

# **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-

conomic 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*.

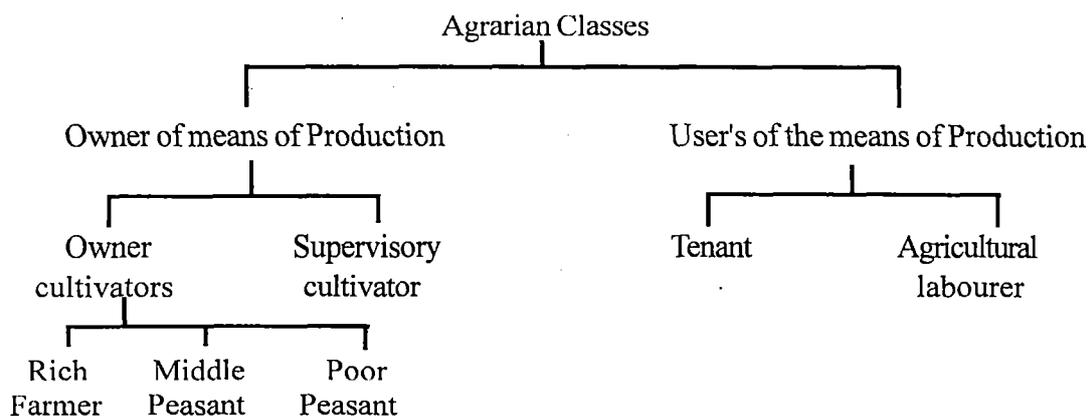
***Dhani Chansi*** : In traditional Cooch Behar the term *Dhani* used to denote the big jotedar , and even the term was used as "surname". At present, the said term has little application since the jotedari system was abolished. Now, generally big land holders are sometimes referred to as *Dhani chansi*. ***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.