

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 Sartre, 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). ^{On} *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

146164

West Bengal University
Library
Kolkata

14 MAR 2002

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.