

CHAPTER - VI

LAND REFORM LEGISLATIONS, AGRARIAN REFORM  
PROGRAMMES AND THE PATTERN OF LAND HOLDING  
IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD.

SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

VI.1.1 The agrarian structure of the primarily agricultural district of Jalpaiguri has undergone changes in the post-independence period with regard to the relative position of different categories of farmers in respect of number of operational holdings, area etc., after the introduction of various land reform programmes. At the same time there has been an enormous growth in the number of agricultural labourers. It should, however, be noted that land-tenure system and agrarian relations have also undergone formal changes in the western Duars region along with the whole State of West Bengal in the post-independence period. West Bengal, like other States of India saw a spate of land reform legislations for rearranging the existing land relations. The main objective behind the introduction of these reform measures was to rectify the defects in the land-tenure systems which existed in the British period. But unfortunately, data regarding the performance of land reforms upto the sixties are not available and hence we have attempted to give a short description of the various reform programmes enacted through legislations in the following section. This will be followed

by a brief review of performances of various agrarian reform programmes. Finally, we would examine the consequences of the introduction of these programmes on the structure of landholding of the district of Jalpaiguri and its Western Duars part since the beginning of the 1970s upto the mid-eighties for which we could have collected data.

SECTION 2 : RESUME OF THE POST-INDEPENDENCE LAND REFORM LEGISLATIONS

VI.2.1 The West Bengal Estates Acquisition (WBEA) Act, 1953 was passed by the State Legislature on 12.2.1954. Section 3 of this Act overrode all enactments, rules, legal formalities and procedures, directives, conventions, customs and any contract express or implied, or any instrument regarding land and revenue administration that were contrary or repugnant to, and otherwise in conformity with the provisions of the WBEA Act, 1953. With this enactment, complexities in land laws in the State were sought to be dispensed with. Thus, the Duars region of North Bengal came on a par with other parts of West Bengal in the matter of land laws after independence. Various forms of leases that regulated the rights and obligations of tenants in the Duars were replaced by new land laws followed by their subsequent amendments.

VI.2.2 The main objectives of the WBEA Act, 1953 were the following

(i) to eliminate the interests of all Zamindars and other intermediaries by acquisition on payment of compensation, (ii) to permit the intermediaries to retain possession of their khas lands upto certain limits and to treat them as tenants holding directly under the State, (iii) to acquire the interests of Zamindars and other intermediaries in mines, and (iv) to provide for certain other necessary and incidental matters. The abolition of all types of intermediaries amounted more or less to an adoption of the Raiyatwari system as was prevalent in some parts of British India. This is because in the Raiyatwari system, the relationship between the Government and the raiyats (i.e. the actual cultivators) was direct and no intermediary existed between the two, as it could be found in the Zamindary system. Hence, after the abolition of Zamindary system, the State, in effect, returned to the old Raiyatwari system. The land system in the Western Duars region of the district of Jalpaiguri, i.e., Jotedary system, was neither similar to the Raiyatwari system nor to the Zamindary system. Here, though settlements were originally made with the jotedars who were mostly cultivators themselves, they also could and did lease out lands to under-tenants called chukanidars, while, the latter in turn leased out to other grades of under-tenants. Sub-infeudation, in fact, once even reached to the fourth stage below jotedars. Moreover, the first two recognised categories of tenants were allowed to employ adhiars. Thus, the jotedars with whom lands in the Western Duars were settled, were in most cases actual owners (raiyats)-cum-intermediaries and sometimes the lower grades of under-tenants held the same position.

The WBEA Act aimed at restructuring the relation between the State and the raiyats in a two-tier model by abolishing all these intermediate interests in land between the two.

VI.2.3 The provision for permitting the intermediaries to retain agricultural land in their khas possession upto 25 acres of agricultural land per individual member of the family, according to section 6 of the WBLR Act, 1953, led the intermediaries to evict tenants from their lands as hastily as possible. But no steps were taken to forestall this procedure. An Ordinance was purfunctorily issued only after the dispossession of tenants had risen to enormous scale. No ceiling was imposed on orchards, tank, fisheries and land comprised in, or appertaining to buildings and structures owned by the intermediaries concerned or others holding them by lease or licence but not as tenants. Intermediaries were given free choice of the lands within the ceiling for retention.

VI.2.4 The WBEA Act, 1953, empowered the Government to acquire the khas lands of any person other than an intermediary if he did not cultivate it himself or if he got it cultivated by bargadars (sharecroppers), provided the amount of such land exceeded 33 acres per owning individual. The intermediaries could easily find ways of getting round that clause by distributing the ownership of lands to a larger number of persons in the family so that none owned more than 33 acres and also by recording the bargadars as agricultural labourers

on land in excess of 33 acres. Jotedars started evicting the bargadars on such a large scale that the Govt. thought it necessary to pass an anti-eviction Ordinance in 1954.

VI.2.5 The inevitable result of acquisition was the introduction of further reforms. So the next step that followed was the enactment of the West Bengal Land Reforms (WBLR) Act, 1955. The complementary Act that followed was the West Bengal Land Reforms (Bargadars) Rules, 1956 and some other concomitant rules. The WBLR Act is very comprehensive. A series of amendments <sup>been</sup> have made in this Act in subsequent years. It may be noted here that compared to the WBLR Act 1955, the WBEA Act, 1953 was a temporary legal arrangement by which the objective of abolishing the intermediary interests of Zamindar-Talukdar-Pattanidar-Jotedar and big raiyats was fulfilled and the intermediaries were converted to the direct (khas) tenants of the Government<sup>1</sup>. Hence enactment of a new and comprehensive tenancy Act was felt needed immediately. This comprehensive Act had to take responsibility of placing the relation between the Government and the raiyat (tenant) on a two-tier land system on the one hand, and settle the relation between the raiyat and the sharecropper on a practical basis, on the other. These responsibilities were sought to be executed through the WBLR Act, 1955.

VI.2.6 The WBLR Act, 1955, was passed with the following six aims in view - (i) to describe the rights, obligations of tenants and relevant matters; (ii) to exercise control over transfer to check

concentration of land in non-cultivating people and in a few hands; (iii) regulation and control of sharecropping; (iv) to evolve rational formula for fixation of rent, to create facilities for consolidation of holding and to organise co-operative farms; (v) attestation and preservation of record-of-rights; and (vi) to settle rights on land and other matters of land management.

VI.2.7 Distribution of vested and acquired land was undertaken under the WBLR Act, 1953. In the process of implementation of this Act, several lakh acres of surplus land in West Bengal came to the khās possession of the Government. It was the duty of the Government, to settle those ceiling surplus land with the landless and land poor actual cultivators and distribute them pattas. But while implementing the Act, it was found that land reforms would not be able to achieve much towards the goal of greater social welfare if the upper limit of ceiling was not scaled down. With this experience, the ceiling of 25 acres of agricultural land as prescribed in the WBEA Act, 1953, was thought to be impractical and therefore, a new section was added in the amendment of 1972 of the WBLR Act, 1955, which is currently known as "family ceiling", replacing the earlier measure of "individual ceiling".

VI.2.8 But if ~~has~~ been found that most of the big raiayats have adopted many malpractices to retain their surplus lands, both before and after the vesting, through different methods. One of the malpractices was that, big landowners resorted to the transfer of lands in

favour of their near and distant relations and other benamdars (in the names of other persons) as soon as they got scent of the ensuing measures for imposition of ceiling. The experience of implementation of the ceiling provisions showed that law makers failed to foresee the dubious methods and witty moves of big land-holders to evade the ceiling provisions.

VI.2.9 After independence the West Bengal Bargadars Act, 1950 was passed. Perhaps, the "Tebhaga movement" compelled the Government to give importance to the problem of bargadars and urged them to pass this Act. The Act provided some relief to bargadars, though much below their expectations. Strangely enough, at this time bargadars became indifferent to any advantage whatsoever of the Act because of the fear of eviction in the event they claimed their bargadari right and partly also due to their utter dependence on the landowners they failed to establish their right<sup>2</sup>. The administrative machinery was also reluctant and perhaps not adequately manned to implement the Act.

VI.2.10 In the WBEA Act, 1953 provision was made to record the names of bargadars in the record-of-rights against the plot(s) of land cultivated by them. Accordingly, names of bargadars were recorded in the record-of-rights which were much below the estimated number. Similar provisions were made in the WBLR Act, 1955 along with certain safeguards and financial assistance for bargadars and small farmers. But satisfactory progress could not be achieved in recording the names

of bargadars until an executive programme called "Operation Barga" was undertaken in West Bengal since July 1978. We have discussed the performance of this programme upto 1980 in the next section of the present Chapter and studied its impact upto 1985-86 in Chapter VIII.

### SECTION 3 : PERFORMANCES OF AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAMMES

VI.3.1 As per 1981 Census, nearly 85% of the population in the district of Jalpaiguri is rural<sup>3</sup>. Agriculture is the mainstay of almost 58% of the working population in this district. The pattern of distribution of population between agricultural and non-agricultural occupation in the State of West Bengal is nearly 58% and 42% respectively<sup>4</sup>. So the percentages of people engaged in agricultural pursuits is almost equal to the State average in the district. Thus, it becomes clear that this district can be regarded as primarily an agricultural one and hence the pattern of distribution of landholdings assumes considerable importance in its economy.

VI.3.2 The primary objective of any land reform programme guided by an egalitarian principle is to gradually eliminate the existing inequality in the structure of landholdings. Ceiling on landholdings in West Bengal has been imposed to achieve that egalitarian goal. "Redistribution of land" as observed in the Seventh Five Year Plan, could provide a permanent asset base for a large number of rural landless poor for taking up land-based and other supplementary

activities. Similarly, consolidation of holding, tenancy regulation and updating of land records, would widen the access of small and marginal landholders to improve technology and inputs and thereby directly lead to increase agricultural production<sup>5</sup>. By an amendment in 1979 of the WBLR Act, 1955, the level of ceiling on landholding has been much lowered and tied to joint-family holding instead of individual ownership of land. Ceiling surplus land are vested in Government. The surplus vested lands were distributed among the landless farmers and agricultural labourers. Questions that call for examination would, therefore, be to examine as to how much land has been declared surplus, what is the actual amount of surplus land available for redistribution and how many landless and land poor cultivators have been assigned with surplus vested lands. Table VI.1 below shows the position in these respects. It can be observed that although per capita availability of vested land in the district and in the tract of Western Duars are only 0.51 and 0.50 hectares respectively, nevertheless, it is higher than the State average of 0.23 hectares. It can be calculated from the table that on the basis of per capita availability of 0.51 hectares of vested land, at least 23,474 additional deserving families might have been benefitted in the district of Jalpaiguri if the total vested land could have been actually distributed. Similarly, if calculated on the basis of 0.50 hectares, the number of additional beneficiaries would have been 20,288 in the tract of Western Duars. These calculations assume importance in view of the fact that, in 1981, landless agricultural labourers constituted about 18% of the total rural workers in the

TABLE VI.1 - PROGRESS IN DISTRIBUTION OF CEILING SURPLUS VESTED LAND IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI,  
IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION IN 1980-81

District/ State/Region	Total vested land (in lakh hectares)	Vested land hit by injunction (in lakh hectares)	Land available for distri- bution (in lakh hectares)	Land distri- buted (in lakh hectares)	No. of benefi- ciaries	Per capita availability of vested land (in hectares) Col. (5) ÷ Col. (6)	Average size of large operational holdings*
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Jalpaiguri	0.47	0.02	0.45	0.35	68,663	0.51	23.28
West Bengal	4.90	0.72	4.18	2.73	11,94,176	0.23	146.36
Western Duars	0.36	0.015	0.34	0.26	51,712	0.50	48.47

\*Holdings having 10 hectares of land and above have been categorised as large holdings in the Agricultural Census.

- Sources: (i) Annual Plan on Agriculture, Jalpaiguri, 1983-84, Principal Agricultural Officer, Jalpaiguri.  
(ii) Land Reforms in West Bengal : Statistical Report V, Govt. of West Bengal.  
(iii) Agricultural situation in India, August, 1985.  
(iv) Office of the Settlement Officer, Cooch Bihar-Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling at Cooch Behar, 1982; and Office of the Settlement Charge Officer, Jalpaiguri, 1982.

district of Jalpaiguri and 16% in the tract of Western Duars, as shown in table VII.4 of the next chapter. Allotment of land to 23,474 prospective assignees of vested land would reduce the proportion of agricultural labourers to 14% of the total rural working population in the district of Jalpaiguri and with such 20,288 assignees, it would have been about 13% in the tract of Western Duars. There is, perhaps, a possibility of detecting more ceiling surplus land and hence reducing to some extent the number of landless agricultural labourers through redistribution of vested land. However, there is no reason to be very optimistic about the possibility of achievement of the above goal by looking at the average size of large holdings (23.28 hectares) in the district which is relatively larger<sup>6</sup>. This has been so due to the amalgamation or merger of corporate plantation holdings in West Bengal and Jalpaiguri district in particular. Hence, the chance of vesting and acquiring more land by taking some land from the large sized holdings is remote. Table VI.1 above further shows that out of the total land of 0.47 lakh hectares vested in the district, 0.02 lakh hectares (4.26%) have been hit by injunction and hence are not immediately available for redistribution. For the region of Western Duars, the percentage of figure works out to 4.17%. It may be observed that detection of ceiling surplus land and its subsequent redistribution may call for the development of functional linkages with the bureaucracy, elected rural self-governing institutions and peasants' organisations. These functional linkages may make much progress towards altering the pattern of distribution of landholdings along the desired egalitarian goal.

VI.3.3 Another land reform programme in West Bengal that has an important bearing upon the redistributive aspect of land reforms is the "Operation Barga" (OB) programme which we have mentioned earlier. Initially, the WBLR Act of 1955 was not very specific in respect of identification of bargadars (i.e., sharecroppers). In most cases the landowners showed one of their family members as a bargadar and actual bargadars often failed to prove their bonafide rights over barga land in the absence of any legal support. To plug the loopholes, Section 21B was inserted in WBLR Act in its amendment in 1977. According to this section "a person lawfully cultivating any land belonging to another person shall be presumed to be a bargadar in respect of such land if such a person is not a member of the family of the other person whose land he cultivates and the burden of providing that such person is not a bargadar or that the land is in his (land owner's) personal cultivation shall ... lie on ... the land owner". Thus the onus of proving that a person is not a bargadar has been put squarely on the land owner. This is a very significant amendment in the law which has been made to help the poor bargadars. The OB programme seeks to secure legal rights to bargadars through recording their names and thus to check the possibility of their unlawful eviction from land operated by them.

VI.3.4 The performance of this programme can be seen from table VI.2 below. A look at this table would show that the performance of OB

TABLE VI.2 - PERFORMANCE OF OPERATION BARGA PROGRAMME IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION UPTO MARCH 1980

District/ State/Region	Estimated no. of bargadars(in lakh)	No. of recorded bargadars(in lakh)	Col. (3) as percentage of Col. (2)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Jalpaiguri	1.94	0.46	23.71
West Bengal	23.10	10.42	45.11
Western Duars	1.47	0.45	30.61

Sources: (i) Directorate of Land Records & Survey, Govt. of West Bengal, May 1981.  
(ii) Office of the Settlement Officer, Cooch Behar-Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling at Cooch Behar, 1982; and Office of the Settlement Charge Officer, Jalpaiguri, 1982.

is not satisfactory both in the district, in the region and in the State upto March 1980. Only about 24% of the estimated bargadars would have recorded their names upto March 1981 in the district which shows that more than two-third of them <sup>were</sup> still then unrecorded. In the Western Duars region, about 31% of estimated bargadars were found to have recorded their names. Compared to the district, the progress in recording of bargadars in the State as a whole was somewhat better, as nearly 45% of the estimated number of bargadars were found to have been recorded in the entire State within a span of three years after the launching of the programme. The presence of a large number of unrecorded bargadars may suggest that a sizable number of cultivators may have to operate on land in an extremely insecure tenurial condition under the constant fear of eviction. Taken to its extremity, it may help in swelling up the number of landless agricultural labourers in near future.

VI.3.5 The socio-economic realities in the rural areas of Jalpaiguri and in the State of West Bengal as well demand that mere assignment of ceiling surplus land or recording the names of bargadars would not help these poor farmers to the desirable extent, unless reform measures are simultaneously supplemented by measures to meet their credit needs. In the absence of such measures, notwithstanding whether land has been distributed to poor landless peasants, (for which the legal right to hold has been established for the bargadars), they might loose their land and it may be transferred to the erstwhile landowners. Taking cognizance of this reality, a relevant programme for financing the bargadars and assignees of vested land by the nationalised commercial banks and regional rural banks has been launched from the kharif season<sup>7</sup> of 1979. During the kharif season of

1978, the State Government with the help of five public sector banks had initiated a pilot scheme of providing agricultural loans to some recorded bargadars and assignees of vested land in 23 selected clusters spread over the whole State. On the basis of experience gathered in 1978, a fairly large-scale programme has been undertaken from 1979 onwards in the whole of West Bengal for both kharif and rabi seasons. Progress of kharif and rabi lending programmes upto 1980-81 is presented below in table VI.3.

TABLE VI.3 - PROGRESS OF KHARIF AND RABI LENDING PROGRAMMES BY THE BANKS TO BARGADARS AND ASSIGNEES OF VESTED LAND IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT, IN WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION FROM 1979-80 TO 1980-81.

District/ State/Region	No. of bargadars and assignees of vested land (in thousand)	Expected level of achievement (in thousand)	Achieve- ment (in percentage of thousand)	Col. 4 as percentage of Col. (3)	Col. (4) as percentage of Col. (2)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Jalpaiguri	114.7	4.3	1.6	37.2	1.4
West Bengal	13,504.1	159.7	71.1	44.5	2.0
Western Duars	80.3	3.2	1.2	37.5	1.4

Sources: (i) Board of Revenue, West Bengal, 1982.

(ii) Office of the Settlement Officer, Cooch Behar-Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling ~~at~~ Cooch Behar, 1982.

It can be observed that compared to the State as a whole, the actual level of achievement as well as of percentages of bargadars and assignees of vested land receiving institutional credit is much poor in the district of Jalpaiguri and its Western Duars region as is evident from columns (5) and (6) of the above table. The inference that can be drawn is that there are enough scope for the programme to make a lot of progress towards emancipating the poor farmers from the clutches of the traditional money lenders by satisfying their credit needs in larger amounts. Till the year of reference, only 2% of the recorded bargadars and assignees of vested land could be brought in the purview of institutional finance. It is further disappointing that the whole body of agricultural labourers could not be brought under the lending programme of the banking system. Unless and until the majority of these groups of people can be assisted in this scheme they must have to depend for their consumption and production loans on the traditional sources of finance.

**VI.3.6** To cope with the problem a massive programme to generate employment in the rural sector requires to be undertaken. With this end in view, schemes like Rural Works Programme (RWP), Food For Work Programme (FFWP) and Composite Rural Restoration Programme (RRP) have been launched since the middle of 1978. All these programmes helped in generating additional mandays of employment. Progress in this regard has been shown in table VI.4. The table shows that through FFW, RWP and RRP about 12.6 lakh and 19.3 lakh mandays were generated in 1978-79 and in 1979-80 respectively in the district of Jalpaiguri.

during 1975-76 and 1979-80 in West Bengal including that in the district of Jalpaiguri. This can be seen from table VI.5 below. The table reveals that the number of sale deeds decreased by about 21% in the whole of West Bengal and by nearly 20% in the district of Jalpaiguri between 1975-76 and 1979-80 and by about 31% in the Western Duars region. Therefore, it can be said that implementation of various rural upliftment programmes undertaken along with land reform in West

TABLE VI.4 - PROGRESS OF EMPLOYMENT GENERATION THRCUGH FFWP, RWP AND RRP IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT, THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION IN 1978-79 AND IN 1979-80

District/ State/Region	<u>Employment generated in lakh man-days*</u>		Percentage variation
	1978-79	1979-80	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Jalpaiguri	12.6	19.3	53.17
West Bengal	534.1	540.9	1.27
Western Duars	8.8	13.9	57.95

Sources: (i) Economic Review, 1978-79 and 1980-81, Govt. of West Bengal  
(ii) Planning and Development Section of the District Collectorate Office, Jalpaiguri, 1982.

\* Adjusted by the wage-rate.

In the Western Duars region of the district, these figures stood at 8.8 lakhs and 13.9 lakhs respectively. This means that mandays increased by 53.17% in the district during the two-year period which, as shown in column (4) of the table, are substantially higher than the increases for all the districts of West Bengal taken together. If it is assumed that all the recorded bargadars and assignees of vested land had participated in the programme, it can then be said that about 17 mandays per beneficiaries were generated in 1979-80 both in the district of Jalpaiguri and in its Western Duars region; whereas, 15 mandays were generated on an average in all the districts taken together in West Bengal. But if all the agricultural labour force in the district of Jalpaiguri (1.11 lakh) and in the Western Duars region (0.84 lakh) are also included then the number of mandays generated per household would come down to about 9 mandays in Jalpaiguri and about 8 mandays in the Western Duars region, while it would be about 8 mandays in all the districts of West Bengal taken together (total agricultural labourers being 33 lakh). It should, however, be noted that all landless and poor peasants do not participate in the programme and hence the actual mandays generated per household should be more than what is stated. Nevertheless, there has been no significant increase in employment generation neither in the State as a whole nor in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the Western Duars region.

VI.3.7 That the implementation of the agrarian reform programmes have to a certain extent improved the economic condition of the rural poor is reflected in the fact that the number of land sale deeds has fallen

though limited in its coverage and effects, has, as the table below indicates, checked the process of land transfer from the hands of the

TABLE VI.5 - LAND SALE-DEEDS REGISTERED IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1975-76 AND 1979-80.

District/ State/Region	<u>No. of sale-deeds registered</u>		Percentage variation
	1975-76	1979-80	
(1)	(2)	(3)	
Jalpaiguri	51,831	41,431	-20.07
West Bengal	14,59,069	11,58,744	-20.58
Western Duars	43,020	29,830	-30.66

Sources: (i) Office of the Inspector General of Registration, West Bengal, 1982.

(ii) Different Registration Offices in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1982.

poor peasantry. This is likely to have had some favourable impact on the landholding pattern of West Bengal as well as that in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the Western Duars region.

#### SECTION 4 : CHANGES IN THE LAND HOLDING PATTERN AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

VI.4.1 From our above finding, it may be observed that in a situation where most of the performances in respect of reform measures are yet to produce any significant result, the overall change in the

distribution of landholding is bound to be overwhelmingly marginal. This will be evident from tables VI.6. It is revealed from table VI.6 that the percentage share of marginal holdings in the district of Jalpaiguri has risen from 37.96% in 1970-71 to 62.14% in 1980-81 and from 38.2% in 1970-71 to 63.33% in the Western Duars region; that is, marginal holdings in 1980-81 comprised about three-fifths of the total holdings in both the areas. On the other hand, these category of holdings comprised an area in 1980-81 which was less than one-fifth, of the total area. The percentage share of the number of small holdings has recorded a fall while that in the area operated in this category has recorded a rise. There have been changes in both percentage share in number and area in other categories also. It is revealed from this table that the trend of changes both in the district of Jalpaiguri and in its Western Duars region are identical, though there are slight differences in their magnitudes. However, it would be more convenient to compare the changes over the decade 1970-71 to 1980-81, if we look at the percentage variation in number and area over the decade for various size categories. Size-wise percentage variations in number and area have been shown in table VI.7 and VI.8 respectively for the district of Jalpaiguri as well as for the State of West Bengal.

VI.4.2 A significant feature which is apparent from table VI.7 is the phenomenal increase in the number of marginal holdings in the district, in the region and in the State. But the area operated in marginal holdings although has recorded a big rise (as is shown

TABLE VI.6 - STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN LAND HOLDINGS IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL, IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1970-71 AND 1980-81

Category of holdings	Distribution of no. of operational holdings (% to total)						Distribution of area under operational holdings (% to total)					
	1970-71			1980-81			1970-71			1980-81		
	W.B.	JAL	W.D.	W.B.	JAL	W.D.	W.B.	JAL	W.D.	W.B.	JAL	W.D.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Marginal	59.97	37.96	38.82	69.69	62.14	63.33	21.61	9.45	9.22	29.16	17.59	17.06
Small	22.34	33.19	32.63	19.35	24.04	23.28	25.81	18.82	17.64	31.21	20.78	19.73
Semi-medium	13.23	23.49	23.40	8.84	11.37	11.16	28.69	24.28	23.07	25.26	19.16	18.93
Medium	4.37	5.25	5.02	1.90	2.35	2.13	19.30	10.63	9.96	10.71	7.23	6.67
Large	0.09	0.12	0.12	0.02	0.10	0.10	4.59	36.82	40.11	3.66	35.24	37.07
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	(4216327)	(135742)	(103542)	(5877649)	(204752)	(160706)	(5043631)	(326079)	(257422)	(5554782)	(3,41659)	(266334) ↗

Notes: (i) Figures in parentheses in columns (2) to (7) show total number of operational holdings and that in columns (8) to (13) show total amount of operational area (in hectares).

(ii) Different categories of holdings comprises land (in hectares) as follows - (a) Marginal : below 1.0, (b) Small : 1.0-2.0, (c) Semi-medium: 2.0-4.0, (d) Medium:4.0-10.0 and (e) Large: 10.0 and above

(iii) W.B. - West Bengal; JAL. - Jalpaiguri; W.D - Western Duars.

Sources: (i) Economic Review, 1982-83, Govt. of West Bengal

(ii) Agricultural Census, 1980-81, West Bengal, Board of Revenue & Directorate of Agriculture (Socio-Economic Evaluation Branch), Govt. of West Bengal, Calcutta, 1986.

(iii) Annual Plan on Agriculture, 1972-73 and 1982-83, Principal Agriculture Office, Jalpaiguri.

TABLE VI.7 - SIZE-WISE PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN THE NUMBER OF OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL, IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1970-71 TO 1980-81

Size/class (Hec.)	Category of holdings	Percentage variation in number		
		West Bengal	Jalpaiguri	Western Duars
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Below 1.0	Marginal	+61.99	+146.93	+153.25
1.0-2.0	Small	+22.00	+ 9.28	+ 10.74
2.0-4.0	Semi-medium	- 6.91	- 22.96	- 25.99
4.0-10.0	Medium	-39.36	- 32.42	- 34.27
10.0 & above	Large	-61.00	+ 13.50	+ 13.14
<b>ALL HOLDINGS</b>		<b>+39.40</b>	<b>+50.84</b>	<b>+55.21</b>

Source: Same as in table VI.6

TABLE VI.8 - SIZE-WISE PERCENTAGE VARIATIONS IN THE AREA UNDER OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL, IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1970-71 TO 1980-81

Size/Class (Hec.)	Category of holdings	Percentage variation in area		
		West Bengal	Jalpaiguri	Western Duars
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Below 1.0	Marginal	+48.63	+95.02	+97.55
1.0-2.0	Small	+33.18	+15.68	+15.68
2.0-4.0	Semi-medium	- 3.02	-17.32	-15.11
4.0-10.0	Medium	-38.90	-28.75	-30.68
10.0 & above	Large	-12.20	+ 0.29	- 4.37
<b>ALL HOLDINGS</b>		<b>+9.74</b>	<b>+4.78</b>	<b>+3.46</b>

Source : Same as in table VI.6

in table VI.8), it is far below the rate of growth in their number. For an analysis<sup>of</sup>, such a state of affair we must take into consideration the distribution of ceiling-surplus land. If we deduct the number of new beneficiary-marginal landholders from the number of marginal operators, the rate of growth of marginal holders over the decade would appear to be a little smaller for all the districts taken together. The percentage variation in the number of marginal holders over the decade is +61.99% in West Bengal when the assignees of vested land (11.94 lakh) over the decade are deducted from the number of marginal operators (40.96 lakh), the decadal percentage variation becomes +54.31 instead of +61.99%. Thus, the annual rate of marginalisation was about 5% in the State which is significantly higher than about 2% annual rate of growth of rural population between 1971 and 1981. This may suggest that marginalisation was more due immiserisation rather than the normal devolution of property. However, the distribution of vested land to the landless persons has raised the annual rate of marginalisation by nearly 1% during the period. But, the picture depicted by the figures for Jalpaiguri district is somewhat different. For the district, if the assignees of vested land (0.69 lakh) are taken into account and deducted from the total number of marginal operators (1.27 lakh), the percentage variation in the number of marginal operators over the decade would actually stand at +13.63% instead of +146.93%. For the Western Duars region, a deduction of 0.52 lakh assignees from 1.02 lakh marginal operators would make the percentage variation point 108.33% instead of 153.25%. Thus, in case of the district of Jalpaiguri the annual rate of marginalisation was about 1.4% and in case of the Western Duars region it

was about 1.1% which is not so significant compared to about 2% annual rate of growth of rural population (shown in table VII.2 of the next chapter) in both the areas. It is, therefore, the redistribution of surplus land among the landless households which has led to a fantastic rise in the number of marginal landholders and caused an annual rate of marginalisation to rise by nearly 15% in both the areas. However, in the absence of land redistribution programme there would have been a higher incidence of landlessness and more proliferation in the number of agricultural labourers.

**VI.4.3** The percentage variation in the number of operational holdings in the small holder category shows a 9.28% rise while in the categories of semi-medium and medium holders show a decline of approximately 23% and 32% respectively in the district of Jalpaiguri. In the Western Duars region of the district, the number of marginal holdings shows a rise of about 11% while in the semi-medium and medium categories there have <sup>been a</sup> decrease by about 26% and 34% respectively which is a little higher than that in the district. The fall in the number of semi-medium and medium holders and a rise in that of marginal and small holders in both the areas point out to the fact that some of the former types of holders have entered the rank of the latter categories of holders. It is to be noted that, simultaneously, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of agricultural labourers over the decade. The percentage variation in the number of agricultural labourers between 1971 and 1981 was about 103% <sup>in the district</sup> as has been shown in table VII.1 of the next chapter. This means that agricultural labourers

increased at the rate of about 10% per annum, a very high rate indeed, but after deducting vested land assignees, the marginal operators in the district had fallen at the annual rate of 1.4%. A fall in the number of semi-medium and medium holders also reveals that some operators from these groups have certainly entered the category of small and marginal holders and at the same time some of those in later categories of holders have become landless over the decade 1970-71 to 1980-81.

**VI.4.4** The average size of all categories of holdings has also changed significantly over the decade. Table VI.9 shows the distribution of average size of holding. It is exhibited in table VI.9 that except in cases of large and marginal categories, the average size of holdings of other three categories, viz., small, semi-medium and medium have increased both in the district and in the region. The rise and fall in the average sizes have been consistent over the census periods in the district, in the region and in the State as well. In the district and in the region the average size of large farms has decreased by 11.64% and 15.48% respectively. The rate of growth of average size of small-sized holdings has been about +5.88% and that in case of semi-medium and medium categories has been to the tune of +13.31% and +5.34% respectively in the district of Jalpaiguri. The corresponding rates of growth in the Western Duars region are +4.48%, +14.69% and +5.48% respectively. However, the important point to note is that the average size of holdings of the marginal categories has fallen by 22% over the decade both in the district and in the region.

TABLE VI.9 - DISTRIBUTION OF AVERAGE SIZE OF HOLDINGS OVER DIFFERENT AGRICULTURAL CENSUSES IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION AND IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL

Size class (hec.)	Category	Agricultural Census 1970-71			Agricultural Census 1980-81		
		Average size of holdings			Average size of holdings		
		JAL	W.D.	W.B.	JAL	W.D.	W.B.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Below 1.0	Marginal	0.60	0.59	0.43	0.47	0.46	0.40
1.0-2.0	Small	1.36	1.34	1.38	1.44	1.40	1.51
2.0-4.0	Semi-medium	2.48	2.45	2.59	2.81	2.81	2.70
4.0-10.0	Medium	4.87	4.93	5.28	5.13	5.20	5.32
10.0 & above	Large	736.62	753.72	64.20	650.91	637.05	144.52
OVERALL		2.40	2.49	1.20	1.67	1.66	0.95

Sources : As in table VI.6.

Note : JAL. - Jalpaiguri; W.D. - Western Duars; W.B. - West Bengal.

under study. But, the rise in the average size of small and medium categories of holdings may suggest that there has been a large-scale eviction of sharecroppers in case of holders in these categories which has contributed to the enlargement of the average size of their holdings. The positive rate of growth of small, semi-medium and medium size of holdings in both the areas suggests that an inter-size movement has taken place as the differential rates of growth of these holdings indicate. This movement has been mostly towards small and semi-medium size groups which implies that the agrarian economy of the district is evidently moving to a position dominated by marginal and small farmers.

VI.4.5 With a view to study the disparities in the distribution of land holdings in different categories, Gini Co-efficients of the distribution of operational holdings and area operated have been worked out and shown in table VI.10.

TABLE VI.10 - GINI CO-EFFICIENTS INDICATING CONCENTRATION INDICES OF LAND HOLDINGS IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL, IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1970-71 AND 1980-81.

State/ District/ Region	<u>Gini Co-efficients of Landholding Distribution</u>	
	1970-71	1980-81
(1)	(2)	(3)
West Bengal	0.476	0.458
Jalpaiguri	0.587	0.618
Western Duars	0.610	0.629

Source : Computation from table VI.6

The Gini Co-efficients representing the distribution of operated are among different size groups of farms for Western Duars region show that this distribution is fairly skewed. The concentration in landholding distribution is higher in the Western Duars region than that in the whole district of Jalpaiguri and that in the State of West Bengal. The Gini Co-efficients for the district of Jalpaiguri also show that the landholding distribution is skewed and the skewness has increased over the decade. The picture for the State as a whole is a little different. In the State, the concentration in landholding is smaller than that of the district of Jalpaiguri and the Western Duars region and has decreased over the decade.

VI.4.6 The highly skewed structure of distribution of landholding in the Western Duars region, in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the State of West Bengal is reflected in the Lorenz Curves which have been shown in diagrams VI.1, VI.2 and VI.3 respectively.

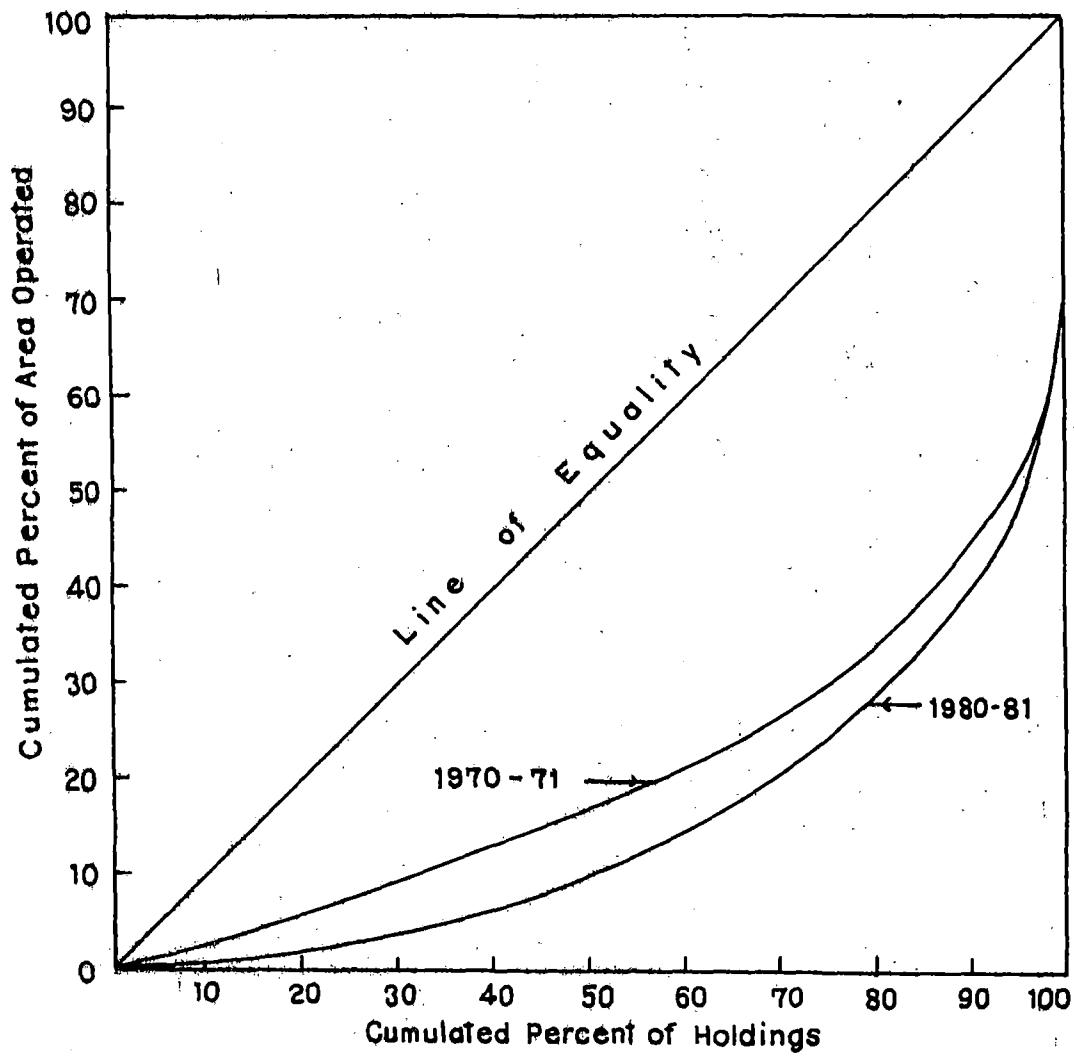


Diagram VI.1 - Lorenz curve showing inequality in the distribution of Land Holding in Western Duars in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

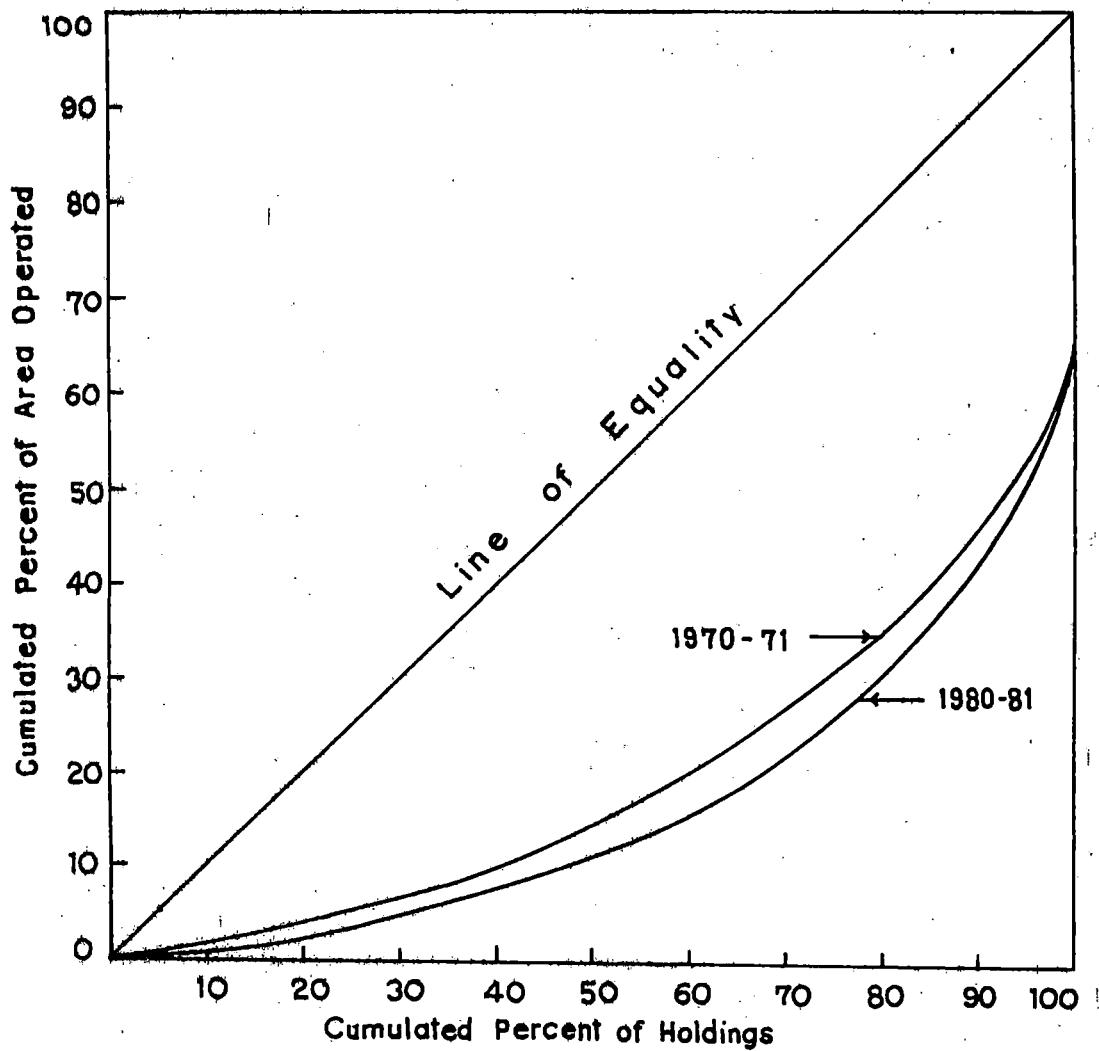


Diagram VI.2 - Lorenz curve showing inequality in the Distribution of Land Holding in Jalpaiguri District in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

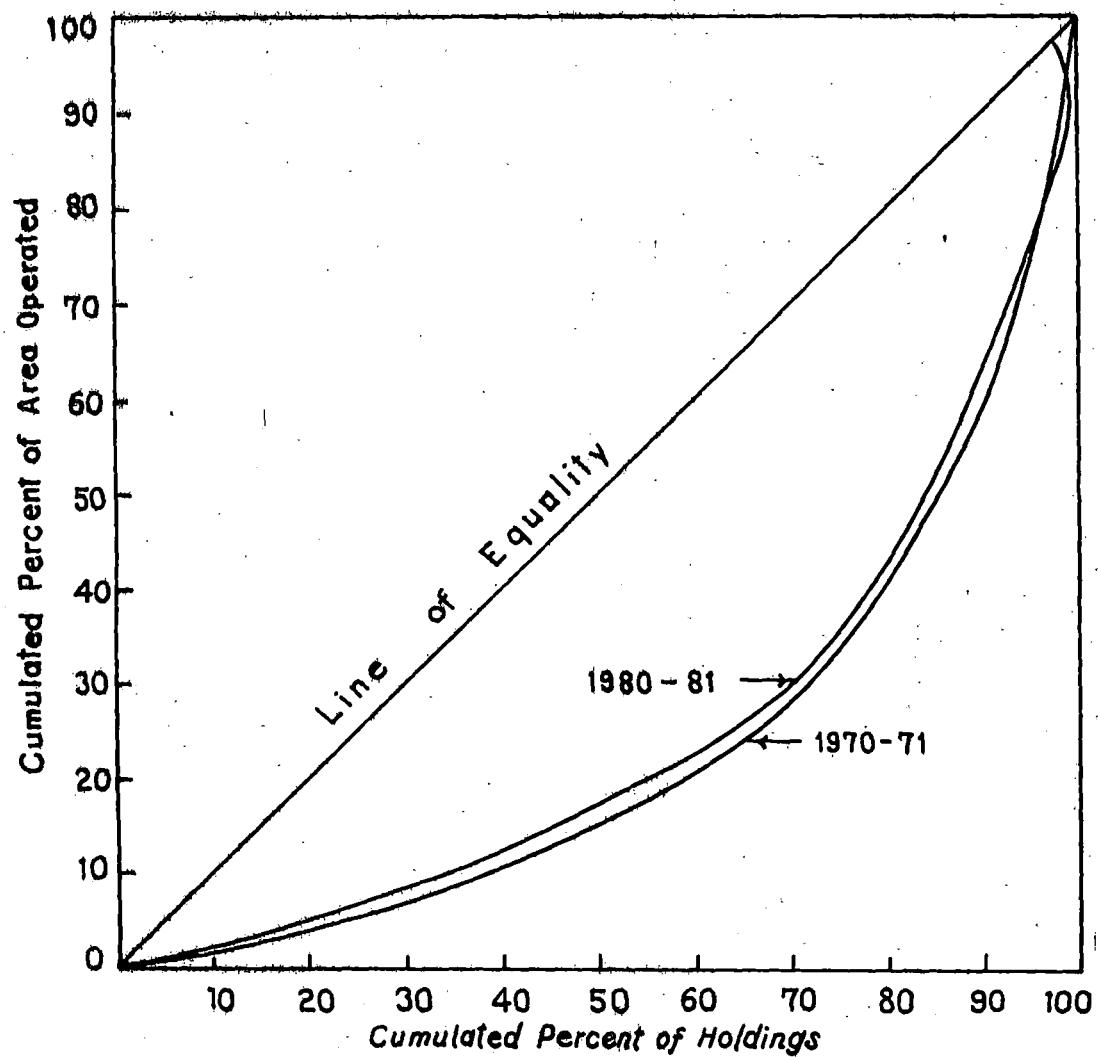


Diagram VI.3 - Lorenz curve showing inequality in the distribution of Land holding in West Bengal in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

VI.4.7 The results derived from the Lorenz Curves are shown in table VI.11 below. It is revealed from this table that while there are inequalities in the structural distribution of landholdings, the change that has taken place over the decade is that top 20% of farms

TABLE VI.11 - INEQUALITY INDICES OF LANDHOLDINGS FOR THE WESTERN DUARS REGION, THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL DURING 1970-71 AND 1980-81

Region/District/ State	Year	Share of bottom 30% of holdings in area operated (percentages)	Share of top 20% of farms in area operated (percentages)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Western Duars	I 1970-71	6	34
	I 1980-81	4	30
Jalpaiguri	I 1970-71	6	35
	I 1980-81	5	31
West Bengal	I 1970-71	7	41
	I 1980-81	8	43

were operating less area in 1980-81 compared to that in 1970-71, both in the district of Jalpaiguri and in its Western Duars region. It also shows that bottom 30% were also operating less area in 1980-81 compared to that in 1970-71. The trends were the reverse for the State of West Bengal over the decades.

VI.4.8 The increasing inequalities in landholding both in the district of Jalpaiguri and in its Western Duars region over the decade seems to have occurred mainly due to the increasing rate of marginalisation caused by legal redistribution of land to landless people and immiserisation of the smaller farmers, eviction of bargadars

and increasing pressure of growth of population on land. It points out to the fact that "while marginalisation of the poor peasantry is going on, on a fairly fast rate, there has not been any serious dent on the effective concentration of land in a few hands inspite of the revised land ceiling law of early seventies and notwithstanding some visible indication to the contrary"<sup>8</sup>.

VI.4.9 The above analysis on the effects of the agrarian reform programmes on the pattern of distribution of operational holdings with reference to the State of West Bengal, the whole district of Jalpaiguri and separately in its Western Duars region, has perhaps made it amply clear that the effects on this pattern may be somewhat different in different districts or regions of West Bengal from the total effect produced in the State as a whole. Moreover, inspite of adoption of various agrarian reform programmes and their positive impact indications, there still remains a significant tendency towards immiserisation of a large section of the rural population in the district of Jalpaiguri together with its Western Duars region and in the whole State of West Bengal which gets its reflection in the sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers as described in the next chapter.

N O T E S      A N D      R E F E R E N C E S

1. Banerjee, T., Paschim Banglar Bhumi-Byabastha O Bhumi-Rajaswa (in Bengali), Calcutta, West Bengal State Book Board, 1983, p. 125.
2. Ghosh, A. & Dutt, K., Development of Capitalist Relations in Agriculture (A Case Study of West Bengal, 1793-1971), New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1977, p. 148.
3. Census of India, Jalpaiguri District Hand Book, 1981, pp. 22-25.
4. Ibid.
5. Government of India, Seventh Five Year Plan, Vol. 2, p. 62.
6. The average size of holdings of marginal, small, semi-medium and medium size of holdings are 0.47 hectares, 1.44 hectares 2.81 hectares and 5.13 hectares respectively as per Agricultural Census of 1970-71 and 1980-81. Please see table VI.8 of this chapter.
7. Kharif is rainy <sup>season</sup> crop and Rabi is winter <sup>season</sup> crop.
8. Bandopadhyya, D., "Land Reforms in India : An analysis" in Kurukshetra, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, October, 1986, Annual Number, p. 6.