had never previously possessed". ( Webster : 1992 : 246 ) . He supported the panchayati raj and in particular the left front government for changing material conditions of rural Burdwan .

However, Mallick ( 1993 ) in his work *Development Policy of a Communist Government West Bengal Since 1977* criticised the left front government for failure in redistributing the development reforms. Using interviews with government official and ruling party members as well as internal government and party documents, the author concentrated upon the left fronts rural development policy . He compared and contrasted it with the policy towards industrial labour , the state bureaucracy and big businessmen . However, Mallick admitted that the powers and policy options of the state government were necessarily limited . A great deal of more could have been achieved , had the ruling party not been impeded by the elitist nature of its political biases. Acharya ( 1993 ) in his paper *Panchayats and Left Politics in West Bengal* also expressed the similar views . He observed that with the introduction of panchayati raj , a new generation of leadership had emerged but their caste and class background remained same as earlier. Mainly the rich and the middle peasant dominated the rural power structure . Participation of agricultural labourers and poor peasants in the decision making process was very limited . To him actually party bureaucracy held the rural power and that power had been generated from the upper layer of the rural society. Similar views were also expressed by Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee (1993) in their work *Leadership, Faction and Panchayati Raj- A Case Study of West Bengal*. The main objective of their study was to find out the changes that took place in the villages of West Bengal with the introduction of panchayati raj . To them, the poor people were still far away from the seat of power and any vital or major decision was taken by the leaders belonging to the dominant lineages who had been dominating the village over the years.

Harriss (1993 ) also observed the opposite view in his article *What Is Happening In*

*Rural West Bengal ? - Agrarian Reforms , Growth and Distribution* . He made his empirical study in the two villages in the Birbhum district. Though he highlighted certain changes taking place in respect of personal dependency, credit control by the rich peasant etc., he concluded in saying , " the agrarian politics pursued by the government have brought about any really significant change in the agrarian structure or that the reforms have been instrumental in agricultural productivity " ( Harriss : 1993:1246 ). Mukherjee and Bondyopadhyay (1993) in their report *New Horizon for West Bengal's Panchayat - a Report for the Government of West Bengal* expressed that panchayat achieved much specially in the field of land reform and rural development . To them " the post land reform agrarian structure of West Bengal will be characterised by small land owners, patta holders and recorded bargadars " ( Mukherjee and Bondyopadhyay 1993:41 ) . However, critics like Acharya (1994) pointed out that power had yet to travel down the lower levels. Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes had been elected but did not held key positions. Moreover, representations of landless agricultural labourers and sharecroppers were negligible .

But, Pramanick and Dutta's observation contradict the observations of Acharya. Pramanick and Dutta (1994) in their empirical work *Panchayats and People - the Bengal Experience* observed , " the data on social background of the panchayat members reveal that there has been a concentration of poor peasants and low income group people in leadership structure and absolute absence of the rich landlords in the panchayats " ( Pramanick and Dutta 1994:62 ) . A good number of social scientists studied tenancy relation in West Bengal. Dasgupta wrote a good number of papers on tenancy relations. Das Gupta (1984 ) in his two articles-one *Sharecropping in West Bengal during the Colonial Period* and the other ' *Share Cropping in West Bengal from Independence to Operation Barga* analysed the history , growth and development of sharecropping system in West Bengal . He pointed out , the major changes took place in the tenancy act. He presented the counter argument against the major criticism on *Operation Barga* and concluded that the tenancy for the sharecropping system had been declining and the demise of the system was by no means imminent .Das Gupta (1992) in his other article *Land*

*Reforms in West Bengal: A Case Study in Impact of Land Reforms on Agriculture and Rural Development* observed that the old style large scale absentee landlordism was no longer existed. The dependency relationship between land lord and tenant of the past had been disintegrating and an impersonal market based relationship had been taking place. To him, land reforms had provided them with a sense of self respect that was hitherto unknown and still rarely seen in the rest of the country. The success of the *Operation Barga* had also been claimed by Ghosh (1992) in his paper *Evaluation of the Programme of Operation Barga*. The success of *Operation Barga* contributed to increase food productivity and the wages of agricultural labourers. By citing the National Sample Survey Data, he claimed that 60 percent of the total agriculture land in West Bengal was owned by small and marginal farmers as against the national figure of 29 percent. Ghosh (1986) in his another work *Operation Barga and Land Reforms* presented the history and existing laws of the act in West Bengal. He analysed the programme of *Operation Barga* in detailed and concluded that *Operation Barga* was really an intervention sought to restore the health of agrarian life, not only for increasing production but also to provide stability in that production process by giving security to the major partners in agricultural production, namely the sharecroppers in a country like India.

Rudra (1981) in his *One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward* criticised the left front government for its adjustment with capitalism by implementing various agrarian programmes. The programmes like *Operation Barga*, Food for Work and *Panchayati Raj* had been evaluated by him. He considered that CPI(M) was promoting party struggle instead of class struggle since the landless labourers of different parties were fighting with each other for getting little share of too little land available for distribution among them. The policy of *Operation Barga* did not help to perpetuate the same. The programme had no effect in curving the position of the rich farmers. The same observation was also made by Khasnabis (1981) in his article *Operation Barga - Limits to Social Democratic Reformism*. He called this programme a classic "bourgeois democratic revolution." In his another article *Tenurial Conditions in West Bengal: Continuity and Change*, Khasnabis (1994) observed that 15 years after *Operation Barga*, tenants of South

Bengal yet remained unsure of their tenurial security and failed to get the legally stipulated share of the product and lacking in access to institutional facilities. They were reverting to private source of credit.

The preceding analysis shows that the major works on agrarian social structure had been done during the period of 1950-60. Initially, they were mainly concerned with village studies. Most of the studies were concerned with village life. Thereafter, during the period of 1970s issue specific analysis either single or more than one had been studied. The major issues were land reforms, caste system, class structure, power structure and so on. Some times interrelationship among the different issues like caste, class and power had been analysed by some scholars. Changing aspect of the agrarian society had also been analysed in this context. Commercialisation of agriculture had added a new dimension to the agrarian society.

After 1970s, the importance of study of agrarian society had been declined. But after 1977 when the left front Government came into power in West Bengal, the importance of study of agrarian society gained a momentum in the state. The left front Government is dominated by CPI(M) whose main objective was to empower the downtrodden people of the agrarian society both politically and economically. To achieve this objective, the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 had been amended. On the question of security of tenants the programme of *Operation Barga* had been introduced. Moreover several rural development programmes like employment generation programme for agricultural labourers, distribution of surplus land among the landless labourers, extension of institutional credit facilities etc., were introduced. Further to increase the agricultural production, various agricultural inputs like seed, fertilizer were provided either free of cost or at subsidized rate to the marginal and poor farmers. Commercialisation of farming has also been started by the entrepreneurial cultivators. Moreover for political empowerment of the rural masses the Government of West Bengal has decentralised the state power by introducing Panchayati Raj system. The 5th Panchayat election was held in May 1998. A good number of panchayat members now belong to the lower strata of rural society. All these have contributed a positive impact on rural West Bengal.

Most of the empirical studies on agrarian structure in West Bengal are limited to the southern districts only. A very few studies are available in the northern districts of West Bengal. Particularly the district of Cooch Behar has remained untouched. The agrarian scenario of Cooch Behar has a very interesting history uniquely different from that of the other districts of West Bengal. The region of Cooch Behar remained under the rule of the Koch King till 1949. This feudal kingdom had its own land tenure system where king was the supreme owner of the land. Below the king there were jotedars who leased-in jote; a tract of land for cultivation as well as residential purpose from the king. Agricultural land was cultivated by adhiars. Between these two, there were also different under tenant classes. However the whole scenario changed rapidly with the changing political status of Koch Kingdom in 1949 when it was merged with Indian territories. Since then all programmes on agrarian reforms adopted by the West Bengal Government were implemented in the district. Thus the pre-merger class structure had been changed. Therefore, in order to understand the present nature of agrarian society of Cooch Behar, the present problem has been selected for study.

## Objectives

The study of agrarian social structure is so vast. It is impossible to look into all its aspects in depth (Beteille : 1974:1). The present study is mainly concerned with tenancy relation, class relation and power structure. The interrelation between class and power has also been examined.

It would be meaningless to present the existing agrarian structure of Cooch Behar without knowing its historical background. It will help us to understand the changing aspect of the relation. Cooch Behar was a princely state before independence of India; a part of bigger Koch Kingdom of Kamrup, Assam. During the British rule it became a revenue paying estate. What was the population composition of pre-merger Cooch Behar? What was the land management system? What was the class structure of rural Cooch Behar? *Jotedari* system was prevalent during the reign of Cooch Behar. How and why did such system develop? What was the rural power structure? The social political status of Cooch Behar had been changed after merger with India in

1949. Cooch Behar became a district town of West Bengal after independence. People had been influxes in Cooch Behar from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Migration changed the demographic and socioeconomic structure of the region. The incidence of migration took place during the period of freedom movement of Bangladesh. Moreover, political and ethnic violence in the North Eastern states further contributed migration in Cooch Behar. Thus migration in different phases made an impact on the socioeconomic condition of the people of Cooch Behar resulting in population pressure on land. Hence the incidence of migration has been analysed.

With the introduction of new Constitution along with various legal measures like adult franchise, land reforms etc., the economic and political status of the people of Cooch Behar had also been changed. The present study designed to answer the following research questions. What is the present land management system? What is the size of holding? What are the different agrarian classes? What are their relationships? How are caste and class related? Agricultural labourers form a major social group in any agrarian society. Who are the agricultural labourers? What are the different types of agricultural labourers? What are their working conditions? What is their payment system? What are their land holding patterns? What is the emerging pattern of agricultural labour relations? etc.

Tenancy forms an important dimension in the agrarian society. It has a historical continuity. In traditional Cooch Behar, tenancy played an important role in the land management system. After the left front Government came into power in 1977, various land reforms programmes were implemented; *Operation Barga* was one of them. The present status of *bargadars* is to be analysed in detail. Thus the present study is concerned with the following research question on tenancy. Who are the *bargadars*? Do they get their name recorded? If not, why? What is the relation between land lord and tenant. How far do landlord and tenant obey the tenancy law? Recently, land surrender or adjustment is being made between landlord and tenant. Why do the tenants surrender or adjust their leased-in land with their land lords? What sorts of benefits do they receive from the land lords? Commercialization of agriculture and *operation barga* attribute

a new type of tenancy which may be called leased -tenancy in the rural Cooch Behar. The emerging trends of the new tenancy have been analysed.

After 1977 the rural power structure in West Bengal has been changed due to regular holding of panchayat election . The power structure of rural Cooch Behar in particular had undergone a substantial change because it was a princely state before 1949 . King was the supreme ruler. At the village level, there had been an institution known as *Dewanias* . These *dewanias* were large *jotedars* residing on their own firms. The tenants were completely under the *jotedars*. Thus *dawanias* reigned as the civil head of the community. They arbitrated all kinds of disputes at the village level . A *Chaukidari* system was also introduced in Cooch Behar during 1882-83. In 1893-94 the Cooch Behar *Chaukidari* Act, 1893 was passed in 1993-94. These *Chaukidars* were empowered with police functions. After independence the above system had been changed. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 was introduced which replaced the old system by creation of *Gram and Anchal Panchayat*. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 was extended to the districts in various phases from 7th June 1958 to 8th June 1960. Under the new system three tier administrative system i.e., village level, block level and district level known as *Gram Panchayat* , *Anchal Panchayat* and *Zilla Parishad* respectively. Each elected member usually hold office for a period of 4 years. However, during the period 1950-60 it was observed that *Panchayat* election was not hold regularly. Most of the members were nominated and they belonged to the class of *Jotedars*. But after 1977, the situation had been changed since *Panchayat* election had been regularly held by the left front government. Therefore in order to understand the present agrarian power structure, the following research question were enquired into. Which political party dominated the *Panchayat* system ? What is the economic background of *Panchayat* members ? What is their caste status ? Besides the gram *Panchayat* there are other representative bodies in the village . What are the different types of representative bodies in the villages ? Who are the representatives on such bodies ? How do they function ? Besides this how caste, class and power are associated with each other. The present study has been made to

answer the above research questions. Moreover, the changing aspect of the agrarian society has also been highlighted.

## Methodology

The main objective of the research is to analyse the agrarian relations. Cropping pattern has a direct impact on such relations. 92 percent of the total population of the district lives in the 1139 villages (1991 census). Paddy both winter and summer form the major crops in Cooch Behar. Jute and Tobacco are among the traditional cash crops. However, commercialization of agriculture had been started in the district. Among the commercial crops - Summer paddy, potato, cabbage, cauliflower, green chilly and tomato are important. Hence the nature of cropping pattern had been taken into consideration for selection of the villages. *Secondly*, heterogeneity of population is an important feature of the villages of Cooch Behar. Population of Cooch Behar consists of *Rajbanshi*, Muslims and other migrated population from Bangladesh. Numerically, *Rajbanshis* are dominant. Community structure had also been taken into consideration in selecting the villages. Hence considering two main criteria- cropping pattern and community structure, I selected the two villages from the Tufanganj subdivision which exhibit the common features of rural Cooch Behar.

There are two *Panchayat Samities* in Tufanganj. I selected the two villages within the same *Panchayat Samity* named Tufanganj *Panchayat Samity* No. 1, but, under two separate *Gram Panchyats*. I started my field work in the month of January 1995 and completed it by April 1996 in two phases. I completed the first phase during the period January 1995 to June 1995 for listing the households. The second phase was completed during the period October 1995 to April 1996 for sample survey. Moreover, I visited the villages off and on when I felt necessity for special information.

An exhaustive census enumeration schedule was prepared for collection of data from each household by interviewing the male head or in his absence any male who could give the informa-

tion since female members were not able to give information on agriculture and land . Data were collected from all the households of the two sample villages . Not a single household was left out.

Following the census enumeration schedule, I collected data on the following aspects from each household. These included; (i) caste, religion and clan; (ii) details of family members like age, sex, marital status, education, occupation and relationship with the head of the household. (iii) details of land- size of holding, leasing in and leasing out, cropping pattern etc; (iv) farm assets including draught and other animals; (v) consumer durables; (vi) transfer of assets proceeding the last ten years and so on . After collecting data on these aspects, they were analysed for determining the status of each household . Having analysed these data, the households were grouped broadly into four categories viz; agricultural labourers, share croppers, cultivators and non-agricultural considering their occupation and major source of income.

The second phase of my sample survey was started in the month of October 1995. Accordingly a set of schedule was prepared for collection of data on various aspects of economic activities from each category of household. About 40 percent of the total households was selected at random method. Information on quality and quantity of land, land use pattern, technology used for cultivation, labour use pattern, productivity, usury practices, marketing of products etc, were collected from the households of cultivators. Secondly informations on mode of employment, duration and place of work, yearly employment pattern, wages, indebtedness, government aid etc. had been collected from the households of agricultural labours . Thirdly, informations from the tenant households were collected on their status of tenancy, terms of tenancy, percentage sharing of costs and products, cropping pattern, place of threshing, land surrendering pattern with their landlord, reasons for such surrender, borrowing, particulars of the landlord like caste, residence, occupation, size of holding etc. Fourthly, data on economic activities were also collected from the non- agri cultural household. Information on Power like membership of political party, position held in any local bodies etc. had also been gathered from all the sample households.

Besides the Primary data, the secondary data were also collected from various sources like District Census, Annual Reports of the agricultural departments, District Gazetteer etc. Data relating to the agrarian system during the region of Koch Kingdom were also collected from the available historical documents. Elderly people of the two villages were also consulted regarding the land tenure system of Koch Behar during the reign of Koch Kingdom. Data thus collected were processed, analysed and compared with available literature. Their results are presented in the subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter-II**

# **Traditional Agrarian Social Structure of Cooch Behar**

## CHAPTER -II

### Traditional Agrarian Social Structure of Cooch Behar

#### Changing Political Status of Cooch Behar

Historically, the political status of Cooch Behar had been in a flux- from a kingdom to a district town. Before it came into being in its present status- a district, it was a part of a bigger Kingdom of Kamrup in ancient times; known as Prajyotishpur. The present Assam, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur ( now in Bangladesh) were the parts of Kamrup. The Kingdom- Kamrup was divided into four parts viz *Kampith, Ratnapith, Subarnapith and Soumarpith*. The present Cooch Behar was the part of *Ratnapith*. During the period of 16th century the Cooch Behar turned into an independent state. Again, in 1773, it became a revenue paying estate of the East India Company. Finally, on 28th August 1949, Cooch Behar became a part of Indian domination; a district of West Bengal on 1st January 1950.

Different dynasties ruled this region; *Koch* dynasty ruled from 1510 A.D. to 1949. Before the advent of *Koch* dynasty, *Khen* dynasty ruled this region. Bisw later known as Biswa Singha, an adventure *Koch* chief laid the foundation of his kingdom in about A.D. 1515 on the ruins of the kingdom of Kamata. His son and successor Naranarayan ( A.D 1540-1587) was not only the greatest of the *Koch* kings, but also he was one of the illustrious rulers of North East India of his times ( Nath : 1989 : 1 ). Regarding the establishment of the present *Koch* Behar, Dalton ( 1973 ) wrote " it appears to be about the year 1550 A.D. that the two powers came into collision, when the *Koch* under their great leader Haju expelled the *Kacharis* and established a dynasty which lasted two hundred years. These *Koch* princes were driven from power in western Kamrup, Rangpur and Gawalpara by the Muhammadans and from eastern Kamrup by the *Ahoms*; but the descendants of Haju still exercise jura regalia in that portion of the ancient possession of his family which is called *Koch* Behar " ( Dalton : 1973 : 89 ). Several Muslim rulers like Hussain Shah, Mir-Jumla invaded this land. Political relations with the Mughal emperors were also established.

## Population Structure

Following the compilation report of the Census 1872, Hunter (1974) classified the population of Cooch Behar as Asiatics and non-Asiatics. Again, Asiatics were classified into two groups- Natives of India and British Burma, and other than Natives of India and British Burma. Natives of India and British Burma were again divided into five groups viz., Aboriginal Tribes, Semi-Hindu Aboriginals, Hindu, Vaishnav ( a religious group ) and Mahammadans. Further, Hindu into eleven occupational groups viz., High caste ( Brahman, Chhatri or Rajput), Intermediate ( Baidya, Kayastha ), Trading ( Marwari, Banik, Khatri, Oswal ), Pastoral ( Goala, Gareri), Agricultural ( Barui, Koeri, Kaibarta, Kurmi, Kolita, Mali), caste engaged in personal service ( Dhawa, Dhanuk, Dhobi, Kahan, Napit ), Artisan ( Kamars, Kumar, Swarnakar, Sutradhar, Sunri, Tali, Weavers ( Jugi, Tanti ), labour ( Nuniya), Boating and Fishing ( Manjhi, Nalua). ( Hunter : 1974 : 341 & 342 ). Thus the composition of population in Cooch Behar was a heterogeneous in nature.

## Population Ranking

Chaudhury ( 1903) made a ranking of the population of Cooch Behar. First of all, he divided the whole population into three major groups viz Aryan race, subject tribes, and aboriginal tribes besides the Muslims. He placed the aryan race on the top and aboriginal at the bottom. The subject tribes had been placed in between the two. Secondly, he observed that each group had a number of subgroups having different social status. Thus the people of the Aryan race were divided into three subgroups like high caste hindus, low caste hindus and the unclean caste. *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Baidya and Kayastha* were included in the high caste hindu; and they were placed at the top of the hierarchy. The low caste hindus were grouped into two categories viz Navasaks or pure functional sub-castes and the unclean castes. *Barui, Baniya, Gowala, Halwai, Kaibarta, Kahar, Kumar, Kumar, Mali, Moira, Napit, Sadgope, Tanti & Teli* were included in the low caste hindu group and were placed above the unclean caste and below the high caste . The third group, the unclean caste included the *Dhopa, Hari,*

*Taliya, Munchi, and Patni*. The subject Tribes were divided into two subgroups viz clean hindu and unclean hindu.. *Khen, Morangia, and Rajbanshi* were included in the former subgroup. *Bediya, Daoi, Dom, Namasudra or Chandal* and *Nuniya* were included in the latter subgroup and were placed at the bottom. In the third category *Garos and Mechs* were included in the aboriginal tribe. Besides these, there were a good number of Muslims who were not included in the above categories. Most of the high castes like *Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas* were migrants who either hold service under the state, or carry on business in the country. There were some native brahmins and kayasthas. They had migrated from Bengal and Assam. Most of the native *Brahmins* belonged to the *vaidic* class. They were the descendants of those who were brought from time to time into the country by the *Khen* Kings of Kamatapur and Maharajas - Biswa Singh, Nara Narayan and Pran Narayan of the present dynasty from Kaunij (Oudh), Mithila (Tirhoot) and Assam (Chaudhury 1903 : 121 & 122). However the Rajbanshi formed the major ethnic group in the region. Next to the Rajbanshi there were Muslims.

## Major Ethnic Groups

### The Rajbanshi

In 1872, the Rajbanshis constituted about 63 percent of the total population. There has been an age-old controversy of their identity. To some scholars, Rajbanshi belonged to Mangolian stock. While others identified them as Dravidian. "Rajbanshi a Dravidian caste of Northern Bengal, originally *Koch*, but now claiming to be an outlying branch of Kshatriyas" (Risley : 1908 : 183 ). The *Koches* were of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other bodo tribes like the *Meches, Rabhas, Dhimals, Hajongs, and Garos*. But in course of time and in some limited areas, they intermarried the Dravidians and gave birth to a mixed Mongolo-Dravidian race but having preponderant Mongoloid characters (Nath : 1989 : 4 ). Chatterji (1998) identified Rajbanshi as Indo -Mongoloid Bodo people or mixed Austric-Dravidian-Mangoloid People. "... during the days of Visva Simha and Nara-Narayana, they are proud

to call themselves Raj-bansis and to claim to be called *Kshatriyas*" ( Chatterji : 1998 : 112). The *Koches* were also designated both as Rajbansis and *Bangakshatriyas*. Most of the scholars agreed that the *Koch* tribe after adopting Hinduism, claimed themselves as Rajbansi (Dalton : 1973 : 90) Etymological, Rajbansi means men of the royal lineage. They identified themselves as Kshatriyas.

Polygamy was common among the Rajbansis. Hunter (1974) identified the three forms of marriage<sup>here</sup> prevalent among the Rajbansis viz Gandharba, Brahma and Widow marriage. Practice of bride price was found among them. Divorcee was also permitted in their society. It was a simple affair since there was no question of maintenance allowance after divorce. There was no social count to grant the divorce. Family was the basic social unit among the Rajbansis. Their family was patrilineal and patrilocal. Marriage took place within the same clan as the Rajbansis claimed to be belonging to one and single clan *Kashyap*.

### **The Muslim**

In Cooch Behar the Muslim, being a second largest community, occupied a unique position. In 1891 about 30 percent of the total population were muslims. Penetration of Muslims started during the period of thirteenth century when Bakhtiar Khilji invaded Tibet. Several Muslim rulers also attacked this region . Mir Jumla occupied Koch-Bihar in the year 1661. However, establishment of political relations with Muslim rulers helped to immigrants. Along with the process of migration there were also instances of conversion of the local population. Dalton (1973) also expressed the same view. To Chaudhury (1903) " By far the majority of the Musalmans are the Sheks, or as they are popularly called, *Nasyas*. They are like greater portion of the Mahamedans of India, descended from the Hindu converts to the religion of Mahammed ". ( Chaudhury : 1903:120). Even the Muslims of Cooch Behar were used to govern by the same law of inheritance as applicable to the Hindus." The Muslims of Koch Behar are also generally guided by the Hindu law of inheritance unless any Muslim dissent proves in the court

that his family was guided by the Muslim law from before" ( Majumdar : 1977 : 57).

However, the Muslims themselves were not homogeneous. The Muslims of Cooch Behar constituted with sects-Sunnis and Shia. Numerically the former was the majority. The local converts and immigrated muslims were known as *Nashya* and *Bhatia* respectively . Most of them belonged to Sunnis sect. Among the muslims of Cooch Behar the Ashraff or Miyan enjoyed the higher status than that of the Ajlafas or Garosthi. Ajlafas belonged to the Nasya group and were associated with agriculture.

## **Land Tenure System**

As I earlier pointed out that before the establishment of Koch dynasty, the Khens ruled this region. They ruled only three generations. The agrarian society had been evolved during the reign of *Khen* dynasty . The *Khens* were Hindus. Agriculture was their main occupation. Two classes of peasants were found viz landlord and peasants. The landlords were also cultivators. After the fall of *Khen* dynasty, we find the emergence of Koch dynasty.

## **Jotedari System**

Jotedari system had been developed in this region. Ecological and social factors were responsible for such development. Large tracts of area were covered with forest and waste land. Vast areas were uncultivated. Man powers were necessitated for reclamation of jungle. Bose observed, "vast areas in this region were uncultivated jungle and settled for reclamation with enterprising tenant farmers called jotedars. .... large tracts of land were assigned to substantial men of capital at low fixed rents and with permanent and transferable rights to facilitate organization of large scale reclamation from jungle. The reserves of labour provided by the semi-tribal Koches and Paliyas- the Rajbansis of later years and by the immigrant Santal tribes were utilized to conquer the inhospitable wasteland. Once the work of reclamation was completed, they remained as sharecroppers with no right of continued occupancy of the land

they tilled and often only in permissive possession of a little homestead on a fragment of the wasteland they themselves had cleared" ( Bose 1986 : 11 &12 ).

The Bengali word '*jote*' is derived from the sanskrit word '*jotra*' means cultivation or cultivable land . Thus *jotedar* means proprietors of *jote*. The *jotedari* system ensured the king a major source of revenue. Since the *jotedars* were allowed to create sub-tenants, land reclamation works used to continue and ultimately earnings of the king used to raise. Baden Powel (1977) observed some similarity between the *Khel* system and *jotedari* system to the point that both the systems helped the chiefs or kings to receive services or to collect revenue from their subjects. Both the systems were found among the Tibeto-Burmeese origin of the King. "Every male above sixteen years of age was designated a paik. Each group of three paiks formed a got... Again, the got were further aggregated into larger bodies called *Khel* ..... A nearly similar organization was, however, imposed on the Kuc and Mec tribes by conquering Bhutiya in the west Dwars. The individual holdings of the land ( there called *jot*) were made to pay land-revenue; and small cluster of houses was headed by a *pradhan*. Over several of these groups was a *Siyana*. Over these, again, was a local collector, and finally a chief of the district aided by a deputy ( Bowel :1977 :137, 138 and 139). Thus the social factor also contributed to the development of *jotedari* system in the region. In Bengal the *jotedari* system was found in other frontier regions like Sundarban regions of 24-Parganas ( Bose : 1986 :7) . The *jotedars* were the head of the little community. He generally manages the affairs of the whole *jot*.

In the traditional Cooch Behar like other parts of India, land was the principal source of revenue of the king. Cooch Behar became a revenue paying estate in the year 1773. Being transformed in to a revenue paying estate of the British, the interest on land revenue took a new dimension. Following an agreement with the East India Company, the King was bound to pay the English East India Company one -half of the annual revenues of Cooch Behar for ever. The company therefore, took a keen interest on land to raise the revenue collection of the estate.

The tenural and revenue system had been rearranged.

There were two kinds of jotes- revenue paying and non-revenue paying . Non-revenue paying jotes were provided to those persons who used to provide special services to the king. However, the system suffered a lot due to the dishonesty and greed of the State officials caused great suffering to the peasants. Hence to increase the collection of revenue and to improve the conditions of peasants Douglas introduced the *Ijaradari* system in 1790.

### **Ijaradari System**

Under the system of *Ijaradari*, the whole estate was divided into small parcels and put up to auction and the highest bid with approved security was accepted. The *Ijaradar* then distributed the total amount he expected to collect amongst the jotes comprised in his *ijara*. But, this system was also failed to improve the actual conditions of the cultivators because many non-cultivators even the known or relatives of the high officials of the king who had no connection with land, used to take out *ijara* for appropriations of profit. So the *ijradari* system of collection was abolished by George Campbell, the <sup>then</sup> Lietenant Governor from March 1872. However, to make the land revenue system more effective, settlements were made. The work of the first Land Revenue Settlement of Koch Bihar was concluded by 1877. Again, the settlement operation were completed in 1889. Historically *jotedari* system was the backbone of the agrarian structure of Cooch Behar.

### **Revenue Paying Estates**

**Jotedari** : The revenue paying estates in the country are called '*jotes*' and the holders of these estates are called '*jotedars*'. The *jotedars* are thus, in one sense analogous to Zamindars and Talukdars of British India. Two kinds of jotes were found in the state. One was Mokarari or permanently settled; and the other was Sarasari or ordinarily or temporarily settled. The revenue of the former was fixed in perpetuity and no increase was allowed where as revenue of

the latter could be increased after expiry of the term of the lease. From the available statistics the number of temporary *jotes* with their average size of holding at the time of Resettlement in Cooch Behar is shown in Table-1

**Table -1** Distribution of jotes by Paragana ( sub-division) and size in Cooch Behar.

Name of Paragana	No of Jotes	Average Area of a Jote ( Land in Bigha)
Mekhliganj	2321	128.1
Mathabhanga	2529	151.1
Lal Bazar	2604	110.5
Dinhata	3980	90.6
Cooch Behar	5337	90.5
Tufanganj	2065	138.6
Total	18836	112.8

( Source : H . Chaudhury : 1903 : 516)

Table-1 shows that at the time of resettlement the total number of temporary jotes was 18,836; Cooch Behar had the highest number (5337) and lowest in Tufanganj (2065). The average size of the *jote* was biggest in Mathabhanga (151.1 bigha) and lowest in Cooch Behar (90.5 bigha) . Average size of a *jote* of Cooch Behar is 112.8 bigha. The size of *jotes* was not uniform. The *jotedar* had to pay the revenue fixed by the state. A fixed profit was allowed to the *jotedar* to ensure security of the revenue of the state and to keep the *jotes* attractive. There were six under tenants found in the estate. They were as follow: **Chukanidari** : The word '*Chukani*' was the general name for an undertenure and the prefix Dar, Dara-Dar etc. marked its place in the scale of subordinate tenancy. A *chukanidar* was the immediate undertenant of the *jotedar*. He was a holder of a certain portion of the *jote* or farm. A *Chukanidar* would sell his land with the

concurrent of the *jotedar*. However, it would be attached or sold in execution of a decree of the civil or revenue court without the assent of the *jotedar*. A *Chukanidar* used to pay a sum not exceeding twenty five percent over the rate that the *jotedar* used to pay to the state.

**Dar-Chukani:** A *dar-chukanidar* was the under-tenant of a *chukanidar*. *Dar-chukani* under tenure was hereditary and transferable. Occupancy right of a *dar-chukanidar* was recognised. A *dar-chukanidar* used to pay fifty percent over the *jotedar's* rate as rent to *chukanidar*.

**Dara-Dar Chukani:** A *dara-dar chukani*<sup>dar</sup> was an under tenant of a *dar-chukanidar* having the same right as *dar-chukanidar*. The rate of rent payable by him was seventy five percent over the *jotedar's* assessment.

**Tasia-Chukani:** A *tasia chukanidar* was an undertenant of *dara-dar chukanidar*. This type of undertenants was very rare. Besides the above four there were also other two forms viz Tuli-Chukanidar and Tuli-Tosio-Chukanidar. But they were not found in all the paragons and their number was insignificant. Table No 2 shows the percentage of different undertenants to total undertenant at the time of resettlement.

**Table -2** Percentage distribution of different undertenants by paragona.

Name of the Parganas	Undertenants			
	Chukani	Dar-chukani	Daradar-chukani	Tasia-chukani
Mekhliganj	62	29	08	01
Mathabhanga	43	38	16	03
Lal bazar	56	35	08	01
Dinhata	38	41	17	01
Cooch Behar	55	35	09	01
Tufanganj	57	33	09	01
Total	49	37	12	02

Source : Choudhury :1903:525.

Of all the above under tenants *Chukanidar* formed the highest (49 percent) and *Tasia chukani* was the lowest (02 percent). The Paragana of Mekhliganj had the highest percentage of *chukani dar*. Size of holding is not uniform for all the under tenures. The variations are also observed in different paragana. Average area of an undertenant is shown in table 3.

**Table 3** Distribution of average size of holding ( in bigha) by types of undertenants and paragana.

Name of the Parganas	Undertenants					
	Chukani	Dar chukani	Dara-dar chukani	Tasia chukani	Tali chukani	Tasia Tali chukani
Mekhliganj	33	24	22	20	06	2.3
Mathabhanga	53	29	20	16	14	14.9
Lal bazar	41	25	20	21	08	-
Dinhata	25	15	07	05	04	1.5
Cooch Behar	33	18	13	09	06	-
Tufanganj	42	22	18	13	-	-
Total (average)	35	19	13	08	08	05

Source : Choudhury : 1903: 532.

Hierarchy of size of holding is observed according to hierarchy of undertenures. All the paragans did not have all categories of undertenures. Tasia chukani was not found in Lal bazar and Cooch Behar Paragana. *Tali Chukani* and *Tasy Tali Chukani* were not available in Tufanganj sub-division. Thus inequality is observed in terms of size of holding among the different undertenures. Land sharing among the different undertenures is shown in table 4.

**Table 4** Percentage of cultivated land held by the different class of tenants and undertenants.

Sl No.	Class of tenants or under-tenants	Percentage of Land hold.
1	Jotedar	27.5
2	Chukanidar	47.0
3	Dar-chukanidar	21.5
4	Dara-dar chukanidar	3.50
5	Tosio-chukanidar	.002
6	Tuli-chukanidar	.0001
7	Tulli - tosio-chukanidar	.0000008

( Source : Correspondence relating to the Patit Charcha settlement and the Resettlement of the State of Cooch Behar 1882-1885, Authority Cooch Behar, 1903.)

### **Non-Revenue Paying Estate**

The king of Koch Behar allowed his subjects to enjoy non-revenue paying land for different specialised services rendered by them. The rent free lands were of different types as below-

**Brahmottar Land** : Brahmins were given the Brahmottar lands for their support when they were made by the reigning king. It was hereditary and transferable. **Debattor Land** : This type of land was granted to Brahmins or other religious persons for worship of a particular deity. Two types of Debattor land were found -(a) persons engaged with for the maintenance of the deity were given such land; and the other (b) the persons engaged in services of the Kings own deity also given such land. However, the debattor land would not be sold or transferable. It would be inherited if the successor be appointed to the same post by the king. **Pirpal** : Just as debattor was given to the hindus for support of an idol, Muslims were also given the pirpal grants for their support to their Pirpal or saints. **Lakhiraj** : This type of land was given to persons for their meritorious act.

It was also hereditary and transferable. But all lakhiraj grants escheat to the state on failure of heirs. **Petbhata** : Relatives of the King were given this type of land for their maintenance. A petbhata grant lapsed at the death of the original grantee and his heirs must apply for renewal to the Raja. It was not transferable. **Jaigir** : Besides the above five categories of rent-free lands, there was also another type of freeland-the Jaigirs. The persons holding Jaigir land had to render personal services to the King. If the holder of Jaigir land failed to render services, their land had been resumed by the king. Jaigir lands were neither transferable or saleable. A jaigirdar could not create any subordinate tenures.

## Agriculture

Agriculture was the sole occupation of the people of Cooch Behar during the reign of Koch king. Paddy, Jute and Tobacco formed the principal crops of the area. The others included wheat, mustered seed, pulses and vegetables like potato, onion, garlic etc.

Primitive type of handmade technology used for land preparation. It includes the wooden plough, the *bida*, the harrow or *main*, the sickle, the *hatchini*, the spade, the *kursi*, the hoe etc. Manure was neither extensively used nor it was considered necessary for all crops. Sometimes only cow dung and oil cake were used as manure. Similarly use of irrigation was also limited to tobacco cultivation. Thus it resulted in low productivity in agriculture in the past.

## Agrarian Relations

The rural society during the reign of Koch Kingdom was stratified as it appeared from the land tenure system. The society was feudalistic in nature. The king was the absolute owner of the land. The size of *jote* was not uniform. Inequality of holding was also found among the different under tenures. *Jotedars* were placed at the top of the hierarchy where as *tulli Tosio Chukanidar* at the bottom. However, the existence of the last three under tenure viz *Tosio-Chukandar*, *Tuli-Chukanidar* and *Tulli -Tosio Chukanidar* was insignificant in terms of their numbers as it ap-

pears from the table. The jotedars and other under tenures usually used to cultivate their land with the help of *adhiars*. These *adhiars* were found in each grade of under tenants. Thus *Jotedar-adhiar* relation was the backbone of agrarian relation during the reign of *Koch* Kingdom.

## **Adhiars**

To Chaudhury (1903 :164) " small farmers cultivate their lands themselves. Big cultivators of almost every grade of tenancy have a class of farm servants under them called *adhiars*". Those *adhiars* were mostly poor men who occasionally possessed their own plough and bullock and a bit of rented land too. They could be identified in two categories. One, those who used to reside in the premises of their landlords and cultivate their lands with landlord' plough and bullock. He was also fed by his landlord. The other, includes those *adhiars* who used to cultivate another man's land with his own plough and bullock and they *adhiars* were called *Utangkara Praja*. In both cases, *adhiars* shared half of the produce. The cost of production was also equally shared by both the landlord and *adhiars*. These *adhiars-jotedars* maintained a harmonious social relations. To Mukharjee (1986) the structure of the *jotedari* system was based on a patrimonial feudal culture of the Rajbanshi. Both of them exhibited some common features. They had the same social status as they belonged to the same community. Both of them were illiterate. Like *adhiars*, *jotedars* also participated in agricultural operation. Apart from their social and cultural similarity, reciprocal behaviour was also found among the jotedars. They used to supply materials for construction of houses of *adhiars*. Agricultural inputs like seed, plough, cattle and other instruments of production were often supplied to the *adhiars* by *jotedars*. Moreover, consumption loans as well as supply of credit as and when required by the *adhiars* were also supplied by the *jotedars*. Similarly the *adhiars* also behaved in the reciprocal way. They used to provide free services other than agricultural operation to their *jotedars*. Unlike the zamindars of other parts of Bengal, these *jotedars* did not have their own musclemen or sepays for collection of revenue. Thus class conflict between the *jotedar* and *adhiars* was not prominent.

## Agricultural Day Labourer

In the traditional Cooch Behar the agricultural labourers were almost absent since nearly every man in the state used to cultivate his small patch of ground. Only small cultivators when not employed in tilling their own fields occasionally hire themselves out as day labourers. However seasonal migration of day labourer used to happen in Cooch Behar. They were mainly from Bihar in the harvesting seasons. They were paid in cash and also supplied with meals.

## Rural Power Structure

No systematic information is available regarding the rural power structure of Cooch Behar before the middle of the nineteenth century. However, the Village Chaukidari Act was passed in the year 1893 for the governance of rural society. Immediately just before the implementation of the said act, the rural society was governed by an institution known as *Dewania*. These *dewanias* were the large *jotedars* residing on their farms. Their neighbours were mainly their tenants who leased-in lands from them and cultivated the same on share basis. These *dewans* reigned as the civil head of the community and arbitrated in all disputes of their neighbours. After the settlement operations the power of the *dewanias* was to a great extent reduced.

After the enactment of the Village Chaukidari Act in 1893, the village affairs were governed by the same. Thus *chaukidar* played an important role in the village affairs. The said act also created the provisions of *panchayats*. But, the system of *panchayat* was not like the present one. The said act did not provide the system of council of *panchayats*. Moreover, they were not elected representatives. They were appointed by the high officials of *Raja*. They were appointed mainly from the residents of proprietor holder of land and residing within one km from the village in which he was appointed. These *panchayats* used to exercise the civil and criminal affairs of the village through the chowkidar who was appointed by the *panchayats*. One of the most important functions of the *panchayats* was to assess the properties of the residents and made a liaison with outer administration of the village.

The Village Chaukidari act 1893 was amended several times. Following the amendment of 1941, the mode of appointment of *panchayat* had been changed from the selected *panchayats* to representative *panchayats*. The amendment provides " .... the adult male rate paying residents of any village shall select .... not less than any three nor more than five residents of the village to constitute the *panchayats* there of; and the *Fouzdari Ahilkar* shall, if he approves of the persons so selected, appoint such persons to be the *panchayats*; but if in his opinion any person so selected is, for reasons to be recorded by him in writing, unfit to be a member of the *panchayat*, the *Fouzdari Ahilkar* shall appoint a fit and proper resident to be a member of the *panchayat*. " [2(2)].

The above provision provides that in selecting the *panchayats* the opinions of adult male rate-paying villages were only considered. Adult women and non-rate paying male had no role in selection of *panchayats*. Moreover, the final selection was dependent on the satisfaction of the official of the king. Hence these *panchayats* were selected from the landed gentry and from those who were known to the officials of the king.

By amendment of 1943 of the Cooch Behar Chaukidari Act 1893, the president of the *panchayats* had been empowered with more civil and criminal affairs of the village than before. The section 3(3) of the said act empowered the President with the following:

- (a) powers under sections 64, 127 and 128 of the criminal Procedure code viz of arresting persons committing offences of ordering unlawful assemblies to disperse and of compelling them to disperse by the use of civil force;
- (b) presiding over the joint deliberations of the *panchayats* , and taking necessary action on the resolutions adopted by *panchayats*;
- (c) visiting primary schools, pounds and public ferries;
- (d) duties of registrars of births and deaths;
- (e) reporting about the out break of epidemics such as cholera, small box etc.

Thus traditional *panchayats* of Cooch Behar were concerned with welfare as well as criminal affairs of the village. However, the old *chaukidari panchayats* under the Cooch Behar Village Chaukidari Act of 1893 had been abolished with the merger of the estate in India and the same was replaced by *Gram* and *Anchal panchayats*. After merger, the West Bengal *Panchayat Act* of 1957 was extended to the district in various stages from 7th June 1958 to June 1960. The first *Panchayat* Election was held in the district in different phases during the period from 1961-1963. During this period the *panchayat* system was 4-tier. These were *Zilla Parisad*, *Anchalik Parishad*, *Anchal Panchayat* and *Gram Panchyat*. It was not a political *panchayat*. No political party contested in the *panchayat*.

# **Chapter-III**

## **Land and People**

# CHAPTER -III

## LAND AND PEOPLE

### The Region

The two sample villages-Balaghat and Guriarpar under study are situated in the subdivision of Tufanganj of Cooch Behar district in West Bengal, India. West Bengal having a total population of 68.00 million according to 1991 census, is one of the densely populated states in India. Population density of West Bengal is 766 persons per square Km as compared to the national average of 267. Rural population of West Bengal constitutes 72.61 percent to the total population. The percentage of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe to the total population is 21.99 and 5.63 respectively. The literacy rate of the state (57.72 percent) is higher than the national rate (52.1 percent).

The district Cooch Behar is geographically situated in the Himalayan terai of West Bengal. It lies between 26°32'46" north latitude and 25°57'56" north latitude. The longitude of the eastern most point is 89°52'00" east and the longitude of the western most point is 88°45'02" east. It's about 20 miles away from the Bhutan range of the Himalayas. The district having 1165 mouzas covers a geographical area of 3345 square Km. The economy of Cooch Behar is mainly based on agriculture. It is marked as "no- industry zone." The major crops of the district is paddy. The traditional cash crops are jute and tobacco. The district is the major tobacco growing zone in the state. Recently, it has achieved a remarkable progress in cultivation of summer paddy (Bodo) and winter vegetables like potato, tomato, green chilly, cauliflower and cabbage. The use of high yielding varieties of seeds and ground water contributed to such progress.

The district has a unique agro-ecological feature. The highest precipitation (above 3000 mm per annum) and a moderately high temperature during summer with a fairly prolonged chilling night temperature (from October to April) hitherto make situation favourable for cultivation of mulberry silk, motra (*clinogyne dichotoma*), bamboo and betel nut. The subdivision, Tufanganj

is situated in the North-Eastern side of Cooch Behar, about 25 Km away from the main town by the side of National High Way 31. The geographical area of the subdivisions is 585.7 square km. It's surrounded by Jalpaiguri to the north, to the east by Assam, to the south by Bangladesh and Dinhata; and to the west by Cooch Behar Sadar.

There are two blocks and two *Panchayat Samities* in Tufanganj. The two villages under study are under the jurisdiction of the Tufanganj Block I and Tufanganj *Panchayat Samity* I but they are under two separate *Gram Panchayats*. There are fourteen *Gram Panchayats* under the *Panchayat Samity* I. The village Balaghat, is under the jurisdiction of the Dewcharai *Gram Panchayat*, situated in the southern part of the Tufanganj. The other village, Guriarpar is under the Dhalpal *Gram Panchayat*, situated in the northern side of Tufanganj.

## **The Villages**

### **The Village Guriarpar**

*Gram Panchayat* is the smallest administrative unit of the *Panchayat* administration in West Bengal. Every *Gram Panchayat* has some villages under its jurisdiction. The village Guriarpar, is under the Dhalpal II *Gram Panchayat* which has twelve villages under its control. The village has an area of 1210.51 square Km; situated about 7 km away in the northern side of Tufanganj Town. The village is surrounded by the river Raidak in the east, in the west by Chatrampur II, in the south by Bans Raja and in the north by Dhalpal. A metalled road connecting Tufanganj and Alipore, is passing by the western side of the village. The nearest Bus Stop is 1 km away from the village. There is no metalled road in the village. There are three major kachha roads which connect the nearest metalled road. All buses bound for Rampur and Alipure, are available here. Besides the buses, one can go to the village by cycle rickshaw from Tufanganj Town.

No electricity is available in the village except in a particular pocket for running 3 motor pumps for irrigation ( Deep tube-well ). These tube-wells were installed by the Indo-Dutch Terai Development Project. One Primary School and three Anganwadi Centres are available in the village. However, biweekly market locally called *Hat*, Sub-Post Office, Junior High School, *Gram Panchayat* Office, Revenue Inspectorate office one each are available within a radius of 2 km from the centre of the village.

### **The Village Balaghat**

The village Balaghat, is located on the bank of the river, Gadadhar, at a distance of 8 kms in the southern part of Tufanganj Town ; and 25 Kms in the eastern side of Cooch Behar town. The village is about 3 Km away from the National High-Way No .31 The area of the village is 213.93 square kms. The western and southern part of the village is surrounded by the river Gadadhar, eastern and northeastern part is surrounded by the village Sikarpur. Not a single road in the village is pukka. One wide kachha road passing through the village connects the National Highway 31. The distance from the Bus Stop to the village is about 3 Km. All the local buses from Tufanganj to Cooch Behar halt here . Primary school, Anganwadi Centre, Sub-Post Office one each are available in the village. Like the village Guriarpar, this village is yet to be electrified. There is no *hat* in the village. The available nearest *hat* is located at a distance of 3 Km from the village by the side of the Highway. However, some big hats like Tufanganj, Chilakhana, Dewcharai are located at a distance of 8 Km, 6 Km and 7 Km respectively from the village. The High School, *Gram Panchayat* Office, Revenue Inspectorate Office etc. are also located at a distance of 7 Km from the village.

However, the villagers of the two villages can avail themselves of the facilities like college, daily market etc. from the Tufanganj Town. Rail communication is not available in this subdivisions. The nearest railway station is Cooch Behar and it is about 30 Km from the subdivisions. In respect of house type and settlement pattern, both the villages exhibit same character. Generally,

the settlement pattern of the two villages is the combination of linear and dispersed cluster. The villages are divided by caste and community quarters. Members of the same community / caste are living in the same cluster. The villagers themselves identified these clusters as Rajbanshi para or Muslim para etc. A cluster is locally called *para*. However, a complete clear-cut division of these *paras* based on caste and community is not always possible. Moreover, the agricultural labourers who are given *khash* land by the Government for their dwelling purposes, are residing together regardless of caste and community. Most of the houses of the two villages are kachha made of bamboo and corrugated tin. A few thatched houses which formed a predominant type in the past, are also found in the 2 villages. Rich people have pacca houses made of bricks and tin. The major source of drinking water is tube-well. Almost every land owning families have their own tube-wells. There are community tube-wells also mainly in the clusters where dwelling houses have no tube-wells. Guriarpar is comparatively a big village having 425 households; forming 65.46 percent of the total households of the 2 villages. There are 219 households in Balaghat which constitutes 34.54 percent of the total.

### Demographic Structure

**Population :** The total population of the two villages is 3517 ; of which 2284 and 1233 at Guriarpar and Balaghat respectively. The population of the two villages is distributed in table 5.

**Table 5** Distribution of population by sex and village.

Village	Population		
	Male	Female	Total
Guriarpar	1170 (51.22)	1114 (48.78)	2284 (100.00)
Balaghat	636 (51.58)	597 (48.42)	1233 (100.00)
Total	1806 (51.35)	1711 (48.65)	3517 (100.00)

Table 5 shows the percentage of male and female population of the two villages under study is 51.35 and 48.65 respectively which is almost similar to the district of Cooch Behar where the percentage of male and female is 51.69 and 48.31 respectively. Both the villages exhibit almost the same pattern in respect of percentage of male and female population. Thus number of female population per thousand male is 947 against the national rural number of 941 (Census 1991).

**Age :** In order to understand the age-structure and dependency ratio of the two villages, the population of the two villages is classified by age and sex in table- 6.

**Table 6** Distribution of population of the 2 villages by age and sex.

Age-Group	Number of Persons		
	Male	Female	Total
0-6	234 (12.96)	267 (15.60)	501 (14.25)
6-15	468 (25.91)	476 (27.82)	944 (26.84)
15-35	589 (32.61)	554 (32.38)	1143 (32.50)
35-60	368 (20.38)	304 (17.77)	672 (19.11)
60+	147 (8.14)	110 (6.43)	257 (7.30)
Total	1806 (100)	1711 (100)	3517 (100)

Table 6 shows that the percentage of child population ( two groups combined 0-6 and 6-15) to the total population is 41.09 percent, which is marginally above the national figure (40.50 percent) following 1981 but which is similar to that of West Bengal (41.37). The female child is more in number than male. The percent age of total dependency ratio of the two villages, is 93.77, which is higher than the national ratio following 1981 census (85.36 percent). The percentage of dependency ratio is calculated taking into consideration of the two groups i.e., child and older (0-15 & 60 above) to the total population of the villages under study. However, the percentage of economically active population in the age group 15-60 year ( two

groups combined of 15-35 & 35-60 ) to the total population is 51.61 where females' share (47.27 percent) is less than male ( 52.73 percent ).

## Migration

The study of migration has a great significance to the study of rural society which contributes to the inter-ethnic relations in terms of social, economic, political and psychological factors. The National Sample Survey Organisation in its Report No 430 on migration observes, " Human mobility (migration) is supposed to be governed by a set of social, economic, political, cultural and personal factors and as such it is of interest from more than one angle ( NSSO 49th Round : 1998). In South Asia the incidence of ethnic violence in many cases is the result of strain relations between the migrants and locals. There had been population influx in Cooch Behar during the periods of 50s and 70s from East Pakistan ( Now Bangladesh) which changes the population structure of Cooch Behar. Table 7 shows the migration pattern of the two villages.

**Table 7** Distribution of migrants by type and sex of the two villages combined.

Sex	Total Population	Type of Migrant		Total
		In-migrant	Out-migrant	
Male	1806	187 (24.44)	100 (99.01)	287 (33.14)
	(100)	(10.35)	(5.54)	(15.89)
Female	1711	578 (75.56)	01 (0.99)	579 (66.86)
	(100)	(33.78)	(0.05)	(33.83)
Total	3517	765 (100)	101 (100)	866 (100)
	(100)	(21.75)	(2.87)	(24.62)

The data shows in table 7 that the percentage of migrants to the total population is 24.62 which is almost similar to that of the 49th Round of NSS data (22.74 percent). Among the total migrants, the percentage of male and female is 15.89 and 33.83 respectively. The per-

centage of female migrants is high because every marriage generates female migration. In India, the brides migrate to the place of residence of the bridegrooms. This phenomenon is called marriage- migration. Here total migrants have been classified in to two groups viz in-migration and out-migration. In-migrant means those who came from outside and settled in the village. It may be due to marriage, shifting of residence etc. The percentage of such migrants is 21.75. On the other hand, out-migration means born within the village and reside outside the village mainly for their lively hood. Percentage of such out-migrants to the total population is only 2.87. Here the males are more in number ( 99.01 percent) than females (0.99 percent). Nowadays males are going out of the villages for work . During my field survey it is reported that unemployed youth had been migrating to the places of Arunachal Prodesh, Nagaland, Assam for work as unskilled workers in the factories of timber, plywood etc. ; in Rajasthan for the works of Decorator, and in the district of Nadia in West Bengal for weaving works. They are mainly engaged in unorganised sector. A very few persons are engaged in government services and posted in out side the villages. It is also observed that some times villagers mainly agricultural labourers and poor peasants migrated to the lower Assam for cultivation of land on seasonal lease basis. Thus our observation is corroborative to the observation of National Sample Survey Organisation who observed " in case of male migrants, movement in both the sectors are mainly guided by employment angle. In case of female migrants, they are mainly due to the reasons of movement of parents / earning members and marriage. In rural India the latter has considerable lead over the former" ( NSS 49 Round : 1998 : H II & 21).

### **Marital Status**

Marital status is socially ascribed character of the population. Marital status is classified into three categories viz married, wodow/widower and divorced or separated. Population of the two villages are distributed by status of marriage in table 8.

**Table 8** Distribution of population by marital status and sex of the two villages.

Village.	Sex	Marital Status			Total
		Married	Widow/ Widower.	Divorced/ Separated.	
Guriarpar	Male	481 (49.43) (94.82)	24 (21.82) (4.73)	02 (40) (0.40)	507 (46.60) (100.00)
	Female	492 (50.57) (84.68)	86 (78.18) (14.80)	03 (60) (0.52)	581 (53.40) (100.00)
	Total	973 (100.00) (89.43)	110 (100.00) (10.11)	05 (100.00) (0.46)	1088 (100.00) (100.00)
Balaghat	Male	240 (49.18) (94.11)	14 (23.73) (5.50)	01 (20) (0.39)	255 (46.20) (100.00)
	Female	248 (50.82) (83.50)	45 (76.27) (15.15)	04 (80) (1.35)	297 (53.80) (100.00)
	Total	488 (100.00) (88.41)	59 (100.00) (10.69)	05 (100.00) (0.90)	552 (100.00) (100.00)
All Total	Male	721 (49.35) (94.62)	38 (2.49) (4.99)	03 (30) (0.39)	762 (46.46) (100.00)
	Femal	740 (50.65) (84.28)	131 (77.51) (14.92)	07 (70) (00.80)	878 (53.54) (100.00)
	Total	1461 (100.00) (89.07)	16 (100.00) (10.31)	10 (100.00) (0.61)	1640 (100.00) (100.00)

Table-8 reveals that there are 1640 married persons (all the three categories taken together) which constitutes 46.63 percent to the total population of the two villages. Of the two villages percentage of married population to the total population is higher at Guriarpar (47.63) than Balaghat (44.76 percent). Of the three types, the percentage of married population (both spouses alive) is high (89.08). The other two widow/widower and divorced / separated

constitute only 10.31 and 0.61 respectively. There is almost uniform pattern of population of two villages. It is observed that percentage of female married population is marginally high in both the villages. It may be owing to a few incidence of polygamy. Similarly the incidence of widow is more in number than widower in the two villages. This may be due to the practice of early age at marriage of female. It is generally observed that at the time of marriage there is age gap between bride and groom. The age of bride is always lower than groom.

### Literacy and Education

Education is an important variable which affects marriage, fertility, migration, employment and so on. It's also an indicator of social development. Following 1991 Census, a literate is considered as one who can read and write with understanding. The number of literate persons of the two villages under study is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Distribution of literate persons by sex and village.

Village	Total Population	Number of Literate Person		
		Male	Female	Total
Guriarpar	2284 (100.00)	748 (32.74)	445 (19.48)	1193 (52.22)
Balaghat	1233 (100.00)	362 (29.36)	248 (20.11)	610 (49.47)
Total	3517 (100.00)	1110 (31.56)	693 (19.70)	1803 (51.26)

The Table - 9. suggests that percentage of literacy to the total population of the two villages is 51.26 which is above the all India level (36.40 percent) as well as West Bengal (41.20 percent) following the 91 census. This higher rate may be due to the literacy programme under taken by the government of West Bengal which had been implemented after 1991. Since I collected data in the year 1996-97, the percentage had been increased during the period 91-96. Female literacy rate is much lower (19.70 percent) than that of male (31.56 percent). The pattern of literacy is more or less similar in both the villages.

After resuming power in 1977, the Left Front Government made the school education free for the poor to have easy access to it. The level of school education of the two villages is shown in table 10.

**Table 10** Distribution of population by standard of education and sex of the two villages.

Village.	Sex	Standard of Education			Total
		Primary	Madhyamik Pariskha	Higher Secondary	
Guriarpar	Male	79 (22.13)	254 (71.15)	24 (6.72)	357 (100)
	Female	61 (34.86)	110 (62.86)	04 (2.28)	175 (100)
	Total	140 (26.32)	364 (68.42)	28 (5.26)	532 (100.00)
Balaghat	Male	65 (30.66)	136 (64.15)	11 (5.19)	212 (100.00)
	Female	53 (46.90)	59 (52.22)	01 (0.88)	113 (100.00)
	Total	118 (36.31)	195 (60.00)	12 (3.69)	325 (100)
All Total	Male	144 (25.31)	390 (68.54)	35 (6.15)	569 (100.00)
	Female	114 (50.00)	169 (58.68)	05 (1.74)	288 (100.00)
	Total	258 (30.11)	559 (65.23)	40 (4.67)	857 (100.00)

Number of persons having school education of the two villages is 857 which constitute 24.36 percent of the total population. Of the three standards, percentage of attainment is high

in Madhyamik Pariksha level ( class X standard ) since it covers V to X i.e., six years of schooling . Similarly, the lowest attainment is found in Higher Secondary and above grade. Of the three levels, attainment of primary education of the female ( 50% ) is higher than male ( 25.31% ) in both the villages since number of female of child population is more than male child. But, their involvement in other two levels is lower than male. It may be owing to their high rate of school drop out after primary education. The social factor like marriage is responsible for such phenomena . The member of Bachelors Degree holders at Guriarpar and Balaghat are 10 ( 7 male and 3 female ) and 9 ( 8 male and 1 female ) respectively . However, there is only one person who holds Post Graduate Degree at Balaghat.

## Religion

In Cooch Behar following 1981 census, the percentage of the Hindu and Muslim population is 79.01 and 20.78 respectively. There are other religions also but their number is very negligible. They include Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. No other religion is found in the two villages except Hindu and Muslim. The number of the Hindu and Muslim population of the two villages is shown in table 11.

**Table 11.** Distribution of population by religion of the two villages.

Village	Religion		Total
	Hindu	Muslim	
Guriarpar	2047 (75.98) (89.62)	237 (28.80) (10.37)	2284 (64.94) (100.00)
Balaghat	647 (24.02) (52.47)	586 (71.20) (47.53)	1233 (35.06) (100.00)
Total	2694 (100.00) (76.60)	823 (100.00) (23.40)	3517 (100.00) (100.00)

The table-11 shows that the percentage of Hindu and Muslim is 76.60 and 23.40 respectively, Hindu population being numerically dominant in the two villages combined.

At Guriarpar the Hindu population is 89.62 percent where at Balaghat they are 52.47 percent to the total population. However of the total muslims, Balaghat has more (71.20 percent) than Gurirpar (28.80 percent)

## Social Setting

### Caste

In rural Cooch Behar the caste system has less importance since the area is mainly dominated by the Rajbanshi. Next to the Rajbanshi, we find the Muslims. The caste group along with their number of households and population is shown in table 12.

**Table 12.** Distribution of household and population by caste of the two villages.

Caste		Village				All Total	
Name	Constituti- onal Status	Gurirarpar		Balaghat		No of H.H	Total Person
		No of H.H	Total Person	No of H.H	Total Person		
Rajbanshi	S.C.	240 (57.83)	1308 (57.27)	108 (49.32)	563 (45.65)	348 (54.89)	1871 (53.20)
Muslim	Minority	42 (10.12)	237 (10.38)	95 (43.38)	586 (47.52)	137 (21.61)	823 (23.40)
Kaibarta	S.C.	114 (27.46)	640 (28.02)	—	—	114 (17.98)	640 (18.20)
Kumbhakar	O.B.C	—	—	08 (3.65)	43 (3.49)	08 (1.26)	43 (1.22)
Namasudra	S.C.	—	—	08 (3.65)	41 (3.34)	08 (1.26)	41 (1.17)
Napit	O.B.C	07 (1.67)	31 (1.36)	—	—	07 (1.11)	31 (0.88)
Tanti	O.B.C	05 (1.20)	27 (1.18)	—	—	05 (0.79)	27 (0.77)
Sutradhar	O.B.C	03 (0.72)	19 (0.83)	—	—	03 (0.47)	19 (0.54)
Brahmin	General	03 (0.72)	17 (0.74)	—	—	03 (0.47)	17 (0.48)
Kayastha	General	01 (0.24)	05 (0.22)	—	—	01 (0.16)	05 (0.14)
Total	—	415 (100.00)	2284 (100.00)	219 (100.00)	1233 (100.00)	634 (100.00)	3517 (100.00)

There are ten castes in two villages besides muslims. At Guriarpar there is no Kumar and NamaSudra. Similarly, At Balaghat we do not find any Napit, Tanti, Sutradhar, Brahmin and Kayastha. Kaibarta, Kumar, Nama Sudra, Napit, Tanti, Sutradhar, Brahmin and Kayastha were migrated from East Pakisthan (now Bangladesh). Most of the Rajbanshi and Muslim are original settlers of the area. But, a small percentage of them have also come from Bangladesh.

### **The Rajbanshi**

In terms of households Rajbanshis are majority in both the villages but numerically they are next to the Muslims in Balaghat. They constitute 53.2 percent of the total population of the two villages. Discussion on origin of Rajbanshi has been made in Chapter - II. During my field study I observed that generally Rajbanshis were not conscious of their caste identity. Usually they identified themselves as *Kshatriyas*. Culturally they form a homogeneous community. Endogamousness is also another feature of them. No social hierarchy is observed by them though they have different surnames like Barman, Roy, Sarkar, Addikary, Mondal, Das etc. who enjoy the same social status except adhikary. Like Brahmins, adhikaris enjoy ritual power; they are entitled to perform some rituals mainly which don't require of worshipping of fire (*yogna*). To achieve the status of priesthood, a Adhikari has to observe *upanayana* ceremony. After going through the *upanayana* ceremony they wear a *kanthi* ( a necklace made of small pieces of *Tulshi* tree), and a sacred thread; and observe some restrictions in food habits and in economic activities. On gaining the status of priesthood, Adhikari is not allowed to eat meat and fish; they are not entitles to perform agricultural activities. But, there is another higher class of priest among the Rajbanshis who are known as Assamese-Brahmin; migrated from Assam; originally they were from Mithila( Bihar). These Brahmins are entitled to perform ceremony and other religious rites which require the worshipping of fire. Hierarchically they are superior to the Adhikaris. The migrated Brahmins of Bangladesh are not entitled to perform any rituals of the Rajbanshis.

It is observed that like the Brahmins all adult males of Rajbanshi are entitled to observe

the *upanayana* ceremony by wearing sacred thread for gaining the status of Kshatriya. Once a Rajbanshi observed the *upanayana* ceremony, he is entitled to follow the surname of Barman, if his surname is other than Barman. This suggests that Barmans are emerging as a superior class than other surnames. Barman means Bara-manus i.e., great man as explained by Powell (1977). The concept social hierarchy is gradually gaining importance in an egalitarian society of Rajbanshis.

### **The Muslim**

Numerically the Muslims are next to the Rajbanshi. Their share in terms of number of household and population to the total are 21.61 and 23.40 respectively. They are found in both the villages. However, they are more in number at Balaghat. They occupy a second position in the two villages combined and at Guriarpar their position is next to the Jalia Kaibarta. Dalton (1973) expressed "The grandson of Hajju, Vishu Singh, with all the people of condition apostatized to Hinduism, and took the name of Rajbansis; those who declined finding they were treated as vile, adopted Islam. Thus the mass of the Koch people became Muhammadans and the higher grade Hindus" (Dalton 1973 : 90). The Muslims of Cooch Behar exhibit many cultural similarities with the Rajanshi. They speak the same dialect. The material culture of both the communities also exhibit many similarities. Most of the Muslims in the two villages belong to the Sunni group. The Muslims of Balaghat are very economically active. They are engaged in agriculture. Moreover, their contribution to agriculture is also significant.

### **The Kaibarta**

The Kaibarta is one of the eight caste groups who had been migrated from east Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The others are Kumbhakar, Namasudra, Napit, Tanti, Sutradhar, Brahmin and Kayasta. Traditionally, Kaibartas were divided into three groups viz. Halua, Jalua and Manji. The traditional occupation of the Halua Kaibarta was agriculture. Now they have identified themselves as Mahisyas. The Jalua Kaibartas are fishermen who were untouchables; and the Manjis were the ferrymen who correspond to Ghattajivins and Patnis. They are said to have

originated from same ethnic group. However, majority of Kaibartas belong to the first category i.e. Jalia Kaibarta (Fishermen). But, at present, they are engaged in agriculture. There are some Halua Kaibartas but there is none in the category of Manji Kaibarta. These Kaibartas are found only in village Guriapar. Numerically they are next to the Rajbanshi. They shared 27.46% to the total population of Guriapar. However, they occupy a third position in terms of the total households and population of the two villages. Their constitutional status is schedule caste.

### **The Kumbhakaras**

In Bengali *Kumbha* means pot and *Karas* means makers. Thus *Kumbhakars* mean pottery makers. Mitra (1953:315) observes that "in Bengal pottery is essentially a family craft where men, women and children of the family work together." There are only eight households of kumbakars at Balaghat. They are migrated from east Pakistan, (now Bangladesh). Numerically their position is third at Balaghat. But, in terms of two villages, their position is fourth. Their constitutional status is *Other Backward Class*. They make earthen pots and sell them in their local *hats*.

### **The Nama Sudra**

According to Risley (Risley in Mitra 1953 31), the *chandals* of Bengal invariably call themselves Name Sudra. Like Kumbhakars they have also only eight households having a total population of fortyone. Numerically their position is fifth of two villages combined. But at Balaghat their position is fourth. Most of the members of Namasudra are engaged in agriculture.

### **The Napit**

In Bengal traditionally *Napit* belongs to the *Navasayaka* group. Their participation in many social ceremonies like marriage, birth etc. is essential. In the smriti texts, the Napita is a Sudra from whom food is acceptable to Brahmanas. There are seven households of Napit found at Guriapar, having a total population of 31 only. They have no representation at Balaghat. At present they are mainly engaged in agriculture. However, a few of them are engaged in their traditional occupation. Their constitutional status is *Other Backward Class*.

### **The Tanti**

They are also called *Jugi*, a weaving caste of Eastern Bengal . There are only five households of Tanti in the village Guriarpar; there is none at the village Balaghat . They were migrated from Bangladesh. None of them at present is engaged in their traditional occupation. Constitutionally they belong to the *Other Backward Class*.

### **The Sutradhar**

Among the different artisan castes, *Sutradhar* ( Carpenter ) is one of them. *Sutradhars* now claim to be Rathakarasa of ancient times. Mitra ( 1953 : 34 ) observes "according to Skandha Purana ( Nagara 7 ) Visvakarma's son were Manu, Mayu, Tvastr, Silpin and Taksaka collectively termed the Rathakara ." There one only there households at Guriarpar with a total population of nineteen . They were migrated from Bangladesh and at present engaged in agriculture. Constitutionally they are identified as *Other Backward Class*.

### **The Brahmins**

Among the higher castes ~~there~~ are only *Brahmin* and *Kayastha*. They are found at Guriarar. The number of Brahmin house at Guriarpar is three with a population of seventees. They were migrated from Bangladesh and now are engaged in their traditional occupation i.e priesthood alongwith agriculture .

### **The Kayastha**

Mitra observes ( Mitra 1953 :238 ) " Kayastha Kact, Kait, Kayath, is the writer caste of Bengal ". Only one household of *Kayastha* is found in the village, Guriarpar . This family is fully engaged in agriculture .

Thus it appears that the populatuion composition in the two selected villages is heterogenous. But, numerically Rajbanshis, Jaliakaibarts and Muslims are significant . The

villages are mainly dominated by scheduled caste Hindu population . Although Muslims have a considerable number of population; no communal violence is observed during the recent years. There is no higher caste population except three Brahmin and one Kayastha families.

## **Marriage**

Marriage is an institution that regulates the sexual behaviour of the individual. As it is already pointed out that marriage is attributed by many social, biological, cultural, economic, and legal factors and so on. Therefore, it is essential to have an idea of the present pattern of marriage system in the two villages under study. Monogamy is the prevalent form of marriage among the Hindus and the Muslims. A few cases of polygamy are also found in the two villages. The incidence of polygamy is found in both the communities - the Hindus and the Muslims. The incidence of polygamy among the Hindus may be due to prevalence of low caste people. However, new generation of literate people are not in favour of the polygamy Their residence is patrilocal.

## **Dowry System**

Marriage has an economic significance . The system of bride price is found among the tribal communities in India to compensate the bride's parent for the loss of their daughter. The practice of bride price was found in the traditional Rajbanshi society. Our field data shows that aged of the Rajbanshi used to pay bride price at the time of their marriage. They used to pay bride price in the form of either in cash or in kind or both . But, now a days , the brideprice has been replaced by groom price. The system of dowry in the form of groom price is also found among the muslims and the other caste groups also. The inter village linkage is reflected through the network of kinship and marriage relations. It is observed that most of the marriages took place within the adjacent villages i.e. with in the *Gram Panchayat*. Incidence of inter-state marriage is also found .

## Family

Though family is considered as an universal phenomenon, it does not mean that it is the same everywhere. The family is still largely an unit of production in the rural society. The size of family is important in rural life since it has an impact on economic, social and political life. The size of family in terms of number of members of the two villages is presented in table 13.

**Table 13** Distribution of households by family-size of the two villages.

Family Size (Number of member)	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Small (1-4)	156 (37.59)	77 (35.16)	233 (36.75)
Medium (5-8)	218(52.53)	118 (53.88)	336 (53.00)
Large (9-12)	30(7.23)	18 (8.22)	48 (7.57)
Very Large (13+)	11 (2.65)	06 (2.74)	17 (2.68)
Total	415(100.00)	219 (100.00)	634 (100.00)

The incidence of medium size family is high ( 53.00 percent ). Commonly 5-8 members are found in a medium size family. The small-size family consists of 1-4 members ;occupies the second position (36.57 percent ). The percentage of very large family (13+) is only 2.68 of the total family of the two villages. The pattern of the family size is uniform in both villages. It is observed that two or more brothers have been living within the same compound under separate hut as a separate economic unit. Each brother is the deciding authority of his own family matters. This type of living arrangement is mainly found among the Rajbanshis and the Muslims. The same phenomenon. was also observed by Mukherjee (1971) .

The family types are conceptualised interms of family composition. The normative family patterns in traditional India are extended or joint family and elementary or nuclear family.

Table 14 shows the types of family that are found in the two villages under study.

**Table 14** Distribution of households by types of family of the two villages.

Family Types	Villages		Total
	Gurirapar	Balaghat	
Nuclear Family	334 (80.48)	186 (84.93)	520 (82.02)
Extended family	81 (19.52)	33 (15.07)	114 (17.98)
Total	415 (100.00)	219 (100.00)	634 (100.00)

Nuclear family is the predominant form in the two sample villages . The percentage of nuclear family to the total households of the two villages in 82.02. Only 17.98 percent households belong to the category of extended type. This pattern is uniform in both the villages.

# **Chapter-IV**

## **Economy and Class**

# CHAPTER - IV

## Economy and Class

### The Economy

As I have mentioned earlier that Cooch Behar is an agricultural district. The economic activity of the two sample villages is based on agriculture. The pattern of agriculture is predominantly traditional. However, modern farming has been started with the help of new technology in some areas. Agriculture has long been most crucial sector of the Indian economy. Indian Planning Commission in its draft report of ninth five year plan observes, "Agriculture and allied activities make the single largest contribution to the Gross Domestic Product accounting for almost 27 percent of the total. Agriculture provides employment to account 65 percent of the total work force." (Planning Commission 1999 : 434 ). The pattern of agriculture depends on availability of land, technology and cultural practices of the people.

### Land

In rural economy land is an important asset in terms of productivity and employment . Generally a person's economic position is determined by the nature and size of land he/she possesses which provides him/her security and prestige also. Thus land has three important properties viz social, economic and political. Land is therefore important in the study of agrarian economics. Cultivable land of the two villages has been classified into three categories - high, medium and low locally called *Chatam*, *Doyem* and *Awal* respectively. The percentage of high, medium and low category of land to the total cultivable land is 85,10 and 5 respectively. The soil composition of the two villages is sandy clay loam. Both the villages are situated by the side of the river. Proportionately sandy soil is higher at Balaghat than Guriarpar . Owing to sandy character of the soil, the cultivators can cultivate winter vegetables at the early time as the field gets dried up immediately after rain. In Cooch Behar usually the rainy season starts from mid April and ends in September.

### Size of Holding

In India the large size of holding has been declined. The different farm size groups are

classified in the NSS reports into six categories viz insignificant (less than 0.002 hecter), marginal holdings (0.01-1.00 hecter), small holdings ( 1.01 - 2.00 hecter ), semi - medium holdings (2.01-4.00 hecter), medium (4.01 - 10.00 hecter) and large holdings ( 10 hecter and above). It appears from Sharma's study who condensed the NSS data of 1982 of size of holding into five categories and observes that West Bengal is predominated by submarginal and marginal holdings which share 47.03 and 17.36 percent respectively of the total holders. On the other hand, large and medium category share only 0.28 and 6.62 percent respectively. The maximum size holds 11.50 percent. " A state by state analysis reveals that marginal ( 1-2.99 acres ) and small ( 2.50-4.90 acres ) holdings gained substantially in the state of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal ( Sharma 1994 : A - 120 ) . The size of farm holding in the two sample villages is not large. Maximum size is 45 bighas i.e. 15 acres. Hence considering the size of farm holdings of the two villages, I grouped them into six categories viz; marginal (below 1 acres), small ( 1-3 acres ), semi - medium ( 3-6 acres ), large ( 9-12 acres ) and very large ( 12 and above ) . Table 15 shows the size of holding of cultivable land of the two villages.

**Table 15** Distribution of households of two villages by size of holding.

Size Class ( in Acre)	Village		
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	Total
Land less 0	102 (24.58)	70 (31.96)	172 (27.13)
Marginal -1	100 (24.10)	52 (23.74)	152 (23.97)
Small 1-3	140 (33.74)	59 (26.94)	199 (31.39)
Semi Medium 3-6	144 (10.60)	24 (10.96)	68 (10.73)
Medium 6-9	14 (3.37)	11 (5.02)	25 (3.94)
Large 9-12	11(2.65)	02 (0.92)	13 (2.05)
Very large 12+	04 (0.96)	01 (0.46)	05 (0.79)
Total	415 (100.00)	219 (100.00)	634 (100.00)

Table 15 reveals that 27.13 percent of the total families has no land . Percentage of landless is higher at Balaghat ( 31.96) than Guriarpar (24.58 ) .Small farm size holders are maximum in number ; they form 31.39 percent of the total households . However, they are more at Guriarpar than Balaghat . Percentage of marginal holders are almost equal in both the villages forming 23.97 percent to the total households. Thus marginal and small holders form 55.36 percent to the total house holds of the two villages. The large and very large size share only 2.05 and 0.79 percent respectively to the total. They are more in number at Guriarpar than Balaghat. Percentage of semi- medium is almost same in both the villages. The incidence of absentee landlord is not present in the two sample villages . Of course a few households have cultivable land in the adjacent villages. Similarly, there are three landlords who are residing in the adjacent villages having cultivable land at Balaghat.

## **Agriculture**

### **Irrigation**

Though there are eight rivers in Tufanganj, the facilities of irrigation has not yet developed at the desired level. Only 11 percent of the total cultivated land in Tufanganj is under irrigation. The sources of irrigation of the two villages are shallow tube-well and deep tube-well. There are three deep tube-wells run by power ( electricity ) at Guriarpar only. In other cases the sources of irrigation is shallow tube-wells run by diesel motor pump. Of the two villages the state of irrigation at Balaghat is better than Guriarpar.

### **Cropping Pattern**

Paddy forms the principal crops of the two villages. Three types of paddy are cultivated in three different seasons . These are *Aus*, *Aman* and *Boro*. **Aus Paddy** : Among the traditional crops, *Aus* Paddy is one of them. Locally it is called *Brittee Dhan*. It's sown in the month of April - May and harvested in the month of July -August. Area under cultivation of *Aus* is higher at Guriarpar than Balaghat. Its yielding is very poor; generally 3-5 mounds per bigha.

Area under *Aus* paddy cultivation has been declined substantially. **Aman Paddy** : *Aman* Paddy ( winter Paddy ) locally called *Hemti Dhan* forms the principal crops of the region including the two sample villages. About 52 percent of the total cultivated area is under *Aman* Paddy. It is transplanted in the month of June - July and harvested during the month of November - December . Both high yielding variety and local variety of *aman* crops are cultivated in the villages. Its yielding varies from 6 to 10 *maunds* depending on type of seed and fertilizer used. **Bodo** : Cultivation of *Bodo* has been started recently. *Bodo* cultivation is still in infancy period of the region. As per status report of the National Agricultural Project on Teraizone, Vol I, West Bengal, only 1 percent of the gross cropped area is allocated to this crop in the Terai Districts while that under the state is of the order of 7 percent ( Status report Vol.- I Teraizone, Cooch Behar : 1993 : 101). Cultivation of boro requires irrigation. Hence it needs capital. Only economically well off cultivators can cultivate this crop. Its yielding rate per bigha is also high. Generally it yields about 15 -20 *maunds* per bigha. Of the two villages, it is observed that at Balaghat ( 34.18 percent ) the area under Boro cultivation to total gross cropped area is higher than Guriarpar ( 1.50 percent ).

### Cash Crops

**Jute** : Jute is a traditional crop in the region. The people of Cooch Behar used to cultivate Jute and *Aman* in the same field . After harvesting Jute in the month of ~~July - August~~, *Aman* are transplanted. It is a traditional major crop of the two villages . Jute is cultivated in the month of April - May and harvested in the month of July - August . Analysis of agricultural census data reveals that 26 percent of farm families of the state are engaged in jute cultivation. What is more important is that 97 percent of jute growers belong to small and marginal groups.

**Tobacco** : Though Tobacco is also a traditional cash crop of Cooch Behar, its cultivation is very restricted in the two villages under study . Only a few Rajbanshi families at Guriarpar cultivate tobacco. **Vegetable** : Vegetable cultivation on commercial basis has been started recently in Cooch Behar. They have a good market - local as well as outside. Among the

vegetable cultivation in the two villages, we find potato, cabbage, cauliflower and tomato. Besides these green chilly, brinjal, oil seeds etc. are also cultivated. The present left front Government in West Bengal is providing seeds at subsidised rate, sometimes even free of cost to the poor farmers for cultivation. They are helping the poor farmers by providing various agricultural inputs like fertilizer, seed etc. **Potato** : In India West Bengal made a remarkable progress in potato cultivation in terms of area and productivity. At the state level area has increased to the score of 67 percent ( Status Report Vol- I Terai zone, West Bengal : 1993 : 106 ). About 9 percent to the gross cropped area of the two villages is under Potato cultivation. Total area under potato cultivation is more at Guriarpar than Balaghat. During my field survey, I came to know that progressing farmers cultivate Potato twice in the same field in the same season; early and late variety. Potato market is very fluctuating . Mainly middleman exploits the poor farmers, as storage facilities of the region are very limited. At present there is no cold storage in Tufanganj. Potato of Tufanganj has a good market in the North Eastern states. **Cabbage and Cauliflower** : Cultivation of cabbage and cauliflower has been started recently in the region. Commercial cultivation of cabbage and cauliflower in the region was first initiated by Dr. A. Mitra, a professor of agriculture in the Uttar Banga Krishi Viswa Vidyalaya, Pundibari, Cooch Behar on experimental basis in his own farm. Gradually, it spreads to the surrounding areas. Even labourers who worked in Doctor Mitra's farms started cultivating of cauliflower and cabbage in their own land. Dr Mitra's farm house is very near to the village Balaghat. Thus Tufanganj appeared to be an agrarian zone of cultivation of cabbage and cauliflower in the District. Cultivation of cabbage and cauliflower is more at Balaghat than Guriarpar. It may be due to the fact that Balaghat is nearer to Doctor Mitra's residence and a good number of Muslim cultivators who worked as agricultural day labourers in the farm house of Mitra. Gradually they acquire money by cultivating cauliflower and cabbage .They further invested their capital in land . It is reported during my field survey that a good number of Muslim cultivators ; even day labourers used to go to Assam for cauliflower and cabbage cultivation on share basis . They leased in land from the landlord on seasonal contract basis.

All initial expenditures relating to cultivation were borne by the land lord . The proportionate share of cost and profit between landlord and tenant is 50:50. A good number of agricultural day labourer became cultivators by purchasing land. And entrepreneurial farmer generally cultivates cabbage and cauliflower twice in a year. It helps reduce the cost of production and thus helps earn more profit. **Other vegetables** : The other vegetables like green chilly, tomato, brinjal etc. are also cultivated in the villages. Medium and big cultivators cultivate the same for money. While small and marginal cultivators cultivate for their own consumption and if there is any surplus , they sell it in the local market. Green chilly and brinjal are cultivated almost throughout the year. Besides the paddy and vegetables , the cultivators of the two villages cultivate different types of cereals.

### **Cereal Crops**

**Wheat** : Wheat is cultivated in the two villages. Area under wheat cultivation to the total gross cropped areas is more at Guriarpar than Balaghat. **Oil seed** : Different types of oil seed like Mustered seed, *Till*, *Tishi* and *Magha* are cultivated in the two villages. However, areas under cultivation of oil seed is more at Guriarpar than Balaghat. They are mainly cultivated for cash. **Pulses** : Pulses like *Kalai*, Lentil and *Khesari* etc. are cultivated in the two villages. They are cultivated mainly for self consumption.

### **Other Crops**

**Sugar Cane** Only one house hold cultivates sugar cane in a plot of one acres at Guriarpar. The cultivator had prepared gur by extracting juice from sugar cane. Besides the above, other crops like bamboo, betel-nut and mulberry silk have been cultivated in the two villages. This region is endowed with some unique agro - ecological features which are conducive to these crops. **Bamboo** : The high rainfall and humidity appear to be the determining factor in favour of many types of bamboo in the region. This is a potential zone for large scale bamboo cultivation. Medium and large owners of land cultivate bamboo. In the traditional set up bamboos

were exclusively used for making house , fencing , basket, dhara etc. apart from fire work . At present, they are supplied to the paper industry. That is why the price of the bamboo goes up. A single bamboo of normal size ( 12'-15' length ) costs Rs. 25/-Rs.35/- depending on its maturity. Bamboos are also used for making Dhara and they are also supplied to other states mainly to Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. **Mulberry** : At Guriarpar two households are involved in mulberry silk production. They cultivate the mulberry plant. **Betel-nut** : **Betelnut** is extensively cultivated in the two villages under study . Almost all households have the trees. Generally, the medium and big land holders cultivate the trees making a separate garden. The villagers have a habit of chewing beatlenut with pan. It has a good market as it is exported to Bangladesh. A kilo of dry beatlenut is sold in the market for Rs.90/-Rs.100/-

## Farm Technology

Development of agriculture depends on the type of technology used for cultivation. Generally the traditional technology is used for cultivation. However, some progressive farmers, nowadays are using modern farm technology. The implements used in the two sample villages under study are of mainly traditional type. The plough is the most important implement. Besides the plough, *khurpi*, (spade) of different shape for wedding, the sickle for reaping the crop, the leveller and hoe for said preparation are used for cultivation. Recently , cultivation of new crops on commercial basis had been started by a section of cultivators. They cultivate *Bodos* paddy (summer variety), vegetates like cauliflower, cabbage, tomato, green chilly, potato etc. Use of pesticide, chemical fertilizer, and irrigation are essential for cultivation of those crops. During my field survey it has been observed that some cultivators are using modern technology viz., Diesel pumpset, shallow, sprayer and power tillers. Sometimes the cultivators who don't posses such farm machinery, can hire the same. Table 16 shows the number of households who possess such implements either one or more than one .

**Table 16** Distribution of Households by types of modern farm implements of the two villages.

Types of Farm Implements	Village			
	G.P. No. of HH	% to Total HH	B.G. No. of HH	% to Total HH
Pump Set	39	9.40	53	24.20
Power tiller	01	0.24	01	0.45
Sprayer	85	20.48	62	28.31
Shallow	26	6.27	67	30.59

Percentage of cultivators who possess modern farm implements to total household, is higher at Balaghat than Guriarpar . It indicates that Balaghat is more agriculturally developed than Guriarpar. Total number of implements of the two villages as revealed from our field data is shown in table 17.

**Table 17** Distribution modern farm implements by types of the two sample villages.

Types of Modern farm implements	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Pump Set	39(41.05)	56 (58.95)	95 (100.00)
Power tiller	01 (50)	01 (50)	02 (100.00)
Sprayer	85 (56.77)	65 (43.33)	150 (100.00)
Shallow	26 (18.98)	111 (81.02)	137 (100.00)

The table 17 suggests that percentage of modern farm implements to the respective total is higher at Balaghat than Guriarpar except power tillers and sprayer. It suggests that Balaghat is more advanced in agriculture than Guriarpar.

## Live Stock

Animal husbandry is an integral part of the Indian agrarian economy. Cultivators receive

inputs from livestock. Draught animal (mainly bullock ), Buffalo, Milky Cow, Pig , Goat, Sheep, Duck and Hen are found in the two villages. Common grazing lands are gradually decreasing in everywhere . Similarly, fallow land is scarce. It makes inconvenient the rural people to keep the cattle . Number of households who possess the livestock of the two villages is shown in table 18

**Table 18** Distribution of households by types of lives stock of the two villages.

Types of Live stock	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Draught Animal	126 (30.36)	85 (38.81)	211 (33.28)
Milky Cow	261 (62.89)	114 (52.05)	375 (59.15)
Pig	10 (2.41)	-	10 (1.58)
Goat / Sheep	110 (26.51)	231 (105.48)	341 (53.79)
Poultry	55 (13.25)	62 (28.31)	117 (18.45)

(Note : percentage shown in the parenthesis to the total household of each village )

Table 18 shows that the percentage of household who possesses the cattle population to the total households is higher at Balaghat than Gurirarpar excepting milky cow. However, it appears that none of the households of Balaghat rears pig.

## Non Agricultural Activities

Broadly non-agricultural activities are those activities which are undertaken outside the agriculture. Non- agricultural activities are an important part of the rural economy. They can

serve as a means of reducing the burden on agriculture by providing employment in rural areas. They can also thereby serve as means of reducing the inflow of people into cities seeking jobs. Basant and Kumar (in Visaria and Basant 1994 :143) observe " both the NSS and Census data suggest that during the last three decades the share of the rural non-agricultural sector in the total labour force has increased. The trend is more clearly observed for male workers than for female workers." It appears that there are 11 percent household of the two villages whose major source of income is derived from non-agricultural activities. However, non-farm work is often undertaken as a secondary activity; some times on seasonal basis. These include some traditional handicrafts like pottery, mat-making, etc. besides bidi making. More over, there are other non-farm activities like driving of hand-cart and cycle-riskha. Some of these activities are directly related with agriculture while others not related with agriculture.

### **Mat-Making (*Dhara* Making)**

Bamboos are available in the region and Rajbanshis are traditional expert in preparing basket, fishing traps, mat etc. for their use and also for sale. At present, mat (*dhara*) is prepared from bamboo for sale, though it is not a major occupation. Generally women and female child are engaged in mat preparation. There are agents who collect these mats from the maker's house and supply them to the local businessman, who finally sold them to the trader of Tufanganj or adjoining areas. These mats are finally supplied in the states of Uttarpradesh and Maharastra . These mats are sold in pieces; a maker can earn of Rs.40/- to 50/- from mates prepared out of a single bamboo which worth Rs. 20/- .The agricultural labourer households from the Rajbanshi and other migrated people are engaged in these work . But, no muslim household is engaged the such work. Mat making activities is found in both the village.

### **Pottery**

Only the *Kumbhakar* households of Balaghat are engaged in the work of pottery. It is

their traditional occupation. It's a seasonal business. They make different kinds of earthen pots like *Kanlsi, Hanri, Chanri* etc, and are peddling in the adjoining villages in exchange of paddy or rice. The demand of earthen pot has recently been declined for availability of plastics and stainless steel.

### **Bidi-Making**

Bidi-making formed a major unit of household industry in the two villages. Generally women and female children are engaged in this activity. They collect the raw materials of bidi from the local agents and prepare the same and supplied to the agents. They get wage on piece-rate system. It is reported that they get Rs. 30/- for preparation of per thousand bidi. In the past Rajbanshis did not prepared bidi; but at present they are making it.

### **Transport Business**

Recently the activities relating to transport have been increased for modernization of farming and marketing of agricultural products. In the past bullock carts were a common means of rural transport. Most of the land owing families used to have such cart; but nowadays the use of bullock cart is very rare due to high prices of bullock and buffalo. Now, bullock cart has been replaced by hand cart locally known as *Thelagari*. This *Thela* is used for transporting materials of agricultural inputs like seeding, manures etc from the residence of the landlord to the farm field. And, again after harvesting, the crops are carried to the landlord's residence by the same for which in the past bullock cart was used. Moreover, *Thela* is used for carrying products to the local market. Therefore with expansion modernization of farming and marketing, the use of *Thela* as a means of transport got an immense importance. Generally most of the agricultural labourer do possess such a *Thela* which costs Rs. 2000/- only. Male adult members are engaged in the work.

## **Repairing Works**

Among the repairing works we find the works of cycle repairing, tube-well repairing diesel motor repairing etc. Male persons are mainly engaged in this work. For tube-well and diesel motor repairing they work not only within the village but also in other adjoining villages.

## **Petty Business**

Trading relating to vegetables, rice and milk are some of the important items of petty business. In case of milk and vegetable trading, the traders purchase directly from the growers and then sell it in the nearby urban centres. And in case of rice selling, the traders purchase paddy from the local hat or farmers and then they process paddy for rice in their residence. They sell this rice in the local urban centre like Tufanganj, Alipurduar etc. It is thus observed that most of the non agricultural activities are directly related to the agricultural production. The similar observation is also made by Basant and Kumar (in Visaria and Basant 1994 :103), "Men, women and children in rural areas also undertake a variety of other activities besides agriculture. Some of these non-agricultural activities flow directly from agriculture or are closely related to it."

## **Service**

Both government and non-government services have been included in this category. The Government services include school teacher both primary and secondary, police personal, health personal and postal employees. Only three persons at Guriarpar are engaged in Central Services in the Departments of Central Security and Income Tax. Employment other than government sector includes employment in shops and other establishments.

## **Man Power**

Estimation of rural employment and unemployment is a difficult task. Most of the eco-

economic activities in rural areas are organised on household basis. Distinction between workers and non workers; and between economic and non economic ( Household ) activities is not always clear. Population pressure and the unequal distribution of land and assets are largely responsible for backwardness of economy. In general, villagers above the age of sixty years are considered too old to work on full time. If they are still active in a joint family they are considered partial earners . Similarly, the persons below the age of fifteen years are often considered too young to take up any work seriously. They are also considered partial earners and dependants. Economic active members of population are those who are in the age group of 15- 60 years. The seasonal character of Indian agriculture does not support the poor peasant to confine themselves to agricultural activities only through out the year. Thus they have to pursue other activities to supplement their income during their lean agricultural seasons. Here census definition of " worker " is followed. According to 1991 census those who had worked for the major part of the year are termed as *main worker* The major part of the year means six months and above. The main workers in the two village are engaged in different occupations.

Table 19 shows the pattern of main occupation of the two villages. Main workers have been classified into two groups by the type of work they perform. These are agricultural and non agricultural Again, agricultural activities are further subdivided into two viz; cultivator and agricultural labourer. On the other hand, non-agricultural activities are divided into five heads viz; household industry, transport business, business, service and , other labourers. Table 19 shows that 78.85 percent of the total workers of the two villages are engaged in agriculture where as only 21.14 percent are in non-agricultural sector. At the time of the 1981 census, nearly a fifth of the rural work force (main workers) were reported to be employed in non-agricultural pursuits (Vaidyanathan 1994 ; in Visaria and Basant 1994: 50 ). Of the two villages the share of non-agricultural workers is less at Balaghat (11.66 percent) than Guriarpar (26..96 per cent).

**Table -19** Distribution of main workers by occupation and sex of the two villages .

Occupation	Village						All Total		
	Gurirarpar			Balaghat			Two village combined		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agricultural									
Agricultural Labour	164 (27.29)	23 (3.83)	187 (31.12)	137 (39.94)	33 (9.62)	170 (49.56)	301 (31.99)	56 (5.96)	357 (37.94)
Cultivator	249 (41.43)	03 (0.50)	252 (41.93)	131 (38.19)	02 (0.58)	133 (38.77)	380 (40.38)	05 (0.53)	385 (40.91)
Total	413 (68.72)	26 (4.32)	439 (73.04)	268 (78.13)	35 (10.21)	303 (88.34)	681 (72.37)	61 (6.48)	742 (78.85)
Non- Agri Cultural :									
Service	28 (4.66)	05 (0.83)	33 (5.49)	12 (3.50)	04 (1.16)	16 (4.66)	40 (4.25)	09 (0.96)	49 (5.21)
Business	36 (5.99)	04 (0.67)	40 (6.66)	05 (1.46)	-	05 (1.46)	41 (4.36)	04 (0.42)	45 (4.78)
House Hold Industries	10 (1.66)	04 (0.67)	14 (3.33)	05 (1.46)	08 (2.33)	13 (3.79)	15 (1.59)	12 (1.28)	27 (2.87)
Transport Business	28 (4.66)	-	28 (4.66)	03 (0.87)	-	03 (0.87)	31 (3.29)	-	31 (3.29)
Other Labour	46 (7.65)	01 (0.17)	47 (7.82)	01 (0.29)	02 (0.58)	03 (0.87)	46 (4.89)	01 (0.11)	47 (5.00)
Total	148 (24.63)	14 (2.33)	162 (26.96)	26 (7.58)	14 (4.08)	40 (11.66)	173 (18.38)	26 (2.76)	199 (21.14)
All Total	561 (93.34)	40 (6.66)	601 (100)	294 (85.71)	49 (14.29)	343 (100)	854 (90.75)	87 (9.25)	941 (100.00)

It may be due to the fact that the muslims are less involved in non-agricultural activities than others. And, since the muslims are majority at Balaghat, that is why participation in non-agricultural activities is less. Secondly, number of agricultural man-days is more at Balaghat than Gurirarpar due to commercial cultivation of crops. The agricultural labourers are getting full employment in the agricultural work. That is why, they do not look for other activities. Percentage of agricultural labourers are also high in Balaghat (49.56) than Gurirarpar (41.93). Cultivators constitute 40.91 percent to the total work-force of the two villages .

## **Class Structure**

### **The Concept Class**

There is difference of opinions among the social scientists on the concept of *class*. Some scholars argued, classes as being primarily economic in nature where as others tend to stress factors such as prestige, style of life, attitudes, identities etc. Basic difference is however, between the Marxist and non-Marxist scholars. Dictionary of Sociology defines "Class" as a large category of people within a system of social stratification who have a similar socio-economic status in relation to other segments of their community. A social class is not organised, but the individual and families who compose it are relatively similar in education, economic prestige and status, Marxist scholars identify the social class on the basis of control of means of production. To Rudra (in Srinivasan and Bardhan 1988 : 376) "a class is a set of individuals who have similar relations with the means of production ( owners of the means of production, users of the means of production etc ) and who are such that they have no 'contradictions' among themselves but who have contradiction with members of other classes." By contradiction Rudra means conflicting economic interests.

In rural India the social organisation of production is based on land. Title of ownership of land varies in different sizes. Moreover the life of rural people is predominantly governed by the informal relation which is impediment of class consciousness based on economic interest. Social life sometimes predominates over economic life. Thus the conceptual reality and empirical reality of class differ. Beteille ( 1996 : 103 ) observes " the relations of production consists essentially of relation between categories of persons contributing in different ways to the process of agriculture. Such categories include land owners, tenants and agricultural labourers. These, together with their interrelation constitute the agrarian class structure of the village." To him these categories are not homogenous.

The social scientists differ in identifying the agrarian classes. Following the Marxism

model, Indian agrarian society has been classified into five classes viz ; Land Lord, Rich Peasant, Middle Peasant, Poor Peasant and Agricultural Labourer ( Mencher 1978; Bose 1984; Oommen 1990; Damle 1993 and others). Some scholars have gone into deeper analysis by applying the Marxist model of labour exploitation criteria and observed the two classes; exploiter and exploited ( Rudra 1992; Patnaik 1987; and Bardhan 1986).

The Marxist model alone is not sufficient to analyse the agrarian class structure of Cooch Behar due to some historical factors. First, the region was dominated by a single community, the Rajbanshis who were agriculturalists and who share a homogeneous culture. Second, concerning the land management system, the region was under the system of *jotedari*; where *joteders* ,a renter class who used to get cultivated their land by *adhiars* (tenants) . These *adhiars* and *joteders* belong to the same community, Rajbanshi. Even in many cases , they have a kinship relation. Hence unlike other parts of India, these *joteders* were not the oppressors on the contrary they used to maintain a good relation with their *adhiars*. That is why, no significant peasant movement was organised in the region; even when Naxalbari movement a peasant movement was organised at the distance of 200 km. away from the two villages. Third, the abolition of *jotedari* system helps abolish the intermediary classes and reduce the size of holding. This region has predominantly marked the existence of self cultivators with small holding. Hence absence of intermediary as well as large holding contributes to subside the sharp class distinction.

Beteille (1974 ) rejects the idea of dichotomous division of Indian peasantry and in the context of West Bengal, he suggests that native economic categories would be an ideal form of analysis for agrarian class structure. He observes "if we take a close look at rural society in West Bengal we will find that the people divide up their social universe not only in terms of the categories of caste but also in terms of certain broadly economic categories. If we regard the first set as categories of the community type, we may provisionally regard the second as cat-

egories of class type. To take a few characteristic examples, we would have among the latter, Jaminder, Mahindar and Munish. What I am suggesting is that an analysis of each of their mutual relations will provide a very fruitful approach to the agrarian class structure " ( Beteille 1974 : 126 ). However, Beteille (1996 ) in his other work *Caste, Class and Power* identifies the agrarian classes of Sripuram as landowners, tenants and agricultural labour with further sub- groups since those categories are not homogeneous . The three class model of agrarian structure was also developed by some other scholars ( Rudra 1992; Thorner 1981 ; Mukharjee 1957).In analysing the class structure of the two villages under study, we shall first discuss the native economic categories as conceived by the villagers of the two sample villages, and then, we shall classify the rural people on the basis of control of the means of production.

### **Native Economic Categories**

Economic categories as conceived by the villagers in the region are *Dhani*, *Giri*, *Girhastha*, *Halua* and *Kamla / Kshet Majur*.

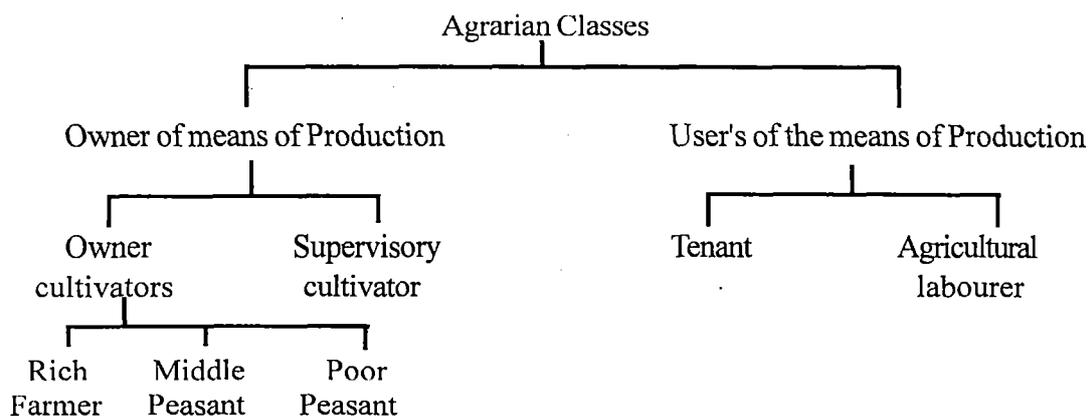
***Dhani Chansi*** : In traditional Cooch Behar the term *Dhani* used to denote the big jotedar , and even the term was used as "surname". At present, the said term has little application since the jotedari system was abolished. Now, generally big land holders are sometimes referred to as *Dhani chansi*. ***Giri***: The term *Giri* is very popularly used by the agricultural labourers to refer to the rich peasant who hired in agricultural labour for cultivation of their own land. Sometimes they may lease out their land to the tenants. Their use of hired labour depends on the size of holding as well as family man power. They are rich but below the category of *Dhani chansi*. ***Girhastha*** : They are equivalent to middle peasants who cultivate their land mainly with their family labour. Their size of holding is comparatively small. In economic hierarchy they are just below the category of *Giri* . They produce mainly for their own consumption. ***Halua*** : The tenant cultivator is referred to as *Halua*. They are also known as *Adhiar* or *Bhagchansi* who cultivates leased in land on crop sharing basis. Generally those households whose size of

holding is not sufficient to sustain their livelihood, cultivate leased in land on crop-sharing basis. They are equivalent to poor peasants and just above the category of agricultural labourers in regard to security of employment. **Kamla / Kshet Major / Dinhajira Kamla** : The term *Kamla* is most popularly used in the region to designate day labourers both agricultural and non-agricultural. The term *Kshet major* exclusively means the agricultural labourer. They are paid mainly in cash; sometimes both in cash and kind for their wages. They include all types of agricultural day labourer whether attached or casual.

But, identification of agrarian classes on the basis of native economic categories may arise confusion because the same term has different meanings in different regions. Say the term *Haluwa* in Assam means agricultural labourer where as in Cooch Behar they are tenants who cultivated leased in land on sharing crops. Hence to avoid this confusion we can classify them on the basis of ownership of mode of production.

### **Agrarian Classes of the Two Villages**

Considering the major sources of income, size of holding and labour participation in agricultural operations, the economic status of each household of the two villages is presented by the following chart.



Like other villages, our sample villages have some households who are not directly involved in the process of production. Their major sources of income are derived mainly from self employment like small business , handicrafts, household industry like bidi and mat making. However a few persons are employed in unorganised sector. Since they are residing within the village, the village mode of production predominates their social life. That is why, following Mukherjee (1971), they are included in the class structure. The Committee of the Agricultural Labour Enquiry on rural man power and occupational structure, 1954 also made non-agriculturalists as a separate class. The major classes thus identified in the two villages are: Owner cultivator, Supervisory - cultivator, Tenant-cultivator, Agricultural labour; and Non-Agricultural households.

### **Owner Cultivator**

Owner cultivating households are those who own land and whose family members usually contribute labour to the agriculture. They may use hired labour or some portion of their land may be leased out. However, this depends on size of holding and cropping intensity as well as availability of family man power. This group is similar to that of 'farmer' as identified by Beteille(1996). In this class Beteille had included the supervisory landowners also. But , in our present analysis, we have placed them in a separate category. As it is mentioned earlier, the population of the two villages belongs to agricultural community. Here there is no social taboo in participating in agricultural activities. Even during my field work I observed that one man from the Bramhin family had been ploughing in his field . Like Beteille we observed that " Land owners do not constitute a homogeneous class " ( Beteille 1996 :117 ). Depending on their size of holding , we can further divide them into rich peasant, middle peasant and poor peasant

### **Rich Peasant**

Those owner cultivators whose size of holding is comparatively large and who also possess modern farm implements are included in this group. With the help of irrigation, they

cultivate vegetables and summer paddy. They predominantly use hire labour. The extent of use of hired labour is more than their family labour to their total labour requirement. Bardhan (1984) identified them as "enterprising farmer". By adopting modern technology they cultivate for market. Thus they extract surplus; a portion of which is again invested in land in the form of seed, fertilizer, technology etc.

### **Middle Peasant**

They are mainly self cultivators. Their family labour predominantly contributes in agriculture. Their size of holding is smaller than that of the rich peasant. Generally they have a plough set with a pair of draught animals. This middle peasant is similar to the kishans as categorised by Thorner (1981 : 11) who observed "..... those villagers who live primarily by their own toil on their own lands. They do not employ labour, except briefly in ploughing in harvest season, nor do they commonly receive rent." To Bardhan (1984 : 179) "in the three districts of Northern West Bengal, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur, agricultural productivity is among the lowest in the state, and the importance of the family farmer class is the highest".

### **Poor Peasant**

They are mainly holders of land. The quality of land they possess is not good also. These poor peasants even sometimes hire out their labour for supplementing their family income. They do not possess any farm asset. Some of them may have only a wooden plough but none of them has any draught animal. They are unable to invest any capital in the form of chemical fertilizer, pesticide in their land. The productivity of their land is also low.

### **Supervisory Cultivator**

They are also referred to as non-cultivating owners. It includes those households who own land but do not contribute any physical labour in the process of cultivation. They may either lease out their land or get their land cultivated with the hired labour. They may only

supervise or give direction of cultivation . In the classical sense, this supervisory cultivators are of two kinds - absentee landlord and residential landlord. In case of former their social background is different ( Beteille1976; Thorner 1981 ). But, like Thorner and Beteille, we do not find any absentee landlord except three at Balaghat who were residing in the adjacent village. Moreover majority of the supervisory cultivators of the two villages are in fact the poor peasants. Their size of holding is small. Since they have no family labour to cultivate, they get their land cultivated by hired labour or share cropper.

### **Tenant - Cultivator**

In the traditional set up, the region was significantly marked by the existence of tenant cultivators who were locally known as *Bhag Chansi / Adhiar / Halua*. Those house holds who take leased in land from landlords and cultivate those lands with their family labour on crop sharing basis. Generally, these tenant cultivators cultivate the leased in land with their farm technology ; the cost of seed and fertilizer is shared by both of them. In one sense, they are similar to the agricultural labour since they are getting wages in kind for their labour. That is why, some scholars have included them in the category of non - owners of land ( Beteille 1996; Thorner 1981 ). But they are different from agricultural labourer to the point that *Adhiars* have to share the risk of agriculture as well as the cost of production. Moreover, they have security of employment. After *Operation Barga* - a programme of land reforms implemented by West Bengal Government in 1977, the customary relation between the land lord and the tenant was replaced by formal relation. Hence we have identified them as a separate class. Now, they are more organised than any other agrarian classes.

### **Agricultural Labourer**

In rural society it is very easier to identify this class. This class is similar to that of mazdur of Thorner ( 1981 ). Those households who work on another person's land for wages in money, kind or share are regarded as agricultural labour households. An agricultural labourer has no

right to lease or contract land on which he or she works. He may or may not have a small patch of land. The agricultural labourer contributes only his labour and he/she does not required to provide capital required for cultivation. He does not possess any farm asset. Such labourers are placed at the bottom of the agrarian stratification.

### Non - Agricultural Households

There are some households who are not directly related to the process of production. Their social life is very much influenced by agriculture. These households are associated with various activities like petty business, household industries like bidi making , mat making etc and employed in unorganized sector. They are mainly counter part of agricultural labourers. Table 20 shows the number of household of each of these classes of the two villages under study.

**Table 20** House hold distribution by agrarian classes of the villages.

Agrarian Classes	Village		Total
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	
Owner Cultivator	149 (35.90)	48 (21.92)	197 (31.07)
Sypervisory Cultivator	15(3.62)	18 (8.22)	33 (5.21)
Tenanat Cultivator	46 (11.01)	31(14.16)	77 (12.15)
Agricultural Labour	150(36.14)	106 (48.40)	256 (40.37)
Non- Agricultural	55(13.25)	16 (7.30)	71(11.20)
Total	415 (100)	219 (100)	634 (100)

Table 20 shows that agriculture labour households constitute 40.37 percent of the total households. Owner cultivators form the next category ( 31.07 percent ). Number of households of the supervisory cultivator is lowest ( 5.21 percent ). Tenant continuators share only 12.15 percent; gradually their number is decreasing . Only 71 ( 11.20 percent ) household belong to the category of non - agricultural households. This suggests that about 89 percent of the total households depends on agriculture.

## Agrarian Classes and Size of Holding

Omvedt (1982) identifies the character of agrarian society of West Bengal and Bihar as mixed form of semi - feudal and semi - capitalist due to existence of high degree of tenancy and at the sometime a large percentage of labour households and some evidence of the rural capitalism ( Omvedt 1982 34). In our two sample villages the incidence of tenancy is not large . But there is higher percentage of agricultural labourer households along with some capitalist farmers. This suggests that semi - feudal relation is gradually being replaced by semi capitalist relations. Earlier it has been pointed out that each of the above categories is not homogeneous in terms of control over the means of production. Table 21 shows the size of holding of the agrarian classes of the two villages.

**Table 21** Distribution of households by agrarian class and size of holding of the two villages.

Agrarian Classes	Size Class ( in Acre)							Total
	( landless) 0	Below 1	1 - 3	3 - 6	6 - 9	9 - 12	12 - above	
Owner Cultivator	0	10(6.57) 5.07	108(54.27) 54.82	48(70.59) 24.30	19(76.00) 6.67	09(69.23) 4.56	03(60.00) 1.52	197(31.07) (100.00)
Supervisory Cultivator	0	05(3.29) 15.15	14(7.04) 42.42	05(7.35) 1.15	06(24.00) 18.18	01(7.69) 3.03	02(40.00) 6.07	33(05.21) (100.00)
Tenant Cultivator	07(4.07) 9.09	20(13.16) 25.96	32(16.08) 41.58	15(22.06) 19.48	—	03(23.08) 3.89	—	77(12.15) (100.00)
Agricultural labour	126(73.25) 49.22	97(63.82) 37.89	33(16.58) 12.89	—	—	—	—	256(40.37) (100.00)
Non-agricul tural household	39(22.68) 53.42	20(13.15) 30.14	12(6.03) 16.44	—	—	—	—	71(11.20) (100.00)
Total	172(100.00) 27.13	152(100.00) 23.97	199(100.00) 31.39	68(100.00) 10.73	25(100) 3.94	13(100) 2.05	05(100.00) 0.79	634(100.00) (100.00)

Table 21 suggests that 31.39 percent of the total households of the two villages under

study belong to the size class of 1-3 acre ( small size ); 27.13 percent have no land and 23.97 percent hold marginal size ( below one acre ). It also appears from farm asset data that none of the households in the class of below 1 acre holds any farm asset . Practically their status is similar to that of the agricultural labourer. Ploughing operation of these families is generally done either with the help of hired labour or by borrowing the plough from his neighbour. **Owner Cultivator** : Size of holding of owner cultivators varies from below 1 acre to the size class of 12 acre and above. 54.82 percent household of the owner cultivator belong to the class of 1-3 acre . As the size increases the number of household decreases. Similarly ownership of farm asset also shows the same trend . Farm asset and size of holding are positively correlated . All the households of the owner cultivators in the class of 9-12 acre and 12 above, possess more than one set of farm asset. That is, they have more than one set of plough, draught animals, sprayers, shallow and at least one diesel operated pump set. This suggests that they have full set of irrigation of their own and get their land irrigated for cultivation of commercial crops. They are the *Rich Peasants* who invest capital in agriculture they constitute 6.16 percent of the total owner cultivator. Bardhan (1984) identifies them as *Capitalist Farmer* who extracts surplus. They cultivate their land predominantly with hired labour. There are ten households in the owner cultivator class who hold land in size class of 6-9 acre. The owner cultivators in the size class of 1- 3 acre may be regarded as *Poor Peasant*. They constitute 58.88 percent. They do not have any farm asset. Some members of this size class also hire out their labour to others. Households in the size class of 3-6 acre may be regarded as *Middle Peasant* and they formed 24.62 percent of the owner cultivator. They have a single set of farm asset like one plough, two draught animals, pump sets and all of them have at least one shallow and a sprayer. It indicates that these households also get their land irrigated by using diesel motor pump. They have been trying to utilise their land very efficiently.

### **Supervisory Cultivator**

Size of holding also varies in this category. All the supervisory cultivators are residing within the village; none is absentee as observed by Beteille (1996) and Thorner (1981). However, there are three landlords who are residing in the adjacent villages. In terms of farm assets, it appears that only 3 households are identified as *Rich Peasant*, and others are *Middle Peasants* (18.18 percent) and *Poor Peasants* (58.72 percent). Households in the size class of 1-3 acre leased out their land due to non-availability of their family labour. Their size of family is very small either single or two.

### **Tenant - Cultivator**

Tenancy on crop sharing which had been once predominant feature in the region, is gradually decreasing. Only 12.15 percent of the total households belong to this category. Majority of them (41.58%) hold the land in the size class 1-3 acre. Only 9.09 percent tenant cultivators are landless; 67.54 percent of them are *Poor Peasant* who hold land in the class of 1-3 acre. Only 3 households of the total 77 households are in the category of *Rich Peasant* who have double set of farm assets. 15 tenant cultivators have single set of farm asset and they are similar to that of *Middle Peasant*.

### **Agricultural Labourer**

They constitute 40.37 of the total households; 49.22 percent of them are landless and 37.89 percent have land in the class of below 1 acre and 12.89 percent families belong to the class of 1-3 acre. The agricultural labour families do not have any farm asset.

### **Non - Agricultural Households**

Economic status of the non agricultural households is similar to that of agricultural labour families. 50.70 percent of them have no land; 36.62 percent in the size class of below one acre

and 12.68 percent in the class of 1-3 acres. Among the non-agricultural households we don't find any farm asset. They are mainly wage earner families who cultivate their land either by employing hired labour or lease out the same.

## **Caste and Class**

Both caste and class are overlapping social phenomena of social stratification of Indian society. The former is social while the latter is economic . Thus Sharma ( 1997 ) observes " caste and class represent to a large extent though through different angles of the same social reality. Classes function within the contexts of caste. Caste conflicts are also class or agrarian conflicts" ( Sharma 1997 : 292 ),

Most of the sociologists observe that caste and class are interrelated . Higher class is being represented in higher castes. On the other hand, lower caste represents in the lower class ( Mencher 1978; Omvedt 1982 ; Chauhan 1972 ; Oommen 1996). Beteille ( 1996 ) observes the same phenomena in the traditional set up of Tanjore village. After independence the class system has gradually been dissociating itself from the caste structure . We do not find the same phenomena in the villages under study due to non- existence of sizeable population of higher castes. There are only four higher caste households - three Brahmins and one Kayastha at Guriarpar village. Not a single higher caste household is available at Balaghat. Scheduled caste population being represented from Rajbanshi and Jalia Kaibarta constitutes 74.13 percent of the total population; Other Backward Classes ( OBC ) formed the 3.63 percent and Muslims 21.61 percent. Only 00.63 percent population are from the higher caste people. Thus major social groups in the two villages are Rajbanshi , Muslims and Jalia Kaibarta. Hence caste factor has got no special significance in analysis of the two villages. We shall analyse the correlation between caste and class. Table 22 shows the relationship of caste and class.

**Table 22** Distribution of households by caste / community and class of the two villages.

Agrarian Classes	Caste /Community				Total
	Rajbanshi (S.C)	Muslim (Minority)	Jalia Kaibarta (S.C)	Others OBC + Genl	
Owner Cultivator	112 (32.18) (56.85)	26 (18.98) (13.20)	49 (42.98) (24.87)	10 (28.57) (5.08)	197 (31.07) (100)
Supervisory Cultivator	15 (4.31) (45.45)	13 (9.49) (39.39)	03 (2.63) (9.09)	02 (5.71) (6.07)	33 (5.21) (100)
Tenant Cultivator	48 (13.79) (62.34)	19 (13.87) (24.67)	09 (7.89) (11.69)	01 (2.86) (1.30)	77 (12.15) (100)
Agricultural Labour	139 (39.94) (54.30)	69 (50.36) (26.95)	44 (38.60) (17.19)	04 (11.43) (1.56)	256(40.37) (100)
Non Agricultural	24 (9.77) (47.89)	10 (7.30) (14.08)	09 (7.90) (12.68)	18 (51.43) (25.35)	71 (11.20) (100)
Total	348 (100) (54.89)	137 (100) (21.61)	114 (100) (17.98)	35 (100) (5.52)	634 (100) (100)

Table 22 shows that all caste groups have representation in all classes. Since Rajbanshi, the original inhabitants of the region constitute 54.89 percent of the total households of the two villages. They represent more in number in each class in comparison with other caste. Owing to their numerical domination their representation is high in all categories. However in terms of intra-caste point of view, it appears that Jalia Kaibarta has highest representation in owner cultivating class. 42.98 percent of Jalia Kaibarta belongs to the owner cultivator class. Though they constitute only 17.98 percent of the total households, they share 24.87 percent of the total land owning families. The Muslims have highest representation in agricultural labourer ( 50.36 percent ). The Rajbanshi and the Jalia Kaibarta have almost equal share in the agricultural labour class ( 39.94 and 38.60 percent respectively). Other caste groups mainly consisting of functional caste groups of OBC category and four general higher castes have

largest share in non agricultural caste ( 51.43 percent ). Of the Rajbanshi and the Muslims the percentage of tenant cultivators is almost equal ; 13.79 and 13.87 percent respectively. In case of supervisory cultivators, the Muslims' share is highest ( 9.94 percent ). Economic position of the Muslims and the Jalia Kaibarta are comparatively better than the Rajbanshi who control 54.69 percent of the total land. Owing to their better economic position, the Jalia Kaibartas and the Muslims are in a position to purchase land. Table 23 shows land transfer of the two villages preceding the last ten years on the date of survey.

**Table 23** Quantity of land transfer by caste of the two villages.

Caste	Land Transfer ( in acre )		
	Purchased	Sold	Balance
Rajbanshi	55.87	82.06	- 16.15
Muslim	55.00	16.15	+ 38.85
Jalia Kaibarta	42.50	28.44	+ 14.06
Other	3.59	5.43	- 1.84

It is observed from table 23 that positive balance is found in respect of two communities i.e. Muslim and Jalia Kaibarta where as others have negative balance i.e. they sold more than they purchased. The Muslims have purchased maximum amount of land ( 38.85 acre ). They are in a position to invest in land. The Jalia Kaibarta are also investing on land. Their position is next to the Muslims. They are residing in the village Guriarpar only. The fertility of the soil in the cluster where the Jalia Kaibartas reside is comparatively better than other parts of the village. They are growing vegetables for markets. Similarly about 70 percent of the Muslims are residing in the village Balaghat. The Muslims of Balaghat are cultivating the vegetables like Cabbage and cauliflower for markets. The price of the cultivable land is very high at Balaghat amongst all the villages of Tufanganj subdivision. Thus there is no significant correlation between caste and class.

# **Chapter-V**

## **Agrarian Relations**

# CHAPTER - V

## AGRARIAN RELATIONS

Relations between landlords and tenants on the one hand, and landlords and agricultural labourers on the other, constitute a major aspect of the agrarian social structure. Here we shall discuss first the agricultural labour relations and then the tenancy relations of the two villages under study.

### Agricultural Labour Relations

The development technology and political forces contribute to change the agrarian labour relations. Agricultural labourers form a vulnerable section of the society, mostly from the weaker sections both economically and socially. They live below the poverty line occupying the lowest rung of the rural ladder. Studies on agricultural labour show that bulk of the agricultural labourers are from the weaker sections of the community; mainly from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe (Sankar 1993; Chauhan 1983). Breman (1985:115) observes "agricultural labourers in Surat District are all tribals". They are the most disadvantaged sections of the society. Thorner and Thorner (1974) observe, "irregular employment, onerous conditions of work, and low wages were associated with agricultural labourers. They formed the most disadvantaged economic group in the rural society".

### Background of Agricultural Labourer

**Caste :** Caste background of the agricultural labourer of 103 sample households the two villages is shown in the table 24.

**Table 24** Distribution of sample households (103) of agricultural labourer by caste and village.

Caste / Community	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Rajbanshi (S.C)	37 (64.91)	19(41.30)	56(54.37)
Muslim	04(7.02)	27(58.70)	31(30.10)
Jalia Kaibarta(S.C)	16(28.07)	-	16(15.53)
Other	-	-	-
Total	57 (100.00)	46(100.00)	103(100.00)

Table 24 shows that majority of the agricultural labourers belong to the scheduled caste; percentage of agricultural labourers who belong to the caste of Rajbanshi and Jalia Kaibarta is 54.37 and 15.53 respectively. The Muslims form 30.10 percent of the total. Other caste groups have no representation.

### Size of holding :

It appears from table 21 in chapter IV that 49.22 percent of the total agricultural labourers are land less; 37.89 percent have below 1 acre; and only 12.89 percent hold in the size class of 1-3 acres. Sankar (1993) observes that 42 percent of agricultural labourers have no land. The quality of land possessed by them is poor. They are not suited to all sorts of cultivation.

### Family Earner

The modernization of agriculture helps increase the agricultural activities yielding more demand for agricultural labourer and resulting in the elimination of rural poverty. Agricultural activities of the two villages have been increased due to commercialisation of agriculture. However the incidence of single earner family among the agricultural labourers predominates in the two villages. Table 25 shows the number of earners per family of the two villages.

**Table 25** Distribution of agricultural labour households by number of earners and caste.

Caste / Community	Number of Earners			Total
	Single	Two	Three	
Rajbanshi	24(48) (42.86)	25(62.50) (44.64)	07(53.84) (12.50)	56(54.37) (100.00)
Muslim	18(36) (58.06)	10(25) (32.26)	03(23.08) (9.68)	31(30.10) (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	08 (16) (50.00)	05(12.50) (31.25)	03(23.08) (18.75)	16(15.53) (100.00)
Total	50(100) (48.55)	40(100) (38.83)	13(100) (12.62)	103(100.00) (100.00)

Table 25 suggests that incidence of number of earners per family to the total sample agricultural labourer's households is high among the Rajbanshis than the Jalia Kaibarta and the Muslims. It may be due to the fact that the Rajbanshi women are allowed to participate in the agricultural operations. Percentage of single earners, double earners and triple earners per family to the total agricultural labourer house holds is 48.55, 38.83 and 12.62 respectively.

### Female Earner :

1991 census data shows that percentage of women agricultural labour has been increased during the period 1981-91. In our two sample villages the number of agricultural labourer is not sufficient. Female participation in agricultural labour market is still not sufficient in the two villages. Generally the agricultural labourers do not pay high esteems to their counter parts to work as agricultural labour. The table 26 shows the participation as agricultural labour.

**Table 26** Distribution of agricultural labour households by involvement of female labour and caste.

Caste / Community	House holds whose female Member		Total
	Work as agri labour	Dose not work as agri labour	
Rajbanshi	19 (33.93)	37 (66.07)	56 (100.00)
Muslim	06 (19.75)	25 (80.65)	31 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	03 (18.75)	13 (81.25)	16 (100.00)
Total	28 (27.18)	75 (72.82)	103 (100.00)

Table 26 shows that of the households whose female members work as agricultural labour is only 27.18. All the caste groups have representation in female agricultural labourer. However, fe-

male labour participation is highest among the Rajbanshis (33.93 percent).

### **Non - Agricultural Activities Works**

The non - agricultural activities of the two villages have been analysed in chapter-iv. Indian agriculture is seasonal in nature. The agricultural labourers don't get employment throughout the year; they are very low paid . They supplement their income by performing non agricultural work in the lean season. The non agricultural activities being performed by the agricultural labourers include making of *dhara* and *bidi*, pulling of hand-cart ( *Thela* ), and petty business.

### **Types of Agricultural Labourer**

The agricultural labourers do not form a homogeneous group. Their status varies depending on terms of employment, duration of work, frequencies of payment and so on. Most of the scholars classified them into two groups viz ; casual and attached ( Bose 1984; Basant 1984 ; Thorner and Thorner 1974 ). The Agricultural Labour Enquiry Commission in 1949 identifies two categories of agricultural labour - attached and casual. Attached workers " are more or less in continuous employment and are under some sort of contact with employers during the period of employment." Casual workers, on the other hand, are " workers employed from time to time according to exigencies of work " ( Thorner and Thorner 1974 : 177 ). To Thorner and Thorner, agricultural labourers are of two categories viz free and un-free with a seven sub-groups depending on terms of employment, duration of work, mode of payment etc. The existence of each type of labour is associated with the type of mode of production. Existence of attached labour in agriculture is characterised by semi- feudal mode of production ( Bhaduri 1984 ). Rudra and Bardhan (1983) classified agricultural labourers into five classes viz casual labourers , farm servants , semi-attached ( type I ), semi-attached ( type II ), semi-attached ( type III ) depending on duration of contract, basis of payment, frequency of payment, medium of payment and so on.

The two major types of agricultural labourers viz ; casual and attached are found in the

two villages under study. Day labour

i.e. , casual labour known as *Kamla* or *Din Hajira Kamla* and attached labour or farm labour is known as *Chakuri Kamla* or *Bachhar Kamla* .

### **Casual Hire Agricultural Labour ( Unattached )**

A casual hire labourer is not attached to any particular employer. They are engaged on daily basis or <sup>for</sup> completion of a particular work for wage. At the end of the day or after completion of the work, they get their wages or contract money. They are free to chose their employer. In case of contract work, it is observed that a group of workers work together. They shared equally the wages so earned among themselves. A day labour is also engaged on piece rate system. There are some works which are mostly done on piece rate system ; it is preferred by the landlord as well as the labourer. Thus a casual agricultural labourer is engaged on daily basis and piece rate system.

Percentage of casual and farm labourers to the total agriculture labour is 93.47 and 6.53 respectively . Our observation corroborates the observation of Rudra and Bardhan (1984 : 7) who observe 84 percent of the agricultural families are purely casual and the rest are attached or semi attached. Under the present setting of agrarian relations changing trend is observed in the composition of agricultural labourer occupying <sup>lion</sup> share by casual hired labourer. This indicates that the incidence of attached labourer has been declined. Jodhka (1994) observed that "the phenomenon of attached labourers had been declined". High incidence of casual labour indicates freeing of agricultural labourer from all kinds of patronage and institutionalised dependency relationship.

### **Working Hours**

The agricultural labourers of the two villages do not allow the outside labourers to work. Similarly , they do not go for work outside the village. An agricultural worker works from 8.00

Am to 4.00 P.M. with one hour break for launch from 1.00 P.M.. To 2.00 P.M.. For launch he/she goes to his/her own house. Now a days, launch is not provided by the land lord.

### **Wages and Income**

As it is already mentioned, agricultural labourers form economically weaker section of the rural society. Their wages and family income are very low in India. Wage rate of a casual worker varies between Rs. 25/- to Rs. 30/- per day. A woman worker comparatively gets a lesser wage by Rs. 5/-. Similarly wage for piece rate varies depending on type, volume and urgency of the work.

### **Monthly Average Employment**

The agricultural workers do not have continuous work. Agricultural operation are generally of a seasonal nature. Accordingly demand for agricultural labour is seasonal. During the sowing and harvesting seasons, almost all the labourers including child labourers are fully employed. But, in many areas where cultivation is mainly dependent on rains, employment of agricultural labour is confined only to a short period and rest of the year most of them remain unemployed. Average monthly employment pattern of the two villages is shown in table 27

**Table 27** Distribution of the sample (103) Agricultural labour households by average monthly working days of the two villages.

Average monthly / working days	Villages		Total
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	
-10	09(15.79) (81.82)	02(4.35) (18.18)	11(10.68) (100.00)
10-20	29(50.88) (58.00)	21(45.65) (42.00)	50(48.54) (100.00)
20-30	19(33.33) (45.24)	23(50.00) (54.76)	42(40.78) (100.00)
Total	57(100.00) (55.34)	46(100.00) (44.66)	103(100.00) (100.00)

Table 27 shows that majority (48 percent ) of the agricultural labourers' households gets work only 10 - 20 days in a month; rest of the days they are unemployed. Of the two villages, average number of working days is more at Balaghat than Guriarpar. At Balaghat 50 percent of the total sample agricultural households have been in work for 20-30 days in a month. This may be due for commercial cultivation of vegetables and Bodo which help increase agricultural man days.

### Borrowing

Labour relation can be better understood by a close observation of borrowing behaviour of the agricultural labourers. In the lean seasons agricultural labourers usually remain unemployed. To meet their family expenditure , they have to borrow either cash or kind from their landlord. As Bardhan (1986;59) observes " there is a large class of labourers who take loans from the employer during the agricultural lean period, when there is little farm work ". Dadan system was very common in many parts of West Bengal. The left front government in West Bengal initiated various developmental programmes like food for work, supply of subsidised rice, old-age pension, extension of banking credit facilities etc. to the weaker sections of the villages people so that they could be saved from the exploitation of landlord and rural money lenders. Credit relations of the agricultural labourers of the two sample villages is shown in table 28.

**Table 28** Distribution of borrowers of agricultural labourers by source and caste.

Caste	Source		Total
	Individual	Institution	
Rajbanshi	02 (15.38)	11 (84.62)	13 (100.00)
Muslim	07 (70.00)	03 (30.00)	10 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	-	02 (100.00)	02 (100.00)
Total	09 (36.00)	16 (64.00)	25 (100.00)

Table 28 suggests that only 25 households of 103 sample households of agricultural labourer are involved in borrowing. More than 75 percent of the households are not involved in borrowings. Our observation are not corroborative with the observation of Bardhan and Rudra (1986) who observed 78 percent of agricultural labourers had a valid loans against commitment of future labour. The patron - client relationship through debt bondage of the two villages has been declined. This will be further confirmed from the data on source of credit. 64 percent of the total borrowers have availed them selves of institutional borrowings. Rural Bank (Uttar Banga Kshetriya Gramin Bank) has provided loans to them with the arrangement of the *Panchayats*. During my field survey, the agricultural labourers reported that now a days the employers were very reluctant to extend their economic assistance to the agricultural labourers as they earlier used to do. The <sup>28</sup> table shows that only 33 percent of the borrowers have taken recourse to the individuals source. However, comparatively it is more *in case of* the muslims than others.

### **Farm Labour ( Attached Labour )**

A labourer who is attached to a particular employer for a specific period of time is called a **farm labour**. The Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Commission defined attached labourers as " Agricultural workers under continuous employment for the last agricultural year, working irregularly, seasonally or annually with or without debt bondage or with or without tie - in - allotment". (Basant 1984 : 390.). The recent enquiry on Agricultural labourers under taken by the Government of India, defines " attached worker" as those who had continuous employment for one month or more at a time. They constitute only 11 percent to the total agricultural labourer. The proportion of attached workers is higher in some states, being about 24 percent in Panjab, 22 percent in Bihar and 20 percent in Uttar Pradesh as compared to about 6 percent in West Bengal ( Thomas 1988 : 6 ). Rudra and Bardhan (1983) also classified the attached labour into two categories - total attached and semi - attached. Thorner and Thorner (1974) identified the attached agricultural labourer as un-free labour. To some scholars the phenom-

enon of attached labour is characterised by the mode of production as semi feudal (Bhadhuri 1984). On the other hand, some others oppose this view. To them, shifts towards capitalism in agriculture was likely to generate a new demand for attached labour. However, number of attached labourers of the two sample villages under study is shown in table 29.

**Table 29** Distribution of farm labourers by caste and village.

Caste	Village		Total
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	
Rajbanshi	04(57.14) (80)	01(11.11) (20)	05(31.25) (100.00)
Muslim	01(14.28) (11.11)	08(88.89) (88.89)	09(56.25) (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	02(28.57) (100.00)	-	02(12.50) (100.00)
Total	07(100.00) (43.75)	09(100.00) (56.25)	16(100.00) (100.00)

Of the two villages, Balaghat (56.25 percent) has more attached labour than Guriarpar (43.75 percent). Among the different caste groups the incidence of attached labour is highest among the Muslims (56.25 percent) and lowest among the Jalia Kaibartas (15.50 percent).

### **Duration of Attachment**

There has been a variation of duration of attachment of farm labourer. Duration of attachment may be one season, one year or more than one year. Table 30 shows the duration of attachment of farm labourers in the two sample villages.

**Table 30** Distribution of farm labourers by duration of attachment with their landlord..

Duration of attachment	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Below one year	01 (14.29)	-	01 (6.25)
One year only	02 (28.57)	07 (77.78)	09 (56.25)
More than one year	04(57.14)	02 (22.22)	06 (37.50)
Total	07 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	16 (100.00)

Table 30 shows that majority of the farm labourers are engaged for one year only. Of the two villages, incidence of one year contract is more at Balaghat than Guriarpar. At Guriarpar, four out of seven farm labourers are engaged for more than one year.

### Caste

During my field investigation it had been observed that landlord recruited their farm labour amongst their very known persons either from their relatives or from their own caste group. Table 31 shows the caste affinity of the landlord and farm labourers.

**Table 31** Distribution of farm labourers by caste affinity with their landlord.

Landlord & farm labour belong to	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Same Caste / Community	06 (85.71)	09 (100)	15 (93.75)
Different Caste / Community	01 (14.29)	-	01 (6.25)
Total	07 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	16 (100.00)

Table 31 shows that landlord and farm labourers belong to same caste in 93.75 percent cases.

## Residence

Landlord and farm labourer<sup>3/4</sup> relationship can also be explained in terms of their residence. Those farm labourers, who reside in their landlords' residence, are more dependent upon their landlord than who are residing outside. Because they are fed by and provided with clothing. They are obliged to do other domestic activities beyond agricultural activities. Thus they enjoy less freedom as compared with those who are not residing in their employers' house. Table 32 shows the residential pattern of the farm labour.

**Table 32** Distribution of farm labourers by type of residence and village.

Type of residence	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Farm labour living in their landlord's house	05 (71.43)	05 (55.55)	10 (62.50)
Farm labour living in their own house	02 (28.57)	04 (44.45)	06 (37.50)
Total	07 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	16 (100.00)

62.50 percent of the total farm labourers are residing in their landlord's house. In both the villages the incidence of residing in landlord's house is more as compared with own accommodation. Those who are residing in their own house, enjoy more freedom because they do not provide obligatory services to their landlords.

## Wages

Farm labourers in the two villages are paid both in cash and kind. Those farm labourers who are residing in their landlord's residence are provided with two sets of clothing i.e.; two set of shirts, vests, *lungi* / *Dhoti* and Towels annually besides food and lodging. They are also paid in cash. It varies between Rs. 2000/- to Rs. 4000/- annually. However, those who are residing in their own houses and engaged for a period of one year or more, are also provided with the

same. However, those who are engaged for a period of below one year, are paid at the prevailing rates of casual day labourers. But, they are neither provided with dress nor food.

### Frequency of Payment

There is no uniform pattern of frequency of payment to farm labour. The frequency of payment is shown in table 33.

**Table 33** Distribution of Farm labourers by frequency of payment of the two villages.

Frequency of Payment	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Daily	01(14.29)	03 (33.33)	04 (25.00)
Monthly	02 (28.57)	07 (01.11)	03 (18.75)
Yearly	04 (57.14)	05 (55.56)	09 (56.25)
Total	07 (100)	09 (100)	16 (100)

Table 33 shows percentage of attached labourers who are paid annually is higher (56.25 per cent). Monthly payment is mostly favoured at Guriarpar (28.57 percent) than Balaghat. However, what ever may be the frequency of payment, it is observed during my field investigation that labourers <sup>usually</sup> received their payment as and when they required.

### Panchayat and Agricultural Labourers

After assuming power in 1977 the Left Front Government initiated various development measures through panchayat for upliftment of the material conditions of the agricultural labourers. They have been distributed with surplus land. Homeless agricultural labourers have been provided with houses under the scheme of Indira Abashan Yojana. To save them from the exploitation of rural money lenders, institutional credit facilities have been extended. As it is already mentioned, agricultural work is seasonal and in the lean agricultural season, workers

remain unemployed as there is no work. Hence to help them during the lean season, efforts have been made to provide them work. The process of empowerment of agricultural labourer has been started by the Left Front Government before assuming state power. Now, agricultural workers have been unionised mainly under the leadership of CPI(M). In the two villages, we find there are 17 agricultural labourers who have membership in *Kshet Majoor Union* and *Theela Union*. They have organised several movements to increase their wages. Thus we find that political consciousness is gradually growing among them. Like Mencher (1978) it is observed that in the two sample villages the mode of production is being shifted from semi-feudal to capitalist relation. Commercialization of cultivation has been started with the use of modern agricultural technology resulting in more demands for agricultural labour. The phenomenon of attached labour is gradually decreasing. Moreover, political development in the region added a new dimension to agricultural labour relations. They are now in a position to bargain their wage, duration of work etc. with the employer. They also stopped labour migration from outside the village. During my field survey I came across a number of cases where the agricultural labourers boycotted all sorts of work to the employer who did not comply with their demands. They put all sorts of pressure upon them so that they could comply with their demands. Thus modernisation of agriculture and decentralisation of political power of the region contributed to the changing of agricultural labour relation of the two villages.

### **Emerging Trends of Labour Relations**

Present generation of agricultural labourers now prefers to work on contract system or piece rate system rather than daily system. Shankar (1993) also observes the same phenomena. To him, the tendency to work on contract appears to be increasing. Due to their age factor, a young worker can work more compared to an aged labourer. They take less time to complete a work than the aged worker. Usually, these younger agricultural labourers work in a group which may be of different sizes. Sometimes such team is formed with the family member i.e., with husband-wife and their children. After completion of the work they are paid with the

contract money. And the workers equally share the amount among themselves. Like the daily wages, there is no uniform rate of piece - rate work. Mainly it depends on the nature of work as well as demands of the agricultural worker. In the wet paddy cultivation zone, time factor is important since agriculture mainly depends on nature. Moreover, with commercial cultivation of vegetable crops in Rabi season, the demands for agricultural labourer have been increased.

### **A Case Study on Contract Work**

Ram Kanta Barua aged 35 an agriculture labourer informed that they worked on contract system during the peak agricultural seasons like harvesting, transplantations, weeding etc. They worked on group. On 18th May, 1996, he along with other eight labourers worked in the field of Naren Barman for weeding of jutes in 2½ bigha of land for Rs.350/- with 2 Kg chira (derived rice). They started work at 9.00 A.M. and completed by 3.00 P.M.. They earned Rs. 36/- per head. Except one all are the Rajbanshis in their team and they were residing in the same para (cluster). Shri Barua informed that in the lean season they take up other non agricultural rural work relating to earthing, bamboo etc. There is no female member in their group. They reported that their wives were engaged in making bidi. They usually get 3 - 5 days' work in a year sponsored by Panchayat. To them it is not enough.

The younger generation of agriculture labourers prefer to work on contract basis because it is advantageous for them on the following grounds. First, work on daily basis requires to serve 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. with one hour lunch break. But, the same volume of work is completed much earlier had they been engaged on contract system. Thus it saves time. Secondly, it helps them earn more. They can earn more on contract system because the saved time is used by them in some other gainful economic activities. Thirdly, their collective spirit is enhanced through this system as they work in a group. Fourthly, it helps develop a formal relationship between the agricultural workers and landlords since they have to bargain to fix the wages of the work. Finally, it also enables them to increase their efficiency.

## Tenancy Relation

Tenancy is an age old institution. Tenancy was found in ancient India as it appeared from the texts of Manusmiriti, Kautliya's Arthasatra and the Budhist Jataka. Medieval India witnessed the same phenomena. But, during the British period the institution of tenancy had been common with the growth of non-cultivating classes for introduction of permanent settlement. Cooper ( 1988 ) observed, the other reasons besides economic depression and feminine for the growth of the sharecropper in Bengal during the British period Prior to 1930 as " a category of rural elite comprising landlords, traders, moneylenders and upwardly mobile raiyats acquired lands and turned to sharecropping. Sharecropping was favoured because it minimised direct involvement in agriculture, was profitable at a time of rising prices and facilitated rent enhancement " (Cooper 1999 62 ).

## Legal Protection

Earlier customary laws governed the relations between the land lord and the tenant. The tenants lived at the mercy of their land lords. No legal protection was made before 1885. The Bengal Tenancy Act 1885 was made to extend limited protection to bargadars. But , the minimum protection e.g. , fixed rent as given in the said act was extinguished by an amendment made in 1929. On the eve of independence, India witnessed a series of peasant movements known as *Tebhaga* - movement, in different regions. The *Tebhaga* movement was organised by share cropper in different parts of Bengal for sharing  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the product. Immediately after independence, the West Bengal Bargadar Act was passed in 1950 to protect the *interest of bargadars* . The West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act was passed in 1955. However, several amendments to the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, were made during the period of 1960s and 1970s for effective implementation of land reforms . The amendment of 1971 of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955, inter alia, made the following provisions :

- i) Increases the percentage of sharing from 50 to 75 if a tenant contributes agricultural imputes;

- ii) Hereditary inheritance of sharecropping;
- iii) Imposition of ceiling on leased in land from 6 hectares to 4 hectares;
- iv) Issue of receipt by the land lord to the tenant in acknowledging the product received from his tenant.

The above provisions were not sufficient enough to mitigate the suffering of the sharecroppers since those were not effectively implemented due to lack of **political will**. However, being assumed in state power in 1977, the Left Front Government of West Bengal wanted to implement effectively the land reforms measures to relief the suffering of the sharecroppers, poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Hence necessary amendments were made to the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 from time to time. An important amendment was made in 1981, known as " The West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act 1981" which was passed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1981 and to which the presidents' assent was given on the 6th March 1986 with a view to eliminating the loopholes in the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955. Some of the Provisions of the Amendment of 1981 of the said Act provides:

Identification of *bargadars* and recording their names were a great problem since land-lords did not comply with the process of identification and recording the names of *bargadars*. On the question of identification of *bargadars* a section 21 (B) was inserted into the said Act which states " a person lawfully cultivating any land belonging to another person shall be presumed to be a *bargadar* in respect of such land if such person is not a member of the family of the other person whose land he cultivates and the question of proving that such person is not a *bargadar* or that the land is in his personal cultivation shall, notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law for the time being in forced, lie on the person who alleges that person cultivating the land is not a *bargadar* in respect of such land." (Shukla 1993 : 43 ). The settlement officials with the help of panchayats and local people launched a campaign known as

**Operation Barga** to record the names of *bargadars*. Section 21 (B) of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 made it easier the provision of identification of a *bargadar*. Since the question of proving lies with their landlord; not with the *bargadar*. Secondly, security of tenure was ensured by inserting a subsection 2 under section 15 of the West Bengal Land reforms Act 1955 which provides " the right of cultivation of land by bargadar shall, subject to the provision of this chapter, be heritable and shall not be transferable" (Shukla 1993 33 ). Thirdly, another insertion was made in two section 21 (C) for ensuing the financial help to the bargadar by forming a State Land Corporation or Regional Land Corporation. Fourthly, to save the *bargadar* from the exploitation of lawyers and touts, a bar had been imposed by inserting a sub- section 21 5 of section 21 of West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 which provides in deciding any disputes under the provision of Chapter II " no advocate or legal practitioner as defined in section 3 of the legal Protection Act 1879 ( 18 of 1979) shall be allowed to plead <sup>or</sup> ~~an~~ act in any capacity on behalf of the party before any officer or authority unless such Advocate or legal Practitioner himself is a party to the dispute" (Shukla 1993 : 49 ).

The Left Front Government wanted to give security, to make them free from all kinds of exploitation and to give them a sense of self respect by amending the relevant provisions of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 and enforcing them strictly. Here we will analyse the nature of tenancy relation and impact of these tenancy laws upon the tenant and also the emerging trends of tenancy of the two villages under study.

### **Type of Tenant :**

During my field work I collected data from 32 sample tenant house holds. There are very few pure tenant households. Most of the tenant households have their own land and thus they belong to the category of owner-cum-tenant. The same phenomena is also observed by Bhowmick(1993). The 32 tenant households are distributed by caste and type in table - 34.

**Table 34** Distribution of 32 tenant households by caste and type of the two villages .

Caste	Type of Tenant		Total
	Recorded	Un-Recorded	
Rajbanshi	14 (58.33) (82.35)	03 (37.50) (17.65)	17(53.12) (100.00)
Muslim	06 (25.00) (54.55)	05 (62.50) (45.45)	11(34.38) (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	04 (16.67) (100.00)	-	04(12.50) (100.00)
Other	-	-	-
Total	24 (100.00) (75)	08 (100.00) (25)	32(100.00) (100.00)

Table 34 shows that 75 percent of the *bargadars* of the two villages have recorded their names. Thus our observation corroborates the observation of Bandhyopadhyaya 1980 who claimed that 75 percent of the *bargadars* had recorded their names, but it contradicts the observation of Khashnabis (1994) who claimed 70 percent of the lessee households did not record their names. Percentage of recorded bargadars is highest (100 percent) among the Jaliakaibartas where as it is lowest (54.55 percent) among the Rajbanshis. Since other caste groups have no representation in the sample, they are left blank.

### **Reasons for Non - Recording**

In the past, as it is mentioned, fear of noncompliance on the part of landlord made the *bargadars* reluctant to record their names. Our data suggests that incidence of recording is high when land lord and tenant do not belong to the same community. The unrecorded *bargadars* reported that the reason for un-recording was noncompliant on the part of their Landlords. Rudra (1981) observes that recording makes the share cropper alienated from the landlords

who are now denying the consumption loan and cost of inputs they shared before to their tenants.

### Tenancy and Cropping Pattern

There is a controversy over the efficiency of tenancy. Some argue that tenancy is inefficient while for others it is efficient. Cropping pattern of the tenant is shown in table 35.

**Table 35** Distribution of tenants by types of crop cultivated.

Cropping Pattern	Type of Tenant		All Tenants
	Recorded	Un-Recorded	
Single Crop (either <i>Aus</i> / Jute or <i>Aman</i> )	06 (25)	03 (37.50)	09 (28.13)
Double Crops ( <i>Aus</i> and <i>Aman</i> or Jute and <i>Aman</i> )	18 (75)	15 (62.50)	23 (71.88)
Total	24 (100.00)	08 (100.00)	32 (100.00)

Table 35 shows that mainly traditional crops have been cultivated by the tenants. Double cropping is the pre - dominant form of cultivation among the recorded tenants. It is not so among the non - recorded tenants.

### Sharing of Crop and Cost

Cropsharing is the predominant form of tenancy in West Bengal; percentage of crop sharing between landlords and tenants varies not only in different region in different times but also within the same region; even within the same village at a time. Khashnabis (1994) observes five different ratios in his study of 26 villages selected from 4 districts of West Bengal ( Khashnabis

1994; A - 189). Bardhan and Rudra (1983) observe eleven different types of crop sharing in 1976. Again four ratios of crop sharing were observed by Khashnabis and Chakraborty (1992) in their study in Nadia district. Bhowmick (1993) also observes five different ratios of crop sharing. However, our sample villages suggest 3 different forms of crop sharing. The pattern is shown in table 36.

**Table 36.** Distribution of tenants by types of crop sharing.

Types of Crop Sharing Tenant : Landlord	No of Cases		Total
	Recorded	Unrecorded	
50 : 50	18 (75)	08 (100.00)	26 (81.25)
60 : 40	01 (4.16)	-	01 (3.13)
75 : 25	05 (20.84)	-	05 (15.63)
Total	24 (100.00)	08 (100.00)	32 (100.00)

Table 36 suggests that half sharing ( 50 : 50 ) is the predominant form of crop sharing pattern in the two villages under study (81 .25 percent). Half sharing is more incase of recorded *Bargadar*. There is no other form of sharing incase of unrecorded *bargadars*. It may be for their intimacy with landlord, the tenants do not exercise their right. But, in case of recorded *bargadars*, there are other two forms. About 20.84 percent of the recorded *bargadars* are enjoying 75 : 25 sharing. Cost sharing is also associated with crop sharing. In case of half sharing, the cost is borne by the landlords and in case of other forms the cost is not shared by the landlords.

### **Dominance - Dependence Relation**

In the past the tenants were dominated by their landlord. But, after Operation Barga such relationship has been changed. Presently the tenants are more free. Table 37 shows the dominance - dependence relation between landlords and tenants.

**Table 37** Distribution of tenants by types and items of dominance - dependence.

Items dominance - dependence.	Recorded	Unrecorded	All tenant
1. Decision regarding cultivation is taken by :			
a. Tenant	20 (83.33)	04(50)	24(75)
b. Landlord	--	01(12.05)	01(3.12)
c. Jointly	04(16.67)	03(37.5)	07(21.88)
Total	24(100.00)	80(100.00)	32(100.00)
2. Cultivation is supervised by :			
a. Landlord himself	07(29.17)	06(75.00)	13(40.62)
b. Any family member of landlord	02(8.33)	--	02(6.25)
c. None the above	15(62.50)	2(25.00)	17(53.17)
Total	24(100.00)	08(100.00)	32(100.00)
3. Threshing and sharing of crops takes place :			
a. Tenant's house	21(87.50)	07(87.5)	28(87.5)
b. Landlord's house	02(8.33)	01(12.5)	03(9.38)
c. Niether of the above	01(4.17)	-	01(3.12)
Total	24(100.00)	08(100.00)	32(100.00)
4. Services rendered by Tenant to his landlord:			
a. Fully paid	24 (100.00)	08 (100.00)	32(100.00)
b. Under paid	--	--	--
c. Unpaid	--	--	--
d. None of the above.	--	--	--
Total	24(100.00)	08 (100.00)	32(100.00)

The table 37 shows 75 percent of the tenants are free to take decision regarding cultivation of their leased in land by themselves. Landlord and tenant take decision jointly in case of only 21.88 percent tenant. And, only an unrecorded tenant reported that his landlord takes decision for cultivation. Now most of the tenants of the two villages are free to take decision about their cultivation. The same table shows that recorded bargadars are more free than unrecorded. Unrecorded *bargadars* are more dominated by their landlord. Earlier it was observed that generally after harvesting the tenants gathered the crops in the house of their landlord where threshing and sharing of crops used to take place. Now, the place of crop sharing and threshing took place in the house of the tenant ( 87.50 ). Only 9.38 percent of the cases, the sharing and threshing took place in the house of the landlord.

In one case it is observed that threshing and sharing took place in the field, neither in the house of landlord nor tenant. The tenants enjoy more freedom in selecting the place of threshing and sharing of crops. In regard to obligatory services, our data suggest that the tenants do not provide such services to their landlords.

Thus the traditional dominance of landlord over tenant in respect of work supervision, decision of crops selection, obligatory services and so on has been declined. Now, tenants are more free in these regards. The present landlord-tenant relation as found in our two sample villages is not just like a dominance - dependence relation as it is called by *feudal or semi-feudal relation*.

### **Credit - Relations**

Dominance - dependence relation of landlord tenant can also be measured in terms of credit relation. In the past tenants used to get all sorts of loan either consumption or other from their landlord. But, at present the landlords are not willing to provide any loan to their tenants. Thus Rudra (1981) rightly pointed out that after Operation Barga the tenants are denied of their consumption loan as well as cost of inputs in agriculture . Our data also show the same phe-

nomena. Table 38 shows the sources of credit enjoyed by the tenants.

**Table 38** Distribution of tenants by sources of credit .

Sources of credit :	No of Tenants		Total
	Recorded	Unrecorded	
(a) Land lord	--	02	02
(b) Institutional	12	--	12
Total	12	02	14

Table 38 presents that out of 32 tenants only 14 tenants ( 43.75 percent ) have incurred the credit. All the recorded 12 tenants have availed themselves of the institutional credit facilities i.e., they incurred loan from Uttar Banga Kshetriya Gramin Bank ( Rural Bank ). On the other hand, two unrecorded tenants have incurred loan from their landlord. This suggests that unrecorded bargadars are more dependent upon their landlord than recorded tenants.

### **Incidence of Land Surrender**

As I earlier discussed that the programme *Operation Barga* was launched to protect the interest of the *Bargadars* by recording their names. But, it has been observed that some of the recorded *Bargadars* have voluntarily surrendered their leased in land to their landlords. Provisions for voluntarily surrender or abandonment by *bargadars* have been made under section 20 (B) in the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955. In such case a willing *bargadars* must give information in writing of such surrender to the appropriate authority appointed under sub - section (1) of section 18 of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955. By passing this legal provision, a section of recorded *bargadars* have surrendered their leased in land. Data available from the two local Revenue Inspectorate Office of the two villages show that there were 79 and 59 recorded *bargadars* at Guriarpar and Balaghat respectively. But during my field survey the same number of recorded bargadars was not found since some of them have

surrendered their leased in land.

A sample of 65 of the total recorded *bargadars* had been surveyed to observe their present status . The samples were selected at random basis. Table 39 shows the total number of recorded *bargadars* as per register by caste and land holding of the two villages under study.

**Table 39.** Distribution of recorded bargadars by caste and leased-in-land.

Caste / Community	Total household	Total leased in land (Acre)	Average holding of leased in land per household
Scheduled Caste	102 (73.91)	81.79 (75.31)	0.80
Muslim	30 (21.74)	22.86 (21.05)	0.76
Other	06 (4.35)	03.95 (3.65)	0.67
Total	138 (100.00)	108.60 (100.00)	0.79

Table 39 shows that there are one hundred thirty eight bargadars who had recorded their names in the two villages till the date of survey . Of them about 74 percent belong to the scheduled caste, the Muslims and Others share only 22 and 4 percent respectively . Since the register did not show the name of the caste of bargadars, we could not show it separately. Here scheduled caste includes Rajbanshis, Jaliakaibarta and Namasudra caste. 102 scheduled caste tenants hold about 75 percent of the total leased in land, 30 Muslim *bargadars* hold about 21 percent of the total leased in land . *Bargadars* belonging to other caste groups which include other backward classes sharing only 03.95 percent of the total land. A sample of 65 (47percent ) of the total recorded *bargadars* of the two village has been surveyed by applying a separate schedule to observe their present status. Hence these *bargadars* have been distributed by

caste and average size of holding in table 40.

**Table 40** Distribution of sample (65) recorded bargadars by caste and average size of holding.

Caste	No of Bargadar	Average size of holding
Rajbanshi	40	1.10
Muslim	15	1.51
Jalia Kaibarta	08	0.96
Others	02	0.24
Total	65	1.15

Table 40 shows that the average size of holding of the leased in land of the *bargadar* is 1.15 acres. Average size of holding is high among the Muslims; it is low among the other caste groups. Size of holding of leased in land among the 65 Bargadars is shown in table 41.

**Table 41** Distribution of sample (65) Recorded Bargadar by size of holding and caste.

Caste	Size Class ( in acre)			Total
	-1	1-3	3+	
Rajbanshi	21 (52.50)	17 (42.50)	02 (5.00)	40 (100.00)
Muslim	08 (53.33)	07 (46.67)		15 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	05 (62.50)	03 (37.50)		08 (100.00)
Other	02 (100.00)	--		02 (100.00)
Total	36 (55.38)	27 (41.54)	02 (3.08)	65 (100.00)

Size of holding of the leased in land is very small. About 55 percent of the total *bargadars* hold below one acre. Only two *bargadars* among the Rajbanshi hold 3 acre and above. Table 42

shows the number of *bargadars* who had surrendered to or adjusted their leased in land with their landlord.

**Table 42** Distribution of sample recorded (65) Bargadars by type of land surrender and caste.

Caste	Type of Surrender / Adjustment			Total
	Full	Partial	Non Surrender	
Rajbanshi	26 (65.00)	01 (2.50)	13 (32.50)	40 (100.00)
Muslim	05 (33.33)	01 (6.67)	09 (60.00)	15 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	06 (75.00)	--	02 (25.00)	08 (100.00)
Other	--	--	02 (100.00)	02 (100.00)
Total	37 (56.92)	27 (3.08)	26 (40.00)	65 (100.00)

Table 42 shows that of the total 65 recorded *bargadars*, only 26 ( 40 percent ) *bargadars* have not surrendered or adjusted their land . 60 percent of them have surrendered their land . It is against 17.83 percent as observed Khusro (1988). Of the total number of surrendered *bargadars* , about 57 percent have fully surrendered and only 3 percent have partially surrendered i.e. they have surrendered a part of their total leased in land. The incidence of land surrender is very high in the two villages. But, none of the surrendered tenants has followed the legal provisions. That is why, their names have not been deleted in the record register as maintained in the Local Revenue Inspectorate office.

### REASONS OF LAND SURRENDER

Now, a question arises why the *bargadars* surrendered their leased in land. Various

reasons are put forward by the land lords and tenant for such surrender. The necessity of money arises for various purposes like social observance, medical treatment etc. are some of them. Land lords met these problems by selling their land for which they were bound to surrender. The reasons of surrender of leased in land is shown in table 43.

**.Table 43** Distribution of (39) surrendered recorded bargadars by types of reasons and caste.

Caste	Reasons : Need			Total
	Owner's	Bargadar's	Both	
Rajbanshi	24 (88.89)	03 (11.11)	--	27 (100.00)
Muslim	05 (83.33)	--	01 (16.67)	06 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	06 (100.00)	--	--	06 (100.00)
Total	35 (89.75)	03 (7.69)	01 (2.56)	39 (100.00)

Table 43 shows that 89.75 percent *bargadars* reported that they had surrendered their leased in land for their landlords' need. Only 7.69 percent reported that they had surrendered their leased in land for their own need; only 2.56 percent for their joint need i.e; owner as well as bargadars. With whom is the surrendered land retained ? During my field survey, it was observed that the surrendered land was not always retained by the landlord himself ; sometimes they sold it to the third parties. In some cases it was fully and in some other cases it was partly retained by the *bargadars*. Table 44 shows the land retention patterns of surrendered *bargadars*.

**Table 44** Distribution of surrender recorded (39) Bargadars by types of land retained and caste.

Caste	Types of Land Retainer			Total
	Landlord	Bargadar	3rd Party	
Rajbanshi	04 (14.81)	07 (25.93)	16 (59.26)	27 (100.0)
Muslim	02 (33.33)	03 (50.00)	01 (16.67)	06 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	03 (50.00)	03 (50.00)	--	06 (100.00)
Total	09 (23.08)	13 (33.33)	17 (43.59)	39 (100.00)

Table 44 shows that incidence of land retention is high in case of third party (43.59 percent); the leased in land has been sold to the third party i.e. other than land lord and tenants. The percentage of *bargadars* and landlords who retained the leased in land is 33.33 and 23.08 respectively. When a *bargadars* retained their leased in land, he has to pay the value of the 50 percent of the surrendered leased in land to his landlord. Different kinds of benefits had been received by the *bargadars* by way of land adjustment. The type of benefits that were received by the *bargadars* is shown in table 45.

**Table 45** Distribution of surrendered bargadars by type of benefits and caste.

Caste	Type of benefits received			Total
	Land	Money	Nothing	
Rajbanshi	07 (25.93)	08 (29.63)	12 (44.44)	27 (100.00)
Muslim	03 (50.00)	02 (33.33)	01 (16.67)	06 (100.00)
Jalia Kaibarta	04 (66.67)	--	02 (33.33)	06 (100.00)
Total	14 (35.90)	10 (25.64)	15 (38.46)	39 (100.00)

Table 45 shows that 24 *bargadars* received either a share of their leased in land or money by

surrendering their leased in land to their landlords. No benefit is received by 15 surrendered *bargadars* (38.46 percent) . However, percentage of *bargadars* who received either land or money is 35.90 and 25.64 percent respectively as a compensation of their land surrender. Intimacy in terms of caste affiliation between landlord and tenant also plays an important factor for land adjustment. Table 46 shows the caste affiliation between landlord and tenant.

**Table 46** Distribution of recorded Bargadars by affiliation of caste with their landlord.

Caste affiliation : Landlord & Tenant belongs to:	Type of Bargader		Total
	Surrendered	Non-surrendered	
Same Caste	28 (71.79)	03 (11.54)	31 (46.69)
Separate Caste	11 (28.01)	23 (88.46)	34 (52.31)
Total	39 (100.00)	26 (100.00)	65 (100.00)

Table 46 shows that about 71.79 percent of surrendered *bargadars* belongs to the same caste of their landlord. On the other hand , about 88.46 percent of the non-surrendered *bargadars* does not belong to his landlords' caste i.e; landlord and tenant belong to different caste. This indicates that due to the caste intimacy between landlord and tenant, they are responsive to each other's need. Thus incidence of land adjustment took place. Sometimes it is argued that due to non availability of institutional credit, the *bargadars* are forced to surrender their land as they could not invest in land. Table 47 shows the credit enjoyed by the *bargadars*.

**Table 47** Distribution of Bargadars by type of sources of institutional credit .

Bargadars Type:	Institutional credit		Total
	Received	Not-received	
Surrendered	17 (65.38) (43.59)	22 (56.41) (56.41)	39 (60.00) (100.00)
Non-surrendered	09 (34.62) (34.62)	17 (43.59) (65.38)	26 (40.00) (100.00)
Total	26 (100.00) (40)	39 (100.00) (60)	65 (100.00) (100.00)

Table 47 suggests that incidence of institutional credit recipient is comparatively high among the surrendered bargadars than the non-surrendered. Hence non - availability of institutional credit on the part of *bargadars* does not justify reasons for land surrender.

After surrendering their leased in land some one may think that the condition of the recorded *bargadars* has been deteriorated. A comparative position in terms of their own land holding at two different points viz. at the time of recording and at the time land surrendering is shown in table 48 .

**Table 48** Distribution of recorded bargadars by types of variation of land holding

Variation of own land holding	Bargaders		Total
	Surendered	Non-surendered	
Increased	20 (51.28)	13 (50.00)	33 (50.77)
Decreased	09 (23.08)	04 (15.38)	13 (20.00)
Remain same	10 (25.64)	09 (34.62)	19 (29.23)
Total	39 (100.00)	26 (100.00)	65 (100.00)

The comparative position is assessed in terms of their holding at time of recording and after surrender of their leased in land. Whether they have been able to increase their quantum of own land or they have sold out their own land or they keep the same quantity as they used to possess at the time of recording. Table 48 shows that only 23 percent of surrendered *bargadars* have lost their own land. About 51 percent of them were able to increase their owns land. And among the non - surrendered *bargadars* 50 percent have increased their own land.

### **Emerging Trends of tenancy**

Recently the pattern of share tenancy has been gradually changing. Landlords are unwilling to get their land cultivated by sharecropper due to fear of recording. Landlords generally

prefer to short term lease rather than permanent lease. Thus share tenancy is being replaced by lease - tenancy. Under the lease - tenancy system landlords generally prefer to lease out their land for a shorter period, mainly for a particular crop season like Rabi season or Pre-khariff season. During the rabi season, the tenants usually cultivate vegetables mainly potato, cabbage and cauliflower in rabi season and bodo in pre-kharif season. There are three major forms of lease - tenancy found in the two villages under study. These are short term lease tenancy on fixed rent, short term lease tenancy on share and short term rent - free tenancy.

### **Short-Term Tenancy On Fixed Rent**

Under this system a landlord leased out their land to a tenant for a fixed period against a fixed rent. There is no uniform pattern of fixed rent. It depends on landlord - tenant intimacy. The agreement may be written or verbal. Under this system the tenant bears all the costs of cultivation. The landlord has no involvement in cultivation. He just earns the rent. And after contract period is over, the land is retained by the landlord and he cultivates the same. This type of tenancy is usually found in the rabi season when the tenant cultivates vegetables like potato, cauliflower, cabbage, tomato for the market.

### **Short-Term Lease Tenancy On Share**

The second category may be called short term lease tenancy on share. Under this system, the cost as well as product is shared by both the landlord and the tenant. A poor cultivator or even an agricultural labourer, having enterprising attitude and no capital to invest in land, usually cultivates in this system. All the initial expenditure relating to cultivation will be borne by the landlord himself. The tenant will provide labour. Some times the tenant also provides the initial expenditure of cultivation. After marketing the product, the tenant and landlord share equally the profit as well as the cost incurred for production. Mainly vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower etc. are cultivated for the market.

This system is gainful for both the tenant and the landlord. Because a poor cultivator who is not able to invest in land, can reap the benefit by this system. Similarly the landlord who has no enterprising ability but having the capital to invest, can gain the profit. The risk of cultivation is also shared by both of them. During my field investigation I came across a cultivator, named Atiur Rahaman, aged 35, a resident of Balaghat, who made a lease contract with Jaymamta Sarkar, a cultivator of Guriarpar, who owned land of 12 acres, for rabi season. Atiur reported that he had been cultivating on lease contract during the last three years with several land owners in the adjoining villages. He mainly takes leased in land during the Rabi season and cultivates potato. He reaps two crops in the season- one early and the other is late. He takes leased in land on share basis. All the initial expenditure is made by Atiur but after marketing, the cost as well as the profit is equally shared by Atiur and his landlord. Atiur also employ hired labour for cultivation. However, he earned every year Rs. 10000/- to Rs. 15000/-.

### **Short Term Rent - Free Lease Tenancy**

The third category may be called *Short Term Rent - Free Lease Tenancy*. Here usually the poor cultivators lease out their land mainly in rabi season. In rabi season they keep their land fallow. Because cultivation of rabi crops requires capital for irrigation, fertilizer, seed etc. Since they are not in a position to invest in land, they kept fallow their land. They only cultivate jute and Aman paddy. On the other hand, the tenant who takes leased in such land applies chemical fertilizer etc. for cultivation of rabi crops in that land. After the harvesting of rabi crops, fertilizer is remained in the soil as residue which helps the lessor in cultivation of his own crops. That is why, the poor peasants who keep their land fallow in rabi season are interested in leasing out their land without any rent for rabi season only.

# **Chapter -VI**

## **Power Structure**

# CHAPTER - VI

## Power Structure

"Power" is an important aspect of social relationship which determines interpersonal and inter group relations in rural society. Therefore, dissection of power is an important task in realizing the agrarian structure. The concept " power" is used here in Weberian sense. To Weber, 'Power' is " the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action "( Weber in Gupta :1993 :456) .To Bottomore, " power is meant here the ability of an individual or a social group to pursue a course of action ( to make and implement decisions, and more broadly to determine the agenda for decision making) if necessary against the interests, and even against the opposition, of other individuals and groups."( Bottomore 1979 : 7 ). Thus power denotes domination of one group or individual over others.

### **The Rural Power**

At present, in rural West Bengal, power is mainly concerned with *panchayat* institution and other elected bodies which are concerned with governance of the village affairs. Beteille (1996) holds the view that power structure of the village could be analysed in terms of *panchayat* and political party. The *panchayat* literally means a group or council of five. Traditionally it refers to a group that presides over and resolves conflict, punishes people and launches group enterprises. At present *panchayat* refers to statutory local body formed through election vested with legal power and empowered with certain governmental responsibilities. The 73 rd amendment of the Indian Constitution made *panchayats* not only a constitutional body but also ensure them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. The State legislatures have been empowered to endow the *panchayat* with such powers and authority as it is thought best to enable them to function as institutions of self government ( Bandyopadhyay 1997 : 2450 ).

When the left front government came into power in 1977, they committed to decentralize

power. Accordingly they hold *panchayat* election regularly since 1978 at an interval of five years. The fifth *panchayat* election was held in 1998. The CPI(M) is a major partner of the left front government, a well organized and ideologically based party committed to rural development involving the rural poor. The *panchayat* system in West Bengal is unique in two respects. First it is political; political parties have openly participated in the election. Secondly, it has become an essential component of a new system of governance (Mukherjee and Bandhyapadhyay 1993 :3).

### **Party Domination in the Region**

The two sample villages are under the two separate jurisdictions of *Lokshabha* (Parliamentary Constituency) and *Bidhansabha* (State Assembly Constituency). The village, Guriarpar is under the Alipurduar Reserved (Scheduled Tribe) Parliamentary and the Tufanganj No. 9 Reserved (SC) Assembly Constituency. On the other hand, the village Balaghat, is under the Cooch Behar Reserved (Scheduled Caste) Parliamentary Constituency and the Natabari Assembly Constituency (Unreserved). Both the parliamentary seats are under the control of left parties. The Alipurduar Parliamentary Reserved Seat (ST) and the Cooch Behar Parliamentary Reserved Seat (SC) have been under the control of Rastriya Socialist Party (RSP) and Forward Block Party respectively since 1977. But, both the *Bidhan Sabha* seats have been controlled by CPI(M). Thus, left parties dominate the political affairs of the two villages under study.

### **Party domination in Panchayat**

The *panchayat* system of West Bengal is three tier viz *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samity* and *Zilla Parisad*. The two sample villages are under the jurisdiction of the same *Zilla Parisad* (Cooch Behar) and *Panchayat Samity* (Tufanganj-I). But, they are under the two separate *Gram Panchayats*, as mentioned earlier in Chapter-I. Guriarpar and Balaghat are under the *gram panchayats* of Dhalpal-II and Deocharai respectively.

Direct participation of political parties in *panchayat* election had been introduced since

1977. Party wise position of the *panchayat* member at the state level ( West Bengal) in 4th *panchayat* election held in 1993 is shown in table 49.

**Table 49** Distribution of *panchayat* members by tier and party in West Bengal in the 4th *panchayat* Election held in 1993.

Party Control	Name of the Tier		
	Gram Panchayat	Panchayat Samaty	Zilla Parishadmati
CPI (M)	35342 (57.93)	6333 (66.99)	528 (80.49)
CPI	799 (1.31)	90 (0.95)	06 (0.91)
Forward Block	1238 (2.03)	169 (1.79)	17 (2.59)
RSP	1526 (2.50)	241 (2.55)	14 (2.13)
Cong-I	16292 (26.70)	2158 (22.83)	73 (11.13)
BJP	2367 (3.88)	125 (1.32)	-- --
Janata	17 (0.03)	--	--
A		--	--
B			
Janata	2	—	—
Indipendent	3382 (5.54)	330 (3.49)	17 (2.59)
Election not held	46 (0.08)	7 (0.07)	01 (0.15)
Total No. of seat	61011 (100.00)	9453 (100.00)	656 (100.00)

Source : Paschim Banga : June 18th,1993.

Total number of *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samati* and *Zilla Parishad* in West Bengal is

3223, 328 and 16 respectively according to 1993 election. Table 49. Shows that election of 46,07 and 01 seats in *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samati* and *Zilla Parisad* respectively was not held. However, it shows that CPI(M) being the major partners of the left front government, dominates in all the tiers. Secondly, the BJP and Janata Dal are not represented in all the tiers. Thirdly, the percentage of seat shared by CPI(M) is higher in Zilla Parisad and lower in Gram Panchayat where as it is reversed in case of Congress-I. Finally, independent candidates have represented in all the tiers. It is evident that left parties dominate the rural power in West Bengal.

The same trend is also observed in Cooch Behar. Party control over *panchayat* in Cooch Behar district is shown in table 50.

**Table 50** Distribution of *panchayat* Members in Cooch Behar by tier and party.

Name of the tier	Total No	Total No. of seats	Party position							
			CPI(M)	CPI	F B	RSP	Con-I	BJP	Janata A B	Independent
Gram Panchayat	128	2418 (100)	1393 (57.61)	01 (0.04)	75 (3.10)	03 (0.12)	539 (22.29)	78 (3.23)	---	329 (13.61)
Panchayat Samity	12	375 (100)	235 (62.67)	---	10 (2.67)	---	79 (21.07)	06 (1.60)	---	45 (12.00)
Zilla Parishad	01	24 (100)	15 (62.50)	---	03 (12.50)	---	02 (8.33)	---	---	04 (16.67)

Source : *Paschim Banga*, June 18th 1993.

The pattern of party control as shown in table 50 is similar to that of the state level. The CPI(M) dominates in all the tiers. The other partners of the Left Front like CPI, Forward Block, and RSP have a minimum representation. RSP and CPI have no representation in *Panchayat Samity* and *Zilla Parisad*. Among the opposition parties, Cong-I has representation in all the tiers but BJP has representation only in the two tiers i.e., in the *Gram Panchayat* and *Panchayat Samity*. Janata Dal had no representation in Cooch Behar *panchayat*. On the other hand, independent candidates have representation in all the three tiers. Though the two Lokshabha seats of the two villages have been controlled by RSP and Forward block, they have little representation

in Panchayat. It is the CPI(M) who dominates the local politics. The party control in the two Gram Panchayat is shown in table 51.

**Table 51** Distribution of Panchayat members of the two Gram Panchayats by party.

Name of Gram Panchayat	Total No. of seat	Party position							
		CPI(M)	CPI	F B	RSP	Con-I	BJP	Janata A B	Independent
Dhalpal (Guriarpar)	16 (100)	09 (56.25)	---	---	---	07 (43.75)	---	---	---
Deocharai (Balaghat)	25 (100)	18 (72.00)	---	---	---	07 (28.00)	---	---	---

Table 51 shows that both the *Gram Panchayats* are controlled by CPI(M). Though Dhalpal is under the Alipurduar Loksabha Reserved (ST) Constituency which is controlled by RSP, not a single member from RSP is represented in the *Gram Panchayats*. Similarly though the *Lokshaba* Constituency of Deocharai is controlled by Forward Block, they have no representation in *Gram Panchayats*. The Cong-I, the main opposition party shares 43.75 and 28.00 percent to total seats of Dhalpal and Deocharai respectively. Thus it appears that CPI(M) mainly dominates the two *gram panchayats*.

### Panchayat Members of the two Villages

There are six *panchayat* members in our two sample villages. Their party affiliation is shown in table 52.

**Table 52** Distribution of *panchayat* members by party of the two villages.

Name of the village	PARTY			TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	OTHERS	
Guriarpar	03 (75)	01 (25)	---	04 (100.00)
Balaghat	---	02 (100.00)	---	02 (100.00)
Total	03 (50)	03 (50)	---	06 (100.00)

Source : Records of Panchayat samity.

Table 52 shows that the Cong -I and the CPI(M) have equal representation in the *panchayat*. At Guriarpar three out of four *panchayats* belong to the CPI(M) . Here the CPI(M) dominates the village politics. On the other hand, at Balaghat, the two *panchayat* members belong to Cong - I party. During my field survey I came to know that some members have frequently changed their party affiliation. Askar Mia, a *panchayat* member of Guriarpar, had contested twice before finally elected in 1993. First time he contested as a Cong - I candidate, then as an independent candidate . And finally, he had been elected as a CPI(M) candidate in 1993. Similar phenomena is also observed at Balaghat where one *panchayat* member who was elected as CPI(M) and in the next time i.e., in 1993, he was elected as a Cong-I candidate. At Guriarpar, there is one female *panchayat* member who belongs to Congress-I Party.

#### **Background of *Panchayat* Members of the two villages :**

Before analysing their class position, it is essential to highlight some of the demographic features of the *panchayats* of the two villages under study.

#### **Age :**

It is observed that young members are represented more in number in the *panchayat* than others. Age of the *panchayat* members is shown in table 53.

**Table 53** Distribution of *Panchayat* Members by age of the two villages.

Age Group ( in years )	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
20-25	—	—	—
25 -35	02 (50.00)	01 (50.00)	03(50.00)
35- 50	01 (25.00)	01 (50.00)	02 (33.33)
50+	01 (25.00)	-	01 (16.67)
Total	04 (100)	02 (100)	06 (100)

Table 53 shows that people prefers younger candidates since they may be dynamic and active; they may serve better for the villagers. 50 percent of the total panchayats members are in the age group of 25-35 years. Only one person belongs to the age group of above 50 years.

### Marital Status

Marital status of the panchayat members is shown in table 54.

**Table 54** Distribution of Panchayat members by status of Marriage of the two villages.

Marrital status	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Married	02 (50)	01 (50)	03(50)
Unmarride	02 (50)	01 (50)	03 (50)
Widow / widower / Divorcee	—	—	—
Total	04 (100.00)	02 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

In respect of marital status of the *Panchayat* members, it is observed from table 54 that percentage of married and unmarried member is equal . However, there is none from the widow/ widower and divorcee.

### Family Size

Family size is also another important contributory factor of becoming a leader. In rural society generally it is considered that the large size family has an impact on economy and politics. The size of family of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 55.

**Table 55** Distribution of Panchayat members by family size and party of the 2 villages.

Village	Party	Family Size				Total
		Small (1-5)	Medium (6-10)	Large (11-15)	Very Large (15+)	
Guriarpar	CPI(M)	---	---	03 (100.00)	---	03 (100.00)
	Cong - I	---	01 (100.00)	---	---	01 (100.00)
Balaghat	CPI(M)	---	---	---	---	---
	Cong -I	---	02 (100.00)	---	---	02 (100.00)
Total			03 (50.00)	03 (50.00)	---	06 (100.00)

It is evident from table 55 that the panchayat members have equal representation from the medium and large families. Small family has no representation. All the members of the CPI(M) have been represented from large family comprising of 10-15 members.

### Education :

Nowadays education is considered to be a means for access to power. Educational standard of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 56.

**Table 56.** Distribution of *Panchayat* members by education of the 2 villages.

Education	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Primary	01 (33.33)	01 (50.00)	02 (33.33)
MP / HS	02 (50.00)	01 (50.00)	03 (50.00)
Graduate	01 (17.67)	-	01 (17.67)
Total	04 (100.00)	02 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 56 shows that all the *panchayat* members are literate having formal education. 50% of

them have passed the Madhyamik and Higher Secondary examination, One member has had the Graduate Degree. Thus demographic background shows that educated, young persons having large size family background are considered suitable for *panchayat* members.

### **Power and Class**

There has been a debate on class position of *panchayat* members in West Bengal. A good number of studies demonstrate that *panchayat* members of West Bengal are poor belonging to the schedule caste and schedule Tribe (Lieten : 1992; Westergard: 1986; Webster:1986; Kumar and Ghosh: 1996). " The survey on the composition of the panchayat members in terms of caste and class in any case confirms that a new type of leadership has come to dominate the stage at the lower levels in the system of political devolution. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers, and therefore also the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, have come very much to the forefront, mainly on account of the composition of the CPI(M) panels. On the basis of time series, it appears that the Forward Block and particularly the Indian National congress are engaged in a catching up process, but that the bigger land owners are still dominant, particularly in the Indian National Congress" (Lieten : 1992 : 118). Webster also holds the same view "..... there is now significant representation in the gram panchayats from among the poorer and more marginal social groups. In particular, landless and marginal land owners, scheduled castes, women and in Saldya, Muslims all have members in gram panchayat " ( Webster 1992:24).

But, critics have pointed out that though the Left Front Government is trying to organize the rural poor regardless of caste by sharing power and by distributing the developmental benefits, they are far away . The rural poor have occupied a peripheral position in the power structure of the Panchayat ( Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee: 1993; Acharya 1993; Mallick 1993). Chakraborty and Bhattacharya observe{ 1993:194}, " however the poor of the village are still far from the seat of power. We have found, further , that the decision making in the village regarding the major or vital issues i.e.; in those which concern the distribution of power and economic

resources, is still the monopoly of the leader ( both formal and informal) belonging to the dominant lineages- which have been dominating the village over the years." The similar view is also expressed by ( Acharya 1993 1080). To him," no doubt, there emerged a new generation of leadership in rural West Bengal but the class and caste background of the new leadership may not have changed much . There developed a new institutional structure, decentralised in form but still dominated by the middle and rich peasants . The agricultural labourers and poor peasants, though not in proportion, have their representatives in the new structure but their participation in the decision making process is still a far cry " .

Similarly Mallick (1993:215) observed " in the rural areas the party politics were such that the CPI(M) leadership would not confront the dominant rural elite. For all the communists talk about their base among the rural poor, this was only manifest in election time. The party organization and the Left Front Panchayats were controlled by the rural middle and upper classes, whose own political and financial interests were threatened by any independent mobilization of the lower classes. Therefore, it was in the political interests of the CPI(M) to maintain a middle-class alliance dominated by the rural elite, which could be maintained only by soft pedalling redistribution reforms ..... However, it did not change the balance of power in the villages in favour of the poor, ...." .

### **Class character of the Panchayat Members**

The class character of the *panchayat* members of the two villages are analysed in terms of their occupation, family income, land holding, possession of farm asset and use of hire labour .

**Occupation :** Occupational pattern of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 57.

**Table 57** Distribution of Panchayat members by occupation and party of the two villages.

Occupation	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Households activities	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Cultivation	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Govt Service	01 (33.33)	01 (33.33)	02 (33.33)
Unemployed	02 (66.67)	--	02 (33.33)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

It is evident from table 57 that share cropper and agricultural labourers have no representation in the panchayat. There is a single member whose principal occupation is cultivation and he belongs to Cong I party. There is one female member whose principal occupation is household activities. There are two government servants; one of them is a primary school teacher and the other is a constable in West Bengal Armed Police. There are two unemployed youths in the *panchayat* members. Though they are unemployed, they are doing some business relating to agricultural products. Thus 93 percent of the *panchayat* members are engaged in non-agricultural activities.

### Sources of Family income

Individual occupation alone is not sufficient for the analysis of class character of the panchayat members.

**Table -58** Distribution of Panchayat Members by source of family income .

Sources of family income	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Only Cultivation	--	02 (66.67)	02 (33.33)
Cultivation and Service	02 (66.67)	01 (33.33)	03 (50.00)
Cultivation and Business	01 (33.33)	--	01 (16.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 58 shows that sources of family income of the panchayat members are either only cultivation or cultivation with other activities like cultivation with service or cultivation with business. *Panchayat* members whose family income is derived from cultivation constitute 33.33 percent of the total members. About 67 percent member's family income is from cultivation with either business or service. Cultivation with service is the major source of family income (50 percent). Sources of family income of the CPI(M) *panchayat* members are either cultivation with service (66.67 percent) or cultivation with business (33.33 percent) . On the other hand, the source of family income of majority members of Cong I is cultivation (66.67 percent) . It may be due to the fact that since CPI(M) is the ruling party, its members get the opportunity of having job or other activities.

#### **Size of holding :**

The economic position of the *panchayat* members could be understood better from their size of holding (family) which is shown in table 59.

**Table 59** Distribution of Panchayat members by size of holding.

Size - Class (in acre)	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
0	--	--	--
1 - 5	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
5 - 10	--	02 (66.67)	02 (33.33)
10 - 15	02 (66.67)	--	02 (33.33)
15 +	01 (33.33)	--	01 (16.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 59 shows landless people have no representation in the *panchayat*. In terms of land holding CPI(M) members are in a better position than the Cong I since their size class is high.

### Labour Use Pattern

Economic position of the *panchayat* members is analysed by their use of labour in cultivation. The pattern of labour<sup>use</sup> is shown in table 60.

**Table 60** Distribution of *panchayat* Members by pattern of labour use and party.

Pattern of labour use	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Purely family labour	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Predominantly family labour	--	--	--
Predominantly hire labour	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Purely hire labour	03 (100.00)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Since all the panchayat members have cultivable land, they require hired labour for cultivation along with their family labour. They may engage hire labour. The households of *panchayat* members have been classified into four groups. First is the purely family based which includes those households who cultivate their land mainly with family labours. They may engage hired labour in case of exigencies. Their status is equivalent to the poor peasant. Secondly, the extent of hired labour used to the total labour requirement is 25 percent of those households who are regarded as the predominantly family labour based households. Their status is equivalent to middle peasant . That is about 75 percent of the total labour requirement is met by family labour. The third category includes those households whose family labour participation to total labour requirement is below 25 percent . That is about 75 percent of the total labour requirement is done by hired labour. Their status is equivalent to enterprising peasant and they are identified as predominately hired labour used family. Finally, the fourth category includes those households who do not contribute family labour to cultivation. The extent of their hired labour used to their total labour use is almost 100 percent. They get their works done by hired labour. Their status is almost similar to that of the rich peasant . Table 60 shows that 66.67 percent of the *panchayat* members cultivate their land with the use of purely hired labour. Only one family cultivates their land mainly by their family labour. All the panchayat members of CPI(M) belong to the 4th category i.e. rich peasant.

### **Farm Asset :**

Mode of production depends on type of technology used in the production process. Therefore, possession of technology is also another indicator of judging the economic position of the members. Table 61 shows the type of farm asset possessed by the panchayat members

**Table 61** Distribution of *panchayat* members by possession of types of farm asset and party.

Type of farm asset	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Plough set without draught animal with or with out shallow	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.66)
Plough set with draught animal with or without shallow sprayer	--	--	--
Single set plough, draught animal, pump set, sprayer with more than one shallow	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.66)
More than one set of plough, draught animal, pump set, sprayer and shallow	03 (100)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 61 shows that on the basis of farm asset, the households have been classified into four categories. The table 61 shows that about 66.67 percent of *panchayat* member has double set of ploughs, Draught Animal, Pump Set, Shallow and Sprayer. Their economic status is equivalent to that of the rich peasant. With the help of irrigation they cultivate vegetables and Bodo paddy for market. All the three *panchayat* members of CPI(M) belong to this class. On the other hand, only one *panchayat* member of Cong-I belongs to this class. One member of the Cong I party has only plough set. Her economic status is equivalent to that of the poor peasant. However, there is one in the third category. His class status is similar to "enterprising farmer". Thus in terms of possession of farm assets it is evident that most of the *panchayat* members have been represented from such families whose economic status is to be categorised as rich peasant.

### **Class and Party :**

Thus from the analysis of the class character of the *panchayat* members we can now distribute the *panchayat* members according to their class nature in table 62.

**Table 62** Distribution of *panchayat* member by class and party.

Class	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Rich peasant	03 (100.00)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.66)
Enterprising Peasant	—	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Middle peasant	—	—	—
Poor peasant	—	01 (33.33)	01 (33.33)
Agriculture Labour	—	—	—
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

All the *panchayat* members are from owner cultivating class. It is evident from table 62 that five out of six *panchayat* members belong to the higher class. They enjoy the rural power and dominate the village affairs. Agricultural labourer, share cropper and middle peasants have no representation in the village power structure. Moreover, all the *panchayat* members of the CPI(M) belong to the rich peasant class.

### Caste and Power

The relationship between caste and power has not remained the same over a period of time. Many studies (Beteille 1996; Bailey 1957) confirm that before independence caste, class and power had been related but after independence they have been dissociated. To Beteille (1996), in the traditional set up, power within the village was closely associated with land ownership and high ritual status. But, today power has been dissociated with high status. " Party membership, contacts with officials, and ties of patronage are factors which play an increasing important part" (Beteille 1996 : 183). Kumar and Ghosh (1996 79) observe "the domination of landowners, money lenders,

and high caste people have been broken. Bhadra (1991) also observes the same phenomena. To him, caste and power to a large extent have been dissociated. On the other hand, some studies also confirm that caste, class and power are co-related (Bose : 1984:254). He observed that the upper classes who also come from upper caste continue to hold power in the villages.

However, the pattern of relationship between caste and power is not uniform through out the rural India. Chatterjee (1982) observes that there is a difference between left politics in West Bengal and rest of India since left politics based more on ideologies rather than popular on consciousness. To him, the structure of organized politics does not take the form of caste (Chatterjee : 1994 96). As it is mentioned earlier that caste factor is insignificant in the agrarian study of Cooch Behar due to nonexistence of higher caste people in significant number. In the two villages, only four families belong to higher caste group (one Kayastha and three Brahmins). They are found at Guriarpar only. Balaghat, the other village, has no higher caste people. Of the two villages, the percentage of scheduled caste, Muslim, OBC and Higher caste house holds to the total is 74.13, 21.61, 3.63 and 0.63 respectively. The caste/ community identity of the panchayat members is shown in table 63.

**Table 63** Distribution of *panchayat* members by caste and party.

Caste / community	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Rajbanshi (SC)	01 (33.33)	02 (66.67)	03 (50.00)
Muslim	—	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Jalia Kaibartas (SC)	02 (66.66)	—	02 (33.33)
Others ( General & OBC)	—	—	—
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 63 shows that other caste groups have no representation in the panchayat. The other caste groups include general castes like *Brahmin* and *Kayastha* and also OBC castes like *Tanti*, *Kumbhakar*, *Napit* and *Sutradhar*. 50 percent of the total members is from the Rajbanshi caste. Though numerically the position of the Jaliakaibarta is third, their sharing in power is next to the Rajbanshi. Only a single seat is shared by the Muslim. It is commonly believed that the CPI(M)'s stronghold is concentrated on the locality of migrant people from East Pakistan, (now Bangladesh). Our data also confirm this phenomena since the two- panchayat members of the Jalia Kaibarta belong to CPI(M) who were migrated from Bangladesh. On the other hand, rest of the *panchayat* members are from the Rajbanshi and the Muslim; three of the four members belong to Cong-I (75 percent) and only one (25 percent) belongs to the CPI(M). Thus no significant correlation between caste and power is appeared from the two villages under study.

### **Power other than *Panchayat***

At the village level, *panchayat* is the constitutional authority of power. But, practically *panchayat* is not the alone who manages the village affairs. The public institutions at the village level are being managed by different representative bodies. Hence these representatives other than *panchayats* also share power. Even *panchayats* are also being controlled and guided by their own political parties through different committees. These committees are formal in nature where some are informal.

### **Different Committees**

School, *Anganwadi* committee are formal since these are constituted following the guidelines of the government. On the other hand, committees of religious institutions like *Mandir*, *Marjid*, Political Parties, Both Committees etc. are informal committees since these committees are not controlled and guided by the laws of the government. Hence in order to understand the reality of the power structure at the village level, we have to analyse their nature, function and the background of their members. Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee (1993 14) observe, " any researcher studying the

political structure in a village will find that what occurs at the surface level is not sufficient, and, even not important for an adequate and accurate understanding of its nature. The village politics is a combination of formal and informal forces, big and petty issues".

It is well known that the panchayat system has been introduced for involving the rural poor in the development process of the rural society by decentralization power. But, there has been a debate over the issue of decentralization. To some scholars in formulating plans for rural development, the panchayats have little choice. They are executing the various developmental schemes framed either by the Central Government or by the State Government. Further, in executing the developmental works, they are not alone enough to take decision. They have to consult with other persons involved in different committees. These committees are of different names viz, Booth Committee, *Panchayat Parichalana* committee, etc. These committees are constituted with the people of their respective constituency from which the *panchayat* is elected. Thus it is found that those people on such committees, are also sharing power with panchayats. Hence it is essential to analyse the nature and functions of such committees.

In our two small villages we find Booth Committee, *Anganwari* Committee and School Committee. Table 64. Shows the total number of committees with their members in the two villages under study.

**Table 64** Distribution of committees by name and villages.

Name of the Committee	Village		Total
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	
Booth Committee	02	02	04
Anganwari Committee	02	01	03
School Committee	01	01	02
Total	05	04	09

There are two Booth committees and one school committee in each village. There are two Anganwadi Committees at Guriarpar and one at Balaghat.

**Booth Committee**      *Booth* committee is constituted generally within the constituency of each panchayat. It is formed to assist the *panchayat* members in performing their daily activities. It serves two purposes. First, it exercises control over the activities of the *panchayat*. Secondly, it involves local people in developmental activities. The main function of the Booth Committee is to select the beneficiary and supervise the developmental activities like construction of roads, sinking of tube-well etc of the *panchayat*. Generally, the Booth Committee consists of the members of the frontal organizations of the political party. At Guriarpar, there is no Booth Committee in the jurisdiction of Cong -I panchayats. The only female *panchayat* (Cong- I ) did not form the Booth Committee because no developmental work is allotted to her as she belongs to the opposition party. Of course, at Balaghat the two Cong-I *panchayat* members have formed the Booth Committee.

**Anganwadi Committee**      Following the recommendations of the National Policy for Children adopted in 1974, the Integrated Child Development Service Scheme was launched in 1975-76 in 33 community development blocks in the country on experimental basis. The Anganwadi is the focal point for delivery of services provided under the ICDS programme. The objectives of ICDS sought to be achieved by providing a package of service to children in the 0-6 year age group, to expectant and nursing mothers and to women between 15-45 years from disadvantaged segments of society. During our survey we find, there are three such Anganwadi Centres working in the two villages; two at Guriarpar and one at Balaghat. However, for smooth functioning and supervising the activities of the programme each centre is governed by a committee. Total number of members of the committee is twenty .

**School Committee**      Each village has a primary school having a managing committee. School

committee is found to look into the daily affairs of the school. Number of members in the school committee is five and four at Guriarpar and Balaghat respectively.

**Other Committees** Besides the above, we also find there are other committees like *Mandir* and *Masjid* (Religious Institutions), Clubs etc. At Guriarpar, we find two other committees viz Beneficiary Committee for irrigation and a committee for motor electric pump with six and ten members respectively. Indo-Dutch Terai Development Authority recently had installed six deep tube-wells at Guriarpar for helping the small and marginal farmers. Thus for proper maintenance of the pump as well as for selection of beneficiaries, the committee for motor electric pump has been formed.

**Background of the Committee Members** It appears that every public institution is governed by a committee involving the village people. These people are also sharing the village power. Therefore, it is also essential to understand their caste/ community as well as their class background.

**Caste** Caste background of the committee members is shown in table 65.

**Table 65** Distribution of committee members by caste

Caste / community	Committee			TOTAL
	Booth	Anganwari	School	
Rajbanshi (SC)	26 (41.94)	12 (63.16)	05 (55.56)	43 (47.78)
Muslim	24 (38.71)	03 (15.79)	01 (11.11)	28 (31.11)
Jalia Kaibarta (SC)	08 (12.90)	04 (21.05)	02 (22.22)	14 (15.55)
Others ( General & OBC)	04 (6.45)	—	01 (11.11)	05 (15.56)
Total	62 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	90 (100.00)

Table 65 shows that all the caste communities have representation in the committees except in *Anganwadi* committee where other caste groups have no representation .

**Occupation** Economic background may be analysed in terms of occupation and land holding . Representation from different occupational groups is shown in table 66.

**Table 66.** Distribution of committee members by occupation.

Occupation	Committee			TOTAL
	Booth	Anganwari	School	
Cultivation	35 (65.45)	10 (52.63)	05 (55.56)	50 (55.56)
Share Cropper	04 (6.45)	—	—	04 (4.44)
Agricultural Labour	14 (22.58)	03 (15.79)	01 (11.11)	18 (20.00)
Service	03 (4.48)	04 (21.05)	03 (33.33)	10 (11.11)
Artisan	02 (3.23)	—	—	02 (2.22)
Others	04 (6.45)	02 (10.53)	—	06 (6.67)
Total	62 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	90 (100.00)

Table 66 shows that of all the occupational groups, cultivators have the highest representation (55.56 percent). Next to cultivators, we find the agricultural labourers represent twenty percent of the total. Artisan group has the lowest representation (2.22 percent). The sharecroppers and artisans have no representation in *Anganwadi* and School Committee. Persons associated with services occupy the second position in the *Anganwadi* and School Committee. Any other group comprises of petty businessmen, self employed persons etc.

**Size of land holding** Size of holding of the member is shown in table 67

**Table 67** Distribution of committee members by size of holding.

Number of the Committee	Size - Class ( in acre)						Total
	0	-1	1 -5	5 - 10	10 - 15	15 +	
Booth Committee	4 (6.45)	12 (19.35)	28 (45.16)	11 (17.75)	04 (6.45)	03 (4.48)	62 (100)
Anganwari Committee	02 (10.53)	—	08 (42.11)	03 (15.79)	04 (21.05)	02 (10.52)	19 (100)
School Committee	—	—	04 (44.45)	03 (33.33)	02 (22.22)	—	09 (100)
Total	06 (6.67)	12 (13.33)	40 (44.44)	17 (18.89)	10 (11.11)	05 (5.56)	90 (100)

Table 67 shows that maximum representation comes from the class of 1-5 acre (44.44 per cent) in all the committees. Landless people have also got represented in the Booth Committee and Anganwadi Committee. They share only 6.67 percent to all the members.

Thus it appears that our observation partially corroborates the observation of Lieten (1992), Westergard (1986), Webster (1986) Malick (1993), Acharya (1993) and others since five out of six *panchayat* members are represented from the scheduled caste. But their economic background shows that they are mostly from higher income group mainly from the rich peasant class. Though agricultural labourers, share croppers and landless people have no representation in *panchayat*, they have representation in Other Committees who also indirectly share the rural power.

# **Chapter -VII**

## **Summary and Conclusion**

# CHAPTER - VII

## Summary And Conclusion

The present study has examined the agrarian relations and changing agrarian social structure of Cooch Behar. The study of agrarian social structure had been initiated after the first world war with the village studies. The necessity of village studies was felt to study the rural institutions and to highlight the economic misery of the people. On the eve of independence, Indian national leaders mobilise the Indian peasantry on the issue of land reforms. Various dimensions of caste had also been studied during that period. Immediately after independence, the necessity of village studies was felt for rural development. The year 1955 was earmarked as a year of village study since a good number of village studies had been published. Initially those village studies were descriptive in nature; they discussed the village life. But gradually the village studies concentrated more on issue of specific analysis. Among the different issues; land reforms, caste system and others got an immense importance during the period of 1950s. Indian nationalist leaders and planners felt the necessity of land reforms on the question of curbing the inequality in the rural society. During the period of 1960s and 1970s the issue of social stratification in the agrarian society had been emerged. Inequality and hierarchy gained importance in the discussion of agrarian society. Thus the subject agrarian classes and power had emerged. The relationship between caste, class and power had been examined. There had been changes in agriculture in some parts of the country with the adaptation of new technology of production. The effects of commercialisation of agriculture on formation of social classes in the agrarian society had also been analysed during the period of 1980s. However, the study on agrarian social structure in West Bengal gained a new momentum when the left front government came in power in 1977. The left front government initiated various rural developmental measures for the betterment of the rural masses like tenants, agricultural labourers and poor peasants. One of the major achievements of the left front government is the implementation of the programme of *Operation Barga*. A good number of studies have been done during the period of 1990s to examine the impact of *Operation Barga*. Further to empower the rural masses the panchayat system had been revitalised by mak-

ing it 3 - tier and also by holding its regular election. Recently political forces and new technology of production contributed to agrarian changes.

In the foregoing chapters, the various dimensions of agrarian structure of Cooch Behar have been examined with the help of data collected from two sample villages. The district Cooch Behar has been selected for study since economy of Cooch Behar is based purely on agriculture. It was once a princely estate, its political status had been in a flux; from a part of a large kingdom to a princely state, again from a princely state to a revenue paying estate; and finally, to a district town by merger with India in 1950. Different dynasties ruled this region; of which Koch Kings reigned for a longer period from 1510 AD to 1949. Thus just 50 years back it had been a feudal estate where the king was the absolute owner of the land. *Jotedary-Adhiary* system was the backbone of the agrarian society. Ecological conditions appeared to be largely responsible for the development of the system. The vast tracts of areas were uncultivated and forests. Naturally man power was a crying need for reclamation of jungle for cultivation. Once a person involved in the process of reclamation of jungles remained as an *adhiars*. The *Jotedary* system ensured the king a major source of revenue. There were two types of *jotes* viz; the revenue paying and non-revenue paying. There were different under tenants in the revenue paying estate. These were *Jotedar*, *Chukanidar*, *Dar-Chukanidar*, *Dara-a-Dar Chukanidar* and *Tasia Chukanidar*. The under tenants had the right to extract surplus of rent at the rate of a fixed percent over and above the rent paid by his immediate above grade. Thus a *chukanidar* who was the immediate under tenant of a *jotedar* had to pay rent at the rate of 25 percent more than the rent paid by the *jotedar* to the King. The non-revenue paying estates were provided for rendering specialised services to the king and also to the relatives of the king for their maintenance. The non-revenue *jotes* were of different kinds like *Brahmattor*, *Debattor*, *Pirpal*, *Lakhiraj*, *Petbhata* and *Jaigir*. The agrarian society was stratified; at the bottom of the hierarchy there were *adhiars* who used to cultivate leased in land on crop share. There were two types of *adhiars*; one, who used to reside in the premises of *jotedars*, even sometimes with family members and cultivate the leased in land with

the plough and bullock of the *jotedars* and get half of the produce. They were known as *Uttanga Kar Praja*. Actually they were similar to the attached farm labourer of the present day. The other was the non-resident tenant, who used to cultivate the leased in land with his own plough and shared half of the produce. During this period agricultural labourer as a class had not emerged. Migrated labourers used to come from Bihar in the harvesting time only who worked as day labourers; they were mainly engaged in earthing works. *Chaukidari* system had been introduced in Cooch Behar during the period 1882-1883. The *Village Chaukidari Act* 1893 was passed in 1893-94. The *Chaukidars* were empowered with functions of the cops. The said act also provided the provision of panchayats who would look after the civil as well as criminal affairs of the village. One of the important functions of the panchayat was to assess the properties of the residents and to act as a liaison with outer administration of the village. Initially the act did not provide the provision for representative *panchayat*; they were appointed by the high officials of the king. The act provide the *panchayat* must be a resident proprietor holder of the land. However, the *Chaukidary Act* was amended several times. By an amendment of 1941, the provision of appointment of panchayat had been changed from the selected *panchayat* to representative panchayat. But in selecting *panchayats* the opinions of the rate paying adult male of the villages were considered only. The adult women and non-rate paying male had no role in selecting *panchayats*. Moreover, final selection was depend on the wills of the high officials of the king. The *panchayats* were appointed from amongst the landed gentry i.e. from the *jotedars* known to the officials. Thus the *jotedars* were used to enjoy political power. In most cases the *jotedars* and *adhiars* belonged to the same community i.e. *Rajbanshis* since the area was dominated by the *Rajbanshis*. Socially and culturally they were the same. That is why, no significant peasant movement was organised in the region. Caste stratification had little implications for absence of higher caste people in significant numbers in rural Cooch Behar.

In the traditional set up, the method of cultivation was primitive. Wooden plough drawn by bullock was used for land preparation. Among the different crops mainly paddy-aman and aus of

local variety with cash crops like jute and tobacco were cultivated . Fertilizer was never used. Only cow dung and oil cake were used as manure in the tobacco field . Irrigation was also limited to tobacco cultivation.

After merger with India in 1950 , the land tenure system as well as demographic structure of Cooch Behar had changed a lot. Political system had also been changed from a monarchical system to a democratic system. A large influx went on from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the period 1950's and subsequently in 1970s after independence of Bangladesh. The rights of the intermediary classes had been abolished with the implementation of land reforms act . Thus the intermediary classes as found in the Jotedary system had been abolished. Individual ownership on land was granted. But Adhiary system continued as a major form of land management system. 1951 census data shows that 30 percent of the total cultivable land was cultivated by adhiars. Agricultural labourers as a class had been emerged; percentage of agricultural labourers during the period of 1950s and 1960s was below 10 percent to the total main workers following the 1951 and 1961 Census data. The influence of the jotedars had been in force to some extent same as it was earlier. The panchayat system had been introduced in the area in the year 1964; initially no election of panchayats was held; rather they were selected. Generally selection was made amongst the jotedars who were mostly associated with the politics of Indian National Congress. Moreover, though the land reforms act was passed, it was not seriously implemented for lack of *political will*.

After 1977 the agrarian structure of Cooch Behar appears to have been changed with the left front government being into power. The two sample villages - Guriarpar and Balaghat having some common features in respect of some amenities selected for study, are located in the subdivision of Tufanganj. The number of households of Guriarpar and Balaghat is 415 and 219 with a population of 2284 and 1233 respectively. Guriarpar is comparatively a big village. Both the villages are located by the side of the river; type of soil is also same - sandy loam. Majority of the

population is scheduled caste. They have no electricity, high school and metalled road. Both of them are heterogeneous in terms of population composition. They include the Rajbanshi, the Muslim and the Other migrated low caste people. Among the higher castes there are only three Brahmin house holds and one Kayastha. They are found at Guriarpar only. Balaghat has no higher caste people. Both the villages have Muslim population; they are more in number at Balaghat than Guriarpar. The percentage of the Hindu and the Muslim to the total population of the two villages is 76.60 and 23.40 respectively. Percentage of literacy of the 2 villager is 51.26 to the total population. Of the two villages Guriarpar (52.12) has the higher percentage of literacy than Balaghat (49.47); about 24 percentage of the total population have avail themselves of the formal education. The migrated castes include *Kaibarta, Kumbhakar, Nmasudra, Napit, Tanti, Sutradhar, Bramhin and Kayastha*. Member of these castes had been migrated from Bangladesh. However, some of the families of the Rajbanshi and the Muslim had also been migrated from Bangladesh.

Like other villages, the economy of the two villages is agriculture. About 79 percent of the total main workers are engaged in agriculture; only 21 percent are in non- agriculture activities. The non- agricultural activities include service , business , household industry (making of bidi, dhara); transport business (riding Thela, Cycle Rickshaw) and other labourers (maid servants; persons engaged in the tea stall, repairing works like cycle rickshaw Tube-well and weaving industries). The pattern of agriculture largely depends on type of land possessed by the cultivators. Soil is sandy loom; predominated by high land. The villages are predominated by small holders. The maximum size class is 12 to 15 acres .The percentage of landless, marginal peasant (below 1 acre ), and small peasant (between 1 acre to 3 acre ) households to the total households are 27.13,23.97 and 31.39 respectively. Thus 55.36 percent to the total households have land below the size class of 3 acres. Semi medium (between 3 to 6 acres ) and medium ( 6 to 9 acres ) holdings together constitute 14.67 percent to the total house holds. Only 2.84 percent hold land in the size class of 9 acres to 15 acres. Thus it appears that the village is predominated by small

and poor peasants. Cropping pattern is not uniform through out the villages. Mainly paddy, Jute and vegetables are cultivated. Among the vegetables potato, cauliflower and cabbage are the main. Rich peasants having irrigated land cultivate Bodo paddy and vegetables for market. The source of irrigation is tube-well. Water is lifted with the help of diesel motor pump. Of the 2 villages it is observed that areas of commercial crops are more at Balaghat than Guriarpar. Generally wooden plough driven by bullock is predominantly used for land preparation. However, recently power tiller is used in some cases for land preparation. The percentage of the total households having pumpset and shallow at Balaghat is 24 and 31 respectively where as it is 9 and 6 at Guriarpar. Among the modern farm implements used for cultivation are pump set, power tiller, sprayer and shallow. Like farm implements, percentage of households having cattle population are also high at Balaghat than Guriarpar. The cattle population include Milky Cow, Bullock, Goat, Buffalo, Duck, Hen, Pig etc. Not a single buffalo is found in the two villages. It is observed that only 33 percent of the total households have draught animals, 59 percent have Milky Cows, Poultry is found in only 18 percent of the total households. Lack of fallow land and common grazing land is the reason for declining of cattle population. The agrarian structure that appeared in the two villages is classified as owner cultivator (31.07 percent), supervisory cultivator (5.21 percent), tenant cultivator (12.15 percent), agricultural labourer (40.37 percent) and non agricultural households (11.20 percent). The owner cultivator is not a homogeneous group. Considering their control over the forces of production as well as labour use pattern, the owner cultivators have been further divided into 3 categories viz. Rich, Middle, and Poor. In the supervisory category, there are some households having small amount of land who get cultivated their land by hire labour or tenancy since they have no family member to employ. The incidence of tenancy has declined sharply. According to 1951 census about 30 percent of cultivable land was cultivated by tenant <sup>in Cooh Behar,</sup> Now it appears that only 12 percent of the households are tenants. Moreover, the incidence of absentee landlords has also declined.

In the two villages we find only 3 Brahmin and 1 Kayastha households and they are in the

village of Guriarpar .Not a single higher caste family is found at Balaghat. Thus the caste system has little implications in the two villages for absence of higher caste people. The villages are mainly dominated by the schedule caste people. In respect of caste and class relation it is observed that like other parts of India there is no co- relation between caste and class i.e., higher caste being represented in higher class. Percentage of owner cultivator is high among the Jalia Kaibartas; (42.98 percent to that total population ) and it is low among the Muslims (18.98 percent). The Muslims form majority in the agricultural labour class (50.36 percent). The Rajbanshi and the Jalia Kaibarta have almost equal representation in the agricultural labourer class in the percent of 39.34 and 38.60 respectively to their respective total population. The Muslim and the Jalia Kaibarta have equal representation in the tenant class. Other castes form majority in the non-agricultural households since members of these castes are mainly from the different artisan groups like carpenter, Tanti, Kumbhakar etc. However, it appears that economic position of the Jalia Kaibarta and the Muslims is comparatively better than the Rajbanshi. The data on land transfer also confirm this observation. The land transfer data suggest that land is being transferred by sale from the Rajbanshi community to the Muslims and the Jalia Kaibartas .

In the relational aspect two major institutions viz tenancy relation and labour relation have been examined in detail. Relations between landlord and tenant on the one hand and landlord and agricultural labourer on the other hand , form an important aspect of the agrarian relations. Like other parts of India agricultural labourers of the 2 villages form as vulnerable sections of the society. 70 percent of the agricultural labourers belong to Scheduled Caste; 49 percent of them are land less and 38 percent have below 1 acre of land. 52 percent of the agricultural labourer households have more than one earners of whom 27 percent are female earners. To supplement their family income, the agricultural labourer households are also engaged in non - agricultural works. There are two types of agricultural labourers locally known as *Dinhajira Kamla* (unattached) and *Bachhar Kamla* or *Chakuri Kamla* (attached). *Dinhajira Kamla* (Day labour) is engaged for a day and at the end of the day they receive their wages. A *Dinhajira Kamla* is

engaged for 8 hours a day and gets his wage at the end of the day. In 1996 - 97 a *Dinhajira Kamla* got a wage Rs. 30/- to Rs. 35/- but a woman worker got less than her male counter part by Rs. 5/- at least. Thus Gender discrimination towards female agricultural labourers is found. *Chakuri Kamla or Bachhar Kamla* (attached labour) is engaged for a specific period usually for one year or one crop season or more than one year. They are also of two types-those who reside in the premises of their landlord and those who do not reside in the premises of their landlord. Attached labourers were usually paid wages with food and clothing. There is no uniformity of their payment system. Usually attached labourer is recruited within the caste members of the landlords. However the incidence of attached labour has declined; at present the percentage of attached labourer found to the total agricultural labourer is 6 percent only.

Tenancy as a part of land management had been a major institution in the region since the area was under the *Jotedari - adhiari* system. The *adhiars* form a major social group during the region of koch kings. The Left Front Government having assumed state power in 1977, amended various provisions of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1954 for protection of the interests of the tenants. The programme *Operation Barga* had been launched by the left front government to record the names of the tenants. It appears that 75 percent of the tenants have recorded their names. The incidence of recording is high among the Rajbanshis (100 percent) and it is low among the Muslims (25 percent) to their respective total. Cropping pattern of the tenant shows that double cropping system is a predominant form of cultivation. Half sharing is the predominant form of crop-sharing among the tenants. Cost sharing is associated with crop sharing. In case of half sharing the entire cost is borne by the land lords; in other cases it is by tenants. The legal safeguards as given in the West Bengal Land Reforms Act are enjoyed more by the recorded tenants than by non recorded tenants. The recorded bargadars are denied of any consumption loan. However, they are enjoying more institutional loan than unrecorded bargadars.

However, inspite of recording, it is observed, a section of tenants have surrendered / ad-

justed their leased in land with their landlords. It appears from the available data that 60 percent of the recorded *bargadars* have surrendered their leased in land. They lost their tenancy status and became either owner of the land or agricultural day labourer. Exigency of money in some cases (90 percent) on the part of landlord and in some other cases (8 percent) on the part of tenant are the main reasons for such surrender. But in some cases (2 percent) the exigencies felt by both (the land lord and tenant) are responsible. The surrendered land has been retained by the land lord, tenant and the third party (other than landlord and tenant) in the percentage of 23.08, 33.33 and 43.59 respectively. In the process of land surrender, the benefits are also reaped by some of the tenants either in cash or in land. 38.49 percent of the total surrendered tenants have not received any thing. Intimacy either in the form of caste or village plays an important role in the incidence of land surrender. 71.79 percent of the surrendered bargadars belong to the same caste of their landlord. On the other hand, incidence of non-surrender is high when the landlord and the tenant belong to separate caste. The caste intimacy plays a positive role in the incidence of land surrender. It is interesting to note that inspite of land surrendering, 51.28 percent of the surrendered bargadars have managed to increase their own land; 25.64 percent have retained the same quantity as they used to hold at the time of recording; only 23.08 percent bargadars have lost control over their lands.

In respect of tenancy and labour relations, it appear that a new set of institutions is being emerged. First the younger agricultural labourers now prefer to work on contract system in the form of piece rate system. They work together forming a group. A group may be small or big. Some times a group is formed with labourers of 20 and more who work together. Work on daily basis requires to serve 8 hours a day. While they can earn the same or sometimes more wages on contract system. It helps them increase their efficiency. At present, modernization of agriculture requires labour efficiency. Thus it also helps the landlords who cultivate on commercial basis. The engagement of agricultural labourer on contract system helps develop a formal relationship between the agricultural labourers and their landlords. Similarly, the share tenancy that is the tradi-

tional adhiary system has been gradually changing. The Landlords are unwilling to lease out their land on perpetual lease due to fear of recording. They generally prefer short term lease. Thus the share tenancy is being replaced by lease tenancy. There are three major forms of short term tenancy that have emerged in the 2 villages. These are fixed rent short terms tenancy, short - terms share tenancy, and Rent free- lease tenancy. In the fixed rent short term tenancy, a landlord leases out his land to a tenant for a fixed period against a fixed rent. There is no uniform pattern of fixed rent . It depends on landlord - tenant's intimacy. The rent is paid in cash. The agreement may be written or verbal. Under this system, the tenant bears all the costs of production and he owns the entire production. The land lord has no involvement in the process of cultivation. He just earns the rent. After the contract period is over, the land is retained by the landlord and he cultivates the same under his own control. Secondly, under the short term share tenancy, the landlord leases out his land for a specific crop season, mainly for one season. A poor cultivator or even an agricultural labourer having entrepreneurial attitude even having no capital to invest in land can lease in land. All the initial expenditures relating to cultivation have been borne by the landlord himself. The tenant cultivates the land. After harvesting and marketing the product the cost as well as profit is shared by landlord and tenant in the ratio of 50:50. Potato, cauliflower and cabbage are generally cultivated under this system. This system is beneficial to the land lord as well as the tenant because a poor tenant who is unable to invest in land can reap the benefit by this system. Similarly, a landlord who has no enterprising ability but has capital to invest can be benefited by this system. The risk of cultivation is also shared by both of them. The third category is Rent Free Lease System. The rent free lease system is generally found among the poor peasants who hold small size of land and who have no capital to invest in land. Such poor peasants usually cultivate only paddy and jute of local varieties. They are not in a position to use fertilizer to their land. In rabi season they keep their land fallow. The entrepreneurial cultivators lease in land from such families for cultivation of vegetables in rabi season only. In cultivating vegetables the tenants have to use fertilizer and other manures. After harvesting the fertilizer remains in the soil as residue which helps the owners who cannot use fertilizer in their land.

The agrarian power structure of Cooch Behar has been changed through merger of it with India and subsequently with the left front government headed by CPI(M) came into power in 1977. In West Bengal the left front government headed by CPI(M) has been reigning since 1977. They revitalised the panchayat system by holding its regular elections at an interval of 5 years. The 5th Panchayat election was held in the 1998. The left parties have retained their domination in every tier since 1977. In the region the left partners i.e. Rastriya Socialist Party and Forward Block have retained their control in both the Lokshabha seats where the 2 selected villages are located. On the other hand, the assembly segments have been controlled by the CPI(M) party. Similarly, the *Panchayat Samity and the Gram Panchayat* have been controlled by the CPI(M). There are 6 panchayat members in the two sample villages; 4 at Guriarpar and 2 at Balaghat. The Indian National Congress (Cong I) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have equal share in the total number of panchayat members of the two villages. Out of the 4 panchayat members at Guriarpar there are 3 members from CPI(M) and 1 from Cong-I party. On the other hand, there are 2 members at Balaghat who belong to Cong-I party. Demographic features of panchayat members show that 50 percent of the panchayat members are in the age group of 25-35 years; 33 percent in the age group of 35-50 years, and only one member in the age group of 50 years and above. The marital status of the members show that no widow or widower has representation in the panchayat. 50 percent of them are married. There is a single woman panchayat of the six members. Data on family size shows that all the members of panchayat are from medium and large families. All the panchayat members of the CPI(M) belong to large families consisting of 10 to 15 members. Members' educational standard shows that they are literate having formal education; 50 percent of them have passed the High school Examination. Only 1 member has completed the Bachelor Degree.

Class character of the panchayat members has been examined in terms of occupation, family income, land holding pattern, labour use pattern and possession of farm technology. Occupational data of panchayat members show that there are two members of the CPI(M) who

are unemployed; one female member of the Cong (I) is engaged in house hold activities; two members one each of the Cong(I) and the CPI(M) are service holders; and one member of the Cong (I) is a cultivator. For a deeper understanding, the economic position of the panchayat members has been examined by analysing their family income. The sources of family income have been classified into 3 heads viz only cultivation, with service; and cultivation with business. Of the 3 panchayat members of the CPI(M) ; the family income the of two members is mainly from cultivation with service and the other from cultivation with business. On the other hand, family income of the 2 members of Cong(I) is only cultivation and the other is cultivation with service. Agricultural labourer and tenant families have no representation in the panchayat . Size of holding of the CPI(M) member is comparatively higher than the Cong-I . Data on labour use pattern show that four panchayat members ( 3 CPI(M) & 1 Cong-I panchayat members) cultivate their land by purely hired labour; 1 member of the Cong-I does it purely by family labour and the other one predominantly by hired labour. The house holds of the four panchayat members have more than one set of plough, draught animal, shallow, pumpset and sprayer. One member has a single set of plough, draught animal, pumpset, sprayer and more than one shallow; and the rest member has only a wooden plough without draught animal. Thus the four members of the panchayat belong to the rich peasant class and 1 to the middle peasant class. The rest member belongs to the class of the poor peasant. Therefore, class and power are largely co- related. Higher classes have more representation in the panchayat than lower classes. Adhiars and agricultural labourers have no representation in the panchayat . The economic position of all the 3 CPI(M) panchayat members has been identified as higher class. Similarly, the class position of the 2 members of the Cong I party is also high. Only 1 member of the Cong I party belongs to poor peasant.

The relationship between caste and power appears to be insignificant due to absence of higher caste people in significant number in the two villages as it is mentioned earlier. It appears that about 83 percent of the panchayat members are from the scheduled caste people; of which

the Rajbanshi alone grab 50 percent of the share. The rest 17 percent is from the Muslim community. General and OBC have no representation in the *panchayat* member. Thus caste and power have no correlation in the two villages under study in one sense, but in another sense, it is observed that since the villages are numerically dominant by the Scheduled Caste people, they have greater share in power. But analysis of *panchayat* power alone is not sufficient to analyse the rural power structure since the *panchayat* members are not the alone to deal with power. There are other persons who are represented in different committees in the two villages to govern the public affairs of the villages. Some of these committees are formal and others are non-formal. In the 2 villages such committees include *Anganwadi* Committee, School Committee, *Booth* Committee, *Mandir* Committee *Masjid* Committee and so on. Some of these committees even control and direct the activities of the *panchayat*. In the two villages under study, we find three types of committees namely Booth Committee, *Anganwadi* Committee and School Committee. About 90 persons are represented in such committees. All the caste groups have representation in those committees. Numerically the Rajbanshis have greater representation than others. In the Booth Committee, it is observed that cultivators, share croppers, agricultural labourers, service holders, artisans and other personals have representation. In the other two committees, all the above categories of persons have representation except share croppers and other occupational groups. Landless people have also representation in those committees. Thus it shows that though landless people, agricultural labourers and share croppers have no representation in the *panchayat*, they have representation in other committees. Agricultural labourers and share croppers are also sharing rural power marginally.

To sum up, it is observed that the agrarian structure of Cooch Behar appears to have undergone frequent changes with subsequent alterations in the political scenario of the area as well as forces of production in agriculture. The area once dominated by *Jotedars* and *Adhiyars*; and non existence of agricultural labourers as a class; now appears to be dominated by marginal peasants, poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Number of landless people have increased

significantly. Pattern of cultivation appears to have changed significantly with the adaptation of new technology and high yielding varieties of seeds. New crops like cabbage, cauliflower, bodo etc. which were once unknown to the region, now have been cultivated in the area. Agricultural productivity has also got an upward thrust substantially with the effective application of chemical fertiliser and irrigation. With the implementation of agrarian legislation by launching the programme *Operation Barga*, the incidence of share cropper appears to have declined significantly. A new form of tenancy i.e.; short-term lease tenancy in the form of fixed rent, or crop share or rent-free system appears to have been emerging. Similarly, in the sphere of agricultural labour relation the traditional system of engagement on daily basis is gradually being replaced by contract system in the form of piece-rate. The agricultural labourers have been unionised by a frontal organisation of the CPI(M) known as *Kshet Majoor Union*. Political development in the region helps them form such a union. They have organized and participated in various movements for fulfilling their demands. They have been able to check in-migration of agricultural labourers from the surrounding villages. The traditional bondage is being replaced by a contractual relation. More over, the incidence of attached labour has declined. Likewise, in power structure, the traditional *Jotedars* have lost their control over village affairs. The two set of power; one which is exercised by *panchayat* members and the other through different committees both formal and informal have emerged. Though in the *panchayat* institution the upper class people have an edge over others, the people from all sections including agricultural labourers and tenants have representation in the other committees managing the public affairs of the villages. Some of these committees though non formal, can control and guide the *panchayat* members. In relation of caste, class and power, it appears that caste system has no implication in the agrarian society of Cooch Behar since the higher caste people have no significant representation in rural society. In Cooch Behar, the Rajbanshis, a schedule caste community, are numerically dominated ; there are the Muslims and the migrated castes who are mainly agriculturalists and artisans. Thus caste has no relation with class and power ; but class and power are to some extent related.

# *Glossary*

# Glossary

Aus Dhan - Summer Paddy

Aman Dhan - Winter Paddy

Awal - Low Land

Adhiar - Share Cropper (tenant) who cultivate leased in land on crop share

Anganwari Committee - A committee for the supervision of works of the centre of distribution run by ICDS.

Anchal Panchayat - Village Panchayat Office

Anchalik Parisad - Panchayat Office of the Block Level

Bachhar Kamla - Attached farm labour

Bida - A large wooden rake with teeth made of sharpened bamboo strips

Bigha - An Unit of Land measurement,  
1 bigha = .33 acre

Brittee Dhan - Summer Paddy

Both Committee - A Committee formed by the CPIM party for selecting beneficiary

Bidhan Sabha - State Assembly

Bargadar - Share Cropper

Bodo - Summer Paddy

Bhag Chanshi - Share Cropper

B J P - Bharatiya Janata Party

Bhatia - Migrated People from the East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh)

Brahmottar land - Non-revenue Paying Land given to the Brahmins for their maintenance

Brahmin - High Caste (priest)

Baidya - A high caste just below the Brahmin

Barui - The name of a caste traditionally engaged in the cultivation of piper betel.

Baniya - A caste associated with trade

Chakuri Kamla - Attached farm labour

Chatam - High land

Chawkidar - Village watch man

Chari - An earthen vessel used for feeding animal.

CPI(M) - Communist Party of Indian (Marxist)

CPI - Communist Party of Indian

Cong-I - Congress Party (Indira)

Chukanidar - An under tenant of Jotedar

Dara-dar-chukanidar - An under tenant of dar-chukanidar

Dar-chukani - An under tenant of chukanidar

Debattar - Non-revenue paying land given to priest of the maintains of deity

Dewan - Head of a princely state	HS - Higher Secondary
Dinhajira Kamla - An agricultural day labour	HH - Household
Dhani chansi - Rich peasant	Hatchini -A wooden rake with teeth made of sharpened bamboo strips.
Dayem - Medium land	ICDS - Integrated Child Development Scheme
Dhara - Mat made of bamboo	Ijaradari system - It is a system of land revenue; by this system the entire estate was divided in to small parts known as jote and these jotes were leased out to the highest bidder.
Dewania - An authorised person of the king	Mandir - Temple
Dhimal - A Non-aryan tribe	Masjid - Mosque
Dhopa - A washer man	Mouza - The Village as a revenue unit
Dom - A lower caste	Nashya - A sect of Muslims who are mainly converted from the lower caste Hindu
Foujdari Ahilkar - The district officer of the Cooch Behar Estate entrusted with the magisterial power	Napit - Barber
Forward Block - The name of a political party	Namasudra - A scheduled caste
Giri - Rich Peasant	Jotedari - Relating to revenue estate, jote.
Gram Panchayat - Village panchayat	Jote - An area of cultivable land
Girhasta - The middle peasant	Janata - A political party
Gowala - Milk man	Jaigir - Non-revenue paying estate given to the servants of the palace; it was not transferable .
Garo - A scheduled tribe	
Henti dhan - Autum Paddy	
Halua - Share Cropper	
Hnari - Earthen pot for storage of water	

Kumar - Earthen pot maker.	Lokshabha - Parliament
Kayastha - A high caste below the Brahmin	Km - Kilometre
Kshatriya - A warrior caste	Mali - Gardener
Kashyap - The name of a clan	Maund - 40 kilogram
Kshet Majoor Union - A Trade Union of agricultural labourer ( a frontal organisation of CPIM).	MP - Member of Parliament
Khash - Vested land	Mai - Harrow
Koch - The name of tribe	Magha - Oil seed
Kalshi - Earthen pot for storage of water	Mazdur - Labour
Kaccha - Muddy	OBC - Other Backward Classes
Kursi - a mallet of wood with a bamboo handle usually of three feet long use for breaking the clods of earth.	Operation Barga - A programme launched by the Left Front Government of West Bengal for recording the names of bargadars.
Kamla - A day labour	Panchayat Samity - Panchayat office at the block level
Kumbhakar - Earthen pot maker	Panchayat - Village council
Khel - A system found among the Tibeto - Burmese people for paying services to the chief.	Para - A cluster of houses
Khurpi - Spade	Pirpal - Non-revenue land given to Pir ( Muslim priest )
Kishan- Peasant	Petbhata - Non-revenue land given to the kinsmen of the king for their maintenance
Kaibarta - A scheduled caste	RSP - Rastriya Socialist Party
Lakhiraj - Rent free holding	SC - Scheduled Caste

ST - Scheduled Tribe

Sadar - Headquarters

Samity - Association

Tishi - Oil seed

Rabha - A Scheduled Tribe

Raiyat - Peasant

Raja - The King

Tulsi - *Ocimum sanctum*

Thela Gari - A wooden car made of two wheels for carrying goods by man

Tasia -chukanidar - An under tenant of dar-chukanidar.

Tanti - Weaver

Teli - Oil pressure

Zamindar - Landlord ( During the British Period)

Zila Parishad - A District level Panchayat Office

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