

**THE EVOLUTION OF LAND-TENURE SYSTEM
IN THE DUARS REGION OF
NORTH BENGAL**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
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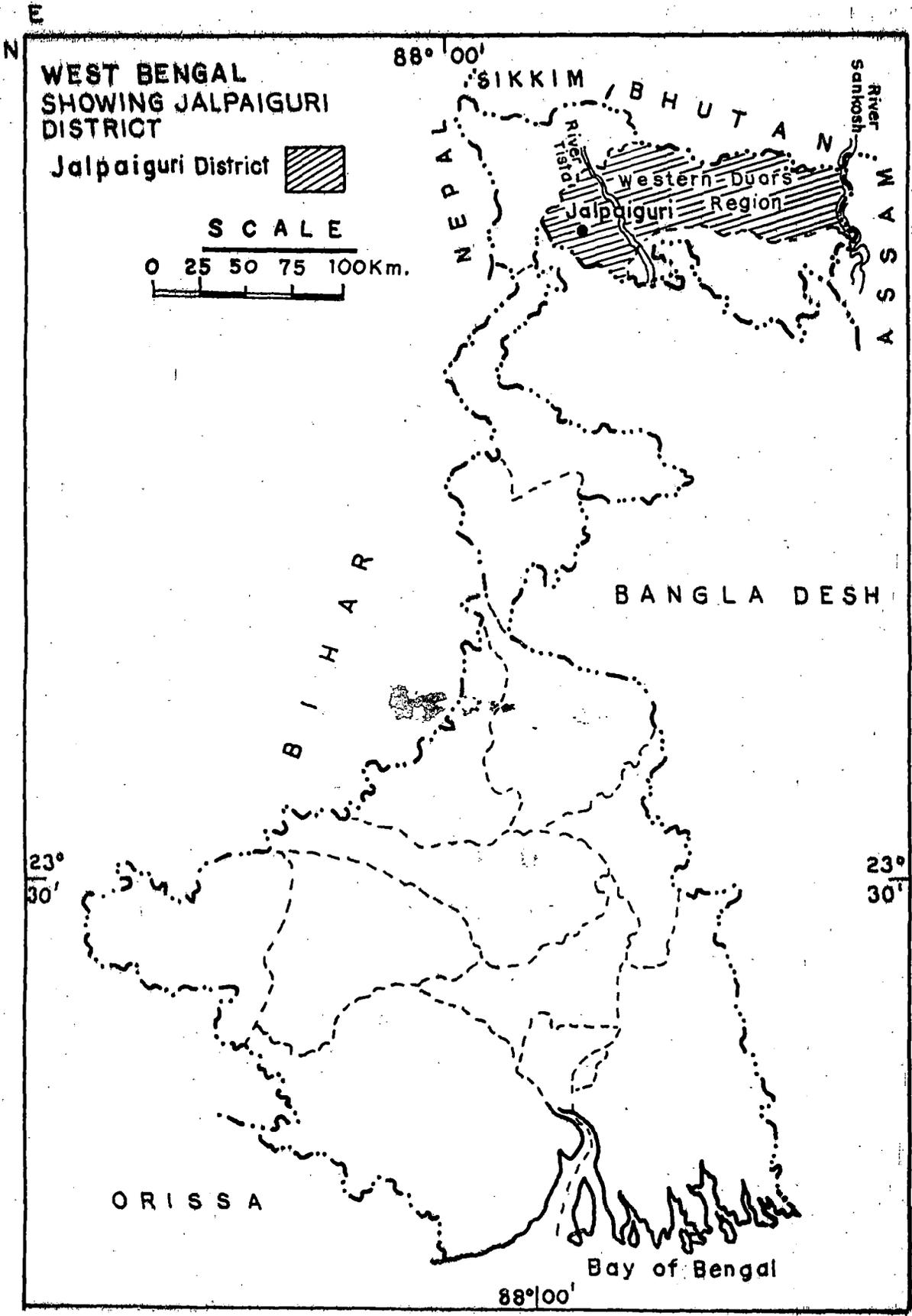
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P R E F A C E

The present dissertation deals with the evolution of land-tenure system in the Duars region of North Bengal. Among several alternatives suggested by his research guide, the author's interest in this particular field was primarily due to his coming of a small peasant family which live in a village in the region of study. Having a first hand knowledge of the rural areas of this region the author has in mind the irresistible fascination of holding land by a farmer whatever small it might be. An evolutionary study of the land-tenure system of this region, therefore, roused the interest of the author. Possession of a plot of agricultural land carries with it high psychological and social value. It helps to raise the status of the weaker sections of society and give them a sense of belonging to the hub of social life. In fact "land is not only the most important economic asset in an agricultural economy, it is an essential resource because without land there can be no state, no habitation and no ground-work for carrying on human activities. Land is a mother resource giving rise to various other things of economic value. Even in urban societies, it is regarded as the most valuable resource from the economic point of view" (Wadhwa, D.C., "Guaranteeing Title to Land : A Preliminary Study" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXIV, No. 41, October 14, 1989, p. 2323). It may be worthwhile to note here the dictum of

(II)

a Nigerian chief about land : "I conceive that land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living, and countless members are still unborn" (Cited in Meek, C.K., Land Law and Custom in the Colonies, Oxford University Press, 1946, page opposite to the title page).

Obviously, the study of the evolution of land-tenure system assumes a special significance as land is one of the most important sources of production which has an important bearing on the lives of cultivators. The mode and quantum of holding land determines the economic, political and social status of a cultivator. Any move by the Government to change the existing land relations would therefore be reacted upon and change the status of the tenants. It is therefore important to see in what circumstances and in what manner the Government initiate the changes and how tenants are affected by these changes.

It was the inspiration of his research guide which provided the author further impetus to undertake the study. From a preliminary survey of literature it appeared that only some fragmented studies have been made on the topic having distinct historical and sociological leanings. But these studies did not focus the economic significance and implications of the changes in land-tenure system as evolved in different periods of history. In the present study an attempt has, therefore, been made to examine the economic importance of these changes.

(III)

It should be mentioned here that the author, while quoting from the relevant authorities, has retained the old spellings of some words as they have been found to be used in the original text. However, for his own text, he has used the usual spellings as are used in current publications.

Two appendices have been added at the end of the present dissertation. Appendix to Chapter III narrates the history of annexation of the Western Duars region to the British India, a note on the land laws of the Western Duars, evolution of different forms of jotes and leases and incidents of different classes of tenures, and appendix to Chapter VIII gives a profile of the villages that were investigated for studying the impact of land reform programmes of the Government of West Bengal in recent period.

Four maps have been inserted, one at the beginning of this dissertation and the other three in Chapters II, III and VIII showing respectively the district of Jalpaiguri and Western Duars region in the State of West Bengal; Western and Eastern Duars based on Rennel's Bengal Atlas, Pemberton's Maps and Survey of India Map; Western Duars region in the district of Jalpaiguri featuring police stations, transport and communications network and main rivers; and Western Duars region showing the location of the six villages investigated. A glossary of terms has also been appended at the end of the thesis.

(IV)

This is an occasion to acknowledge the author's indebtedness to various persons and institutions. The author is deeply indebted to Dr. Hillol Kumar Chakrabarti for his invaluable guidance. It was his constant encouragement and inspiration that made possible to complete this work. The author is also grateful to Dr. (Mrs) Bhaswati Chakrabarti, his guide's wife for her hospitality, affection and tolerance during the long course of preparation of the thesis.

In this occasion the author desires to mention with reverence the names of his teachers namely Prof. P.C. Sarkar, Prof. M. Dasgupta, Prof. J.C. Debnath, Dr. C. Mukhopadhyay and Dr. R.N. Bhattacharjee of the Department of Economics, Prof. T.K. Roy Chowdhury, Prof. (late) A. Deb and Dr. A. Ghosh of the Department of History, North Bengal University for their critical comments and suggestions.

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(V)

The author acknowledges the help and assistance rendered by government officials for the collection of official data and Panchayat members for the collection of field level data. The author has been greatly encouraged by the whole hearted cooperation extended to him by the peasants of the villages which he has investigated, and therefore owes gratitude to them.

As to the collection of the secondary source materials, the author gratefully remembers the facilities he received from the librarian and staff of the North Bengal University Library, the National Library, Calcutta, the Cooch Behar State Library, Cooch Behar, the Office Library of the Commissioner of Jalpaiguri Division, Jalpaiguri, the Library of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta and the Library of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (Eastern Regional Centre), Calcutta.

The author is extremely grateful to his friends and family for their moral support. Last but not the least the author thanks the University Grants Commission for granting him one year teacher fellowship under the Faculty Improvement Programme in 1989-90.

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November 1990.

C H A P T E R - I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

I.0.1 The chief objective of this study is to reconstruct the nature of land-tenure system and to examine the changes that have taken place in the agrarian economy and society of the Duars region of North Bengal over the period 1774-1988, and their impact (as far as can be identified) on the social and economic developments in the region during the period. The study of the land-tenure system in the post-independence era with a special emphasis on the impact of "Operation Barga" programme adopted in the Duars region, along with other parts of the State to record the names of sharecroppers in the record-of-rights forms a special part of this study.

SECTION 1 : BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

I.1.1 It has almost become customary to treat land revenue and tenancy systems, prevalent throughout the undivided Bengal as homogeneous. It is well known that the Zamindari system was introduced in the British Bengal along with many other parts of British India since 1793 when Lord Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement in lands. But a fact which is very often neglected is that the Zamindari system, as prevalent in the southern parts of undivided Bengal, was not in vogue in various parts of North Bengal. In fact, in some parts of North Bengal¹, the Acts and Regulations regarding land

prevalent in other parts of Bengal did not come into force unless those were specifically extended to these areas. These specific parts, technically called "non-regulated areas", remained outside the purview of the Permanent Settlement. The land revenue and tenancy systems that were introduced by the British in these areas of North Bengal may be termed as "Jotedary system".

I.1.2 There are certain historical factors behind the introduction and evolution of this system in this area. It is known that the various parts of North Bengal, especially the Duars region, came under the direct British rule only a hundred years after the Battle of Plassey. The British consolidation of empire in the Duars was complete as late as 1865 after the Anglo-Bhutanese War.

I.1.3 The Bhutanese laws and customs regulated the land revenue and tenancy laws of Bengal Duars, technically called "Western Duars" or commonly known as "Duars" before its annexation to the British empire. It is also evident from the old historical records that the land revenue and tenancy systems of the region at times were regulated by the laws and customs of the 'Koch Kings' of the then Cooch Behar State (the present Cooch Behar district of West Bengal) before the subjugation of the entire region by the Bhutanese.

I.1.4 Thus, prior to the British annexation of the Western Duars, the region was ruled sometimes by the powerful Koch Kings and sometimes

by the Bhutanese "Durbar" in different periods of history. Consequently, the land revenue and tenancy systems that prevailed in this region were not British till the middle-half of the nineteenth century.

I.1.5 When the area was annexed to the British empire, population was very low but there was vast area of land available for cultivation. The density of population per square mile was ^{also} low and village localities were few and far between. Beverly, in his Census Report of 1872 noted, "In the recently acquired Duars the population is 67 to the square mile. As it is, it appears to have doubled since it came under British rule and still to be increasing at a rapid rate, the increase being due of course to the immigration from the more populous part around"². All available records show that in most parts of this area, "jhum", i.e., shifting cultivation with "slash and burn" method prevailed³.

I.1.6 The first full-fledged settlement of the Duars area was undertaken by Mr. Sunder in 1889⁴. He followed the British policy of "least resistance" and gave due recognition to the prevailing local customs, needs and tradition. The British understood the potentialities of this area and declared a large tract of land as "waste" and utilised the "waste land" for cultivation and plantation of tea. By declaring some areas of the Duars as "waste", the British

authority separated this area from the rest of Bengal. The land laws and regulations which were relevant in other parts of Bengal were declared "inapplicable" in this area. The whole Duars area was brought under direct control of the Government. Moreover, the British Government declared the whole area "underdeveloped". Apart from declaring a large tract as waste land, the British tried to settle lands with the individuals, locally called "jotedars". The relationship between the cultivators who were "jotedars" and the paramount power, i.e., the British Government was direct and not many intermediaries existed, as could be found in permanently settled tracts. Ultimately, the system that evolved in this area may be termed as "Jotedary System".

I.1.7 With the resumption of peace after the British annexation of the Western Duars, there was huge influx of population from the neighbouring districts. As the soil was virgin it attracted a large number of people. Pressure of population on land increased. Railway lines were opened up. Tea was introduced in the district in 1874.⁵ There was gradual monetisation of the economy of Duars and commercialisation of its agriculture. These had a far reaching effect on the land-tenure system itself. Fragmentation and alienation of land holding took place which further brought forth profound changes in the structure of the economy. Introduction of tea in the region uprooted the sons of the soil on the one hand, and swelled the number of competitors for agricultural land on the other. New jotedars from the tea gardens, mostly became absentee tillers and thereby introduced a new phenomenon in the agrarian structure, viz., the emergence of

agricultural labourers, who were originally the owners and tillers of the soil. On the one hand there had been concentration of land-holding in a few hands of jotedars; on the other hand, there were many sharecroppers who cultivated small plots of lands without any right on land.

I.1.8 Just after independence the Duars region inherited the above features. In the post-independence period, along with other states of India, West Bengal also had enacted land reform legislations. Land-tenure system was made homogeneous for the whole State. All intermediary interests in land were abolished. Ceiling on land holding was imposed. Surplus vested lands were distributed to the landless people through various land reform measures. Despite these measures, there had been a continuous rise in the number of marginal farmers as well as in the number of landless persons, i.e., agricultural labourers. The Duars region of North Bengal is not an exception to this trend. Moreover, the initial land reform legislations enacted by the West Bengal Government did not provide any protection to sharecroppers against illegal eviction until it launched a special drive called "Operation Barga" programme. It is a programme for recording the names of sharecroppers in the record-of-rights to give them security of tenure. This is a landmark in the history of evolution of tenurial rights in land in the Duars region as well as in the State as a whole.

I.1.9 The term land-tenure is viewed in this study to denote something more than mere rights in land and intended to cover also

such relationships in society as are governed by the various rights in the use of land. The study in its widest sense aims at an analysis of the changes in agrarian structure. Since land is a crucial productive factor, at least in the initial stages of economic development, an enquiry of this kind is likely to throw some light on the institutional factors which have facilitated or retarded economic development.

I.1.10 But, it involves an incursion into various disciplines; such as, economics, history, sociology, law, political science and geography for an analysis of agrarian institutions and their effects on social and economic development by the very nature of the problem⁶. This interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry not only places heavy responsibilities on any one who undertakes it but also necessitates, in the case of research by individual scholars, delimitation of its scope, so that, it can be handled by methods they are familiar with in their particular areas of specialisation. In terms of the concepts and methods of analysis used, this study can be described as one which falls in the border-land of economics and history.

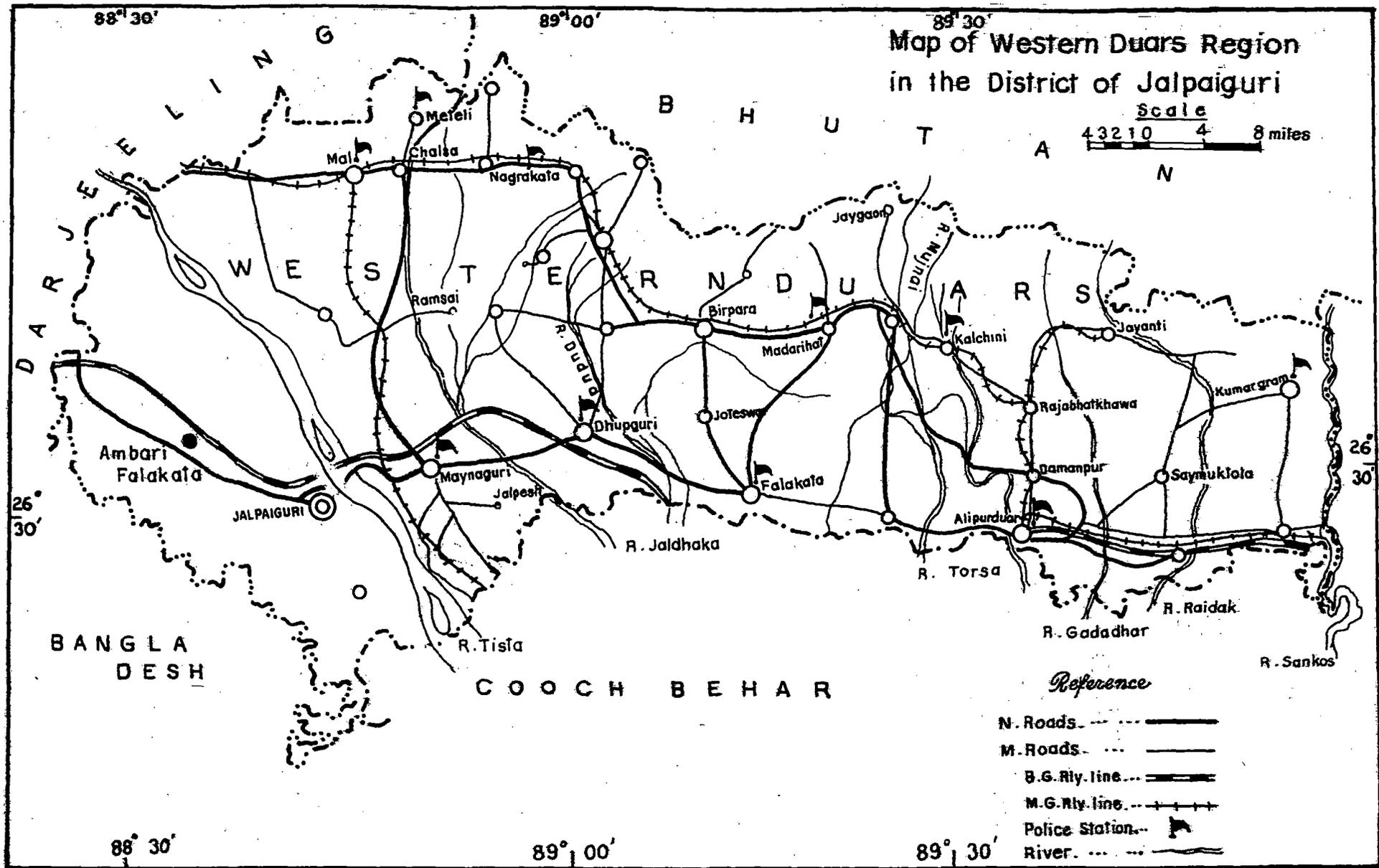
SECTION 2 : A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE REGION OF OUR STUDY

I.2.1 Before discussing the scheme of work and the layout of chapters we shall make an attempt to give a brief sketch of the region.

I.2.2 Our region of study was a separate political and administrative unit during the Bhutanese period and for about four years during the British period. At present, it is more a geographical entity than having a separate administrative jurisdiction of its own. The district of Jalpaiguri was formed in 1869 by the amalgamation of the Western Duars district with the Jalpaiguri sub division of Rangpur⁷. The reasons for selecting this region to study the evolutionary process of its land-tenure system are its historical uniqueness compared to the other parts of the district of Jalpaiguri as well as other parts of West Bengal, its exclusion from the purview of Permanent Settlement and its special type of land-tenure system in the pre-independence era, and its socio-economic specificities.

I.2.3 The name "Duars" refers to that tract of country which affords gateways or duars to Bhutan from India⁸. The Duars region is a strip of land along the foot of the Himalayas, about 25 miles in breadth from north to south and about 180 miles in length from east to west⁹.

I.2.4 There are supposed to be 11 recognised duars or passes into Bhutan from India, of which five are located in the Western Duars, which from the west to eastwards are Chamurchi, Lakhimpur, Balla, Baksha (Buxa) and Kumargram¹⁰. Chamurchi is by far the most important commercial route. Lakhimpur is reached from Lankapara Tea Estate or Totopara. It is a difficult route and is used only by those



Map. 2 .

who are settled along the route. The Balla route through Jaigaon does not have much commercial importance. Buxa has virtually two routes. One goes via Buxa to the third big town of Bhutan and the other goes direct from Jayanti. The second important commercial route is through Kumargram Tea Estate falling within Kumargram Duar. This road passes through to Kalikhola, an important Bazar in Bhutan, which is at the trijunction of Bhutan, West Bengal and Assam¹¹.

I.2.5 In the text both the terms "Duars" and "Western Duars" will be used synonymously to mean the same region. The Western Duars tract consists of so much of the present Jalpaiguri district as was ceded to the British Government by the Bhutias in the year 1864-65¹². Except for a small patch of about 15 square miles, named Ambari Falakata, which lies on the west of the river Tista, the whole area forms a parallelogram with a length, east to west, of 86.75 miles; and breadth, north and south, of about 38 miles. It lies between the parallels of 26°13' and 27°0' north latitude, and between 88°30' and 89°55' east longitude¹³. The total area of the tract is 1928 square miles¹⁴. The present area of the region is bounded in the north by the State of Bhutan and Darjeeling district; on the east by the Goalpara district of Assam, the right bank of Sankos river marking the boundary line; on the south by Bangladesh and the district of Cooch Behar and on the west by the river Tista. The outlying pargana of Ambari Falakata, on the west of the Tista river is bounded on all sides by pargana Baikunthapur of the Jalpaiguri district¹⁵.

I.2.6 The geographical speciality of the Western Duars region may be described as follows. The chief characteristics of the Western Duars are the numerous rivers and hill streams which intersect it in every direction and the large tracts of sal forests, tall grasses and reeds, especially dense and luxuriant along the banks of rivers and streams. The entire region, but for intervals of patches of land for ordinary cultivation, is studded with tea gardens and large patches of reserved forests. They make a beautiful sight along miles after miles. The largest area of ordinary cultivation in this tract is between Dalgaon and Falakata in the heart of the Western Duars. In the neighbourhood of Bhutan range, from five to ten miles before reaching the hills, the land rises gradually. In this tract, the soil is only 3 to 4 feet deep with a sub-stratum of gravel and shingle containing red top soil, valuable for tea plant. This is the only mountainous tract in this region. In the dry season the beds of some of the streams, for some miles after leaving the hills, remain dry, the water re-appearing further down. The principal rivers are the Tista, the Jalchaka, the Dudua, the Mujnai, the Torsa, the Kaljani, the Raidak and the Sankos.

SECTION 3 : METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

I.3.1 In our present study we have mostly relied on and delved into the historical records and contemporary literature. We have also depended largely on the Government Reports and documents and other literature available. To find answers to some of our questions, a

field investigation had been undertaken during 1985-86 in six villages of the Western Duars. The six villages have been selected from three categories of Land Revenue Settlement Circles, taking two villages from each Circle. The first category contains Circle where recording of the sharecroppers in relation to probable number has become highest among all the 5 Circles comprising the Western Duars region, the second category of Circle is that where the recording is the lowest among all the Circles, and the third category of Circle falls between these two extremes in respect of recording in relation to probable number of sharecroppers. Again, from each Circle two villages have been selected, one with the highest number of recorded sharecroppers and the other with the lowest number of recorded sharecroppers of the Circle. As some special emphasis in our dissertation has been added to show the extent of success of "Operation Barga" programme in the region of our study, we have selected three Settlement Circles in such a way so that our selection recognises the fact of non-uniformity in the matter of recording of sharecroppers over different parts of the Western Duars region. With due recognition to this particular fact, our selection of the two villages within each Circle depicting two extremes in the matter of recording, would help us in throwing light on some of the features of the "Operation Barga" programme clearly discernible in the region of study. Our analysis also wants to point out the fact that under the same set of circumstances, the "Operation Barga" programme would be qualified with the same features as we have encountered in our field of investigation.

SECTION 4 : THE SCHEME OF THE PRESENT WORK

I.4.1 The present dissertation contains altogether nine chapters of which Chapter I forms the introductory part. Chapter II deals with an analysis of the land-tenurial system as was prevalent during the Bhutanese subjugation of the Western Duars region. An attempt has also been made in this chapter to indicate the possible ways in which the reforms in the tenurial system should have to be brought about once the region passes through an ordered administration.

I.4.2 Chapter III attempts a systematic presentation of the changes in land-tenure system in the British period. Having annexed the territory, the Britishers introduced many changes and reforms in different aspects of land relations and administration. Effects of these reforms and changes on the agrarian relations and social and economic development have also been shown in this chapter.

I.4.3 Chapter IV analyses the impact of the plantation sector on the subsistence sector, i.e., agricultural sector of the economy of Western Duars. Chapter V is devoted to a critical appraisal of the role of Jotedary system in agricultural development. A comparison in this regard has been made with the Zamindary system.

I.4.4 Chapter VI describes the changes in the pattern of land holding after the introduction of agrarian reform measures in the post-independence period and its consequent impact on the growth

of small farmers, marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and sub division and fragmentation of land holding. In Chapter VII causes and consequences of the rapid growth of agricultural labourers in the post-independence period have been explored.

I.4.5 Chapter VIII forms a special part of this dissertation. It analyses in some detail the extent of success achieved by the "Operation Barga" programme of the Government of West Bengal to record the names of sharecroppers in the record-of-rights to give security to their tenures. A cross-section study of the impact of this programme in the Duars area has been made. Problems connected with agricultural production and productivity have also been dealt with. Role of institutional finance for raising the efficiency of share-tenancy and the overall development of agriculture has been reviewed. The secondary data available were, however, found to be deficient and inadequate for this purpose. To get a clearer picture of the contemporary situation, and to attempt a more detailed analysis of the prevailing land relations a field investigation was undertaken during 1985-86. The data collected through this investigation forms the basis of the analysis in this part of the study.

I.4.6 The scope of the field survey was inevitably restricted by the scale of effort that could be put in on a one-man basis and by

the limited time available for carrying it through. In all 1903 households distributed over 6 revenue villages were covered by the survey.

I.4.7 Chapter IX summarises our whole discussion. Some attempts have also been made here to indicate the ways by which the development of the region of our study, especially the development of agriculture of the region can be brought about.

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

1. "North Bengal" implies the northern territories of West Bengal, lying north of the river Ganga and includes within its folds the five districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, West Dinajpur and Malda.
 2. Beverly, H., Report on the Census of Bengal, 1872, Part I, Chapter I, p. 102.
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 5. Thompson, W.H., Census of India, 1921, Vol. V, Part I, p. 65.
 6. Warriner, D., Land Reforms and Economic Development, Cairo, 1955, p. 3.
- "In the discipline of economics, the subject matter field of land-tenure is essentially a 'bridge' sub-discipline involving as it does a combination of economics, law and sociology plus heavy borrowings from the field of political science". Philip Raup, quoted in F.O. Sargent, "A Methodological Schism in Agricultural Economics", Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1960, p. 49.
7. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 2.

8. Mitra, A., Census of India, 1951, District Handbooks, Jalpaiguri, p. viii. Deb, A., Bhutan and India - A Study in Frontier Political Relations (1772-1865), Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1976, p. 112. Deb observed : "The term Duar is derived from dwar meaning passes, gate or entrance. It is inappropriately applied to the level tract upon which the mountain passes open. Thus a much wider meaning has become attached to the word than that etymologically belongs to it".
9. Selections from the Calcutta Review, Vol. XLVIII, Jan. 1869 to April, 1870, pp. 39-40 cited in Majumdar, A.B., Britain and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhotan, Patna, Bharati Bhawan, 1984, p. 16. Sen, A.K., Western Duars - Past and Present, in Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir, 1869-1968, p. 48.
10. Mitra, A., op. cit., p. viii.
11. Ibid.
12. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 1.
13. Ibid. Mukherjee, B.B., Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement Operations in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1931-35, Calcutta, B.G. Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1939, p. 1.
14. Milligan, J.A., op.cit., p. 5.
15. Census of India, 1961, District Census Handbook, Jalpaiguri, p. (12).

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CHAPTER - IILAND REVENUE AND TENURIAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE
WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING THE BHUTANESE RULE.SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

II.1.1 In this chapter we want to re-examine the nature of land revenue and land-tenure arrangements in the Duars region of North Bengal during the Bhutanese period.

II.1.2 The reconstruction of the history of land revenue and land-tenure system of this region during Bhutanese period is rather difficult due to paucity of sufficient data. Our source materials are various government documents and reports and accounts left by the British government officials. Another problem arises due to the fact that the documents, reports, etc. sometimes give contradictory views. Nevertheless, from these contradictory and sometimes fragmentary documents, it may be possible to give some idea of the then prevailing land revenue and tenurial arrangements of the region. Such an attempt has been made in the following paragraphs.

II.1.3 The discussion will be initiated and developed in the following manner. Since we are writing about the Bhutanese period, we shall first know as to how this region came under the Bhutanese subjugation. Then we shall describe the prevalent land-tenure system and trace and its origin. Next we shall delineate the land revenue arrangements. And finally, we would summarise the whole discussion and comment on the impact of the land-tenure and revenue arrangements on the agricultural development of the region.

SECTION 2 : EARLY HISTORY OF WESTERN DUARS
BEFORE ITS ANNEXATION TO BRITISH INDIA

II.2.1 The territory called Western Duars extending from the river Tista to the river Sankosh lying at the boundary of Assam were held by the Koch chieftains¹. In order to ensure her hold over the fertile tract of Western Duars, Bhutan was interested in the affairs of Cooch Behar State. There is, however, no authoritative document recording the exact period from which the Bhutias extended their grip on the plains of the Western Duars². In the official history of Cooch Behar, H.N. Choudhury stated that before the first Anglo-Bhutanese War (1772-74), the Bhutias systematically took possession of a large number of 'taluks' (a land unit) in the Western Duars, which were formerly held in farm under Cooch Behar, were usurped by them and did not pay any revenue to the Cooch Behar Raj. They also openly dispossessed some other lands covered by taluks "Chichakhata, Paglahat, Luckiduar, Kyranti and Maraghat which were under direct management of the state

[of Cooch Behar]"³. Though not founded on the firm basis of chronology, this observation of H.N. Choudhury gives us some idea about the process in which the Bhutanese acquired control over the Duars under Cooch Behar⁴. In fact the struggle between the Koch and the Bhutanese had been continuing for a long time⁵. In this context Dalton (1872) wrote : "There were no doubt conflicts between the Kuch [Koch] and the Bhutias about three hundred or four hundred years ago but these were struggles for supremacy in the Duars which ended in many of the Kuch [Koch] leaders as Sidli and Bijni and other chiefs submitting to the Bhutias"⁶. There were two probable causes of these small battles. The first was the geographical and physical situation of the region. Most of the parts of the region was full of jungles and infested with wild animals. Moreover, as large part of it was lying at the base of the hills, very often the bandits and the outlawed anti-social elements left the southern territories and took shelter here⁷. It was very difficult to extend their effective administration in such a place on the part of the Cooch Behar Kings⁸. Secondly, there was an economic reason. For Bhutan, it was very lucrative to extend its possession over this region. The Bhutanese collected many necessities of life and also articles of luxurious consumption from the Duars⁹. Naturally, it was not possible to give up her possession of this area.

II.2.2 At the beginning of the 18th century and by 1765 the kingdom of Cooch Behar had become very much weak due to internal dissensions. Bhutan reigned supreme in the Cooch Behar darbar¹⁰. The Cooch Behar Raj could do nothing without the permission of the Bhutanese officials. To

expel the Bhutias from her territory the Cooch Behar Raj entered into a treaty with the East India Company in 1773 and virtually became a feudatory state of the Company. The Company managed to drive away the Bhutias from the Cooch Behar darbar, but the Bhutanese supremacy in the Duars region continued unabated. Under the initiative of the Bhutias, the Company entered into a non-aggression pact with the Bhutias in 1774 by which the Bhutias agreed not to molest the territories of the Raja of Baikunthapur¹¹, who by that time had become a rent-paying Zamindar under the East India Company. At that time, the Company was trying to oblige the Bhutias by every means so that they could find out a trade route to Tibet through Bhutan. The Bhutias took this as an opportunity to lay claims on two areas (Jalpesh and Ambari Falakata) which were in possession of the Zamindar of Baikunthapur and asked the Company to procure those two places for them from the Zamindar. Without examining the propriety of the claim of the Bhutias, the Company readily agreed and directed the Zamindar in 1779 to make over the possession of these tracts to the Bhutias. The Zamindar lodged repeated protests with the Company and delayed the making over of the areas on various excuses for ten years, but was ultimately compelled by the Company to hand over the places to the Bhutias in 1790¹².

II.2.3 From this time upto the conclusion of the Treaty of Sinchula¹³ and the annexation of Western Duars in 1865, the Zamindar of Baikunthapur and the Cooch Behar Raj were debarred by the Britishers from dealing with the Bhutias directly. The Bhutias got freehand over the Western

Duars without any opposition. However, the Bhutias had a particular way to deal with the Duars region and geared up its administration accordingly. Thus, the inhabitants of the Western Duars were obliged to pay their allegiance to different authorities at different periods of history before the Britishers could extend their administration into the tract.

SECTION 3 : LAND-TENURE ARRANGEMENT

II.3.1 Actual tillers of the soil were divided into a few classes¹⁴. The first and the most powerful person in the hierarchy of settled agriculturists was the jotedar who held a certain amount of land individually, jointly or in common. His holding was called a jote. He paid revenue to the Government of Bhutan through its agent Katham or Tahsildar. In practice, a jote constituted the core of the land-tenure arrangement.

II.3.2 The most usual way of acquiring a jote was by succession. The original acquisition of many jotes was explained by the principle of holding land by the first settler. The Bhutia Rajas and Governors allowed settlers to take possession of unpopulated parts of an area for a term of five years, "more or less, without payment of revenue"¹⁵. When the entire land or a portion of it was brought under cultivation, the settler was called a 'jotedar'. The jotedar then paid revenue fixed by

government. There were some jotes that passed through several generations. A jotedar could acquire a jote by purchase or through a gift from another jotedar. Lastly, a jote could also be acquired by a grant from the Bhutia Raja effected through his Subah (Lieutenant Governor). This grant could be made with the lapse of a jotedari due to absence of heir, and/or in the event of abandonment of holding by a jotedar and/or in the case of a first settlement in uncultivated land. A jotedar could occupy a jote as a peasant proprietor and he had the liberty in growing and disposing of the produce. He could also sublet the entire or a part of his holding to any one he liked and at any term he could secure. The idea of rack-renting was, in fact, inherent in the later provision because it can be presumed that as the jotedar had to pay a stipulated sum to the government, he tried to secure such a term that would ensure him the highest income. Jotedar's right was saleable with the restriction that in doing so, he could not prejudice the rights of any third person. Jotes were considered to be the property of the family and not that of the individual. This provision might have restricted the frequency of selling jotes and compelled the jotedars to some extent to stay on the same jote for generations inspite of oppressions of the Bhutias. This restriction on salability was further strengthened by the fact of charging a fee for recognition in cases of alienation and succession. The fee charged, was in the nature of either a fine or a relief paid by both the outgoer and the incommer. Alienation took place also through usufructuary mortgage. ^{Mr.} Tweedie did not ^{find} ~~find~~ any case of alienation of jotes through will. ¹⁶ But he guessed that the same principle which regulated alienation by sale or by gift might apply to rights devised by will.

II.3.3 A jotedar had to observe two kinds of liabilities, viz., to pay the revenue fixed for his jote and to pay benevolences which the Bhutan Raj had been habituated to demand in different times.

II.3.4 A jotedar's tenure might be terminated in three ways. These were (i) by absence of heirs, (ii) by desertion and (iii) by abandonment of loyalty which was the natural concomitant of desertion. A jotedar's right was not saleable for the purpose of collecting revenue dues in case of default. This appears to be a very strange thing. In all probability, this right was also not liable to forfeiture in such a situation. It might be reasonably conjectured that, in practice, the jotedars dared not to be defaulters for a long time out of the apprehension that he might be tortured physically, if his revenue remained overdue for a long time.

II.3.5 During the Bhutanese regime, there is no doubt that land was abundant. Question arises as to what prevented anyone from occupying virgin land and become a jotedar, under the circumstances. What led to the formation of a hierarchy and the creation of sub-infeudation? The most important factor, as it appears to us on the basis of available evidence is that access to the acquisition of a jote was not open to all. The restrictions were economic and social and these made land a scarce asset, not physically but socially, leading to a formation of cultivating hierarchy.

II.3.6 The economic restriction was that a necessary pre-condition to acquiring a jote was the possession of some amount of capital. The "original settler" assuming that he leased out his land on adhi (share cropping), would have to wait for at least five years before he received any income from it. The implication of this is that he must have had some alternative source of income. The jotes could be "obtained by purchase or gift from another jotedar, the right of alienation being limited"¹⁷. Obviously, to purchase a jote, it was necessary to own means. The question of purchasing a jote arose as, probably, the ultimate owner of all the land was the State and it had the power to vest jotedari rights on a person.

II.3.7 Another important factor inhibiting open access to jotes was the social and political status of the potential jotedar. The process of acquisition being regulated through Subahs and Kathams (revenue collectors), the position of the individual concerned in the power hierarchy, the influence he had in the village, his relations with the rulers and his standing in their eyes were important considerations for the determination of his eligibility to get a jote. The fact that transactions in land were accompanied by a "fee" given in both cash and kind as a gift to the officials, deterred many from taking up virgin lands simply because they could not afford it. It was this very fact of limited access to land acquisition economically, socially and administratively which created the basis for the formation of a hierarchy.

II.3.8 Access to land being limited, one way out was to lease in cultivable land from the jotedars either on a fixed cash rent based on the amount of land or on a crop-share basis. But here also a certain degree of "familiarity" was necessary, along with certain amount of resources. Those who did not possess any resources whatsoever, apart from their physical labour, became projas or adhiars (share-croppers). The jotedars, too, on their part, perhaps favoured leasing out land. He would retain a part of it for personal cultivation, often with family labour and leased out the rest either on a cash rent or crop-sharing basis. In a situation of labour shortage, this was the only way to maximise both the land under cultivation and their share of the surplus.

II.3.9 Below the jotedars, there were smaller estates and tenure holders who were all dependent on jotedars' estates. A jotedar was the superior landlord and the holders of subordinate estates under him were the tenants. Three classes of tenants were there, viz., chukanidars, rayats and projas. They differed among themselves with respect to the (i) length of time for which the estates were held, (ii) and by the mode of payment by the lessees, i.e., in cash or in kind as a share of the crop. In reality, they could perhaps also be differentiated by the amount of resources they possessed, the chukanidar having the most, while the proja (adhiar) having nothing.

II.3.10 In the next step below jotedars, there were the chukanidars. A chukanidar held land for a fixed term of more than one year and paid a fixed money rent. He enjoyed a temporary tenancy and it lasted for

the period of contract. The contract was, perhaps, oral. Because Tweedie did not mention of any written contract. A chukanidar could not sell or transfer his right without the permission of the jotedar. We have no data on the amount of rent paid by chukanidars to jotedars. But what is certain is that it was not uniform and the jotedar had the right to raise it according to his will. It is also certain that rents paid by chukanidars to jotedars was higher than that paid by jotedars to the government.

II.3.11 Rayats constituted the next grade of tenants. In Tweedie's opinion, the term rayat was used in other parts of Bengal as a general term applicable to various kinds of cultivators, but, in the Duars, the word meant "a yearly tenant who pays to the jotedars a yearly money rent for the land held by him"¹⁸. He was a man of some capital, and as such conducted agricultural operations at his own expense"¹⁹. A rayat differed from a chukanidar with regard to the length of time of holding the tenure. The former was a tenant for a year while the later was a tenant for several years, though both of them had a non-permanent tenure.

II.3.12 In the lowest ladder of the hierarchy of rent paying tenants were the projas. He paid rent in kind to the jotedar or chukanidar who engaged him. There were also some important differences between the projas and the rayats. First, a rayat paid rent in cash at a fixed rate but a proja paid rent in kind to the jotedar at the rate of fifty percent of the produce of land. Secondly, a rayat was a tenant for one year but a proja was nothing but a tenant-at-will. Thirdly, a rayat possessed

some capital but a proja had to depend entirely on the jotedar for cultivating his land. The latter got seed, manure, plough, cattle and other implements of agriculture from the jotedar. After harvest, the amount of seed advanced by the jotedar had to be repaid by the proja over and above the half of the produce of lands.

II.3.13 Therefore, the projas were the actual tillers of the soil, but very often the jotedars and chukanidars also appeared to be actual tillers of the soil when they tilled their lands themselves. The position of the projas were the most vulnerable as they had neither the ownership right nor the security of tenure, whereas, although the rayats and chukanidars had no ownership right, they enjoyed security of tenure for several years or at least for one year. In all probabilities, it can be claimed that the rayats and chukanidars had their means to tide over the periods of distress. Being tenants-at-will there had always been a threat of eviction of the projas by the jotedars. However, the most common practice might have been the desertion of a jote by the projas themselves. Due to co-existence of scanty population and huge amount of waste lands available for cultivation, it can very well be presumed that jotedars had little intention to evict the projas. We have already mentioned that the agrarian situation in the Duars was marked by a relative physical abundance of land compared to labour, which was scarce. Under the circumstances, share-cropping was the best method of "surplus labour appropriation"²⁰ by the landlords. Therefore, eviction of an adhiar would mean that the jotedar could gather less surplus because of discontinuance of cultivation by projas in such a case. So the motivation of projas towards desertion might have been due to direct

Bhutanese oppression inflicted on them and the pressures put on them by the jotedars for collecting large amount of rent to satisfy the Bhutia task-masters.

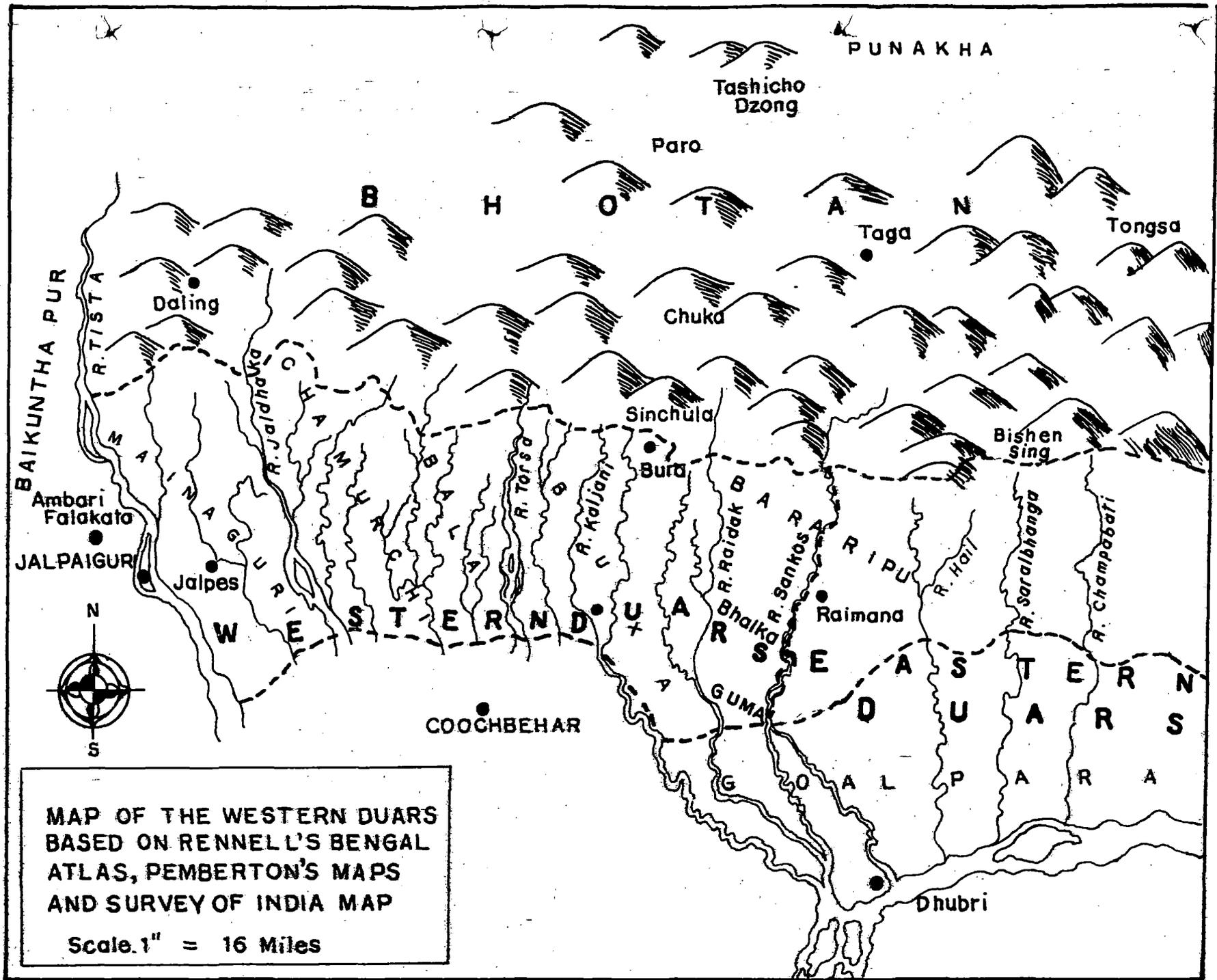
II.3.14 A system of daily wage labour did not exist, at least, we have not found evidence of it. This is not unnatural, as the mode of production, (which was certainly not capitalistic), was not conducive to wage labour. Even during peak agricultural seasons, when the demand for labour could have risen substantially, daily wage labour was not engaged. Family labour of tenants and share-croppers provided the necessary labour in such periods.

SECTION 4 : ORIGIN OF THE TENURIAL ARRANGEMENT

II.4.1 Prior to making an analysis of the inter-relations among different classes of tenants let us investigate as to how and when the arrangement as described above was introduced in the Western Duars. It is clear from various reports and documents that the Bhutanese government did not intend to develop a system of good government, and land-tenure and revenue arrangements in the Western Duars. The basic reason was that they did not come to settle and live here permanently. This region was a sort of colony to them. For purposes of settlement they very much disliked this place²¹. Naturally they did not intend to introduce anything new or novel and allowed the prevailing customs to continue.

II.4.2 As noted earlier, this region was under the rule of the Cooch Behar Raj. Later on, it came under the Bhutanese subjugation. Thus the customary land-tenurial and revenue arrangements resembled that of the Cooch Behari arrangement. The Bhutias established their control over this region gradually. A glance into the pre-Bhutanese part of the history is necessary in order to establish our hypothesis that the Cooch Behari system of land-tenure was in vogue in this region before its Bhutanese subjugation.

II.4.3 There were as many as nine Duars comprising the Western Duars, stretching from the river Sankosh in the east to the river Tista in the West. To the West of Bara Duar lay Buxa Duar. The Buxa Duar comprised the area between the rivers Raidak and Torsa. When Bhutan's influence became predominant over Cooch Behar from the first quarter of the eighteenth century, she later ceded the lands lying below the hill upto Chechakhata²². For this favour, Bhutan agreed to pay annually five Bhutanese ponies to Cooch Behar²³. In the western sector of the Duar, however, Bhutan's right to the lands was disputable. Because, though Cooch Behar claimed to have farmed out these lands to Bhutan, the latter claimed them as her possessions from time immemorial²⁴. The matter of the fact, however, was that due to domestic troubles of Cooch Behar and her obligation to Bhutan for the military assistance given by the latter against the Mughals gave an upper hand to the Bhutanese. Later on, the lands originally farmed out to her were subsequently claimed by Bhutan as possession. This gave rise to disputes and the East India Company was called in to settle. It is to be noted



Map. 3.

that when Ralph Fitch visited Cooch Behar, he found that Bhutan was four day's journey from it²⁵. Not only so, even in 1626-27, when Stephen Cachella, the Portugese Jesuit traveller went to Cooch Behar, he found Jaigaon at the foot of the hills, included within the northern boundary of the Koch Kingdom²⁶. In this way, Bhutan had successfully pushed her southern boundary at the cost of Cooch Behar.

II.4.4 Luckhe and Chamurchi Duars were situated to the West of Buxa Duar between the rivers Torsa and Mujnai and between the Mujnai and the Jaldhaka rivers respectively. These were also undefined territories. The Mughals, during Mir Jumla's invasion of Cooch Behar went in pursuit of her king Pran Narayan, who had fled to the Bhutan hills; they halted for sometime at Kanthalbari, which was about twenty miles in the north of Cooch Behar. But as in the case of Buxa Duar, so also in the region between the Torsa and the Jaldhaka, Bhutan succeeded in pushing her boundaries far south of Kanthalbari. So that, the few villages in Maraghat between the Jaldhaka and Dudua rivers, were all that remained to Cooch Behar. And Maraghat also, in future, became an Alsace between the two States²⁷.

II.4.5 On the West of the Chamurchi Duar and between the rivers Jaldhaka and Dharala lay Yamerkot which is better known as Maynaguri Duar. It is clear from the map of Rennell²⁸ that this tract was rather narrow, for the eastern portion of Baikunthapur stretched out to obstruct its southward expanse. Afterwards, as we have already alluded, Bhutan being pampered by the East India Company, claimed also the eastern part

of Baikunthapur, and succeeded in increasing the area of Maynaguri Duars at the cost of it.

II.4.6 From the political history of the Western Duars it can be easily inferred that the current system of land revenue and land-tenure in the Bhutia period in this region must be the Cooch Behari system²⁹. However, we would not make a comparative study of the land-tenure and revenue systems of the Bhutanese occupied Western Duars and that of Cooch Behar State. That ought to be a subject of a separate study. Nevertheless, we shall point out certain broad features of the arrangements in the two regions in order to show that the Bhutanese did effect no substantial change in the land revenue and tenurial arrangements as it was prevalent in the Western Duars region when the area was under the control of the Cooch Behar Kings.

II.4.7 In the Cooch Behari land-tenure system, Raja was the owner of the soil. Similarly, in the Bhutia period, the Bhutan Government was the owner of the territory or soil. In Cooch Behar, the following were the other classes of tenants³⁰ : (i) Jotedars (ii) chukanidars, (iii) dar-chukanidars, (iv) dar-a-dar chukanidars, (v) tasia-chukanidars and (vi) adhiars or projas. In our earlier description of different classes of tenants in the Western Duars, we have seen that the first two and the last classes of tenants were common in both the regions. In the British period Mr. Milligan, the officer entrusted with the survey and settlement operation (1906-16) of Jalpaiguri district opined that this rayat class of the Bhutia period perhaps constituted the class of dar-chukanidars of the British period³¹. So the third class of

undertenants of Cooch Behar corresponded to the same class of undertenants of the Western Duars. There is, however, a striking similarity between the adhiar or proja class of tenants in so far as their rights and class characteristics were concerned, namely, that in both the areas the adhiars were the actual tillers of the soil, that they had no rights in the soil and cultivated land on the condition of half-sharing of the crop. Though adhiars have been described as "tenants-at-will" in the Bhutia land-tenure system and as "hired labourers" paid in kind in the Cooch Behari system, they virtually belonged to the same class of tenant³².

II.4.8 One marked difference between the two systems of land-tenure is that many undertenants were recognised by the government in the Cooch Behari land-tenure system and therefore most of them enjoyed the occupancy right and the permanency of tenure, but in the Bhutanese arrangement, except jotedars no other class of tenants enjoyed either occupancy right or permanency of tenure. Another difference was that the rights of various classes of undertenants were clearly defined in the Cooch Behari system, and therefore, they were in a better position than their counterparts in the Western Duars during the Bhutia period.

II.4.9 Thus, though there were some differences with regard to the rights, permanency of tenures, classification of tenants and clarity of definition of rights of different classes of tenants, still there were similarities in some fundamental respects. Firstly, in both the regions there was a stratification among tenants. There were the highest

description of tenants having rights and permanency of rights as well as the lowest class of tenants with minimum rights or having no rights. Secondly, the most fundamental similarity lies in the fact that exactly similar words like jotedar, chukanidar etc. were current in both the regions to describe tenants of the same position. It could be found that in the contemporary period these words were in use only in the State of Cooch Behar and Baikunthapur region (in the permanently settled portion of Jalpaiguri district) and nowhere in any district of Bengal. As Baikunthapur along with the Western Duars tract earlier formed parts of the Koch kingdom, therefore, we can safely say that the land-tenure arrangement in the Bhutanese occupied Western Duars was nothing but a reflection of the Cooch Behari arrangement. The observed differences were not of kind but only in the higher degree of intricacy involved in the latter system. Thirdly, the composition and characteristics of the corresponding classes of tenants were also more or less the same. The orderliness of the Cooch Behari arrangement in terms of the clarity of definition of rights of tenants etc. is explained by the fact of prevalence of a good Government in the State of Cooch Behar and concern of its authorities for the welfare of its subjects which was unexpectable in the Bhutanese occupied Western Duars for reasons stated above.

II.4.10 In the matter of stratification of the tenantry it can be found that in the Coch Behari system it was of a higher degree than that of the Western Duars. This was for the simple reason that in the contemporary period the State of Cooch Behar was more populated and

therefore characterised by the presence of large number of settled cultivators which resulted in the larger degrees of sub-infeudation. In contrast to this there was lesser degree of sub-infeudation in land in the Western Duars. But the rights of the under-tenants were not defined or established in the Western Duars and as a result they were more oppressed and exploited through rack-renting, illegal exactions etc. Subsequently, in the British period, it could be found that though a little more intricacy crept in, the rights and obligations of different classes of tenants in the Western Duars were defined, at the same time, in clear-cut terms.

II.4.11 Doubts were raised by the British government official Mr. Metcalfe regarding the existence of an arrangement of land-tenure as described by Mr. Tweedie. He commented, "no jotedari rights such as those found by Mr. Tweedie, could have been respected or indeed have existed, under the Bhutias, as they cared for nothing except to realise all they would get in grain, pigs, spirits and money"³³. In all probabilities, the system was not operative in the entire tract of Western Duars. It was possibly in operation in those parts of the Western Duars which were relatively more open, cultivated and relatively more populated. The pargana of Maynaguri was such a place. Grunning's Gazetteer of Jalpaiguri reveals that Mr. Tweedie prepared his report on the land-tenure arrange of the Bhutanese occupied Western Duars on the basis of interview of a Katham (Bhutia rent collecting officer), two jotedars of Maynaguri and information received from his Amins (native revenue officers) who narrated him the prevailing land-tenure arrangement of that part of

Western Duars³⁴. This arrangement could never be in vogue in the entire area of Western Duars under the oppressive Bhutanese practice of revenue collection. It is to be noted that progress of cultivation in the Western Duars took place gradually from west to eastward³⁵. Moreover, its interior parts were mostly inhabited by the tribes like Meches, Totos, etc. who were wandering people³⁶. They were nomadic in nature and habituated to shifting cultivation, which was facilitated by the availability of vast amount of virgin land. Perhaps these people paid only 'dao-tax', capitation tax etc³⁷ and did not pay any land revenue and due to the unsettled nature of their cultivation no system of land-tenure could develop. Under these circumstances, it appears that a more or less formal arrangement of land revenue and land-tenure prevailed only in those areas that were adjacent to the State of Cooch Behar. On the other hand, in the more interior parts, informal arrangements were predominant due to its demographic and geographical features.

II.4.12 The conclusion that we can reach from the above analysis is that the land-tenurial arrangement prevalent in the Bhutia occupied Western Duars was nothing but that of the Cooch Behari type in a nebulous form. The Bhutias did not evolve any system. They only allowed the existing arrangements to prevail. In the absence of introduction of any reform it could not become systematic. In the latter periods the Britishers made attempts to systematise the land relations through the introduction of various reforms and modifications in the arrangements.

SECTION 5 : LAND REVENUE ARRANGEMENT

II.5.1 Let us now sketch the arrangements for revenue collection in the Western Duars during the Bhutanese rule with special reference to the land revenue and its administration. Historically it has been found that whoever might be the rulers - the Mughals or the Britishers, the chief objective of their administration was the management of the land revenue. The land-tenure system was developed as a means to achieve that objective³⁸. The Western Duars region of the district of Jalpaiguri was not an exception to this fact. It is also a historical truth that in spite of changes of regimes, the rulers of the later days did not introduce major changes in the basic structure of land revenue arrangements and demands of the earlier days³⁹. This tradition was maintained during the Bhutanese regime in Western Duars.

II.5.2 It had always been assumed in the Duars that every field under cultivation used to be reclaimed at the tenant's own expense from the original jungles. The Bhutanese custom was to leave land rent free for five years after reclamation. Thereafter, rent was assessed at area rates according to the hal or plough - a local measure of about five acres of best quality land where winter rice was grown. The old settlers were allowed to possess other lands free of charge. New comers were charged Rs. 2-8 a hal for all kinds of lands⁴⁰. Detailed classification of land according to quality, location etc was not made. A special cess of one rupee a hal was levied for the cultivation of mustard seed. A local rate of one rupee a hal and two rupees per house

was levied for pujas (worship). There was a fee for irrigation channel, the number of which was very few. There were other taxes like the "dao tax", levied from those who temporarily squat in the jungles, taxes on looms, licences to trade and to ply boats. These were designed rather to "realise something from the wandering Mechis [Meches], the weavers and traders than to impose any additional burden on the permanent cultivators"⁴¹. In the Buxa duar, the land was used to be farmed out among people who paid a fixed deposit (jummah) on the estate. This deposit was irrespective of fluctuations in cultivation or in the number of ryots⁴². We have noted earlier that two forms of cultivating enterprise existed at this time - shifting and settled. The latter, because of its implications of higher productivity, and hence, surplus, was attached a greater social value both by the people themselves as well as the rulers⁴³. The shifting cultivators belonged to various tribes such as the Meches, Bodos, Ravas, Totos, the Meches being predominant numerically. They would clear a patch of land, following slash and burn method and cultivate paddy, cotton, edible roots, pulses, millets etc. with tools like the dibble sick and hoe. They domesticated animals and spun coarse silk cloth (endi), often bartering these with their neighbours, probably for salt and iron articles such as knives⁴⁴. However, from the fact that each family paid a capitation fee (or dao tax), calculated variously according to the number of adults in the family and sickles possessed, it can be said that as far as revenue collection was concerned, the unit of assessment was the family and not the tribe of the individual. The taxes were collected not by an indigenous tribal

leader, but by the Zinkaffs (messengers) of the Kathams (rent collectors). The Zinkaff came annually to each family to collect the taxes and other cesses. It is not certain whether the lands belonged to the individual families or to the tribe as a whole. Since the family was the unit of revenue collection, the land probably belonged to it. Even under settled agriculture the jote was the property of the family and not the individual⁴⁵. However, it would not be surprising if the land at least initially, belonged to the tribe as a whole as it happens elsewhere⁴⁶.

II.5.3 Mr. Tweedie, the first Deputy Commissioner of Western Duars after its annexation in 1865 found in his investigation that revenue was realised by Tahsildars (Kathams) directly from the jotedars during the Bhutanese rule. The undertenants of jotedars paid rent in cash or kind to the jotedars. From our analysis of land-tenure arrangement of the Western Duars we have seen that the rates of rent for the undertenants were higher than those for jotedars at every successive lower grades.

II.5.4 There was the widespread prevalence of the system of unpaid labour. It is recorded that the Totos, a tribe who inhabited the lower slopes of the hills, used to give labour in lieu of rent for land. They used to carry the Subah's burden from one place to another and build bridges annually⁴⁷. Another tribe, the Mechis [Meches] used to pay rent in elephants tusk, stag skin etc⁴⁸. In fact, this practice of resorting to the custom of unpaid labour was something new and was introduced in this area by the Bhutias whose origin was in Bhutan proper.

II.5.5 Another very common custom prevalent in the Duars was that of feeding the Bhutanese soldiers and officials who happened to be there or passing through them on some kind or other of official business. It would appear that corvee, forced requisitions, oppression of Bhutanese officials and 'endless' civil strife in the Duars made the lot of the cultivator an unenviable one. A large number of people migrated to Darjeeling Terai after 1850. Many of them were engaged in road building and working in the new settlement. Sometimes steps had to be taken to ensure continuity of cultivation and residence. Thus, when one tract was going to be deserted by cultivators, the Deb Raja (the temporal and de-facto ruler of Bhutan) took a series of remedial measures. He granted remission of taxes for five years. In order to encourage settlement of new ryots (tenants) six kinds of cesses were dispensed with. Requisitions for soldiers and officials were remitted for five years and concessions were granted to Meches and other tribes⁵⁰. It is also reported that Bhutanese officials in the Duars used to receive payment for allowing their subjects the right to intra-Duar trade⁵¹.

II.5.6 The provincial Governors (Penlows) were endowed with abundant power. The policing of the country, the levy of taxes and the administration of justice were committed to them⁵². They kept the machinery of the Bhutan Government in motion with the help of a host of subordinate officials like the Subahs (Dzongpons) the Zinkaffs (messengers) in Bhutan and the Kathams in the Western Duars. The titles

of subordinate officials as narrated above underline the interesting fact that some are distinctly of Tibetan origin while others, specially in the plains, indicate a continuity since the days of the Mughals⁵³. The point of uninterrupted tradition was not merely a matter of form. The functioning of the old system in the Duars plains appears to have been undisturbed⁵⁴. Certainly, the Bhutias found it most suitable as they did not have sufficient man-power and dreaded the lower heights and the humid jungles of the Duars.

II.5.7 The officer entrusted with the administration of a Duars was known as Subah. A Subah was a Bhutanese and so a foreigner among the people of the Duars. He was the man who represented the Deb Raja in his judicial, military and mercantile capacities. His duty connected with the revenues consisted only in remitting a portion of it to the Deb Raja, while retaining another portion as remuneration for his trouble. He used to be appointed temporarily and that originated in the supremacy of the party in Bhutan to which he belonged. His continuance in office depended on that party's ability to remain in power. In hot and rainy seasons, he came down to the lower hills and visited the lower plains to enforce obedience or to invade the territory of the neighbouring States⁵⁵.

II.5.8 Immediately below the Subah, officers were chosen from among the people of the Duars. "Almost all the principal officers in charge of these Duars plains were Kacharees, Assamese or Bengalees appointed nominally by the Sunnud (title deed) of the Deb Raja, but virtually

at the recommendation of the Pilos [Penlows] in whose jurisdiction they were comprised, and without whose sanction they would never be able to retain their situations for an hour"⁵⁶. The chief subordinate officer was known in the Western Duars as Katham. This officer was a man of respectable birth and good repute in the country. But at the time of his appointment, due consideration was given to the highest bid, made by an individual applicant for the post, to pay the revenue of the district to the Subah. The recognised income of this officer accrued from the collections made from the 'specified localities', which he was allowed to retain for himself. The existing rent was generally low but between four to six times that rent was demanded by the Subah. The revenue officer under the Subah (i.e., the Katham) also kept for himself a handsome profit, very nearly equal to the sum he despatched to the Subah. In addition to their duties as revenue officers, the Kathams assisted the Subah in the exercise of civil and criminal authorities⁵⁷.

II.5.9 The revenue of each estimated area was liable to be handed over to the Subahs by the Kathams. Subahs were chiefly revenue collecting officers who were not paid any salary from the Bhutan treasury but could only retain a portion of the revenue thus collected by the Katham for their personal expense. The tenure of a Subah depended on the volume of revenue which he could hand over to the Bhutanese treasury - larger was the transfer of revenue longer would become the tenure of his service. This peculiar service condition would necessarily induce a

Subah to demand revenue from a Katham, who was entrusted to the revenue collection of an area, more than what was usually estimated to be paid by the local inhabitants. It has been recorded that the decent of a party of Bhutanese Zinkaffs in the Duars was regarded as a calamity by the local inhabitants⁵⁸.

II.5.10 It would, however, be appropriate to locate the sources of harassment and misery of the inhabitants of Western Duars in the institutional arrangements in Bhutan itself rather than attribute them to the wickedness of a number of border chiefs. Pemberton is forthright in saying that "every official endeavours to gather as much property, as possible during his tenure of an office which he is aware is likely to be but of short duration and as the removal of the superior is generally attended by the dismissal of every subordinate under him at the same time, the incentive to speculative industry exists in every grade"⁵⁹. Under the circumstance, the cultivator was the actual victim of the system which deprived him of the rewards of his labour.

II.5.11 The above delineation is suggestive of the fact that the demand for revenue under no circumstances could have any link with the revenue earned from land cultivated by local inhabitants. The settlers in the vast wasteland of Western Duars were liable to pay such revenue as might be fixed, and also occasional benevolences. To be precise, the inhabitants of an area under the jurisdiction of a Subah would be liable to pay whatever amount the Subah would require to appease his higher authority. This was how the revenue liability of an

area was determined under the so-called rule of the Bhutias.

II.5.12 Writing on the revenue system of Bhutan, Eden observed, "Strictly speaking there is no system. The only limit on the Revenue demand is the natural limit of the power of the officials to extort more There never was, I fancy, a country in which the doctrine of 'might is right' formed more completely the whole and sole law and custom of the land than it does in Bhutan"⁶⁰. Thus the only motive behind the so called Bhutanese arrangement of revenue collection in the Western Duars was the limitless extraction, resulting in severe oppression of the local inhabitants. The rights to real or personal property was limited by this oppressive custom evolved by the Bhutias for the entire region of Western Duars.

II.5.13 Surgeon Rennie had viewed the matter in a little different way. According to him, Ashley Eden who was writing under a sense of "personal insult and political failure" suffered from a tendency to "over-state Bhutanese defects"⁶¹. Commenting on the revenue system prevailing in the Duars, Rennie writes : "It would seem doubtful whether the Bhutanese mode of collecting their revenues from the Duars was so unsystematic as Mr. Eden's note of it implies; because since our annexation of them it has been determined in the first instance, to continue collecting it in the same manner as the inhabitants had been accustomed to under Bhutanese rule"⁶². But this view of Mr. Rennie does not appear to be entirely warranted in view of the fact that the Britishers kept the old traditions and customs uninterrupted for a few

years after their annexation as they thought it wise not to "venture into the unknow" and not because that it was a systematic one. Because we see that later on they introduced reforms to "systematise" the land and revenue relations in the Western Duars through various survey and settlement operations and enactment of land laws and rules. Moreover, whatever system was there, it was not always respected and maintained. Mr. Sunder in this context observed : "all rights, whether to real or personal property must be taken as subject to this limitation that they were continually violated, particularly during the civil war which immediately preceded our annexation"⁶³. This view of Mr. Sunder, therefore, also contradicts Surgeon Rennie's observation.

SECTION 6 : SUMMARY

II.6.1 The ultimate picture of the agrarian situation in the Western Duars, on the eve of the British annexation, can be summarised thus.

II.6.2 It is found from available historical records that Western Duars once formed a part of the Koch kingdom but fell into the hands of the Bhutias when the kingdom began to disintegrate. The Bhutias dominated over the tract until the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864-65 when the Britishers wrested the land from the Bhutias and formed a new and separate district of Western Duars.

II.6.3 The sole motive which led the Bhutias to rule over Western Duars was to extract as much revenue as possible from the acquired region. In so far as their objective could be achieved, they did allow the old custom and tradition to operate. The demographic characteristic of the region was such that whereas the areas adjacent to Koch kingdom were mainly populated by the Koches or Rajbansis, the rest of the region was frequented by tribal people who mainly squatted in the jungles and practised shifting cultivation. The State of cultivation thus varied as one proceeded from the south to the north towards Bhutan where vast portion of the region was covered with dense jungles with occasional signs of habitation. But in the southern parts, where settled agriculture had been fairly in practice, found the development of some relations on land mainly along Cooch Behar's lines. The tenurial arrangement as such had long prevailed customarily in these portions of Western Duars even before the Bhutanese control over the region.

II.6.4 But it is really doubtful whether such arrangement could ever prevail among the migratory tribals who lived over a major portion of Western Duars. In fact, it could safely be presumed that unlike jotedars and their sub-tenants, such as chukanidars or others in the region with settled cultivation, the tribals pursued their material activities under the direction of their chiefs, locally described as Gaburs, Mandals, Dewnias, etc., who used to hold land on behalf of the tribal people under their domination⁶⁴. The peculiar arrangement which the Bhutias had introduced for Western Duars for the collection of revenue had nothing to do with the state of cultivation of an area and as such with the tenurial arrangement.

II.6.5 Under such circumstances, a market for land did not develop. Absence of any social tension could also be safely presumed. In fact, the only tension from which the inhabitants had to suffer originated from the peculiar Bhutanese arrangement for collecting revenues from the acquired territory.

II.6.6 The revenue demanded from an area had nothing to do with the capability of an area to pay revenue. This was so, because the task of revenue collection from an area was entrusted to a local person of repute who promised the highest bid. He had no fixed remuneration for the service he rendered, but had a fixed locality from which he earned income. The more he could despatch to his immediate superior task-master, the longer his tenure could be assured of. Similarly the highest revenue official did not get any fixed salary from the Bhutanese treasury, but depended entirely on the revenue handed over to him by his subordinate officers from which he could keep a portion of the revenue for his own expense, despatching the other portion to the Bhutanese capital. But in this case also, the more he could despatch to the Capital, the more secured could be his position. Thus, every stage of revenue collection during the Bhutanese regime was marked by 'excesses'.

II.6.7 In such a state affair, the Bhutias, irrespective of the state of cultivation of an area, would take village as a "unit" for the payment of revenue, no matter as to how the revenue was deposited with the local revenue official. The coercive way in which revenues were collected by the Bhutias it is natural to suggest that they were

interested in "money, pigs and spirits" only. It was of no concern for the Bhutias whether the revenues were handed over by the jotedars or the tribal chieftains. Everywhere the local official would demand whatever they thought fit. All the inhabitants of Western Duars had to pay always both in kind and cash, a host of gifts, benevolences and various other demands made from time to time, not only by the local officials but also by the party of Bhutanese officials who would arrive frequently in the plains of Duars from the Bhutanese capital. The exploitative nature of revenue collection had rendered the plight of the inhabitants of Western Duars to a pitiable state and sometimes caused desertion of a village. Perhaps the migratory habit of the tribals of Western Duars got impetus not only from the availability of vast virgin soil but also from the torture and sufferings inflicted on them by the Bhutias. A large area of Western Duars remained a happy hunting ground of the Bhutias where no sign of change was visible since the days it was described as the "land of independence"⁶⁵, until peace was restored by the Britishers towards the later part of the sixties of the 19th century.

II.6.8 The Bhutanese arrangement of revenue collection also leaves scope of doubt as to whether inhabitants of the areas where there were settled cultivation could actually hold land hereditarily. Because, at the time when there was no written document, the existence of any right to any kind of property is a doubtful proposition. Classification of land, on the basis of fertility, location etc, was not made. Jotedar's revenue payment obligation depended neither on the type of land he held

nor on the capability of his earning from land. In fact, revenue was demanded from a village as a whole, and it was the local official who would distribute the payment obligation among the inhabitants in accordance with what he was obliged to pay to satisfy his immediate superior task-master. The ultimate victim of such an arrangement of revenue collection would naturally be the undertenants and projas (share-croppers) on whom would fall the burden of handing over such a portion of produce which would enable their giris (landlords) to despatch an amount desired by the revenue collector. This arrangement was bound to encourage frequent desertion of villages by the projas in order to avoid obligation of payment. Excessive demands of the local officials also sometimes compelled jotedars to desert their land in order to free themselves from the clutches of a particular Bhutanese official of a particular area.

II.6.9 Thus, attachment to land, tenurial arrangement, creation of property rights and even the social relations among the people of Western Duars were regulated by the Bhutanese revenue arrangement. All the inhabitants, whether holding land individually or collectively had a Bhutia repression-phobia which perhaps stood in the way of a sharp differentiation among the peasantry based on differential economic conditions. All of them considered themselves to be equally prone to the Bhutia repressions.

II.6.10 Still then, the Bhutanese arrangement had injected some sort of differentiation in the Western Duars society. There emerged two

distinct classes - one, who were the victims of the Bhutia oppression and the other were the oppressors. The common people belonged to the first category, the local revenue collectors belonged to the second. It was revealed on enquiry made immediately after the British annexation that the local inhabitants of the second category had no title to land but were merely revenue collectors. They did not till the land, but earned revenue from it. Hence, they appeared to form a "rentier class". Initially after the British annexation, it had been proposed to give them temporary settlements in lieu of drawing their earnings from the specified localities during the Bhutanese regime. This second category of people because of their high birth and close connections with the Bhutanese durbar through the Bhutia officials, had begun to consider themselves to be different from other peoples of the locality. Thus, class differentiation in a rudimentary form did appear in the Western Duars society during the Bhutanese rule. This got further impetus for proper regimentation due to multifarious factors imminent on the introduction of the British administration in Western Duars. It is thus clear from our above delineation that development of agriculture and economic development in general was retarded or did not get impetus due to the absence of any systematic land-tenure and revenue relations and constant fear of the inhabitants from the Bhutanese government officials in the event of producing more goods, earning more income and accumulating more fortune.

II.6.11 On the introduction of the British administration, the whole region remained no longer a region inhabited by oppressed people. A host of changes in every aspect - social, economic and political - slowly but steadily began to take place when peace was restored and oppressions were stopped in the region after the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864-65. An attempt has been made in the following chapter to delineate the transformation of the economy and the society of Western Duars during the British rule.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Choudhury, H.N., The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement 1903, pp. 263-64.
5. Sen, A.K., Western Duars - Past and Present, in Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir, 1869-1968, pp. 48-57.
6. Dalton, E.T., Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, p. 96.
7. Sen, A.K., op. cit., p. 50.
8. Ibid., p. 51.
9. ✓ Eden, A., Report on the State of Bootan and on the Progress of Mission of 1863-64, p. 17.
10. Sen, A.K., op. cit., p. 52.
11. Earlier it was a part of the Koch Kingdom and ruled by the vassals (called Raikats) of the Koch Kings and paid tribute to the latter. By 1625, the former became independent. About 1680, the Raikats acted as the protectors of the Cooch Behar State. Ibid., p. 52.
12. Ibid., p. 54.
13. By this Treaty the Western Duars region was permanently annexed to British India.

14. The delineation is based on the report of Mr. J. Tweedie, the first Deputy Commissioner of the Western Duars, inserted in Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, 1876, pp. 283-92. Mr. Tweedie left a note on the land-tenure arrangement of the Western Duars during the Bhutanese period.
15. Ibid.
16. See note 14 above.
17. Ibid., p. 28.3
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 284.
20. Pearce, R., "Sharecropping : Towards a Marxist View", in Byres, T.J., Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 10, Nos. 2 & 3, 1983.
21. Sen, A.K., op. cit.
22. "Cacchegate" mentioned by Ralph Fitch was situated about 20 miles to the north of Cooch Behar.
23. Letter from the Collector of Rangpur to Warren Hastings, 20 January 1773 (Comm. Cir. Pro.), p. 126.
24. Cooch Behar Select Records, Vol. I, pp. 1-2.
25. Foster, W., Early Travels in India (1583-1619), Oxford, 1921, p. 27. Fitch visited Bengal in 1585-86; and Cooch Behar, a little later.
26. Wessels, C., Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603-1721, The Hague, pp. 122-25. Jaigaon is nearly in 26.50 north latitude and 89.28 east longitude, and about 30 miles straight in the district of Cooch Behar.
27. ✓ Majumdar, A.B., Britain and the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhotan, Bharati Bhawan, Patna, First edition, 1984, p. 19.
28. Published according to the Act of Parliament, 15th August, 1779. Please see Map 3.

29. This is indirectly corroborated by at least two authoritative documents of the land-tenure system of Cooch Behar. These two documents are - (1) H.N. Choudhury's "The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement" (1903) and (2) W.W. Hunter's "A Statistical Account of Bengal", Vol. X, 1876.
30. Hunter, W.W., op. cit., pp. 388-90.
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32. Hunter, W.W., op. cit., p. 390.
33. Metcalfe quoted in Sunder, D.H.E., Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, p.
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35. Sen, A.K., op. cit., p. 49.
36. Note by P. Nclan in Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 16.
37. Hunter, W.W., op. cit., pp. 293-94.
38. ✓ Banerjee, T., Paschik Banglar Bhumi-Byabastha O Bhumi-Rajaswa, (in Bengali), West Bengal State Book Board, Calcutta, 1983, p. 1.
39. Ibid.
40. Rupees 2 and 8 annas; i.e., 2.5 rupees.
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42. From W.H.J. Lance, Chief Civil Officer, Lt. Centre Column in Col. J.C. Haughton, dated Camp Balla, Dec. 20, 1864, Bhutan Political Proceedings [No. 37, para 26].
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44. Hunter W.W., op. cit., pp. 281-82.
45. Ibid., p. 283.
46. Mitra, Amit, op. cit., p. 48.

47. See reference 42 above.
48. Ibid.
49. Deb, A., op. cit., p. 117.
50. From Capt. W.H.J. Lance, op. cit., These are the purport of two deeds recorded in the communication.
51. Letter addressed to Capt. Jenkins from Brodie Ensign, dated Falakata, the 22nd March, 1834, Foreign Political Proceedings, August 28/34, No. 53, N.A.I.
52. Deb, A., op. cit., pp. 35-36.
53. Deb, A., op. cit., p. 36.
54. Ibid.
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56. Pemberton, R.B., Report on Bhutan, p. 48.
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64. Deb, A., op. cit., p. 35.
65. Sen, A.K., op. cit., p. 50.

CHAPTER - III

LAND-TENURE SYSTEM IN THE DUARS REGION
DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD (1865-1947)SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

III.1.1 The scope of this chapter is to show the evolution of land-tenure and land revenue systems that were introduced in the Western Duars region after its cession by the Bhutias into the British hands. We shall also show the consequent impact of the introduction of changes in the systems on the agrarian economy of the area. For the relevant information we have delved into different Survey and Settlement Reports of the British period, District Gazetteers, Census Reports and various other documents left by the Britishers and also writings of the present day authors.

III.1.2 The British Indian Government contemplated to introduce gradually many changes in the matter of land revenue system, tenurial arrangement and general administration with a view to set things in orderly condition in the annexed territory as these were in a state of chaos and disorder during the Bhutanese rule¹.

SECTION 2 : REASONS FOR INTRODUCING TEMPORARY SETTLEMENT
IN THE WESTERN DUARS.

III.2.1 There were basically three types of land in the Western Duars during the British period. These were tea grant land, which was divided into 180 grants of temporarily settled estates primarily,

meant for tea cultivation. Secondly, forest land, comprising reserved forests. The third category was agricultural land which was divided into four government estates called tahsils. These four tahsils were Mainaguri, Falakata, Alipur and Bhalka respectively. The tahsils were divided into lots (known as jotes) and were leased out. The lessees were known as jotedars². There was another government estate named Ambari Falakata, which though did not fall within the boundaries of Western Duars, was annexed at the ~~same~~ time and was settled in the same manner. These government estates were retained for the khas (own) management of the Government as a "raiayatwari tract"³.

III.2.2 Baden-Powell mentions three classes of temporarily settled estates. The class in which the temporarily settled estates of Western Duars belonged was "Territory annexed by treaty or conquest at a date subsequent to 1793"⁴. Again, of the seven categories of government estates mentioned by Baden-Powell, government estates of the Western Duars belonged to the category of "Lands which were acquired by conquest in cases where the lands were not already owned, and the Government did not see fit to confer any general proprietary title as, e.g. the Duars of Jalpaiguri and the Darjeeling District"⁵. It should be noted here that the Jalpaiguri district as a whole was called a "non-regulation" district, but the whole body of ordinary law was in force in the "regulation portion" to which the Permanent Settlement extended⁶, i.e., the portion which was situated to the west of the river Tista. The "non-regulation portion" or the Western Duars which was situated to the east of the river Tista, enjoyed a

special position regarding the application of land laws. The Acts and Regulations, that were applicable in the "regulation portion" of this "non-regulation" district as well as most other parts of Bengal where lands were permanently settled, did not come into force in the Western Duars unless those were specifically extended to this area⁷.

III.2.3 The Government's policy to retain some estates under the khas management and make temporary settlement with the lease holders in this region can be explained in the following manner. The Government did expect that dealing directly with the tenants would enable its officers to gain a practical knowledge of the progress of agriculture, to assess the extent to which the productive powers of the land developed and to make periodic assessment of the money value of the produce⁸. Thus, it was thought that "gross rent could be increased by improvements, extended cultivation, or otherwise"⁹. Above all, the Britishers could see a vast potentiality for tea cultivation in the Western Duars region which also led the Government to make temporary settlement in some of the estates.

III.2.4 It is perhaps taken for granted that the prosperity and development of an agrarian economy as well as that of the tenants as well, would depend to a large extent on the existence of a healthy tenant right on land. The Britishers did realise this truth. So when the Duars region came under their control they took initiative for

creating a healthy tenant right in this tract. This, they thought, would also facilitate the raising of a pretty amount of land revenue.

SECTION 3 : EVOLUTION OF RIGHTS OF TENANTS

III.3.1 The area passed through different phases of reforms and transformations under the British rule in course of time. Initially, the British Indian Government as a part of its deliberate policy found it convenient to allow the prevailing customs and traditions to guide its policy regarding the problems connected with land revenue and tenurial arrangement so that it would avoid antagonism from the peasantry against the new administration. However, an enquiry was conducted immediately after annexation to find out the nature of tenancy relations¹⁰.

III.3.2 It was revealed that the region had evolved a system where there were four classes of people involved in the ownership and cultivation of land, viz. jotedars, chukanidars, rayats and projas to whom lands of the region were parcelled out. The rights enjoyed by each class of tenants seemed to be differential and guided by customs and usages¹¹. Persons who were found to own land were customarily known as jotedars and their holdings were commonly called jotes. The Britishers found these persons to be in a privileged position. Their existence was felt throughout the region. Probably these were the persons who were committed to pay land revenues to the Bhutia administration. Moreover, it was also found that it was not possible for those jotedars to manage vast quantity of land themselves

for which they were found often to sub-lease their lands to persons described as chukanidars for a particular period which was usually more than one year. Sometimes the jotedars subleased their lands for one year only to a particular class of tenant, customarily described as rayats. But in fact there seemed to exist only two classes of tenants, viz., jotedars and chukanidars, for though the "rayats" unlike the "chukanidars" held lands for a year only still could retain land continuously because of the relative abundance of land. Perhaps lands were leased out to rayats for a year only to enhance the rent in the next year and/or to ensure their loyalty to jotedars. The proyas were actually landless farm labourers.

III.3.3 The first problem, therefore, which cropped up after the annexation of the Duars was to determine the rights and status of all classes of tenants who were seen to possess interest in land. For the solution of the problem, it was decided to conduct survey and settlement operations periodically. Rights and obligations of different classes of tenants were defined and evolved through these settlements.

III.3.4 The first such attempt to settle the land revenue and determine the tenurial relations was made by Mr. Beckett in 1870 after the annexation. This was followed by four successive survey and settlements -- Browne's in 1880, Sunder's in 1889-95, Milligan's in 1906-16 and Mukherjee's in 1931-35.

III.3.5 Land was measured, classified and rates of rent were fixed, though imperfectly, for the first time during the first settlement operation undertaken by Mr. Beckett in 1871. But it was not felt necessary to effect any substantial change in the status, rights and obligations of tenants and in the revenue rates as was found in the Bhutia period¹². Perhaps the Britishers did not think it expedient to initiate any big change in the existing order of things, just at the beginning of their control lest it might antagonise the tenantry of the Duars. Therefore, rights and obligations of jotedars were not defined in the first settlement, only "their rights were acknowledged as found by Mr. Tweedie"¹³, on his enquiry just after annexation. But the jotedars were distributed pattas. It was, however, felt that they had a vested transferable interest in the land. But the settlement of 1880 was not confirmed so the incidents of jotedar's tenure set forth in the pattas did not have legal validity. The rates of rent for jotedars were fixed without showing any basis. Chukanidars were not given any patta, only their names were recorded in the chita. The rents of chukanidars was not also recorded for the term of the settlement. On the quality of this settlement Mr. Metcalfe commented: "On the country being ceded by Bhutan, a rough guess settlement was made"¹⁴. The Government of Bengal criticised Mr. Beckett's settlement for several defects and "subsequently condemned it on the ground that this survey was inaccurate, that insufficient inquiry was made into the ownership of the jotedar's tenure"¹⁵.

III.3.6 The second settlement (1880) also did not find it necessary to change Tweeje's classification and definition of tenants. The major point of improvement in this settlement was the fixation of chukanicar's rent payable to the jotedars for the term of the settlement. However, it was realised only after a lapse of three years that the settlement was "unworkable" on the ground that "the assessment was found to press heavily on the jotedars"¹⁶. In fact "Jotedars were unable to pay the Government revenue; their lands were sold for recovery of the revenue, and they began to relinquish jotes throughout the Duars"¹⁷. Under the circumstances the Government had no other alternative but to reduce rates of rent¹⁸.

III.3.7 Thus at the very initial stages of the British settlement operations in the Western Duars no serious attempt was made either to have a clear perception of the classification in respect of tenants of the Duars or to define their rights, obligations and status. The third settlement operation known as Mr. Sunder's settlement was carried out during 1889-95. In this settlement as well as in later settlements various forms of leases were granted to jotedars which paved the way towards classifying different grades of tenants of the Duars and defining their rights, status and obligations. Incidents of their tenures were also laid down. It was observed that "the leases then / at Sunder's settlement period / granted and the proceedings then approved by Government, constituted the first binding contract between Government and the jotedars. Then for the first time was the

policy of Government in the matter of their status enunciated with the force of law, signed, sealed and for ever ratified"¹⁹.

III.3.8 In what follows is depicted the position, rights, status and obligations that finally accrued to the cultivating classes from the various leases issued to them from time to time in successive settlement operations in the Duars. Our discussion starts with jotedars followed by a description of the rights and obligations of all those who were found to be connected with land.

III.3.9 To start with the Jotedars, we may define him as a person who held land directly under the Government. His holding was called a jote. He was a tenant with heritable and transferable title in his holding vested in him by virtue of the temporary lease granted to him and by the fact of possession with the power to transmit that title to those whom he sublet. He had the right to be resettled in his jote and on the expiry of the term of settlement, subject to an increase of rent if the Government so desired²⁰. The joteđar was not recognised as the absolute proprietor of his holding²¹. As the Government was the real proprietor of land, it could resume any portion of the land of a joteđar for public or other purposes. Joteđar's title to possession of the land included in his jote was subject to this superior right of the Government. However, in case of any resumption, proportionate reduction in the rental would be made and compensation was allowed for any permanent improvement²². Again, jotes were liable to sale if the rent due was

not paid, and to forfeiture if the jotedar failed to comply with the conditions of his lease. Besides acquiring by direct settlement from the Government, a jote might also be acquired by purchase and by inheritance. Various forms of jotes were created through the leases issued from time to time, and the terms and conditions of holding them varied²³. Though in practice all classes of jotes were permanent, still theoretically the degree of permanency varied with different classes of jotes. Transfer of jotes was allowed with varying restrictions depending on the class of jote. A jotedar had the right to sublet and employ adhiars for cultivating land, subject to some restrictions²⁴. A jotedar might be resident or non-resident, i.e., he might live on or near the jote or at a far away place from the jote. Although it was preferred to settle jotes largely with the resident jotedars there was, however, no bar on acquiring a jote by a non-resident capitalist²⁵.

III.3.10 Our discussion above, thus, have made it clear that the local customs and traditions which formed the basis for ascertaining the rights and obligations of jotedars during the Bhutanese regime were progressively replaced^{by} a host of laws related to land-tenure and revenue arrangements in the British period.

III.3.11 The first most important class of tenants to hold land under a jotedar^{was} called a chukanidar — a term which seemed to prevail from a long time and perhaps from the days when the Koch Kings ruled over the region²⁶.

III.3.12 During the Bhutanese rule, the rights of a chukanidar were purely temporary and had no legal basis. Prior to the formal recognition of the rights of chukanidars in the British period, a lot of discussion took place and their rights were evolved and established through different states.

III.3.13 In the first British survey and settlement operation (1870), only the names of chukanidars were recorded in the chitas along with the amount of land occupied by them without, however, issuing any separate khatians to them. Detailed incidents of a chukani tenure was also not laid down.

III.3.14 Initially, the authority intended that for all practical purposes the rents of actual cultivators would have to be recorded. In addition, they should also be protected from any increase of rent during the period of settlement²⁷. Thus, the creation of a healthy tenant right was explicitly taken to be the principal objective of the second settlement²⁸. But it was also decided not to create any further sub-infeudation beyond chukanidars.

III.3.15 However, though the position of chukanidars was not very clear upto 1880, nevertheless, two recognitions were given to them, viz. that they were entitled to acquire a right of occupancy and that their rents were to be fixed while making settlements with jotedars. It was decided not to enhance that rent during the term of the settlement.

Inspite of this, a clear definition of a chukani tenancy had not been formed.

III.3.16 A definite beginning towards the development of a healthy tenant right was made through the various clauses of the lease of 1880. One of the clauses indicated that a jotedar must give his chukanidar the same promise of renewal of his lease as the Government had bestowed on him. In another clause, jotedars were compulsorily required to give a patta to every chukanidar.

III.3.17 The rights provided by the lease of 1880 did not actually accrue to chukanidars as the second settlement was not confirmed. However, the letter in which proposal for the third settlement was made in 1888 was a very important one. In this letter, chukanidar's position was boldly defined. A chukanidar was defined as a person who held within a jote on very much the terms as the same jotedar himself. His title was stated to be permanent, heritable and transferable. It accrued on his entering into possession. His original rent was a matter of contract, but it was not enhanceable during the currency of the settlement but might be enhanced at resettlement. The jotedar had no power to resume land. This was the prerogative of the Government, who might resume lands in a chukani in the same way as jote land might be resumed²⁹.

III.3.18 The incidents of a chukanidar's tenure was clearly defined in the third settlement which was confirmed by the Government. A chukanidar was defined as a person who held land under a jotedar. He had no right to sublet his lands. The jotedar was bound by the term of his agreement with the Government to issue a written registered lease³⁰ to all his chukanidars. Chukanidars were not allowed to sublet their land but they could employ adhiars³¹. The rent of a chukanidar was fixed for the term of settlement and was not liable to be enhanced during its currency. Chukanidars' rate was fixed at fifty percent above that of the jotedars. Sunder noted that "there is an unwritten law between him and his jotedar that he can not be ousted from his lands so long as he pays his rent. Some jotedars endeavour to get over this by giving a chukanidar a lease on plain paper; but they never succeed against the chukanidar"³². A chukani interest was heritable but not transferable without the permission of the jotedar. The degree of permanency allowed to a chukanidar was the same as that of the jote containing it, unless the Government at any time thought it proper to modify any of the conditions in the leases. A chukanidar could not be ousted from his holding even when he was not in occupation for twelve years³³. One interesting point is that although a chukani interest was created by a jotedar, the Deputy Commissioner had the power to cancel any chukani or forfeit the right of renewal if the chukanidar was found to have contravened any of the conditions of the lease³⁴.

III.3.19 In the fourth settlement the right to transfer was "specifically refused" to the chukanidar³⁵. They could transfer their interest only with the consent of jotedars. Regarding permanency and heritability" no new departure in principle was made³⁶. A specific provision was incorporated to the effect that all new chukanidars must have to be resident cultivators³⁷. The right of inheritance was clearly stated. Leases issued during this settlement explicitly forbade subletting by chukanidars. During the last British settlement period (1931-35) and upto independence of India chukanidars' status and position remained the same.

III.3.20 To sum up the final position of chukanidars before independence became this : A chukanidar was a tenant below a jotedar. Chukanidar's holding was called chukani. He had no right to sublet his lands. He could sublet only "under the pain of immediate forfeiture of such tenure"³⁸. A jotedar was bound by the term of his agreement with the government to issue a written registered lease to all his chukanidars. In that lease right to sublet was not granted, but employment of adhiars was permitted. The rent of a chukanidar was fixed for the term of settlement and not liable to be enhanced during its currency. The margin of profit allowed to jotedars was fifty percent above the rate at which the jotedar's rent was assessed for the land sublet. A chukani tenure was heritable but not transferable without the permission of the jotedar. The right to transfer was specifically refused. His tenure was permanent as that of the jote containing it. A chukanidar could not be evicted from his holding except by order of a

competent court, even when he was not in occupation for twelve years on a jote³⁹. In no circumstance a chukanidar could be a non-resident cultivator. The position of chukanidars finally became clear at the settlement of Mr. Milligan in 1906-16. Milligan noted : "Finally the position of chukanidars has been made quite clear and definite by the grant of leases to them setting forth in full the incidents of their tenancy; and by giving them copies of the settlement khatians and rent slips, showing how their rents have been calculated, they have been armed to defend themselves against illegal exactions"⁴⁰.

III.3.21 Both in Sunder's and Milligan's settlement periods, inspite of the fact that the chukanidars were not allowed to create further sub-infeudation, this sub-infeudation reached even to the third and fourth stages in the form of dar-a-dar-chukanidar and nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidar in the last settlement (1931-35) during the British rule before independence. In all these settlements, the sub-tenants below the rank of chukanidar had no legal right as the government did not recognise them at all. All these tenancies were created contrary to the express orders of the government and therefore, they were absolutely ignored. However, these sub-tenants below chukanidars drew the attention of the Settlement Officer of the last British settlement before independence for a particular reason. He felt that, although those sub-tenants existed in contravention to legal provision, nevertheless, they were the persons associated intimately with cultivation, i.e., they were found to be the actual tillers of the soil. Hence, in that settlement tenants below chukanidars had been recorded in separate khatians and fair rents were fixed

for them with a note in the incidence column that those tenancies were "not binding against the superior jotedars and the Government"⁴¹. In spite of this they had been found to hold lands from year to year, i.e., temporarily, and had "persisted chiefly because they have by custom the right of inheritance"⁴².

III.3.22 Jotedars and chukanidars perhaps encouraged sub-tenancy because of the fact that, in doing so, they could shift a part of their rent paying liability onto the shoulder of their sub-tenants. The lower grades of tenants in effect enjoyed some sort of quasi-tenancy right and hence leading in was preferred by them in comparison to remaining in the cultivating process as adhiars, who were treated to be farm labourers. However, as the government did not encourage sub-infeudation, a number of sub-tenants below chukanidars were appraised of their real position in the eyes of law during Sunder's settlement (1889-95) which promoted some of them to take up land as jotedars and could improve their condition⁴³. But it was subsequently seen that in spite of governments appraisal or advice, some cultivators preferred to accept the position as they held even though they did not enjoy any legal status in that case. Probably, the tendency to avoid direct contact with the government may explain their unwillingness to upgrade their status. However, sub-infeudation could not spread much⁴⁴ in the Western Duars because of the widespread prevalence of a system of cultivation known as adhiari (share cropping) as we describe below.

III.3.23 The real backbone of agriculture in Western Duars were the adhiars, who were also known as projas, although prior to the Sunder's settlement in 1889 a distinction was sought to be made between a proja and an adhiar. A proja was thought of as a mere farm labourer having no rights; while an adhiar, though supposed to have no rights, had the status of non-occupancy ryot and the privilege of non-eviction from the land under the condition of regular payment of corn rent⁴⁵. It may be conjectured that, the distinction was made on the criterion of whether the cultivator in question was entirely dependent on the landlord for subsistence and for cultivating land or had some means to depend on his own. Whatever might be the reason, the adhiars or projas, truly speaking, were the mainstay in the extension of cultivation in the Western Duars. But right from the beginning of the British administration, this class of cultivator was specifically excluded from the enjoyment of the protection given to the under-tenants. Nevertheless, the service of adhiars was so indispensable in connection with agricultural operations that from time to time it was felt necessary to confer some sort of tenant right upon them.

III.3.24 In the Western Duars, origin of the adhiari system of cultivation and the adhiar class may be attributed to the fact that extension of cultivation to the vast amount of cultivable land that remained waste could be made only by leasing out of land to adhiars. It was found that "the system [of cultivation by employing adhiars]

was the only possible one in the newly settled countries"⁴⁶. Two options were open to jotedars and chukanidars to brought their excess waste lands under cultivation : either to get it cultivated by adhiars or to leave it follow. While choosing for the first option the substantial landholders had to employ adhiars. But, though lands were abundantly available, access to other inputs such as seeds, animals and cash, determined the potential of a cultivator to extend cultivation in the waste lands. Persons who had the required capital at their disposal became jotedars or chukanidars who took grant of lease from the government. It is, thus obvious that at the initial period after the annexation, all of the immigrant cultivators could not become jotedars or chukanidars due to lack of necessary capital. It was the policy of the government to settle lands only with those who possessed sufficient means to cultivate it. Consequently, those immigrants having sufficient capital took up lands as jotedars and chukanidars. It was also due to differentiation among the peasantry with respect to possession of capital that some people took up lands for cultivation in adhiari system. Thus, it becomes apparent that it was both the demand for and supply of adhiars that was responsible for the origin and growth of this system in the Western Duars region. However, the growth and perpetuation of the system in the latter part of the British rule is explained by the high rate of profit it yielded to the superior landholders compared to other forms of sub-tenancy. This point would be further elaborated later in this section.

III.3.25 Adhiars were found to exist even in the period when the Bhutias occupied this region. In the Bhutia period adhiars were "tenants-at-will" and treated as mere farm labourers by their landlords. The tradition continued for the whole of the British period. It should, however, be noted that during the Bhutia period, though adhiars were treated as agricultural labourers, nevertheless, they had greater mobility and a stronger bargaining power. This was because their supply as actual tillers was very small while their demand was very high. In the event of imposition of rigorous terms in oral contracts they could and did move to other jotedars and chukanidars. At the beginning of the British rule the position of adhiars remained the same for some years for the same reasons.

III.3.26 After the inception of the British rule adhiars were considered to be agricultural labourers, at least for some years, by the government itself as was usually conceived by the prevailing local opinion. The government was not sympathetic at all to this class of cultivators at least upto 1895.

III.3.27 The main reason for conceiving adhiars as labourers was that in most cases they were supplied all inputs of agriculture while only physical labour was contributed by them, though after harvest proportional deductions were made for the inputs supplied by their landlords. As most of the adhiars were totally dependent on their landlords for inputs of cultivation, the latter took it as their right to treat the adhiars as their farm labourers and servants. The government

also did not like to provide them any protection. The government of Bengal, in 1878, expressed the opinion that proyas were labourers rather than ryots and rates of rent should not be fixed for them⁴⁷.

Mr. Sunder's definition of an adhiar in 1895 also showed that an adhiar was "much more a labourer than a tenant"⁴⁸. However, the government at the same time suggested that such unsatisfactory state of affairs regarding the status of adhiars should not be allowed to continue. The measure sought to be adopted was that adhiars who held land for several years, their produce rent should be commuted to money rents, as such commutation would help in conferring upon the adhiars legally defined rights and status of tenants or under-tenants with fixed rent and security of tenure. But, since such commutation would have benefited the adhiars at the cost of superior tenants it was thought that such commutation "would not be at all successful as local [landlords'] opinion was dead against it"⁴⁹. In fact, it was not only in the Western Duars but also in other parts of Bengal in contemporary period, the notion common among the landlords' was that adhiars were mere labourers, and any attempt to commutation was strongly opposed by the landlords⁵⁰.

III.3.28 In the given tenurial and socio-economic specificities of the Duars region, the factor which was more causal in perpetuating the adhiari system was the profit it yielded to jotedars and their under-tenants. Legal provisions ensured security of tenure and limited the scope of enhancement of cash rents for tenants and under-tenants. But it did not provide for the security of tenure and produce rents of adhiars. In the Duars half-produce sharing was the common contract

between the adhiars and the jotedars. Inputs of cultivation were being supplied by the jotedars. The 50:50 sharing served in ideological purpose in sounding equitable, but in reality the adhiars were deprived of even half a share because of deductions for seed and other inputs. The amount received by the adhiars after such deductions would have been barely adequate for subsistence. The landlords always tried to maximise their surplus appropriation. It thus appears that although adhiari implied egalitarianism as far as sharing of the output was concerned, it always concealed a high rate of exploitation.

III.3.29 Produce rents were invariably higher than cash rents, which gave an abnormally high rate of profit to jotedars. The positive difference between the value of produce rent paid by adhiars to jotedars and the cash rent paid by jotedars to government or the cash rent paid by chukanidars to jotedars was crucial in influencing jotedars' preference for sticking to adhiari system to sub-tenancy. This was also the reason for the perpetuation of the system inspite of the government's anticipation that "if left to itself the adhiari system would work out itself"⁵¹. Adhiari, being outside the purview of legal provision, was a mechanism for rack-renting.

III.3.30 That the jotedars made a substantial profit by leasing out land to adhiars on produce rent than that to chukanidars would be evident from table III.1 below. It can be seen from this table that the cash equivalent of produce rent paid by adhiars to jotedars

was higher than the cash rent paid by jotedars to chukanidars by 94.64%, 298.25% and 425.32% in tahsils Maynaguri, Falakata and Alipur respectively in 1895⁵². It should be noted that the jotedars could

TABLE III.1 - COMPARISON OF CASH RENT PAID BY JOTEDARS TO GOVERNMENT AND THE CASH EQUIVALENT OF PRODUCE RENT PAID BY ADHIARS TO JOTEDARS IN THREE TAHSILS OF WESTERN DUARS IN 1889 (AVERAGE IN AN ACRE OF LAND)

Tahsil	Cash rent paid by <u>jotedars</u> to government			Cash equivalent of produce rent paid by <u>adhiars</u> to <u>jotedars</u>			Col. (3) as percentage of Col. (2)
	(1)	(2)		(3)				(4)
	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.	
Maynaguri	1	12	0	3	6	6	94.64
Falakata	1	8	9	5	14	7	298.25
Alipur	0	13	2	4	5	2	425.32

Source: Estimated and adjusted from Sunder, D.H.E., Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, pp. 120-21

Note: Rs. - Rupees, As. - Annas, Ps- Pies.

Note: In old coins: 1 Rupee = 16 Annas.
1 Anna = 12 pies.

at best impose on chukanidars a rate 50% above the rate at which they paid to the government. Thus, it becomes apparent that adhiars, in fact, paid an abnormally high amount to the jotedars in terms of⁵³ produce rent. Since the prices of food grains were rising "enormously", and since the rates of rent to be paid by chukanidars to jotedars was fixed for the terms of various settlements it might be reasonably

deduced that, as years passed on, adhiars as produce rent paying cultivators became more attractive to the substantial landholders and the latter were induced to employ adhiars in larger numbers. This is evidenced by the high rate of growth in the number of adhiars. It could be found that the number of adhiars rose by 88.26% between the settlement periods 1889-95 to 1906-16⁵⁴.

III.3.31 The payment of very high rate of rent by adhiars to jotedars, in effect, amounted to rack-renting of adhiars. There were other exactions also as discussed in the next section of this chapter. In fact, after the payment of produce rents and other dues the adhiars were left with meagre means to subsist on and they remained perpetually indebted to jotedars. Sunder found that adhiars were "in a chronic state of debt, and does nothing to improve his position"⁵⁵. The matter of the fact is that the adhiars had no capability to improve his position. The main cause of indebtedness of adhiars was that they had to take loans willingly or unwillingly from jotedars in cash or kind, the rate^{of interest} of which was 50% or more⁵⁶. Jotedars were usually much liberal in advancing loans to adhiars. The ulterior motive was, however, to put the adhiar in a perennial debt trap and make him dependent on his landlord. That adhiars were caught in an ascending debt spiral is evident from the following extract from Sunder's report : "In the division of paddy after reaping and threshing, which is always made in the jotedar's compound, the jotedar first takes his share, then he recovers, with interest, the paddy which he had lent the adhiar. If the whole of the proja's or adhiar's

share be absorbed in liquidating the debt and it still remains unsatisfied the unpaid portion is allowed to stand over and the jotedar recovers it when the next crop is reaped. He also advances more paddy"⁵⁷. Recent studies shows that this situation remained unaltered in the 1940's⁵⁸. Adhiars had also to meet secondary demands of jotedars. Details of the exploitative techniques have been described in the next section. In fact the adhiars, who was the direct producer, was left with less than half share which barely compensated for the tasks that contributed towards cultivation, not to mention the survival of the family household⁵⁹.

III.3.32 It is apparent from the above analysis and illustrations that a quite high rate of profit from adhiari was the most important reason for its adoption as well as its perpetuation at the latter part of the British rule.

III.3.33 With the growth of population very little amount of waste land was available after 1920 to extend cultivation⁶⁰. Number of adhiars on the other hand was growing rapidly. Compared to the early years of the British rule the supply of adhiars became relatively abundant now. Competition among adhiars for getting land under adhiari consequently increased. The landlords now had superior bargaining strength and the adhiars had to suffer. Besides a high rate of interest on loans, various kinds of exactions and non-economic forms of exploiting adhiars were reinforced⁶¹. Moreover, the threat of eviction to adhiars from land was intensified. Thus indebtedness,

rack-renting, excess exactions and the consequent poverty of adhiars made them utterly dependent on the landlords. It was against all these oppressions that the adhiars of the Duars, in correspondence with their counterparts in other parts of Bengal, stood together and organised a movement against the jotedars and other vested interests. This is famously known in the peasant history as the "Tebhaga Andolan" which we shall delineate in the next section.

III.3.34 The position of adhiars from the beginning of the British rule to its end may be summarised as follows. Adhiars were merely recorded by name in Beckett's settlement (1871) without providing for them any right or protection. Determination of their position and status remained pending for later periods. In Brown's settlement (1880) adhiars were considered to be labourers and hence it was not felt necessary to fix fair rents for them. However khatians were given to all adhiars in this settlement, but it was latter found (in 1888) that "in 90 percent cases the lands had since changed hands"⁶². It shows that any attempt on the part of the Government was frustrated by the move of the superior landholders. Mr. Sunder, during his settlement (1889-95) also did not take any measure "to improve or even to define the status of this unfortunate class" as no efforts were felt desirable in this regard⁶³. But from the description of adhiars in Sunder's report it appears that they were not mere labourers or farm servants, because it contained this significant expression : "He pays rent in kind, namely half of all crops he may grow on the land which is allowed to him"⁶⁴.

III.3.35 Further steps for resolving this important issue may be described in the best possible way by reproducing from Milligan's report. He noted : "The next mile-stone in the adhiar's progress was Notification No. 964 T.R. of 5th November, 1898, extending the Tenancy Act with certain limitations to the Western Duars. This notification speaks of jotedars, chukanidars, dar-chukanidars, adhiars or other tenants of agricultural land, and as it was a Tenancy Act Notification, the word 'tenant' was presumably used in its technical sense. This can not of course be taken as a ruling that all adhiars are tenants under the Act, but at least it disposes of the prevailing heresy that all adhiars are merely labourers and have no tenant rights"⁶⁵.

While further amplifying the implication of the notification of 1898, he further noted : "As however the application of the Act was to be limited by the definition of the rights and obligations of these various classes of tenant contained in settlement proceedings therefore approved by Government or with the terms of leases therefore granted by Government it would seem prima facie that the dictum of Mr. Sunder and the wording of the notification and leases above referred to were intended to be perpetuated to the eternal damnation of the adhiar. It is true that the Advocate General at the time held that although prior to 1898 adhiars had no rights they would by virtue of Notification No. 964 T.R. be able to acquire occupancy rights under the Act, but in giving this opinion he was only reviewing the situation arising from the fact that no leases had ever been granted by Government to adhiars; the limitation imposed by rights and obligation

defined in settlement proceedings was not under consideration by him"⁶⁶.

III.3.36 After 1898 and before the commencement of Milligan's settlement in 1906, the question remained latent. However, Milligan held that one significant circumstance was noteworthy, "namely that the Civil Courts treated as rent-suits all suits brought by Jotedars for recovery of their share of the crop, and in various decrees adhiars were alluded to as tenants"⁶⁷. Thus, though no real boon accrued to the adhiars out of the discussions and pronouncements on the subject before Milligan's settlement, nevertheless, "there was a general feeling that something should be done to secure to this class of cultivators some sort of tenant right in their lands"⁶⁸.

III.3.37 The main stumbling block on the way of conferment of tenant right was actually the strongly opposed local opinion to such a course. Concern for adhiars was expressed in Government circles in Sunder's time also. Mr. Nolan, Commissioner of Rajshahi Division, in his note on the settlement of the Western Duars in 1895 remarked: "The system of dividing crops has always seemed to me an objectionable method of taking the rent of land inasmuch as it deprives the farmer of one-half of the usual motive for industry. But it is not a bad way of paying a labourer, as it gives him an interest in his work, inferior no doubt to that of the owner working his own field"⁶⁹.

III.3.38 Milligan himself gave a serious thought over the issue. His sympathetic concern for adhiars may be shown in his own words: "The spirit with which this problem was approached was strongly antagonistic to the popular conception of an adhiar. It was felt to be intolerable that an agricultural system, which was extending and establishing itself with such remarkable rapidity as the adhiari system has done during the last quarter of a century, should deny all rights in the land to class which form the basis and backbone of any community carrying on agriculture under its auspices. It was resolved that this settlement must at least make a beginning in the eradication of this gross injustice"⁷⁰. He further found out the real hurdles in the way of resolving the issue and took measures to remove those. He observed : "In the course of the discussions that paved the way for definite orders some misunderstandings arose from failure at all times to distinguish between the de facto incidents of an adhiar's tenure according to local custom and usage, and the de jure character with which it was considered desirable and feasible to invest it at the present stage, and the criteria to be adopted for the purpose; but such misunderstandings merely delayed, they did not prejudice the decision. Such was the unanimity and rigidity of local opinion on the question that, pending the collection of information on which to base a definite policy, all adhiars were at first merely recorded in the khatians of jotedars and chukanidars in the column for subordinate interests in the occupation of plots. Such a record was sufficient for the preparation for separate khatians if such were subsequently decided upon. At the same time a register

of adhiars was kept in which the length or time for which he had held the same lands was noted, as well as the facts about the possession of cattle and ploughs, the custom regarding advances, seeds, housing and arrangement of what crop was to be grown year by year"⁷¹. After further investigations and review of the existing state of things Milligan reached the policy conclusion that "In the Western Duars where the [Bengal] Tenancy Act only applied to certain lands and only in a restricted manner to them, and where no classification of tenants under Chapter II [of the BT Act 1885] was being made, it was decided that separate khatians should not on this occasion be opened for Adhiars, but that a clause should be inserted in the new leases of Jotedars and Chukanidars definitely stating that Adhiars who cultivate with their own ploughs and cattle shall be deemed to be tenants including protection from eviction except by their own consent or under the orders of a Civil Court"⁷².

III.3.39 From subsequent documents it appears that adhiars did not really enjoy the benefits intended to be conferred upon them on the basis of the decision taken in Milligan's settlement period as those decisions were not implemented. In the last British settlement, in 1931-35, known as Mukherjee's settlement adhiars drew almost no attention of the Government. No discussion can be found about adhiars in Mukherjee's report. Number of adhiars were not recorded, only the areas held by them was shown⁷³. But the land held by adhiars was lower in 1931-35 compared to 1906-16. Perhaps a lot of adhiars had been evicted since the completion of Milligan's settlement in 1906-16, as the adhiars having own ploughs and cattles were intended to

be given tenant status. However, due to lack of data reasonable deductions may only be made in this regard, in the light of contemporary events. It is certain, however, that till the independence of India in 1947 nothing was done in defence of this class of tillers of land. It was only after independence that progressive legislations were enacted and implemented from time to time to raise the legal status of adhiars and to protect their interests.

SECTION 4 : ADHIARS' (SHARE CROPPERS') MOVEMENT IN THE LATE 1940s

III.4.1 Our above delineation of the agrarian relations in the Western Duars shows that the form of control over land and labour that emerged as the dominant one was the jotedar-adhiar relation or the adhiari system under which the adhiar, virtually a semi-serf, usually cultivated the jotedar's land with or sometimes without his own plough and cattle and handed over half of the produce of land to the jotedar. He had no tenancy right and suffered from various forms of exorbitant exactions.

III.4.2 It is notable that adhiars were, indeed, in a favourable position in the Duars than their counterpart in most other parts of Bengal at least upto 1920 as land was relatively abundant⁷⁴ and number of agricultural labourers were very few in the Duars⁷⁵. Even a comparison of the terms of adhiari contract in the non-regulation part (i.e., Western Duars) of Jalpaiguri district and its regulation part shows that, in the former adhiars were supplied with inputs of

cultivation such as plough, cattle, seeds etc. and received half of the produce, whereas adhiars in the latter part got the same share by cultivating with their own inputs⁷⁶. But when land became more scarce adhiars of the Western Duars also began to face adverse terms and conditions. As they were "tenants-at-will" jotedars could and did evict adhiars at the latter's slightest disagreement in any respect. The government was thinking of providing some sort of tenant status and security of tenures to adhiars. But jotedars and other substantial landholders were dead against it. The intention of the government was reflected in the issue of khatians to adhiars. But this endeavour of government was frustrated by jotedars in evicting the khatian holding adhiars "neck and crop"⁷⁷. The terms of contract that was prevalent between jotedars and adhiars was entirely "oral", and the jotedars took the advantage of this vulnerable position of the adhiars. Moreover, since the government thought that adhiars who would occupy and cultivate a plot of land for a consecutive term of twelve years might be given "tenant" status, it induced some jotedars to keep on shifting adhiars from one plot to another every year⁷⁸.

III.4.3 There was no improvement in agricultural practices under the jotedari system⁷⁹. Jotedars had no initiative in improving the method of cultivation to acquire more prosperity⁸⁰. Due to lack of means and insecurity of tenure adhiars could not also introduce necessary improvements of agricultural practices. The situation did not change in the 1940s also. Thus the impoverishment of the adhiars was due to the low returns from agriculture and more importantly was a result

of the progressively increasing demands of the jotedars on adhiars' harvest.

III.4.4 There are several instances of exploitative techniques applied by the jotedars to squeeze the adhiars. One of the techniques was to entrap the adhiars in a chronic debt obligation. When an adhiar took up land for cultivation he was used to be given an advance of 12 maunds (equivalent to about 5 quintals) of paddy by the jotedar, which was known as nahara. An interest of 50 percent or more per annum was charged by the jotedar on nahara⁸¹. Many jotedars made acceptance of nahara one of the conditions while taking new adhiars, even if the adhiar did not need it. Thus the jotedar was assured of 6 maunds or more of paddy in addition to half of the adhiar's crop. The jotedar would also give further advances of paddy or seed whenever he needed it. This was known as bhuta and the rate of interest was the same as that on nahara. If the adhiar needed draught animals the jotedar would loan them to him at 6 maunds of paddy for a pair of bullocks and 12 maunds for a pair of buffaloes. This loan was called pana and was interest free⁸². For paying these loans the adhiars would have to part with three-fourth of his crop, if not the entire crop to the jotedar and would have to seek further loans from him. In addition to this, adhiars were burdened with a number of levies imposed by the jotedar to cover almost any expenditure incurred by him. Adhiars had to pay levy known as sepahi posha, for the maintenance of the jotedar's guards. If a jotedar organised a religious gathering

(hari sabha) where devotional songs were sung, he recovered its cost by imposing a levy. Some jotedars even collected a levy, known as maiya pora, for educating their daughters. Levies were also collected for maintenance of the jotedar's horses and elephants, known as ghora bandha and hathi bandha, respectively. The cultivators had to pay a particularly high toll for these elephants because in addition to the levy, the jotedars allowed these animals to roam freely in the fields, consuming and destroying the standing crop⁸³.

III.4.5 In this connection, the ethnic composition of adhiars is to be specially mentioned. The jotedars were mainly Rajbanshi, Bengalee Hindus and Muslims⁸⁴. And the adhiars also largely belonged to the first and the third categories of people. However, peoples of various tribal groups like Oraons, Mundas and Santals came in this region as labourers in connection with working in tea gardens since the beginning of the industry in 1874. Immigration of these peoples into the district was organised by the tea planters to meet the growing labour requirements. Their number stood at two lakhs in 1931, and constituted one-fifth of the total labourers of the district⁸⁵. These tribal peoples were called Adivasis. There were also jotedars among Adivasis. But these people were few in number and were mainly the sardars or their decendants. Sardars were gang-leaders in the tea plantations and they were also engaged in recruiting new workers for which they got a fee. In addition, workers recruited by a Sardar were put under his charge and he got a small part of their wage as a commission. These people were therefore in a position to gather some

money which they could invest in purchasing jotes. Apart from few jotedars, Adivasis were rarely able to cultivate land under their own possession as there was very little scope to do so. The government insisted on distributing large tracts of land, which most Adivasis could not afford to lease. Moreover, by the beginning of the century, practically all cultivable land in Duars was leased out. Grunning noted in 1911 that almost all available land in Mainaguri tehsil "has been filled up rapidly and there is very little land left for few settlers"⁸⁶. Hence, in most cases the Adivasis became adhiars to some of the jotedars. Mr. Milligan, noted that in 1910, tribal adhiars who were ex-tea garden workers cultivated 64,281 acres of jote lands⁸⁷. This is a quite significant amount as the total area cultivated by adhiars during that settlement was 148,602.84 acres⁸⁸.

III.4.6 The "Tebhaga movement" (sharecroppers' struggle for two-thirds share of produce) has been described as virtually a tribal peasant uprising in wide areas under Mal and Matiali police stations in the Duars⁸⁹, though non-tribal adhiars also took part in it. The exploitation of adhiars by jotedars in various forms gradually increased. It has been observed that "Exploitation of the adhiars, overwhelmingly immigrant tribals - Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Santals, etc. in large parts of the Duars by the jotedars, mostly Muslims and Rajbansis but also some Marwaris and immigrant Bengalees, knew no limits"⁹⁰. Oppression of the jotedars reached to such a level that they treated the sons, daughters and wives of the adhiars' as their (jotedars) property and sometimes exploited them sexually⁹¹. On the whole, the condition of

adhiars has been described as similar to serfs⁹².

III.4.7 The basic and foremost demand of the Tebhaga movement was the two-thirds share of the produce for the adhiars. There were other issues also. It was against the collection of excessive tolls at the hats (weekly rural markets), various levies or abwabs, as mentioned earlier, exacted by the jotedars from the adhiars over and above the half-share and exorbitant interest on karja or consumption loan in paddy and also for the right to stock harvested paddy at nij kholan, that is, at a threshing place chosen by the adhiars.

III.4.8 The peasant upsurge around the issue of Tebhaga flared up in the Odlabari-Dam Dim-Mal-Chalsa-Baradighi area between late January or early February and April 1947. This peasant outburst had taken place somewhat autonomously and spontaneously⁹³. The railway workers and tea garden labourers also took part in this movement with the adhiars. A remarkable solidarity was formed between these classes of labourers⁹⁴. The movement had already started earlier in other parts of Bengal and also in the western part of the district (west of river Tista - the permanently settled part). In the mean time the story of success achieved by the Tebhaga struggle in those areas had spread to the peasants of the Mal-Matiali area of the Duars through the railway workers and Union activists and also through various other channels⁹⁵. There were also labour unrest in tea gardens at this

time. So the wave of this unrest that was continuing in the surrounding plantation areas for several months had also certainly stirred up the minds of adhiars. All these factors converged to give shape to the simmering discontent and anger of the peasants. In fact "in early 1947 four distinct forces - the communist leaders and cadres, the railway workers who had been unionised and were being led by the Communists for several years, the plantation labourers who were just in the midst of a process of being organised and were in a state of turmoil, and the peasants (mostly tribals), organised in the conventional sense but in a restive and militant mood-joined hands"⁹⁶, and the result was an outburst of peasant movement.

III.4.9 The form of the movement was uniform. Hundreds and thousands of peasant men, women and even children who ^{were} mostly tribals and also some Nepali, Rajbansi and Muslim peasants took part in the movement. A large number of tea garden labourers and railway workers joined them and had struck work in support of the agitating peasants. They carried Red Flags and in many cases armed with lathis, spears and bows and arrows marched from village to village. Tribal drums, nagras and madals were used to spread the message of the struggle and mobilise the peasants. However, the time this uprising took place in Duars the harvesting was over and paddy was already stored with the jotedars. In such a circumstance, the Tebhaga struggle in Duars inevitably took the form of forcible seizure of paddy for securing a two-thirds share. It has been observed that in the Duars "one witnessed not only something unprecedented in the history of popular

movement in Jalpaiguri but also one of the rare instances of close physical interaction between peasants, workers and tribals in the history of popular movements in India"⁹⁷.

III.4.10 Massive police repression followed next. There were scuffles and confrontations between the police and the agitators. The police forces opened fire at several places and several persons died. The government took all possible steps to smash the spread of peasant-worker rebellion⁹⁸. It was this massive state repression which has been held to be the main factor for the serious set back of the movement. The movement even at its highest remained deprived of support from the non-Communist nationalists. It was another reason for the failure of the movement. Still one more important factor was the non-participation of a large part of the Rajbanshi and Muslim peasants⁹⁹.

III.4.11 It may be noted here that inspite of their similarity in content there were differences with regard to the form and nature of the movement in the Western Duars compared to the other parts of Bengal. The main distinguishing feature was that, in the Duars it was not only the adhiars themselves but the tea garden workers, who were mostly tribals, also actively participated in the movement. In this sense the "Tebhaga" movement in the Duars was an important landmark in the working class movement¹⁰⁰ and it may be called a "worker-peasant-tribal upheaval"¹⁰¹.

III.4.12 Though the movement was not successful, still it retained its legacy for the later peasant movements and it urged upon the State Government in the post-independence period the necessity of legal enactments to improve the status and position of adhiars. In the Tebhaga struggle quantitative dispute over the share of produce was not the only issue but radical changes in the agrarian relations as well as breaking of the socio-political power of the jotedar-cum-mahajans (money lenders) were also very important issues. This movement brought to the fore the fact that one of the most important facets of the land problem is related to the problem of adhiars. Tebhaga struggle was, indeed, the pioneer of the later day revolutionary peasant movements¹⁰².

SECTION 5 : TENURIAL SYSTEM AND THE NATURE OF PROPERTY RIGHT IN LAND

III.5.1 The discussion made so far would direct us to make a pertinent question . What was the nature of property right that evolved through the creation of jotedari and chukani tenures by the issue of various forms of leases from time to time? It can be found from the conditions laid down in the leases and in the incidents of the jotedari tenure that, whatever might be the terms and conditions of settlement between the jotedars and the Government, the fact remained that the Government was the supreme proprietor. In a Government order in 1873 it was expressed that "... there was some ground for allowing to jotedars who were actual cultivators a right of

occupancy in the lands they cultivated"¹⁰³. But "the possession of any real proprietary title by jotedars was ... questioned"¹⁰⁴. Jotedari tenure was, however, recognised as involving a vested transferable interest on the land, and it was temporary tenancy which was normally renewable. The right of transfer was, however, not recognised as an absolute right¹⁰⁵. Land leases were framed "in exercise of the prerogative of Government, as owner of the soil, to give and allow such rights as it pleased in the newly annexed lands"¹⁰⁶. That the jotedar, in theory, had no proprietary right in land would be further evident from the following extract: "From time to time the jotedars of the Western Duars have petitioned Government to grant them the right of partition and separate accounts asserting that jotes are estates and that they, the jotedars, ought to have the rights of land-holders or proprietors in this respect".

This claim has always been emphatically denied and refused¹⁰⁷. Therefore, the Government itself was the landlord in the Western Duars¹⁰⁸. The jotedars, indeed, enjoyed a quasi-proprietary right and not the full proprietary right. They utilised only the usufructuary right¹⁰⁹ for a limited period (the term of the concerned settlement) on an agreement to pay the stipulated rent and an enhanced rent whenever the Government would consider it fit to revise the rent rate at the next settlement.

III.5.2 In the Zemindary system the ownership question is much easier to understand. Here the settlement was made with the Zemindars

and the function of the Government was mainly to collect the revenue and not to become the proprietor of land¹¹⁰. The Board of Revenue was instructed to note that, "... the jotedars [of the West Duars] are not in the position of Zemindars, but are half farmers and half Government tenants. Government has given them a security of tenure such as they never had under the Government of Bhutan, and must insist on their conforming to equitable arrangements with the actual cultivators"¹¹¹. The Zemindar had the right to pre-emption which was a proper safeguard to maintain the proprietorship. Rent was also fixed in perpetuity and for this reason there was no attack on proprietorship at the attempt of the Government to increase rent. But in the Jotedary system the Government had full liberty to raise rents at certain intervals (at the initiation of a new settlement), law of pre-emption was not applicable by jotedars, settled jotes could be resumed by the Government even if there were no outstanding revenue dues. In all such cases, the Government had the scope to interfere with the ownership right of the jotedar. Thus, on the issue of ownership, the Jotedary system is not comparable with the Zemindary system.

III.5.3 Question may be raised as to under what right jotedars sublet land to chukanidars. The answer is that, jotedars were permitted by the Government" to create one definite class of under-tenants" which was "of equally temporary character" as that of the Jotedary¹¹². Chukani tenure was recognised by the Government since the settlement of 1889-95. Chukanidars were given occupancy right which was permanent and heritable but not transferable. Chukani tenure

could not be cancelled by a jotedar without the orders of a Civil Court. However, though this form of occupancy right of chukanidars may apparently seem to be ownership right but these are two distinctly separate rights and the latter does not inevitably follow from the former.

III.5.4 The above deductions of the nature of property right in land in the Western Duars are all what was in theory or in the eyes of law, i.e. de jure. But whatever it might be in theory, in practice, i.e. in de facto, both jotedars and chukanidars enjoyed the ownership right in land, both jotedari and chukani tenures were, in fact, permanent, heritable and transferable and there is no evidence of cancellation of jotedari and chukani tenancy due to the breach of any contract.

III.5.5 The implication of the de jure nature of property right in land in the Western Duars is that there were lesser scopes of creating higher degrees of sub-infeudation by jotedars than one degree below the class of jotedars due to govt's prohibition and less possibility of rack-renting the under-tenants by jotedars as the enhanceable upper limit and the period for fixing rent were specified in the leases. The de facto nature of the property right, as found in several evidences, however, shows the contrary to the de jure nature. The degree of divergence between the two forms of the nature of property rights and its causes has been analysed in the section that follows.

SECTION 6 : IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TENANTS
AND AREA HELD BY THEM

III.6.1 It was the government's policy in the Western Duars to settle lands only with those men who had sufficient means to cultivate it properly and could bring the waste lands under cultivation within a specified period of time¹¹³. Naturally persons having some capital became jotedars. The jotedars were not only men of means, they were perhaps more intelligent than their neighbours and took the role of leadership in their respective localities. They had better access to the government officials. Very often they were also the head men (dewnyas or prodhans) of their localities. In the Duars, villages were formed centering round the homesteads of these headmen¹¹⁴. Of course, all jotedars were not equal in respect of their power and influence. They differ among themselves in the matter of possession of land and other forms of wealth and the number of people under their loyalty. But they seemed to be the most powerful among all in their respective localities. A common feature among the jotedars was ^{that} they managed the whole affair of the entire jote under their possession¹¹⁵. After retaining what they choose for their own cultivation they leased out the rest of the land to their under-tenants.

III.6.2 Though lands were originally settled with the jotedars, who would cultivate some portion of their jotes themselves as well

as with the aid of adhiars, the former also sub-leased some land to the chukanidars. The chukanidars were also substantial cultivators and were men of some capital. But their capital and influence were not adequate enough to convince the government officials to select them as jotedars. For this reason they had to lease in land from jotedars. The under-tenants of chukanidars in the local areas looked the latter as their jotedars. This was so for the reason of acquisition of an actual position by chukanidars almost similar to jotedars. It is evident from the fact that chukanidars were legally recognised tenants and had permanent and heritable rights in their tenures. Moreover, chukanidars, like the jotedars, had the right to employ adhiars for cultivation. Thus it appears that in the local community, the chukanidars being the direct under-tenants of jotedars and employers of adhiars had a considerable influence on the village society.

III.6.3 From a study of various Settlement Reports of the British period it becomes apparent that the number of different classes of cultivators and the areas held by them changed over time. These changes were definitely due the interaction of various socio-economic forces. In the paragraphs below we have tried to locate the reasons for these changes and their implications for the economy and society of the Western Duars.

III.6.4 Table III.2 below shows the distribution of different classes of cultivators over different settlement periods. The extent

TABLE III.2 - DISTRIBUTION OF CULTIVATORS UNDER DIFFERENT SETTLEMENT PERIODS IN THE WESTERN DUARS

Categories of cultivators	Number of cultivators			Percentage increase/decrease	
	1889-95	1906-16	1931-35	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35
(2)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<u>Jotedar</u>	23,339	15,244	16,230	-34.68	6.61
<u>Chukanidar</u>	14,016	17,752	22,412	26.66	26.25
<u>Dar-chukanidar</u>	3,739	-	4,583	-	-
<u>Dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	-	-	392	-	-
<u>Nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	-	-	14	-	-
<u>Adhiars</u> under <u>jotedar</u>	15,618	21,107	-	35.14	-
<u>Adhiars</u> under <u>chukanidar</u>	6,552	10,091	-	53.78	-
<u>Adhiars</u> under <u>dar-chukanidar</u>	-	1,210	-	-	-

- Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E., Survey and Settlement in the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1895, p. 121.
- (ii) Milligan, J.A., Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District, 1906-16, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1919, pp. iii, xiv, xxv (Appendix).
- (iii) Mukherjee, B.B., Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement Operations in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1931-35, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1939, p. 95.

of sub-infeudation and the practice of leasing in and leasing out in the Western Duars can be easily guessed from this table. The degree of sub-infeudation increased gradually and it reached to the fourth stage below the rank of jotedars, though only one stage below the class of jotedar was permitted by the government. There were, in our view, two reasons for this state of affair. The first was the need to reclaim and to bring more land under cultivation, specially at the initial years of the settlement, as early as possible. The need arose due to the fact that stipulation was made in the leases issued to the jotedars by the government to the effect that jotedars should bring the waste lands leased out to them under cultivation within a specified time otherwise the unreclaimed waste land would be resumed from them¹¹⁶. This was the reason why jotedars leased out to chukanidars in addition to leasing out to adhiars. Milligan held the large size of the jotes responsible for the growth of sub-infeudation.¹¹⁷ The chukanidars, inspite of government's prohibition leased out to dar-chukanidars for the same reason. The second reason for sub-leasing was the motive of realising cash rent from under-tenants. Realisation of cash rent from the under-tenants enabled the jotedars and other sub-lessors below them to shift the rent paying liability partly to the lower grades of tenants. It was perhaps more the case in the last settlement period when the rates of rent payable by jotedars and chukanidars were raised much¹¹⁸.

III.6.5 Another reason for sub-leasing by jotedars to chukanidars, which should not be overlooked, was the rack-renting of chukanidars

by jotedars. During Sunder's settlement period (1889-95) it was decided that jotedars would be permitted to fix the rents to be paid by chukanidars at a rate which could be a maximum of 50% above the jotedari rate or it could be raised upto that maximum if it was not already upto that level¹¹⁹. Jotedars were not allowed to raise the rate thus fixed during the term of the settlement and they were directed to issue a registered patta (lease) to the chukanidars. But during Milligan's settlement period (1906-16) it was found that though the chukanidar was nominally entitled to get a registered patta from the jotedars, no such patta was in fact been given¹²⁰. Some of the jotedars did not adhere to the government's direction and hence "chukani rents were mere lumpsum assessments"¹²¹. It appears that rack-renting was more common specially in case of new chukanidars.¹²² Rack-renting, however, was not a widespread phenomenon in the Western Duars as it becomes evident from Milligan's note: "It must not however be thought that all jotedars have systematically wrung enormous rents from their chukanidars. This is very far from being the case. The bulk of the jotedars have treated their chukanidars very fairly, but cases of the other kind have been sufficiently numerous to necessitate the provision of more explicit and practical protection for this class of tenants"¹²³. During Milligan's settlement period loopholes in the leases issued during Sunder's settlement period were plugged to protect the chukanidars from rack-renting. We have no evidence of rack-renting of chukanidars by jotedars after Milligan's settlement, but its possibility can not be ruled out. Therefore, it was the possibility of earning large amount of rent

income through rack-renting might have led jotedars to lease out land, in addition to other reasons.

III.6.6 Another point which is revealed from this table is the changes in the number of different categories of cultivators over different settlement periods. It can be seen that the number of jotedars decreased by 34.68% in 1906-16 compared to 1889-95 and increased by 6.61% in 1931-35 compared to 1906-16. The main reason for the fall in the number of jotedars between 1889-95 and 1906-16 was the sale and transfer of some jotes. During the settlement period of 1906-16 it "came to the notice" of the Settlement Officer that of the 5,542 jotes transferred, the purchasers, among others, in 3,444 cases were jotedars who were "already in possession of other jotes" and in 100 cases the purchasers were tea gardens or its representatives¹²⁴. The first group of purchasers amalgamated the newly purchased jotes with their original one and the second group amalgamated the jote land with their estates. Another group of purchasers (their number was 1,298) were the chukanidars. This group was, perhaps, recorded as chukanidars instead of jotedars. It is also possible that some of the transfers were not recorded in the Settlement Report, which did not come into the notice of the Settlement Officer. It may be noted here that due to the conversion of jote lands into tea 125 gardens many of the Mech jotedars were evicted and left Western Duars. Jote lands were taken up for tea cultivation as "all land suitable for tea" had "already been taken up, or definitely refused by Government " and therefore, "the only way of opening out new tea-

lands" was "by the purchase and amalgamation of jotes"¹²⁶. Some of the jotes were purchased by mahajans (money lenders) and pleaders who were absentee landholders. Thus the transfer of jotes was facilitated by the introduction of tea cultivation, gradual monetisation of the Duars economy, development of a land market and the emergence of money lenders. Further issues on alienation of Jotes and the growth of absentee landlordism have been elaborated in some detail in the next section. However, the act which would compensate the fall in the number of jotedars would have been the creation of new jotes and jotedars. But the pace of creation of new jotedars was checked by the declining amount of waste land to be brought under cultivation¹²⁷. For this reason, it is natural that lesser number of jotes were created during 1906-16 settlement than that of 1889-95. The reason for a small rise (6.61%) in the number of jotedars in the settlement of 1931-35 compared to that of 1906-16 was the creation of some new jotes and jotedars.

III.6.7 Table III.2 also shows that the number of chukanidars increased by 26.66% between the 1889-95 and 1906-16 settlement periods and by 26.25% between 1906-16 and 1931-35 settlement periods. The reasons for this increase are not far to seek. Firstly, as noted earlier, it was the motive of the jotedars to lease out land to chukanidars to collect some rent from them which enabled them to keep a large amount of land under their possession by virtually shifting the burden of rent payment on to the chukanidars. There were other considerations as well on the part of the jotedars, as explained above.

All these factors led to the rise in the number of chukanidars over different settlement periods. The second reason for the increase in the number of chukanidars was the growing pressure of population on land. The population in the tract swelled gradually with the influx of population from the neighbouring areas. In the absence of alternative avenues of employment outside the agrarian sector, the entire population had to fall back upon agriculture to earn a livelihood¹²⁸. With the steady progress of cultivation, the amount of further waste lands to be brought under cultivation gradually diminished. As a result, the prospect of becoming jotedars for the immigrants, by taking new leases of jotes, declined. Most of the new comers, therefore, had to lease in land as chukanidars from jotedars. It resulted in a rise in the number of chukanidars. Thirdly, lack of sufficient resources and influence also led some people to take up land as chukanidars. Finally, many jotedars who sold their jotes to other jotedars became chukanidars to the purchaser-jotedars. Sale of jotes, therefore, led to the increase in the number of chukanidars. Moreover, in "a number of cases" jotedars created benami chukanis in their jotes which also caused the number of chukanidars to rise¹²⁹.

III.6.8 Chukanidars in turn leased out land to dar-chukanidars.

The main reason appears to be the sheer motive of appropriation of cash rent by chukanidars from dar-chukanidars. But creation of the grades of dar-chukanidars by chukanidars was prohibited by the government, and consequently no protection was granted to the former.

In a situation, where chukanidars, the legally recognised grade of tenants were in some cases rack-rented, it is possible that in some cases chukanidars in turn rack-rented dar-chukanidars. This appears to be more the case during and after the last British settlement (1931-35), when due to rise in the number of cultivators competition for land increased much. Dar-chukanidars were not recorded in the settlement of 1906-16, but the fact of sub-infeudation below the rank of chukanidars prevailed as is evidenced from the existence of dar-chukanidars in the settlement periods of 1889-95 and 1931-35. Number of dar-chukanidars rose by 22.57% between these two settlement periods.

III.6.9 Grades of sub-tenants below dar-chukanidars, viz., dar-a-dar chukanidars and nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidars, could be found and recorded only in the settlement periods of 1931-35. But it is also possible that they did exist during the settlement period of 1906-16, but like dar-chukanidars, were not recorded.

III.6.10 Achiar under jotedars rose by 35.14% between 1889-95 and 1906-16 settlement periods and achiar under chukanidars rose by 53.78% during the same period. It is thus seen that growth of the achiar class had out numbered that of the jotedar or chukanidar classes. The causes of the sharp increase in the number of achiar have already been explained earlier. It may be reiterated here that it was the high rate of profit in achiari cultivation which led to the enormous growth of this class. The other reason was the need for

bringing more and more lands under cultivation in a situation where there did not exist any separate class of agricultural labourers. Adhiars were the mainstay for continuing and extending cultivation in the Western Duars. To describe it precisely, it was the existence of both demand for and supply of labour that was responsible for the spread of the adhiari (share-cropping) system of cultivation and the rise in the number of adhiars. The implication of the growth of the adhiari system was that it checked the growth and magnitude of sub-infeudation and consequently the relentless rack-renting of lower grades of tenants¹³⁰.

III.6.11 It is interesting to point out here that the number of adhiars is not given for the settlement period of 1931-35. We have already made a mention of the fact that the tract of Western Duars along with other parts of Bengal was engulfed in a movement famously known as the "Tebhaga" movement at the late 1940s to ameliorate the deteriorating economic condition of the adhiars. The background of this movement was in fact in preparation since the 1920s. The reasons for not recording the numbers of adhiars (inspite of their existence in the system of land management) during the settlement period of 1931-35 might be the apprehension of the government that it would help in strengthening the organisation of the adhiars' movement¹³¹.

TABLE III.3 - DISTRIBUTION OF AREA HELD (IN ACRES) BY VARIOUS CLASSES OF CULTIVATORS IN DIFFERENT SETTLEMENT PERIODS IN THE WESTERN DUARS

Categories of cultivators	Area held			Percentage increase/decrease	
	1889-95	1906-16	1931-35	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<u>Jotedar</u>	201,694	265,755	496,524	31.76	86.84
<u>Chukanidar</u>	93,582	130,299	188,720	39.24	44.84
<u>Dar-chukanidar</u>	18,254	-	22,027	-	-
<u>Dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	-	-	943	-	-
<u>Nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	-	-	21	-	-
<u>Adhiars under jotedar</u>	54,914	108,923	75,105	98.35	-31.05
<u>Adhiars under chukanidar</u>	16,452	25,389	30,111	54.32	18.60
<u>Adhiars under dar-chukanidar</u>	-	42	-	-	-

Sources : (i) Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 7

(ii) Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. xi (Appendix)

(iii) Mukherjee, B.B., op. cit., p. 95.

III.6.12 Table III.3 above shows the distribution of area held by various categories of cultivators during different settlement periods. The table reveals that area held by jotedars recorded an increase of 31.76% between 1889-95 and 1906-16 settlement periods and by 86.84% between 1906-16 and 1931-35 settlement periods. This trend implies that jotedars controlled more and more land over different settlement periods. Control over land of the chukanicars also increased as is evident from the increase in area held by them. Growth in area held by chukanicars between 1889-95 and 1906-16 is greater than that of the jotedars. It implies a greater tendency of the jotedars to lease out land to chukanicars between these two settlement periods. On the other hand, growth in area held by jotedars (86.84%) is far greater than that by chukanicars (44.84%) between the settlement periods 1906-16 and 1931-35. This shows that the tendency to lease out by jotedars had declined between 1906-16 and 1931-35 than that in 1889-95 and 1906-16, that is, the jotedars had a tendency to keep more land under self-cultivation between the periods 1906-16 and 1931-35, which is further corroborated by the decline in the area held by adhiars under jotedars (rate of growth being -31.05%) during the same periods. However, it is probable that during the settlement period of 1931-35, some of the jotedars concealed their lands lease out to adhiars and showed it as their self-cultivated land due to the constant pressure of the adhiars to be declared as tenants and the apprehension of probable agitation by adhiars. However, land held by adhiars shows a very high rate (98.35%) of growth between 1889-95 and 1906-16 settlement periods. It indicates a rapid growth of the system of

adhiari cultivation. Land held by adhiars under chukanidars increased both between 1889-95 and 1906-16 settlement periods, and between 1906-16 and 1931-35 settlement periods. This trend corroborates the inference that adhiari system of cultivation grew rapidly.

TABLE 4 : AVERAGE SIZE OF HOLDING OF ALL CLASSES OF TENANTS IN WESTERN DUARS (1889-1931)

Class of tenant/settlement	Average size of holding (in acres)		
	1889-95	1906-16	1931-35
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<u>Jotedar</u>	8.64	17.43	30.59
<u>Chukanidar</u>	6.68	7.34	8.42
<u>Dar-chukanidar</u>	4.88	..	4.81
<u>Dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	..	..	2.41
<u>Nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u>	..	..	1.50
<u>Adhiar</u> under <u>jotedar</u>	3.52	5.16	..
<u>Adhiar</u> under <u>chukanidar</u>	2.51	2.52	..
<u>Adhiar</u> under <u>dar-chukanidar</u>	..	0.03	..
ALL ADHIARS	3.22	4.15	..

Source: Computed from tables III.2 & III.3

III.6.13 Average size of holding of various classes of cultivators during different settlement periods has been shown in table III.4 above. The table exhibits that average size of holdings of both jotedars and chukanidars had risen continuously over the three

settlement periods under study. But the average size of holding of jotedars had risen at a greater rate than that of chukanidars. Moreover, the average size of holdings of jotedars were far larger than that of the chukanidars and adhiars. This clearly shows that over the settlement periods more and more lands had been concentrated at the hands of jotedars. The average size of holdings of adhiars, though, had risen slightly during 1906-16 settlement period compared to that in 1889-95, the rise was lower than that of the jotedars and the average size of holdings of adhiars was much less than that of the jotedars and the chukanidars. The trend of changes in the average size of holdings of various classes of cultivators indicates that inequality of land holding and hence income between the upper and lower grades of tenants became sharper implying a deteriorating economic condition of the people at the lower echelons of the tenantry.

III.6.14 It follows from the analysis above that there had been growing clustering of cultivators at the bottom layers of the agrarian social structure. The bottom layers were represented by the largest class of poor peasants consisting of tenant cultivators and share-croppers (adhiars). It is, however, not true to suggest that all the layers of cultivators were found to exist in the same plot of land in all cases. All the layers could be found in a number of cases only. However, the most interesting fact is that the agrarian structure in the Western Duars developed perfectly on the pyramidal model which was mainly due to increasing pressure on land and absence of

alternative avenues of employment outside agriculture¹³². The pyramidal model of the agrarian social structure that evolved may be shown in the following way. At the top of the pyramid was the Government. The

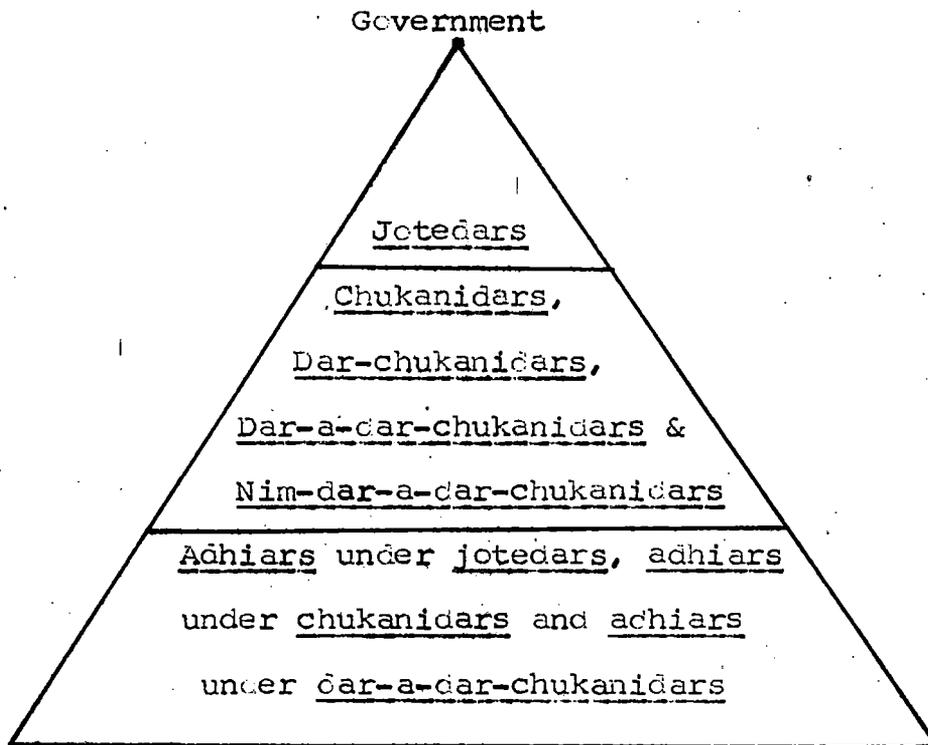


Diagram III.1 : Pyramidal Model of Agrarian Social Structure in the Western Duars during the British period.

subsequent bottom layers were represented by (i) jotedars, (ii) chukanidars, dar-chukanidars, dar-a-dar-chukanidars and nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidars, and (iii) adhiars under jotedars, adhiars under chukanidars and adhiars under dar-chukanidars respectively.

SECTION 7 : GROWTH OF ABSENTEE LANDLORDISM - ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

III.7.1 One significant aspect of the development of tenurial relations in the Western Duars was the growth of absentee landlordism. This phenomenon had its origin and growth in several factors.

III.7.2 In 1895 out of the 23,339 jotedars in Western Duars 1,615, that is, 6.92% were absentees and out of the 14,016 chukanidars 34, that is, 0.24% were absentees¹³³. Later on this number had gone up as is clear from table III.5, which shows the percentage distribution of different kinds of buyers of jotes in the Western Duars during 1906-16.

III.7.3 From table III.6 it is revealed that compared to 1889-95 settlement the number of jotes sold increased 14 times and the value of total jotes sold rose to 70 times in 1906-16. On the other hand, table III.7 shows that the total area sold increased to about 18 times in 1906-16 compared to 1889-95 and the percentage of land sold (of total cultivated land) increased to 11 times.

III.7.4 Data are not available for the third Settlement (of 1889-95) as to the nature of transfer, that is, to what kind of people these jotes were transferred. But there can be no denying the fact that a certain percentage of the transferee-jotedars must have been absentees. Because from the data (in Table III.5) on the nature of transfer of jotes in the fourth settlement (of 1906-16) it is found

TABLE III.5 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF BUYERS OF JOTES IN THE WESTERN DUARS DURING 1906-16.

<u>PARGANA</u>	<u>BUYERS OF JOTES IN PERCENTAGE</u>							
	<u>Jotedar</u>	<u>Chukanidar</u>	<u>Mahajan</u>	<u>Pleader</u>	Tea garden Manager	Tea Garden Doctor	Tea Company	<u>Mukhtear</u>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Chengmari	95.30	2.81	1.80				0.9	
South Maynaguri	40.40	26.03	32.15	1.30	.05	.07		
North Maynaguri	97.07	1.30	1.60					
West Madari	39.00	56.60	1.00					3.40
Lakhipur	44.26	22.70	4.02		7.21	7.21		14.60
Moraghat	62.63	21.27	16.10					
Bhalka	91.60		9.40					
Bhatibari	71.43	19.40	2.64	.40	6.12			
Chakoakheti	38.00	59.00	3.00					
East Madari	30.30	18.40		1.30				
Buxa	31.20	68.00	.80					
<u>TOTAL</u> <u>AVERAGE</u>	62.16	23.09	11.40	.23	1.12	.46	1	1.44

Source: Milligan, J.A. - op.cit., p. xix (Appendix 17)

TABLE III.6 NUMBER AND VALUE OF JOTES SOLD IN WESTERN DUARS (1889-1916)

<u>TAHSIL</u>	No. of <u>jotes</u> sold in (1889-95)	No. of <u>jotes</u> sold in (1906-16)	Value (Rs.) (1889-95)	Value (Rs.) (1906-16)
1	2	3	4	5
Mainaguri	306	2425	58,450	21,29,822
Falakata	70	1932	9,226	9,58,059
Alipur	11	978	545	16,87,476
Bhalka	4	247	274	1,77,887
Ambari Falakata	8	-	1,047	-
TOTAL	399	5542	69,541	48,93,245

Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 5, 162, pp. 136-60.

(ii) Milligan, J.A. - op. cit., p. 544, 697, p. xix (Appendix 17)
p. xiii (Appendix 10)

TABLE III. 7 AREA (IN ACRES) AND PERCENTAGE OF LAND SOLD IN WESTERN DUARS (1889-1916)

TAHSIL	1889-95			1906-16		
	Total area of cultivated land	Area of cultivated land sold	% of cultivated land sold	Total area of cultivated land	Area of cultivated land sold	% of cultivated land sold
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mainaguri	113,537	4,549	4.01	106,883	24,023	22.48
Falakata	73,515	1,647	2.24	104,675	27,645	26.41
Alipur	28,181	251	0.89	124,753	62,950	50.46
Bhalka	8,487	93	1.10	20,854	4,716	22.61
Ambari Falakata	7,118	236	3.32	6,029	-	-
TOTAL	2,20,838	6,776	2.94	3,63,194	119,337	32.86

Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 5, 12, pp. 136-60.

(ii) Milligan, J.A. - op. cit., p. 544, 697, p xiii

(Appendix 10), p. xix (Appendix 17).

that of the total jotes sold, about 15% was bought by people like mahajans, mukhtears, tea garden managers etc. who could not but be absentee landlords. The rest 85% purchasers of jotes were jotedars (62.16%) and chukanidars (23.09%). It is reasonable to believe that of these 85% purchasers of jotes at least some were absentees.

III.7.5 The tendency to alienate jote by sale originated after the second British settlement (1880) of the Western Duars. But from the third settlement (1889-95) no measure was adopted to check this tendency by inserting a residence clause in the jotedars' and chukanidars' lease or by some other means so that the growth of absentee landlordism, which was considered to be detrimental to agricultural development, could be stopped. It was, however, not possible to check the growth of absentee landholders at that time and also subsequently. Though most of the jotes were acquired through leases it was also permissible to acquire jotes through transfer by sale or mortgage.

III.7.6 The land as a marketable commodity, thus started to appear in market by the eighth decade of the nineteenth century and it was fairly developed by the first decade of the twentieth century as is evident from the rise in land prices in the Western Duars shown in table III.8.

TABLE III.8 : LAND PRICE (PER ACRE IN Rs) IN WESTERN
DUARS (1883-1894)

Year/ Tahsil	Mainaguri	Alipur	Bhalka	Siliguri	Falakata
1883	3.7	3.0	..	4.2	6.3
1884	5.7	1.5	..	2.1	4.9
1885	6.8	2.0	1.2	8.9	5.3
1886	7.1	0.8	1.0	7.8	4.1
1887	13.0	1.6	2.7	3.2	5.8
1888	12.7	2.0	1.9	6.0	7.2
1889	15.2	4.5	2.6	6.8	7.8
1890	10.2	6.1	3.9	4.8	4.7
1891	12.7	2.3	4.8	4.1	8.2
1892	14.5	4.7	4.4	2.4	11.1
1893	12.2	2.9	2.2	7.1	8.3
1894	14.9	4.3	1.5	3.5	7.8

Source : Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., pp. 139-61.

III.7.7 The following factors may be held responsible for this unprecedented fact in the course of development of tenurial relations.

III.7.8 First is the cause of a sharp increase in the rates of rent. As the land price was rising rapidly, the Government found it convenient to enhance the rent of the jotedars and chukanicars. It also induced, perhaps to some extent, some jotedars to sell jotes to earn profit. But this was likely to be much uncommon. The most plausible reason for selling of jotes

was the increasing rate of rent at successive settlements as is evident from Table III.9. It was more so because of the fact that it was not possible on the part of the jotedars to enhance the rent of their immediate undertenants, (i.e., chukanidars) which was fixed by the Government. On the other hand, the rate of rent gradually rose on account of a rise in land price and also because of the influx of population from the neighbouring districts to get land for cultivation at a lower rate of rent compared to their native place at the initial period. Growth of population in Western Duars from 1865 to 1951 has been shown in table III.10. The brunt of the rise in the rate of rent since the settlement period of 1906-16 had to be entirely borne by jotedars as they could not shift it to the lower grades of tenants, due to the Government's restriction in this regard. Being unable to pay the rent many jotes were sold by jotedars¹³⁴.

III.7.9 The second cause of the transfer of jotes was the intrusion of Mahajans (money lenders) in the Duars economy. Once land-tenure system had been adopted to western concepts of private property, land became a negotiable asset. It could now be used as security for loans and in case of default

could be forfeited and transferred. Not only did the British rule provide these conditions, it cast them within a system of law that made contract enforceable.

TABLE III.9 PERCENTAGE RISE IN RATES OF RENT IN VARIOUS TAHSILS OF WESTERN DUARS OVER DIFFERENT SETTLEMENT PERIODS (1889-95 TO 1931-35)

Class of land	Percentage increase in the rates of rent							
	Maynaguri Tahsil		Bhalka Tahsil		Falakata Tahsil		Alipur Tahsil	
	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35	1889-95 to 1906-16	1906-16 to 1931-35
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
<u>Bastu</u>	0.00	66.67	33.33	62.50	0.00	75.00	33.33	68.75
<u>Dohola</u>	0.00	110.94	44.44	76.92	77.78	75.00	44.44	84.62
<u>Saharai</u>	8.18	109.30	100.00	77.78	20.00	78.13	11.11	60.00
<u>Danga I</u>	-	104.55	-	56.67	-	77.18	-	77.08
<u>Danga II</u>	-	134.38	-	75.00	-	75.00	-	75.00
<u>Doba</u>	-	134.38	-	75.00	-	75.00	-	75.00
<u>Patit</u>	-	87.50	-	75.00	-	75.00	-	75.00

Note: Only comparable categories of land in different settlement periods have been taken into account. Necessary conversions and adjustments have been made.

Source: Milligan, J.A., op. cit., pp. 36-37.

TABLE III.10 GROWTH OF POPULATION IN WESTERN DUARS (1865-1931)

Year	No. of persons	Rate of increase in population (%)	Density per square mile
1	2	3	4
1865-67	49,620	-	-
1872	1,00,111	101.76	51
1881	1,82,687	82.48	93
1891	2,96,964	62.55	151
1901	4,10,606	38.27	211
1911	5,19,372	26.49	267
1921	5,58,971	7.62	288
1931	6,04,234	8.1	311
1941	6,94,206	14.9	357
1951	7,47,356	7.66	385

Sources : (i) Hunter, W.W. - A Statistical Account of Bengal, 1876, p. 247.

(ii) Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 44.

(iii) Mukherjee, B.B. - op. cit., p. 11.

(iv) Census of India, 1921, Vol. v, Part I, p. 66.

(v) Census of India, 1951, Jalpaiguri District Hand book, pp. 13-15.

III.7.10 It is, however, not true to suggest that money lending was unknown during the pre-British period or that previously it did not exert any influence on the rural life. The fact is that as long as production remained directed almost exclusively to subsistence, the function of money lenders in rural areas was necessarily different from what it would become when production for sale gained in importance. In a subsistence economy, the money lender's activities were restricted to supplying the peasant with money to subsist on, when he was in trouble because of crop failure or because of extraordinary expenditure or such family events as marriages and funerals. Most loans of this type were paid or repaid in kind at very high rates of interest.

III.7.11 In the British period, a new dimension of money lender's role can be noticed in this area of North Bengal. As the value of land increased, the money lenders found that he may have a positive interest in the default of his debtor. Previously he might have been cautious in advancing more than the peasant could manage to repay. But when the money lender saw that he could gain from the default of a debtor, he became a necessary evil for the borrowers in the rural economy. His concern was no longer restricted to acquiring profits as a financial intermediary, but was directed increasingly on the acquisition of and speculation in land. By charging exorbitant interest rates or by inducing the peasant to accept larger credits than he could manage to pay, the money lenders could hasten the process by which the peasant was dispossessed.

III.7.12 The Marwaris, Upcountrymen, Kabulies etc. and the indigenous money lenders found the Duars region as a congenial place for money lending activity. It had been found by enquiries in 1905 that the rate of interest in Maynaguri and Alipur Tahsils varied from 18% to 37.5% and in Falakata tahsil it varied from 12% to 75%. On an average the rate was 36%¹³⁵. The transfer of jotes in certain cases was due to the exaction of such an unusual high rate of interest on the 'jotedar borrowers' and the consequent inability of the borrowers to repay the amount, thereby forcing them to settle through sale or transfer of lands. Figures in table III.11 below will establish our pre-supposition. A sudden growth of landed interest amongst the money lending and business communities for earning profit from land was the reason for such a state of affair.

A glance at table III.11 would show that altogether 781 jotes were acquired by different communities in Falakata tahsil between 1895 and 1906. The transfer of 205 jotes were added to the acquisition of 576 new jotes by different communities. As business communities had started penetrating into the area, it may well be presumed that money lending activity was an important factor for such transfer of land. ^{This} is well borne out by ^a report made in 1911 by Grunning. Grunning reported that in the Government estates the tenantry were mostly in debt in the taluks bordering on the Darjeeling terai. Out of the 227 jotes comprised in the taluks of Totgaon, Udalbari and Saogaon Fulbari in the Mainaguri tahsil, 102 or 45% were transferred in 1904-5 and the tahsildars reported that many of them had passed into the hands of the professional money lenders¹³⁶.

TABLE III.11 PATTERN OF JOTE OWNERSHIP AT FALAKATA TAHSIL

Caste/Tribe/ Community	Number of <u>jotes</u> held		No. of <u>jotes</u> transferred	Acquisition of <u>jotes</u>
	1889-95 Settle- ment	1906-16 Settle- ment		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Rajbanshi	1613	1638	Nil	+25
Muhammadans	1095	1092	3	-
Mech	404	381	23	-
Jalca	3	19	Nil	+16
Garo	26	17	9	-
Santhal	..	2	..	+ 2
Oraon	33	263	..	+230
Nepali	56	140	..	+84
Marwari	..	115	..	+115
Up-Countrymen	..	272		+272
Kabuli	..	14	..	+14
Assamese	..	18	..	+18
Europeans	2	7	..	+5
Bengalees from other districts	260	136	124	-
Kyan	46	..	46	-
Total	3538	4114	205	781

Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 130.

(ii) Grunning, J.F. - Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Alhabad Pioneer Press, 1911, p. 99.

III.7.13 Thirdly, the introduction of tea plantation in the district in the decade seventies of the 19th century was another factor responsible for the alienation of jotes and growth of absentee landholders. With the expansion of the plantation sector many jote lands were converted into tea gardens through purchase by tea estates from jotedars. It is also reported that some jotedars voluntarily sold their jotes to tea companies for plantation purpose and converted the sale proceeds to shares of tea gardens¹³⁷. Moreover, the surplus that was accumulated at the hands of the well paid Bengalee babus employed in tea gardens, was invested in certain circumstances in purchasing jote lands. This helped in swelling the number of absentee landlords¹³⁸.

III.7.14 Fourthly, commercialisation of agriculture was also responsible for the growth of this phenomenon under review. Commercialisation of agriculture began to start in the Western Duars from the last decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, very little amount of commercial crop was produced in this area before 1870. Area under jute cultivation went upto 6620 acres¹³⁹ in 1895. Area put under jute cultivation more than doubled between 1901-02 to 1907-08. It should be noted that commercial cultivation of jute and also tobacco did not encounter much difficulty at the initial stage or even at the later stage. The inducement to cultivate these crops was provided perhaps by their profitability, easy availability of credit from mahahans, ready market of these products, selling against cash money which met the cultivators' need to repay debt, paying rent etc, and

by the cultivators' desire to minimise the risk of cultivation by cultivating jute in addition to paddy as the latter crop was more susceptible to pests and insects. Another important factor inducing the expansion of commercial agriculture was the easy availability of credit for this purpose from mahajans (money lenders). When commercial farming began to develop in North Bengal, some parts of the crop was sold, the money lender took on a role of wider economic significance. Money outlays for seeds, fertilisers and other agricultural inputs became necessary for the successful cultivation of most commercial crops and if the peasant was obliged to reduce his output of food crops, he also needed cash to cover part of his food requirements. His cash need thus became greater than ever. And since his land was now transferable and became a valuable collateral for loans, the money lender was willing to advance larger sums for commercial agriculture than before¹⁴⁰.

III.7.15 Perhaps there was an accumulation of surplus value at the hands of those jotedars' who were the substantial growers of jute. They bought jotes out of this surplus. On the other hand jotedars who were growers of traditional non-commercial subsistence crops only, might have sold some of their jotes to the former type of jotedars due to their deteriorating economic condition.

III.7.16 Finally, the general backwardness of agriculture was also responsible for alienation of jotes. Agriculture was too much traditional and subsistence-oriented. There was no effort on the

part of the jotedars to improve the mode of cultivation by adopting better methods of cultivation, making provision for irrigation, introducing new and improved varieties of seeds and crops. Agricultural production remained stagnant. As a result some jotedars, who were indolent and unenterprising, had to sell their jotes to the well off newcomers and to their prosperous neighbours.

III.7.17 Absentee landlordism brought in its train adverse consequences on the development of agriculture of the region. Resident jotedars could supervise and manage their jotes closely and could effect some sort of improvement in land and its cultivation even within the traditional modes of cultivation which was not possible on the part of non-resident jotedars. The chief interest of the latter was to earn as much profit as possible and hence they managed their jotes in such a way as to achieve this end. They, perhaps, encouraged the cultivation of commercial crops like tobacco or jute in their lands by advancing loans to their sub-tenants.

III.7.18 Thus the agrarian social structure of the Western Duars as well as the district of Jalpaiguri as a whole underwent a remarkable change with the growth of absentee landlordism. Jute or tobacco cultivation is much more labour intensive than that of paddy and other traditional crops. It is more expensive also to cultivate. It was not advisable to cultivate this crop with the help of share-croppers. Hence instead of employing adhiars, day labourers began to be used for its cultivation and in the process many adhiars

were evicted out of their land and converted to day labourers¹⁴¹. In this way, a new class - the landless agricultural labour class was born. Moreover, with the growth of absentee landholders, the usual social bond that was there among the jotedars and their under-tenants and adhiars was broken and some sort of social tension was engendered between the absentee jotedars and their inferior interest holders¹⁴².

SECTION 8 : DECLINING TREND OF LAND CONTROL BY INDIGENOUS
CASTES, TRIBES AND COMMUNITIES

III.8.1 The story of the changes in land control in the Western Duars remains incomplete if the same is not seen for the various caste categories. These changes were consequences as well as causes of different socio-economic forces at work. They also open up new lines to see and think as to how different castes reacted and adopted themselves with the changed situations.

III.8.2 Table III.12 presents the distribution of number of jotes and area held by various castes/tribes/communities during the settlement periods 1889-95 and 1931-35. From columns (2) and (3) of table III.12 it can be seen that the number of jotes held by all castes except three, increased over the period. Among the three indigenous castes and tribes who greatly lost their control over land, two were tribal castes (the Garos and the Meches). They lost because some of them left the place and migrated eastward, perhaps to Assam¹⁴³. Another reason may be that poor economic condition compelled some of them to sell their lands.

TABLE III.12 DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBER OF JOTES AND AREA HELD BY DIFFERENT CASTES/TRIBES/
COMMUNITIES IN WESTERN DUARS (1889-1935)

Caste/ Community	Number of Jotes		Percentage change between 1889-95 & 1931-35	Acreage held		Percentage change between 1889-95 & 1931-35
	1889-95	1931-35		1889-95	1931-35	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Rajbanshi	5,264 (52.79)	6,137 (40.34)	16.58 (-12.45)	180,910.52 (47.00)	124,934.46 (40.70)	-30.95(-6.30)
Muhammadan	2,692 (27.00)	3,530 (23.21)	31.13 (-3.79)	121,583.20 (31.59)	78,270.34 (25.50)	-35.63(-6.09)
Mech	766 (7.68)	604 (3.97)	-21.15 (-3.71)	20,593.66 (5.35)	12,271.18 (4.00)	-40.42(-1.35)
Brahmin	201 (2.02)	513 (3.37)	155.22 (1.35)	11,316.37 (2.94)	5,106.20 (1.66)	-54.88(-1.28)
Kayastha	192 (1.92)	365 (2.40)	90.10 (0.48)	8,503.17 (0.02)	6,683.53 (2.18)	-21.40(2.16)
Paharia	147 (1.47)	--	--	6,064.06 (1.58)	..	..
Oraon	116 (1.16)	1,086 (7.14)	836.21 (5.98)	2,899.99 (0.75)	20,782.56 (6.77)	616.64(6.02)
Kyan	99 (0.99)	..	..	12,642.87 (3.28)	..	..
Saha	76 (0.76)	160 (1.05)	110.53 (0.29)	3,533.42 (0.92)	3,160.34 (1.03)	-10.56(0.11)

Contd..

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Marawari*	68 (0.58)	596 (3.92)	776.47 (3.24)	2,618.25 (0.68)	12,409.17 (4.04)	373.95(3.36)
European (Christian)	57 (0.57)	904 (5.94)	1485.96 (5.37)	3,940.00 (1.02)	10,258.91 (3.34)	160.38(2.32)
Dobhasiya	54 (0.54)	..	..	901.19 (0.23)	..	..
Gope	47 (0.47)	..	..	3,074.55 (0.880)	..	.
Napit	34 (0.34)	30 (0.20)	-11.47 (-0.4)	1,600.03 (0.42)	1,550.22 (0.50)	-3.11(0.08)
Garo	33 (0.33)	26 (0.17)	-21.21 (-0.16)	938.46 (0.24)	605.60 (0.20)	-35.47(-0.04)
Munda	4 (0.04)	43 (0.28)	975.00 (0.24)	111.58 (0.03)	616.43 (0.20)	452.43(0.17)
Nepali	3 (0.03)	178 (1.17)	5833.33 (1.14)	69.60 (0.02)	4,907.54 (1.60)	6,951.06(1.58)
Bhutia	2 (0.02)	55 (0.36)	2650.00 (0.34)	16.66 (0.004)	1,315.73 (0.43)	7,797.54(0.42)
Baidya	2 (0.02)	15 (0.10)	650.00 (0.08)	69.01 (0.02)	844.83 (0.28)	1,124.21(0.26)

Contd..

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Santhal	..	193 (1.27)	..	..	3,190.14 (1.04)	..
Ltd. Co.	..	96 (0.53)	..	..	4,266.65 (1.39)	..
Total	9,857 (98.86)	14,531 (95.52)	47.42 (-3.34)	381,386.59 (99.09)	29,11,73.83 (94.86)	-23.65(-4.23)
Others	114 (1.14)	6.81 (4.48)	497.37 (3.34)	3,509.32 (0.91)	15,816.47 (5.14)	318.84(4.23)
ALL TOTAL	9,971 (100.00)	15,212 (100.00)	52.56	384,895.91 (100.00)	306,990.30 (100.00)	-20.24

Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E. - op.cit., p. 130; (ii) Mukherjee B.B. - op.cit., p. 137 (iii) Computation

Note : (i) Marwari (1889-95) = Chhetri + Boyed (Byudh)

Marwari (1931-35) = Chhetri + Boyed (Byudh) + Agarwalla + Mahorri + Oswal + Singha
+ Gauthi + Dugar + Others

(ii) Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of the total.

III.8.3 But the caste which lost the most in its control of land was the Rajbanshis. Though their absolute control over jotes rose by 16.58% between the periods 1889-95 and 1931-35, their control over total number of jotes fell by 12.45%, and the area held by this caste declined by 30.95% and its control over the total area in the Duars fell by 6.3%. The immigrant losing community were the Muhammadans. The percentage of jotes held by it rose by 31.13% during the settlement period of 1931-35 compared to the settlement period of 1889-95, but their control over the total number of jotes fell by 3.79% and the total acreage held by this community fell by 35.63% and the control over the total acreage fell by 6.09%.

III.8.4 Among those who gained, six categories deserve mentioning, and causes of their gain need explanation. These were the Oraon, Europeans, Marwari, Brahmin, Nepali and Kayastha respectively. All these were immigrant castes and communities. One thing common about these castes except the Oraons and the Nepalese was that they were non-cultivating castes. The Oraons were imported from the Chhotonagpur region to work as tea garden labourers. While employing them as labourers, initially they were also given some lands by the planters. Afterwards, after their retirement from job they purchased some amount of land and settled as cultivators in the areas adjacent to tea gardens. By this process they came to occupy and control larger amounts of lands. The Europeans (Christians) came to occupy more lands through purchase who used jote lands to convert it into tea gardens. The Marwaris could grasp more lands through their money lending business

as already mentioned. Number of jotes held by them rose by 776.47% and control over total number of jotes rose by 3.24% and control over the total area rose by 3.36%. Control over total jotes rose by 1.35% for the Brahmins but their control over total acreage fell by 1.28%. The number of jotes held by this caste increased for two reasons. Firstly, they acquired some jotes through purchase, out of the surplus earned by their profession. Secondly, they came to own some jotes in terms of gifts from their clients for whom they performed religious ceremonies¹⁴⁴. The Nepalis were the immigrants. They came and bought jotes in the Duars which was perhaps cheaper than that in their native place. The Kayasthas were mainly white-collar job holders and formed a major chunk of the Bengalee middle class. They purchased jotes, out of their saving from earning in tea gardens and small businesses. One Bengalee immigrant trader caste, the Sahas, could also improve their position steadily in terms of their holding over the total number of jotes and control over the total acreage. Another immigrant community, the Bhutias, could also improve their position both in terms of their holding over the total number of jotes and control over the total acreage.

SECTION 9 : MAJOR SOCIAL CHANGES ACCOMPANIED BY
CHANGES IN AGRARIAN RELATIONS

III.9.1 Thus a qualitative change occurred in the land control of this region over the years. The indigenous majority castes gradually lost their overwhelming control over land while some new immigrant

castes gradually came to control more and more lands. The average size of holding of the indigenous castes began to fall with the increase of their cultivator members over the years. With no improvement in the method and technique of production, it indicates that their economic condition definitely deteriorated. This phenomenon must have fostered a sense of deprivation and frustration among them. They must not have viewed this development with favour, but they had nothing to do except adapting themselves with the changed situation. Being habituated in an easy going traditional life adaptation was also not much easier for them. With the intrusion of the upper Hindu castes and other new castes and communities in the agrarian society, the economic and social life of the indigenous majority castes also undergone perceptible changes. Manifestation of one of such changes in economic sphere was found in the commercialisation of agriculture. Changes in social and cultural life was revealed in the form of spread of English education among these indigenous castes, and gradual adoption and emulation of culture of the Hindu upper castes.

III.9.2 The process of economic displacement which started in the last decade of the nineteenth century had been aggravated in the third decade of the twentieth century by pushing out the majority of the Rajbanshis and Muhammadans, the two indigenous castes and communities, to dependable subsistence. Pauperisation increased by loss of land and transfer of wealth from their possession which told upon their social fabric. Plantation and urban economy had no visible

spread effect on the household economy of the poor jotedars, chukanidars and adhiars. On the contrary, the economic disparities which had already crept in the society was further widened. Naturally, the thorn which hurt the indigenous people most was that they were made to feel as aliens in terms of economy and culture in their own land¹⁴⁵.

III.9.3 Most of the people of the rural society of the Duars were men of the comparatively lower echelons of the Hindu and Muslim communities. In the social structure of Bengal of the nineteenth century there were tremendous influence of caste and creed. The Rajbanshis were looked upon as low caste Hindus¹⁴⁶. Some people of this caste have been referred as men of "Nasya" caste in the Census Reports¹⁴⁷. Perhaps the word "Nasya" was derived from the Bengali word "Nasto" meaning "spoiled". Some Hindus converted into Muslims due to social and economic reasons comprised the people of this community.

Nevertheless,

III.9.4 the kind of social and economic inequalities which causes the formation of classes were not observed in the rural society of the Duars in the last century. All the people of a village, as if, belonged to a single community. Caste or creed-led inequality which was an important characteristic of the growing South Bengal villages in the last century was not visible in the rural society of the Duars region of North Bengal.

Most of the local jotedars in the Western Duars cultivated lands themselves. They employed their poor relatives and friends as sharecroppers and under-tenants. The habitation of the latter used to be formed around the houses of the jotedars. Similar food and dress, social status, attitude to physical labour and family relations - all helped to maintain a social equality, balance and harmony. Although there were economic inequalities, that did not find its reflections in social relations.

III.9.5 But gradually a vertical change began to emerge in the rural society of the Western Duars. With the growth of population all waste lands were taken up for cultivation and the easy way to become jotedar was closed. Number of intermediaries increased. Differences of status also widened among the intermediaries. Adhiari (sharecropping) system became more profitable with the rise in prices of agricultural goods. As a result, the jotedar class began to depend more on adhiars instead of self-cultivation and tried to be the members of the Bhadrolok, i.e., the Bengalee middle class. Social cohesion even within a single community got loose with the passage of generations.

III.9.6 Due to the growing pressure of population, land became relatively scarce and came to be regarded as a more valuable property. Land prices also increased gradually. Cultivation of jute and food crops rose rapidly with their ever increasing demand. As the

landed property was unevenly distributed, income from cultivation of these crops was also unequal. Usually the lions share went to the jotedars, especially to the big ones who cultivated commercial crops like tobacco and jute in larger acreage. Above all, the jotedar class began to emulate the standard of living, habits and manners of the elite (Bhadrolok) class living at urban centres. They began to immigrate to urban centres, availed the opportunities of English education and began to treat physical labour as inferior. In consequence, social and economic inequality was gradually accentuated and the concept of exploitation crept in. Many jotedars sold their jotes to tea companies and converted the sales proceeds into shares. Thus the tendency to invest grew and the traditional attitude to investment was changed.

III.9.7 The rural society of the Western Duars was different from that of the other areas of the contemporary Bengal. Firstly, the villages of other parts of Bengal were well established and social relations were determined by caste and creed assimilations. On the contrary, the villages of the Western Duars were not well set and the differences of caste and creed was not much distinct. Secondly, the forms of professions pursued and the level of education attained by the rural people of other parts of Bengal

was not possible to be acquired by the people of rural Western Duars due to a difference in the socio-economic set up. The upper caste people did not cultivate lands themselves in the former area and evinced an apathy towards

physical labour. The main source of their livelihood was from rent income and cultivation by employing share-croppers. Later on, they became the chief members of the 'Babu' community of the British administration when their income from agricultural source appeared to be insufficient. They could assimilate themselves with the colonial administration by taking English education. This special component of the Bengalee middle class was basically caste based and consisted of the upper caste Hindus and the elites among the Muslims. Thirdly, in the southern parts of Bengal landlords were mostly inhabitants of urban centres and depended on surplus income from agriculture. Most of these absentee landlords formed the new urban middle class. Its consequence was that the relation between the landlords and share-croppers deteriorated and contradiction between them sharpened. But the situation in the Western Duars was not exactly like this. Here most of the jotedars were residents on or near their jotes and very often socially related to their share-croppers and under-tenants and mostly belonged to the same caste. Here, income of most of the jotedars was derived mainly and very often only from agriculture. Absentee landlordism in the Western Duars, as already noted earlier, was a later date event and originated in the first decade of the twentieth century and gained a place of significance from its third decade. For these reasons, the agrarian unrest that took place in other parts of Bengal long ago did not occur in the Western Duars until the forties of this century. Indeed, no peasant movement occurred here before the Tebhaga movement of the late forties

of the present century.

III.9.8 However, after independence, due to the influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), pressure of population on land further aggravated and created new forms of contradictions and social tensions and further brought about a qualitative change in the economic life of the people of the region.

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

1. We have narrated in detail about the disorderly state of things during the Ehtanese regime in Chapter II. The history of annexation of Western Duars has been described in ^{the} Appendix to this Chapter.
2. Grunning, J.F., Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad Pioneer Press, 1911, p. 84.
3. Baden-Powell, B.H., Land System of British India, Vol. I, New York, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972, p. 444. Baden-Powell notes : "... The student will mark this, and not confuse the 'raiyatwari tracts' of modern Bengal Reports with the raiyatwari districts of Bombay, Madras, . In the latter, Government treats the raiyats not as its tenants, but as individual proprietors - whether called in law 'proprietors' or 'occupants' - and assesses their holding to land-revenue properly so called. The term 'raiyatwari tract' in the eleven Bengal districts in which it occurs, means that there is no proprietor but Government, and that Government acts directly as the landlord, taking rent from the tenants, which rent it enhances, just as any other landlord does under the law".
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, p. 446.
6. Ibid, p. 499.
7. Please see ^{the} Appendix to this Chapter for Land Laws of Western Duars.
8. Baden-Powell, B.H., op. cit., p. 444.
9. Ibid, pp. 448-49.
10. Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, London, Trübner & Co., 1876, p. 283. The enquiry was made by Mr. J. Tweedie, the first Deputy Commissioner of the Western Duars. This enquiry report has been quoted in a condensed form in Hunter.
11. Roy Choudhury, Tapas K., "Land Control : Class Structure and Class Relations in Western Duars (1871-1905)" in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, June, 1987, p. 25 (off print).

12. Grunning writes : "For six years after the cession of the Western Duars by the Bhutias, the policy followed was to collect all recognised dues without altering the amount". Gruning, J.F. , op. cit., p. 88.
13. Mr. P. Nolan's "Note on the Settlement of the Western Duars" inserted in Sunder, D.H.E., Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, The Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1895, p. 17.
14. Ibid, p. 41.
15. Ibid, p. 41.
16. Ibid., p. 18.
17. Gruning, J.F., op. cit., p. 88. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 44. Total amount of reduction was Rs. 17,806 in 1295 jotes. Another Rs. 5,465 was lost by relinquishments and desertions.
18. Ibid., p. 18.
19. Milligan, J.A., Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District, 1906-16, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1919, p. 78.
20. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 118.
21. Baden-Powell, B.H., A Manual of the Land Revenue Systems and Land Tenures of British India, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1882, p. 243.
22. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 118.
23. Please see ^{the} Appendix ^{to this Chapter} to have an idea of the evolution of various forms of jotes and leases.
24. For further details of the incidents of a jote please see ^{the} Appendix ^{to this Chapter}.
25. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 125.
26. Discussion on this issue has been made in Chapter II.

27. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 83.
28. Ibid., p. 83.
29. Ibid., p. 84.
30. Form of the lease was approved by the Government.
31. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 118. Milligan J.A., op. cit., pp. 84-85.
32. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 119.
33. Ibid., p. 119.
34. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 85.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 138.
38. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 118.
39. In the Bengal Tenancy (B.T.) Act of 1885 it was laid down that a tenant could not be evicted from land if he is in occupation for at least twelve years. The B.T. Act was, however, not applicable in the Western Duars.
40. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 86.
41. Mukherjee, B.B., Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement Operations in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1931-35, Alipore, Superintendent, Government Printing, 1939, p. 66.
42. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 87.
43. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 119.
44. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 87. The degree of sub-infeudation does not appear to be much significant in view of the fact that the number of persons involved and area occupied by them was very small in comparison to the number of jotedars, chukanidars and adhiars. This is evident from the relevant figures in different settlement periods as given in tables III.2 and III.3 in Section 6 of this Chapter.
45. In 1888, Mr. Lewis in making the proposal for the settlement of 1889-95 wrote as follows about this class of cultivators:
"... As regards the mere adhiar he has no rights to be recorded, but his name should appear in the settlement papers and he should

have the same privilege as a non-occupancy raiyat, namely, he should not be liable to eviction, so long as he pays his rent". He further on defined the proja as one who "has no rights; he is an adhiar who pays a corn rent in the shape of half produce". Quoted in Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 88.

46. Ibid., p. 88.
47. Letter No. 893T dated 8th July, 1878 of the Government of Bengal to the Board of Revenue. Cited in Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 88.
48. Nolan, P., "Note on the Settlement of the Western Duars", cited in Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 21. Mr. P. Nolan was the then Commissioner of Rajshahi Division in which Western Duars was included.
49. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 89.
50. Cooper, Adrienne, Sharecropping and Sharecroppers' Struggles in Bengal 1930-1950, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1988, p. 23. Cooper notes : "In Dacca, for example, the landlords resisted attempts to record share croppers [i.e., adhiars], because any recognition of status would confer rights and diminish their control of the land". She further quotes : "Almost invariably, except in Bikrampur, the landlords claimed that the cultivators were their servants or hired labourers, that the whole crop belonged to their landlords and that the portion retained by the cultivator was merely the price of his labour. On these grounds the landlords claimed the right to eject the cultivator at will, and as a matter of practice this habit was not infrequent, the practice however is clearly inconsistent with tenant rights; the landlords relief largely on a misapplication of a ruling of the High Court (reported in Calcutta Weekly Notes Vol. XIII) known as the Pabna Ruling, by which they attempted to prove that bargadar (sharecropper) can not be a tenant, a misinterpretation founded on the very inaccurate precis of the ruling".

51. It was Mr. Lewis' view cited in Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 89.
52. Figures have been adjusted and calculated from Sunder's tables for "cost of cultivation and profits of jotedar and adhiar from one hal or five acres of land". Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., pp. 120-21.
53. Gruning, J.F., op. cit., p. 97.
54. Please see table III.2 of this chapter.
55. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 119.
56. That adhiars had to take loans from jotedars "unwillingly", i.e., due to need is evident from our analysis. Adhiars had also to take loans "unwillingly" as many jotedars made acceptance of bhuta or bhutali (an advance of 12 maunds of paddy) one of the conditions while taking new adhiars. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 119.
57. Ibid., p. 120.
58. Bhowmik, S.K., "Tebhaga Movement in Dooars" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXI, No. 22, May 31, 1986, p. 978.
59. Our finding for the Western Duars is corroborative to that of Cooper in her studies mentioned in note 50 above.
60. Amount of cultivable waste land was 392,693 acres in the settlement period 1889-95, 1,49,701 acres in 1906-16 and 2,453 acres in 1931-35. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 113; Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. vii, xi, xvii (Appendix); Mukherjee, B.B., p. 92 and p. 95.
61. Details of the kinds of exactions and non-economic forms of exploitations which created a "dependency web " have been laid down in the next section.
62. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 90.
63. Ibid., p. 89.
64. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 119.
65. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 89.

66. Ibid., pp. 89-90.
67. Ibid., p. 90.
68. Ibid.
69. Cited in Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 21.
70. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 91.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., p. 92.
73. Mukherjee, B.B., op. cit., pp. 94-100
It is rather strange that there is neither mention nor discussion on adhiari system of cultivation in Mr. Mukherjee's Settlement Report except that only the lands held by adhiars have been shown in Appendix IV, without mentioning their number. The probable reasons have been discussed in course of our analysis later in this chapter.
74. We use the words "most of the parts" because in some parts of Bengal where land was relatively plentiful, upto the year mentioned, might enjoy the same privileged position as in the Duars region upto 1920.
75. There is no mention of existence of agricultural labourers in the Western Duars in Survey and Settlement Reports of the British period.
76. Xaxa, V., "Evolution of Agrarian Structure and Relations in Jalpaiguri District (West Bengal)", in Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1980, p. 79.
77. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 90.
78. Ibid, p. 91.
79. Please see Chapter V for details.
80. Mitra, Ashok, Census of India 1951, Vol. VI, District Census Hand book : Jalpaiguri, Calcutta, Government of West Bengal, 1953, p. LXXVI.

81. Bhowmik, S.K., "Tebhaga Movement in Duars" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXI, No. 22, May 31, 1986, p. 980, note 22.
82. Sunder, D.H.E., p. 120.
83. Bhowmik, S.K., op. cit., p. 978.
84. Mitra, Ashok, op. cit..
85. ✓ Dasgupta, Ranjit, "Peasants Workers and Freedom Struggle, Jalpaiguri 1945-47", in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XX, No. 30, Review of Political Economy, July 27, 1985, p. PE-42.
86. Gruning, J.F., op. cit., p. 86.
87. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 14.
88. Ibid., p. iii (Appendix)
89. Dasgupta, Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-47.
Ganguly, Samar, "Duarser Shramik O Krishak Bidroher Kahini" (in Bengali) in Roy, Dhananjay (ed.), Tarai Duarser Shramik Krishak Bidroha O Tebhaga Andolan (in Bengali), Calcutta, Pratibhas, 1988, p. 62.
90. Bhowmik, Nani, "Bikshubdha Duars" (in Bengali) in Swachhinata, May 4, 1947, cited in Dasgupta Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-47.
91. Dasgupta, Manoranjan, "Taraier Tebhaga Sangramer Katha" (in Bengali), in Roy Dhananjay (ed.), op. cit., p. 38.
92. Dasgupta, Sachin, "Tarai Anchaler Krishak Andolan" (in Bengali) in Roy, Dhananjay, op. cit., p. 17.
93. Dasgupta, Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-43.
94. Ibid. Ganguly, Samar, op. cit., pp. 56-61.
Dasgupta, Bimal, "Duarser Shramik Krishak Andolan O Tebhaga" (in Bengali) in Roy, Dhananjay (ed.), op. cit., pp. 64-79.
95. Dasgupta, Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-47.
96. Ibid.

97. Ibid., p. PE-48.
98. Swadhinata, April 11, 1947.
99. Dasgupta, Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-48.
100. Bhowmik, p. 143.
101. Dasgupta, Ranjit, op. cit., p. PE-47.
102. Dasgupta, Sachin, op. cit., p. 19.
103. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 78. Government Order No. 3637 of 26th May, 1893.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid., p. 81.
106. Ibid., p. 80.
107. Ibid., p. 81.
108. Ibid., p. 82.
109. Roy Choudhury Tapas K., op. cit., p. 31.
110. Roy Choudhury Tapas K., "Duarser Bhumi-Rajaswa Byabasthar Bibartan" (in Bengali), in Madhuparni, December, 1987, p. 157.
111. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 83.
112. Ibid., p. 83.
113. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., Chapter XX, pp. 121-32.
114. Baden-Powell, B.H., The Indian Village Community, London, Green & Co., 1896, p. 139.
115. Ibid.
116. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., pp. 121-32.
117. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 93 and p. 97.
118. Increases in the rates of rent over different settlement periods have been shown in table III.9.
119. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., pp. 118-19.
120. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 137.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid., p. 139.
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid., p. 136.
125. Ibid., p. 137.
126. Ibid., p. 120 and p. 136.

127. Please see note 60 above.
128. It may be noted that, although tea cultivation began in this area since 1874, for several reasons almost the entire labour force was recruited from outside the area and the state for several reasons as noted in Chapter IV.
129. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 138. Milligan observed : "I found a number of cases in which the jotedar had created a benami chukani in favour of some member of his own family at a rent which left only a normal profit to the jotedar. He then proceeded to sell the jote to a tea-garden coolie or other ignorant person at the full price of unencumbered land. The purchaser found on trying to settle down and cultivate the lands he had bought that the fraudulent chukanidar was securely in possession and that all he had purchased was the right to make an infinitesimal profit on the annual rental. In some cases such chukanis were found recorded in Mr. Sunder's papers...".
130. Ibid., p. 87. Xaxa, V., op. cit., p. 72.
131. However, from the area of land cultivated by adhiars during this settlement (shown in Table III.3), it can, reasonably, be inferred that adhiars were quite numerous during this period; though, in all probabilities, it appears that the area cultivated was under-reported by tenants employing adhiars due to the then socio-political condition.
132. Xaxa, V., op. cit., p. 82.
133. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 118.
134. Roy Choudhury Tapas, K., op. cit., p. 137.
135. Gruning, J.F., op. cit., p. 101.
136. Ibid.
137. Mukherjee, S., "Jalpaiguri Zelar Samajik Kathamo" (in Bengali) in Madhuparni, December, 1987, p. 167.

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138. Xaxa, V., "Colonial Capitalism and Underdevelopment in North Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, No. 39, September 28, 1985, p. 1663.
139. Gruning, J.F., op. cit., pp. 59-61.
140. Chakrabarti, H.K., A Socio-Economic Study of the Meches in a Selected Areas of North Bengal, unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the North Bengal University, 1979, p. 69.
141. Roy Choudhury, Tapas K., op. cit., pp. 39-40.
142. Ibid., pp. 43-46.
143. Sanyal, C.C., *The Meches and the Totos of North Bengal*, The University of North Bengal, 1973, pp. 21-22.
144. Roy Choudhury Tapas K., op. cit., p. 42.
145. Ibid., p. 47.
146. Mukherjee, S., op. cit., p. 151.
147. Ibid. Roy Choudhury Tapas K., op. cit., p. 43.

CHAPTER - IVPLANTATION SECTOR : ITS IMPACT ON THE SUBSISTENCE
SECTOR OF THE WESTERN DUARSSECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

IV.1.1 Tea plantation had its beginning in the district from the year 1874. Thereafter, the growth of the plantation industry was very rapid. It showed a very large investments of capital in the contemporary times¹. A rough estimate of the total capital invested in this industry made on the basis of a per-acre investment requirement of Rs. 400 to Rs. 500 for clearing, planting and bringing to bearing stage a tea estate in the early days gives the following figures². In 1881, the total area under tea was 35,683 acres and the amount of capital invested was between Rs. 1.42 crores to Rs. 1.78 crores. Area under tea rose to 76,158 acres in 1891, showing a corresponding rise in investment within Rs. 3.04 crores to Rs. 3.8 crores. In 1911, the tea acreage in the Western Duars went up to 88,000 acres while the total investment on tea increased and remained within the limit of Rs. 3.52 crores to Rs. 4.4 crores³.

IV.1.2 Thus, this region experienced the penetration of the British capital in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, curiously enough, the area which received investment on such a large scale, had a stagnant social formation because of its semi-feudal production relations, archaic technique of agricultural production and the corresponding low level of productivity⁴. It will, therefore, be interesting

to study the way in which these substantial investments made by the English merchant capitalists ^{helped} in transforming the underdeveloped socio-economic formation as found in this region. It is also interesting to study the impact of the plantation sector on the growth and development of the traditional subsistence sector. But a proper study of these aspects requires initially a study on the history of the development of tea cultivation in the Western Duars along with an analysis of the pattern of plantation and agrarian social structure as found in the plantation vis-a-vis agrarian sectors.

SECTION 2 : THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEA CULTIVATION
IN THE WESTERN DUARS

IV.2.1 Plantation industry was started in this area by the British merchant capitalists, followed latter by the Bengalee planters settled in Jalpaiguri town. The local peasantry in the Duars did not participate in the growing of tea. Tea gardens were started by the British planters on "culturable waste land" taken in lease directly from the colonial government. In the Darjeeling hills, tea plantations began in 1856. When no more land was available in the Darjeeling hills, the submontane tract of the Western Duars attracted the attention of the planters. The first tea garden in the Western Duars was set up in 1874 by Mr. Brougham. The second garden was opened at Fulbari and owned by Colonel Edward Money. Colonel Money was an enthusiastic entrepreneur. Writing in the tea Encyclopaedia in 1881 he declared, "I thought years ago, when I first began work there and the place was a howling wilderness, that the said Western Duars would eventually prove the best tea district in India".

IV.2.2 The early British planters started tea plantations on an extensive scale, as there was an abundant supply of culturable waste land in the Duars in those days. Grant of land for tea cultivation was liberally made to the intending planters at nominal rents and, therefore, allotments were taken in extensive blocks. It can be known from the Census Report of 1911 that "Almost all the available land suited for tea cultivation in this district has now been taken up and further expansion of tea cultivation can not be very great"⁶.

IV.2.3 The first indigenous entrepreneur was Mr. Rahim Bux, the peskar to the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri. He took a lease of 728 acres of land for the purpose of tea cultivation in 1877. Between 1879 and 1910, the Jalpaiguri capitalists floated eleven tea companies having a total capital of Rs. 11.25 lakhs⁷. But compared to the British entrepreneurship, the Indian entrepreneurship grew very slowly during the 19th century. Activity of the latter gathered momentum from the second decade of the twentieth century. The reasons for the late advent of the Jalpaiguri Indians in tea plantations have been enumerated to be four — (i) lack of confidence of the Indians in their own ability to carry out successfully the projects demanding comparatively large investments, (ii) non-availability of land, (iii) depression in the industry and (iv) the lack of access of the Indian community to the organised money market in Calcutta or elsewhere. All these problems were of a temporary nature and the Indian entrepreneurs could overcome them within a short time⁸.

IV.2.4 Between 1912 and 1919, the Bengalee entrepreneurs of Jalpaiguri town entered the tea industry in the Duars in large numbers. But, by then most of the good tea growing land was already in the possession of the English planters. Hence, many of the latecomers had to convert "jote" lands (ordinary cultivable lands) into tea plantations. These lands were settled as "jote" lands under the settlement operations conducted between 1889 and 1895 by Mr. D.H.E. Sunder, the then Settlement Officer of Western Duars. But the conversion of jote lands into tea lands was banned by the Government in 1914. This was done perhaps under the pressure from the British planters, who did not favour the penetration of indigenous entrepreneurs into the plantation industry. Whatever might be the reason, it could at best be said that it was indeed a belated attempt on the part of the Govt. to stop transfer of land in Western Duars, from small resident cultivators to non-resident non-cultivators⁹. However, the governmental policy checked temporarily the penetration of indigenous entrepreneurs into tea plantation. They had to wait till 1924 for the further expansion of their activities when a decision to lift the ban was taken following a visit to Jalpaiguri of the then Governor of Bengal in 1921. Nevertheless, the share of the Bengalee entrepreneurs in the industry was necessarily small both in terms of capital invested and acreage. This would be evident from table IV.1 below.

IV.2.5 The table shows at a glance the ownership pattern of tea companies in Jalpaiguri district as on March 31, 1933. The overwhelming dominance of Europeans in the tea industry is quite apparent.

They owned and controlled 82 percent of the total area under tea in the district.

TABLE IV.1 - OWNERSHIP PATTERN OF TEA COMPANIES IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT AS ON 31.3.1933

Type of ownership	Area under tea (hectates)	Percentage of total area under tea
A. Public Ltd. Co.		
i) Sterling	26,198.67	48
ii) European Rupee	17,336.87	30
iii) Indian Rupee	11,308.69	19
B. Private Ltd. Cos.		
i) European	1,016.09	2
ii) Indian	583.36	1
C. Proprietorship Estates		
i) Europeans	1,005.49	2
ii) Indians	1,069.97	2

Source : Mukherjee, S., Emergence of Bengalee Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantations of Jalpaiguri District (1879-1933), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Bengal, 1978, p. 197.

SECTION 3 : PATTERN OF PLANTATION AND AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

IV.3.1 The capitalistic mode of production was brought along with the emergence of large scale British capital investment in the tea plantation estates of the Western Duars. The class structure that

emerged was analogous to that of the modern industrial sector. The new class structure comprised of the small number of managers with their assistants and the large chunk of plantation labourers who formed the top and bottom section respectively of the plantation class structure. In between these categories, there was the intermediate class of white collar employees in tea estates known as babus who were the clerical staff. The class differences were often coupled with ethnic differences. The first group of people mentioned above were mostly Europeans and Anglo-Indians. The intermediate class consisted of mainly Bengalees, and the plantation labourers were invariably tribals comprising different ethnic groups with their own languages, culture and customs. The class differentiation along such ethnic lines brought about ethnic and class solidarity among the managerial and intermediate class¹⁰.

IV.3.2 While the above was the condition in the northern part of Western Duars, the southern part was steadily being brought under cultivation. Agriculture in the southern part, as already discussed in Chapter - III, was based on the ownership of tenures large or small by the jotedars, who rather than organising production on the basis of hired labourers, preferred to lease out some parts on various tenurial arrangements for the purpose of actual cultivation. Such arrangement eventually resulted in the widespread practice of infeudation and sub-infeudation of the same plot of land, in view of the relative shortage of land with the growth of population together with the absence of an alternative source of earning in the rural front¹¹.

IV.3.3 Thus, the agrarian structure that developed consisted of a small number of landlords (jotedars) and other intermediaries and a huge mass of peasant population with a differential tenurial rights over small holdings. Agricultural production was largely subsistence-oriented. Production for the market formed a small portion of land under cultivation¹². But the striking point to note is that such a subsistence economy with many features of pre-capitalist relations of production became all the more entrenched, even though there was a phenomenal growth of the plantation industry which was capitalistic in character. This pattern of development has led many scholars to treat these societies as having a dual social structure. A persistence of two different modes of production relations and levels of productivity, had separated the small peasant economy of the Western Duars from the more prosperous plantation enclaves, giving birth to a dualism in the economy where a capitalistic nucleus co-existed with an archaic structure¹³.

SECTION 4 : IMPACT OF THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY ON THE WESTERN DUARS ECONOMY

IV.4.1 With the above background, let us now explore the impact of the plantation sector on the subsistence sector. Broadly speaking, there could have been four types of conducive effects - (i) absorption of surplus population of the subsistence sector by the plantation sector, (ii) growth of markets of local agricultural products needed by the

plantation population, (iii) diversification of the traditional economy by helping the growth of agro-based small industries and industries for supplying various inputs needed by the tea industry and (iv) investment of a part of the surplus generated in the plantation sector for the development of the subsistence sector. In the following paragraphs, we have made a detailed discussion of each of these effects in seriatim under different sub-heads.

(i) Absorption of surplus population of agricultural sector

IV.4.2 The pressure of population on land was increasing gradually due to the declining quantum of culturable waste land and influx of population from the neighbouring areas¹³. A detailed discussion of this has been made in Chapter III. Therefore, it would have been a boon to the agrarian economy if a part of the surplus population could be siphoned off from the subsistence sector to the fast growing plantation sector. This could, on the one hand, lessen the extra burden of population from agriculture, thereby making an outlet for gainful employment, and on the other, raise the per capita income of the remaining population and also reducing the burden of rent that was imposed on them. But, this did not and could not happen as most of the labourers were recruited from Chotanagpur plateau of Madhya Pradesh and Santhal Parganas of Bihar¹⁴.

IV.4.3 For several reasons labourers were not recruited from the Duars and the neighbouring areas. Firstly, the planters might think that the locally recruited labour force would not only be unsteady but

also would demand higher wages than the labourers recruited from outside the State. About the lower wages for emigrant labourers in tea gardens and higher wages in the agricultural sector, the sub-divisional officer of Karimganj (Assam) reported in 1883 : "... the rate of wages of (Emigration) Act labourers (was) less than rupees three per month during the last season. Bengalees in the adjoining villages earned without difficulty rupees seven per month"¹⁵. The wages for day labourers or agricultural labourers in Jalpaiguri district were three annas to four annas per day, i.e., around rupees seven per month¹⁶. This is why inspite of incurrence of a high initial expenses in recruitment, preference was for recruitment from outside the State. Secondly, the local people like the Rajbanshis, Muhammadans and the tribal people of the Duars such as the Ravas, Meches and Totos were not available for work in tea gardens. They were unwilling to work in tea gardens, perhaps due to the unhealthy climate and more importantly on account of their age-old affinity to agricultural pursuits. The areas most suited for tea cultivation were covered with thick unhealthy forests which had to be cleared. Thus, the low wages, hazardous conditions of work and unwillingness to give up independent agricultural pursuits provided strong disincentives for the local population. Thirdly, the recruitment of labourers for plantation estates in north-east India from the tribal belt in Chotonagpur and Santhal Pargana had become a wide practice. It was easy to recruit labourers from the said zones on account of the abject poverty of these labourers¹⁷. These unfortunate tribal peoples were alienated from their lands and their traditional rights due to the disastrous effects of

permanent settlement, viz., rack-renting, resumption, subletting and increased indebtedness¹⁸. Moreover, since 1859, famines, floods and occasional scarcities played havoc in their economic life¹⁹. Employment of these poverty-stricken tribal labourers at low wages, in fact, entailed the highest possible profit to the planters. Finally, local labourers used to be employed earlier in indigo cultivation. But the experience was uncomfortable because employment of such labourers resulted in the mutiny of 1859. Memory of this mutiny was still fresh in the minds of the British capitalists at the beginning of tea plantation in this area.

IV.4.4 That almost all the tea garden labourers were recruited from outside in the tea gardens of the Western Duars is not an isolated event. This pattern of recruitment from outside the local area was more or less a rule rather than an exception in most cases of plantation in other parts of the world.

IV.4.5 Prof. Myrdal has paid a considerable attention to this problem. He points out in his celebrated book "Asian Drama" : "As in mercantilist times, in Europe there was little enthusiasm in the colonies for experimenting with the wage scale to test responses. Indeed, there was never, even on the intellectual level, a discussion of using higher wages to induce workers to accept conditions of steady, disciplined work. It was also cheaper and simpler to seek out labour - usually from a considerable distance - that could be acquired at low wages. Organised recruiting had a further recommendation : workers when far removed from their homes, were more amenable to discipline. The vested interest of

employers in a cheap labour supply was only plainly demonstrated. In Burma, where new land for cultivation was readily available, the local peoples could not be persuaded to work at low wage rates which imported Indians would accept. On this point a Mercantilist way of reasoning was most cheaply apparent, for the Government subsidised the importation of Indian coolies with a view to bringing down the rate of wages"²⁰.

"The picture was less clear-cut on the Indian sub-continent. In places where a particularly rapid development in a new line of activity raised the long-term demand for regular labour, as for instance on the plantations or in the coal mines ... labourers were brought in from remote regions. That, in India, resort to foreign labour - that is, labour from other colonies - was not taken is simply a reflection of the fact that India, being so large, included regions in which labour could be made plentifully available. Often tribal people were herded together and made to work under strict supervision at low rates of pay"²¹.

IV.4.6 The result of this policy of the planters was that there were unprecedented inflow of "immigrants" to the Western Duars as well as in the whole district of Jalpaiguri. The rapid increase in the number of people in Jalpaiguri district between the period 1891 to 1941 is shown below in Table IV.2.

TABLE IV.2 - IMMIGRATION TO JALPAIGURI (1891-1941)

Year	Actual population	Immigrants
1891	433,334	44,329(10.23)
1901	544,906	95,899(17.60)
1911	661,282	152,174(23.01)
1921	694,054	163,024(23.49)
1931	739,160	158,757(21.48)
1941	845,702	156,765(18.54)

Source : Mitra, A., Census of India, 1951, Vol. VI, Part IA,
Calcutta, 1953, p. 264, Statement 1.91.

IV.4.7 For the reasons enumerated above, the Duars and its neighbouring areas were left out of the purview of the labour recruiting zone for the plantation estates. This trend of recruitment that was set at the beginning of the plantation industry continued for the later period also. As a result, the surplus agricultural labour force that was evident from the growing practice of infeudation and sub-infeudation in the later years of the British rule²² did not find gainful employment in the plantation sector. It may be noted here that culturable waste land was not scarce but the fact was that such lands were not available for ordinary cultivation. Firstly, because from the beginning of the British survey and settlement, an attempt was made by the Government to earmark lands either for ordinary or for special cultivation. Such a restrictive policy kept the local peasantry not only out of the advantages

of expansion of cultivation but also left a large tract of land at the possession of the plantation estates. Moreover, since 1914, many tea estates had taken leases of jote lands, i.e., lands which were originally earmarked for ordinary cultivation²³. However, of the total area leased in by the tea estates, only about one half was generally brought under actual cultivation of tea. The rest was used for ancillary activities like reserve for fuel, free grant of land for personal cultivation of labour households, settlement of labourers in the estate and other related activities²⁴. A portion of the leased in land was also kept for future expansion. Secondly, a considerable part of the waste lands was declared as "reserved forest" by the Government. This sharply reduced the amount of land that could have been made available to the land hungry tenantry of the area²⁵. Besides, the growing population did not find employment elsewhere in other sectors which remained almost underdeveloped. For example, in 1921, industrial establishments other than plantations, as shown in Table IV.3 below, employed a total number of 536 skilled workers of whom 36 were women. The predominantly rural character of the district of Jalpaiguri²⁶ is obvious from the fact that only 315 unskilled workers including 85 women were engaged in non-farm jobs outside plantation. Even the growth of employment in the plantation industry was already slowing down. But the population in the tract was increasing gradually.

IV.4.8 The result was that an ever increasing population seeking employment continued to fall back upon traditional agriculture to eke out a living rather than moving out to plantation estates, which in view

of the enormous growth of the latter could have surely relieve the subsistence sector of the growing labour force. This fact of non-absorption of surplus labour force of the traditional sector left its deep mark on the underdeveloped structure of the region.

(ii) Growth of markets for local agricultural products

IV.4.9 Impact of the growth of the tea industry was also minimal in this respect, though not altogether nil. Whatever positive impact was left that happened without any conscious or well-intended motive of this sector; rather it was inflicted in the process of developing and maintaining itself. This happened due to the very nature of the plantation population and the mode of management of the estates.

IV.4.10 Transport and communication had developed in this region for meeting the needs of the plantation sector in the matter of transportation of processing and manufacturing machineries, building materials, coal etc. and also for exporting its product, i.e., tea. Extension and development of the communication system in addition to serving its above mentioned needs also opened up the need for the growth of towns and markets. At this time, most of the towns and markets of the Duars grew at various points along the railway lines. Besides these, weekly markets (hats) were also held in most of the tea estates in the region. These markets became the regular meeting points of the peasant and plantation population. Labourers of the tea estates constituted the majority of the consumers in these markets and collected their essentials and luxuries from them. It opened up an outlet for the peasants in the

TABLE IV.3 - INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENTS (OTHER THAN PLANTATIONS) IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT IN 1921.

Description of establishment	No. of establishments	Total No. of persons employed		Manager		Supervisory and technical staff		Clerical staff		Skilled workmen (Indian)		Unskilled workmen* (Indian)	
		M	F	Euro-peans or Anglo-Indians	Indian	Euro-peans or Anglo-Indians	Indian	Euro-peans & Anglo-Indians	Indians	M	F	M	F
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Jute presses	3	103	3	1	2	1	-	-	9	74	8	-	-
Tea-chest and three-ply wood factories	1	259	69	1	-	9	1	-	19	84	-	137	66
Land rolling mills	1	44	-	1	-	2	-	-	2	1	-	38	-
Brick, tile and fire-brick factories	6	344	58	-	6	-	7	-	11	210	28	98	19
Railway workshop	1	175	-	1	-	-	-	-	3	118	-	53	-
Printing presses	2	40	-	-	2	-	16	-	1	13	-	4	-

*Figures refer to workmen aged over 14 years. Brick and tile factories engaged 23. Workmen below 14 years of whom 11 were females. Printing presses engaged 4 workmen below 14 years.

Source: Bengal District Gazetteer, B Volume, Jalpaiguri District, Calcutta, 1923, Table XXX.

Note: M - Male
F - Female

subsistence sector to dispose of their commodities like rice, pulses, fish, oil, vegetables and other goods²⁷.

IV.4.11 In this way, a constant interaction took place between the plantation sector and the peasant sector. Nevertheless, the plantation estates and the emerging market centres and townships could not create sufficient demand so as to place the subsistence sector to the take off stage. There were several reasons for such a state of affair. First, the wage rates of labourers on the one hand were very low and stagnant, on the other the prices of food grains and other goods were rising steadily which resulted in the low purchasing power and hence low demand for agricultural goods²⁸. Secondly, there was the system of supplying consumer goods at a subsidised rate to the plantation labourers. Labourers and other employees were supplied with food grains, mustard and kerosene oil, salt, sugar, gur etc. and also some clothings²⁹. Supply of these goods lessened the dependence of a good number of consumers on the local market. At the same time the bulk purchase of these goods to supply them to the labourers was not made from the district or its neighbourhood but from the big trading companies, who procured these articles mainly from the southern part of Bengal and sometimes from other provinces³⁰. Thirdly, a part of the land not actually brought under tea cultivation used to be parcelled out into small plots and distributed to the labourers as free grant for personal cultivation of subsistence crops³¹. Production of food crops, vegetables etc. on such lands met some portion of the demand of these goods. The total market demand for the produces of the subsistence sector could not rise much for this

reason also. Lastly, the growth of the local market was also retarded by the very nature of the tribal labourers, who were accustomed to simple and bare living. It had a dampening effect on the demand in the local market. All the same, the big trading companies could not cater to all the requirements of the plantation estates. The left-over demands of the plantation estate stimulated the growth of the towns and market centres. Suppliers, shop-keepers, merchants and money lenders could do substantial business at these places³².

IV.4.12 : Thus, the low level of wages, relative preponderance of payment in kind and a link with the vestiges of the peasant economy as found to have retained by the plantation labourers ruled out a rapid expansion of the rural market of food grains. So, the benefits of the plantation economy reached the peasants in the subsistence sector only to the limited extent. Nevertheless, "... the plantations could contribute, at least indirectly, to the growth of the hinterland area. The chief economic advantage of the plantation industry lies in its ability to secure a high return by employing a large number of unskilled labourers. The only skill that is required of the plantation workers is the ability to obey orders. Had wages of plantation workers been higher than the requirements of a narrowly defined subsistence minimum, production in local agriculture and small-scale manufacturing sector dominated by potters, weavers, blacksmiths, cobblers etc. would certainly have been stimulated by an increased demand for food and simple manufactures, from the workers. In this way the tea plantations here could

indirectly pass a part of their output to the population in the hinterland and thereby increase their income. But ... due to their low income and consequent low standard of living, agriculture and local manufacture in the area did not receive the necessary demand-pull for development from the tea garden workers"³³.

(iii) Diversification of the traditional subsistence economy through the growth of agro-based and plantation related industries.

IV.4.13 The expected conducive impact of the plantation sector in this respect was, in fact, nil. There were two causes for this. The soil of the Duars was suitable for cultivating various types of fruits and vegetables. The government officials found potentialities of producing such crops³⁴. But, no effective measures were taken to demonstrate and explore the possibilities. There was also no initiative on the part of the farmers as these garden-produces brought for sale in the market did not bring adequate prices for the reasons enumerated earlier. These facts acted as disincentive on the propensity of the peasants to take the risks involved in commercial agriculture, and caused the agrarian sector to remain mainly subsistence-oriented. However, plantation industry created a market for itself. It was dependent on other means of production like machines, tools, farm implements and other inputs. Again, the tea estates also needed a large quantity of fertilisers such as phosphate, ammonium sulphate, potash and others. They gave a strong support to the fertiliser industry. Tea was also the mainstay of the plywood industry as tea chests in large quantity were required for despatch of tea to various sale centres in India and abroad. Yet, neither

the fertiliser nor the plywood industry could emerge and flourish in the region, as all these were imported from outside and no steps were taken by any one to set up these industries. Tea industry also required different types of agricultural implements like the pruning knives, rakes, spades etc. But upto 1920, these articles were mainly imported from outside India by the tea estate owners. When the supply was stopped from England, the tea estates procured these items from organised and mechanised units outside the region³⁵. The task of indigenous and local blacksmiths or units was reduced only to the reconditioning of these implements. Thus the need of the plantation sector for many of its inputs could not help in developing the small scale industries producing plantation related inputs.

IV.4.14 If it had not been so, not only would it have diversified the regional economy but it would have further generated demand for articles of consumption in addition to already existing demands generated by the mass of the immigrant plantation population. This definitely could have a significant bearing on the peasant economy in diversifying its activities.

IV.4.15 The reasons for such an undesirable state of affair appears to us to be two, namely, procurement of the said articles from outside the region and the non-emergence of a class of dynamic entrepreneurs either from the plantation or the subsistence sector to set up such industries. If enterprising men with sufficient foresight would have emerged or immigrated to this region they could blaze the trail in this

regard. But, unfortunately this kind of men were not there. Thus, the possibilities of diversification of the subsistence sector through the establishment of agro-based or plantation related industries were throttled and hence capitalism in the form of plantation agriculture failed to bring about dynamic changes in the existing agrarian relations.

(iv) Investment of a part of surplus generated in the plantation sector for the development of the subsistence sector.

IV.4.16 [It is evident from the analysis above that generation of surplus and capital formation outside the class of the owners of tea estate and their managers was very limited. Nevertheless, the Marwaris through their supply business in tea gardens and money lending pursuits in the subsistence sector and Bengalee "babus" through their earning from employment in tea estates did a substantial saving. This saving was invested either in purchase of land or in the opening up of new business and expansion of the old ones in the neighbouring or district towns,] but in no way, these savings went into the improvement of agriculture. The plantation labourers also did some saving ~~in~~ spite of the low and stagnant wage rates, through overwork and by engaging their family labour for the maximum possible limit. A part of this saving was used for purchasing land in the subsistence sector but the major part was taken away to their native place for repayment of loans and spent on other agricultural requirements³⁶.

IV.4.17 The managers and their assistants earned a lot through high salaries, commissions and other benefits paid to the managerial staff

by the tea companies³⁷. So, the saving propensity was invariably high among the managerial staff. These high salaried managerial staff in the plantations were mostly Englishmen accustomed to high standard of living. But their number was small and most of their consumption needs were satisfied through supplies from their home³⁸. Therefore, the consumption expenditure of this class did not help in flourishing the indigenous manufactures. As the investors and managerial staff were predominantly foreigners, the surplus and profits earned by the plantation estates were siphoned off elsewhere for investment³⁹. "The appropriation of indigenously produced economic surplus by foreign capitalists for their own external use thus prevented its investment to meet indigenous needs. Had this not been so, there would have been greater potential for economic development in the peripheral social formation"⁴⁰.

IV.4.18 The Indian planters, in most of the occasions, also followed their British counterparts. The surplus earned by them was not invested in the district for promoting development activities there. Perhaps a greater part of the surplus was channelised to business in other places. However, no record or study is available in this regard. Of course, a part of the surplus was spent in the district but that was confined either to procuring of new leases, expansion of the existing estates, modernisation of processing plants or improvements of tea cultivation in the estates⁴¹. Thus it is observed that "if the foreign owners of the tea plantations were withdrawing the surplus from the area where it was generated for the purpose of investment in their home, the Indian owners of the Dooars tea plantations, mostly from Jalpaiguri town,

did not behave any differently in this matter. The latter also did not show much interest in the reinvestment of the surplus generated in the tea plantations, either for the expansion or development of the industry itself or for setting up other industries in the hinterland area. The rates of dividend were pretty high in the Indian tea companies although the divisible pool of surplus was smaller. Surplus from the plantations owned by Indians were also regularly drawn. It went on land, trading, speculation, real estate in the metropolitan city of Calcutta or simply financed luxury consumption, perhaps some charities. Hence in the matter of capital transfer to the non-agricultural sector of the plantation economy the foreign and Indian planters behaved similarly, albeit for different reasons"⁴². Thus, we see that the surplus generated in the plantation sector at the hands of the labourers, middle class employees as well as both Indian and foreign planters did not even partially come into circulation to initiate the developmental process in the traditional sector.

IV.4.19 There are two contrary views regarding the type of impact that the plantation industry produced on the social, economic and cultural development of Jalpaiguri district. One line of thought indicated that "the common people of Jalpaiguri derived some income from the tea companies and tea estates either as share-holders or suppliers, contractors, etc. The industry employed many educated persons and a host of labourers. All this resulted in the general prosperity of the people. So the cost of living in this district was much higher than that of many other districts of Bengal. As for cultural development, the numerous schools

including the defunct Jackson Medical School, colleges of various descriptions, which grew up in this town and district had the primary funds collected by the tea industry. The opera houses, play grounds, clubs and libraries drew their sustenance from the funds of tea industry. Medical, literary, political, musical and other cultural conferences held in this district, were mainly patronized by the tea industry. In fact, true urbanization with all facilities in the town and sub-division were mainly the product of money and men of tea industry"⁴³.

IV.4.20 The second line of thought indicated that "tea is an important industry which contributes substantially to betterment of economic life of this district and that in forest there is a vast exploitable resource which can be expected to contribute towards the general development of this district. Unfortunately, these two sizeable income and wealth generating sectors remain almost as enclaves and do not have either interdependence or complementarity with the agricultural or agro-industrial sector which is the primary field of economic activity of the major part of population. It can, therefore, be possibly stated without much error that economic life in the district depends on agriculture which is its primary and sole source of activity"⁴⁴.

IV.4.21 It can be seen that the first view has mainly emphasised the cultural and educational development of the urban centres of the district due to the growth of the tea industry. A critic of the first view observed that "Apart from making the obvious mistake of measuring the general prosperity of the district by the high cost of living the first

view on the matter has conveniently equated "people" with a minority of town-dwellers who certainly benefitted from direct or indirect connections with tea industry. It is true that educational, literary or cultural activities in the urban areas of the district received patronage from the tea planters but the poor and illiterate coolies employed in large numbers in the plantations or the small peasants or adhiars equally poor and illiterate, living on the fringes of the tea estates failed to derive any benefit from such patronage"⁴⁵. It would, therefore, be reasonable to presume that the said developments in the urban centres had only widened the economic and cultural gap and disparity between the urban and rural areas.

IV.4.22 However, from further evidence of facts, the second line of thought seems to be more realistic than the first one. Regarding the state of agriculture it has been observed that the "existing agricultural practices born of years are mostly traditional and agriculture in this district is strikingly characterized by low cost, low efforts, low return and low economy"⁴⁶. The settlement officer of Jalpaiguri district wrote in 1919 about the state of agricultural activities in this district as follows : "The backwardness of agriculture throughout the district is remarkable, the more so as the climate is so favourable. Not only is the variety and in some cases the quality of the crops grown exceedingly meagre, but the implements of agriculture are absolutely primitive and agricultural livestock are of the poorest quality. No attempt is made to exploit the possibilities which the soil and

climate hold out, but the cultivators go on doggedly growing rice and jute, rice and jute and again rice and jute"⁴⁷. The backwardness of agricultural development of the district points to the fact that under the colonial rule, the investment by merchant capital in plantations in a backward peasant economy tend to perpetuate its underdevelopment.

IV.4.23 Apart from its impact on the economic development of the region, the growth of tea plantation in the Duars had also its impact on the landholding pattern of the "sons of the soil" and other immigrant population. In this section we shall study the important question as to whether the expansion of the plantation industry led to the uprooting of the original inhabitants of the region, and if so, with what consequences. But let us first see who were the sons of the soil.

IV.4.24 The country of Western Duars, as noted earlier, can be subdivided into two parts having distinct topographies, viz., the northern and the southern parts. The northern part is a submontane tract of about ten to fifteen miles in width from the Bhutan Hills. The southern part of the country is a plain area which is further down to the northern border of Rangpur, Dinajpur (both now in Bangladesh) and the feudatory state of Cooch Behar. The northern part of Western Duars was covered with thick jungles and criss-crossed by numerous streams and rivulets. The climate was very unhealthy. Only the Meches could live there. They were a wandering tribe at that time and practised shifting cultivation. The special census of 1871 estimated that roughly 28% of the total population of Western Duars were the Meches who lived in this area⁴⁸.

They developed a tribal economy based on subsistence. The lower plains were comparatively habitable. A settled population lived there consisting of the Rajbanshis (65.9%) and the Muslims (12.3%)⁴⁹. As the plain area was suitable for ordinary cultivation, it attracted a large number of cultivators. However, settlement was mainly concentrated in the areas adjacent to the districts of British Bengal and the feudatory state of Cooch Behar. The settled population were by and large the immigrants from the neighbouring districts. "The upper belt was the virtual kingdom of Meches"⁵⁰. The Rajbanshis and the Muslims were immigrants. But they began to settle down long before the annexation of Duars took place. In the pre-annexation period, south Mainaguri was a part of Baikunthapur Zemindari. The Raikots, i.e., the Zemindars of Baikunthapur, settled these lands with the residents of Jalpaiguri. The Raikots being non-resident jotedars, encouraged the Rajbanshis and Koches to settle there as under-tenants. For some other reasons also early settlements were made in this area. But, in so far as Western Duars was concerned the Meches were, truly speaking, the sons of the soil.

IV.4.25... In the years 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941 the number of Meches in Jalpaiguri district was 22,350, 19,893, 10,777, 9,510 and 6,386 respectively⁵¹. There had been a net exodus of the Mech people from Jalpaiguri to Assam⁵². Though the real cause of exodus is not known it may be suggested that the establishment of tea gardens in the Duars might have prompted them to move eastward. One of the reasons is that tea gardens were established by converting the jungles and bushes where

the Meches used to practise their shifting cultivation. Eviction from their original places of habitat led the Meches to leave the place. Let us look at the location of tea gardens vis-a-vis the concentration of Mech population in the Western Duars.

IV.4.26 The major tea producing areas of Jalpaiguri district were Mal, Matiali, Nagrakata, Dhupguri, Madarihat and Kalchini. Among these police stations Mal, Matiali and Nagrakata have the highest concentration of tea estates. The spread of tea gardens gradually became thinner as one proceeded from western to eastern police stations of Jalpaiguri district. The following table would show this.

TABLE IV.4 - TOTAL AREA UNDER PLANTATIONS IN DIFFERENT POLICE STATIONS IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT IN 1906-07

Name of Police station	River boundary	Total number of estates	Total area under plantation (in acres)
Jalpaiguri Sadar		3	3824.87
Rajganj		2	2188.46
Mal	Tista-Jaldhaka	43	45924.79
Matiali		16	24444.88
Nagrakata		21	27801.04
Dhupguri		26	44757.60
Mainaguri		3	3568.65
Falakata		6	9136.71
Madarihat	Torsa-Raidak	13	29187.55
Kalchini		19	104368.61
Kumargram		1	20454.46
Birpara	Raidak-Sankosh	1	2549.61
Alipurduar		5	6783.98

Source: Mukherjee, S. - Emergence of Bengalee Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantations of Jalpaiguri District (1879-1933), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Bengal, 1978, p. 194.

IV.4.27 It can be seen from the table that in the Sadar sub-division of Jalpaiguri district (comprising the police stations Jalpaiguri and Rajganj) only about six thousand acres (i.e., about 2% of the total area) were taken up for tea cultivation in the given period. Except this small area, the tea planting areas of Jalpaiguri situate in the Western Duars part of the district. It is in this latter part and more particularly in Kalchini, Mal and Madarihat police stations, where both acreage and the number of estates were large, that the Mech population was concentrated⁵³.

IV.4.28 From Table IV.4 it is evident that most of the tea gardens in the Duars were set up in the areas between the river Tista and Jaldhaka, Torsa and Raidak, and Raidak and Sankosh⁵⁴. Comparing the location of the tea gardens with the areas where Meches were reported by D.H.E. Sunder in his settlement report (1889-95) to cultivate lands⁵³, it can be found that almost all the tea gardens were established in those areas where there had been large concentration of the Meches. For instance, Atiabari Tea Co. which was established in 1904, was reported by Mr. Sunder to be inhabited by the Meches who cultivated land by payment of Dao-tax. The establishment of this tea estate completely ousted the Meches who used to cultivate land in that area. In the same way, Bhatkhawa tea estate and Rajabhat tea estate which were established in 1903 and 1910 respectively, had perhaps taken away the opportunity of the Meches to cultivate in those lands. To add another example, the opening up of tea estates between Borojhar and the Buxa forests⁵⁶ which were reported by Mr. Sunder to be inhabited by the Meches⁵⁷, had thrown

the Meches out of cultivation from those areas. Examples of the conversion of land once cultivated and inhabited by the Meches into tea plantations can be multiplied.

IV.4.29 In fact, the progress of tea cultivation depended on the speedy settlement policy in the "waste" land. It has been mentioned that one of the major constraints of the expansion of tea cultivation in the first decade of the twentieth century was the scarcity of land. By 1907-08, no more waste lands were available. It compelled the Indian entrepreneurs to search for arable jote lands suitable for tea cultivation⁵⁸. Thus slowly but steadily jote lands were taken up by the Indian entrepreneurs in the Western Duars. This is evident from the Table IV.5 below.

TABLE IV.5 - NUMBER OF COMPANIES RAISED BY THE JALPAIGURI BENGALLEES BETWEEN 1912 & 1919 WITHIN THEIR ESTATES IN JOTE AND KHAS LANDS

Year	Number of companies	Area where their estates situated in	
		Jote	Khas
1912	8	6	2*
1913	5	5	-
1914	2	1	1
1915	-	-	-
1916	-	-	-
1917	6	6	-
1918	-	-	-
1919	8	8	-
Total	29	26	3

Source : Mukherjee, S. - op. cit., p. 200.

*The two entries in Jalpaiguri khas lands were virtually old estates, Gazuldoha and Kalabari. Khas lands and wate lands are the same.

IV.4.30 The above table reveals that between 1912 and 1914, of the 15 companies raised by the Bengalee entrepreneurs of Jalpaiguri, 11 companies happened to be situated in jote lands of Jalpaiguri district. In spite of the imposition of the ban, it can be found that 14 companies were raised in jote lands in Jalpaiguri district within the period under ban. As is mentioned earlier, the conversion of jote land into tea gardens came to a temporary halt in 1914, following a ban on such conversion by the Government. However, the ban was lifted in 1921 after which the expansion of the plantation mainly took place by converting jote lands into tea gardens⁵⁹. "The conversion of jote lands into tea estate was permitted by Board of Revenue and Government of Bengal [after the lifting of the ban]^{and} most of the estates were situated on jote land in the Jalpaiguri district areas"^{59A}.

IV.4.31 The settlement of waste land in a quicker pace and the gradual conversion of jote lands into tea estates resulted in uprooting of the Meches from their traditional places of habitat and perhaps led them to move further east, where land was still plenty. In this context Mr. Mukherjee observed : "Their eventual decline in this area can be explained in the following manner : the northern belt of Western Duars was gradually brought under tea cultivation after annexation. The Meches lived in this belt and having no proprietary right on land, were easily displaced. They migrated to east. Some of them settled in the easterly thanas (police stations) of Western Duars, i.e., Kalchini and Kumargram, but the rest migrated to Goalpara district of Assam"⁶⁰.

IV.4.32 It may be noted that there was a considerable increase of Mech population in the Goalpara district of Assam between the periods 1881 to 1901. In 1881, Mech population was 57,390, which rose to 73,760 in 1901. But there had been a considerable fall in the number of Mech population in the next two decades. Their number was 68,900 in 1911 and only 8,292 in 1931⁶¹. According to C.C. Sanyal, "the fall in the number [of Mech people] in later years is significant. The real cause is not known. Probably they went from Goalpara to further east or were absorbed into other castes or they recorded themselves as belonging to other branches of the same tribe. This is corroborated by other figures of 1961 census where in Goalpara there were 160,351 Bodo, 13,184 Kachari; in the rest of Assam there were 185,632 Bodo, 223,752 Kachari but in 1911 the figure was 168,429 in the whole of Assam"⁶². In the rest of Assam, the population figures for the Meches stood at 495 in 1881; 1,035 in 1901; 924 in 1931; and 6,840 in 1961⁶³.

IV.4.33 However, if we accept Hodgson's contention⁶⁴ that Mech and Bodo are the same and Mech is a name imposed by strangers and the people call themselves Bodo, which, of course, is the proper designation, or Grierson's observation⁶⁵ that the term Mech is, at present day, confined to the speakers of plain Kachari or Boro who dwell west of the district of Kamrup, then the Census figures of the Jalpaiguri district and the district of Goalpara of Assam show that the number of Mech people had fallen continuously in Jalpaiguri whereas the number had increased steadily in Goalpara over the periods from 1891 to 1931. C.C. Sanyal noted, "Analysing the figures of the Census Reports it appear that there was a large exodus of the Mech from Bengal towards

Assam and then further eastwards"⁶⁶.

IV.4.34 Mr. B.B. Mukherjee in his settlement report of Jalpaiguri district in 1935 pointed out that in competition the Meches would not stand the greater intelligence of the Rajbanshis and the Mahammadans to whom they sold their land in the more developed area and moved eastwards towards the less developed tracts, and most of them had crossed over to Assam⁶⁷.

IV.4.35 From the facts and figures cited above it appears that though social and psychological reasons might led the Meches in planning to leave Western Duars, the most important reason was that the establishment of tea gardens in the Duars might have promoted them to move eastward. It has already been shown above from various evidences that tea plantations were established by converting jungles and bushes, where the Meches used to practise their shifting cultivation, into plantations. Maulavi Wajih Uddin Ahmed, the settlement officer to the Deputy Commissioner, Jalpaiguri, in his report (1895) expressed concern for the Meches in the following words : "some specific area may be reserved for them [i.e., for the Meches], as in the event of all the lands hitherto occupied by them being taken up for tea cultivation, they will have no place to live in, and no land to cultivate. It will simply be driving them to starvation and ruin"⁶⁸. It is this apprehension of Mr. Ahmed which came to be true in practice and led many of the Meches, the "sons of the soil", to be evicted from land and ultimately led them

to leave Western Duars.

IV.4.36 But the Meches so evicted were not properly rehabilitated by the Government. They did not find employment in tea estates as most of the labourers were imported from outside the State for various reasons as stated earlier. It ^{been} has_^ observed that "With the beginning of tea gardens, in the 'waste lands' some Meches were reduced to the status of 'illegal squatters'. Some of them were, of course 'resettled', but not all of them. The 'resettlement' occurred also after a considerable 'time lag' (10 to 15 years). Meches were not given jobs in tea gardens. The condition of working was so severe and the wage rate was so unattractive, that the Meches or at least some of them went further east to Assam. In fact, the Meches were the 'victims of development' "69. Thus, the development of tea gardens did not confer any real benefit to the Meches; rather it simply drove them to the state of landlessness. The remaining Meches turned to settled cultivators and the large part of agricultural land gradually came to be held by the "immigrant" peoples.

IV.4.37 Thus we see that the overall impact of development of the plantation industry on the economy of Duars region was on no count very much favourable on the development of the agrarian sector. The industry received a considerable amount of investment judging from the standpoint of the level of investment in other industries in contemporary times. Surplus that was generated in the plantation sector was also

substantial. But very negligible part of it was transferred to the subsistence sector for its development. From all evidences it becomes clear that most part of the surplus was spent in financing the conspicuous consumption expenditure of peoples at the upper eschelons of the plantation social structure, some part of it was spent for financing investment in trade or real estate building elsewhere other than the district. Still another part was reinvested for the improvement and expansion of cultivation in the estates. Savings of the plantation labourers also did not come to be invested or circulated in the agricultural sector in a big way for various reasons. Nevertheless, a part of the savings of the tea garden labourers was expended in purchasing land in the fringe areas of tea estates, but was never invested for the improvement of agriculture.

IV.4.38 However, a commercial interaction constantly took place between the population in the plantation sector and that in the agrarian sector, though not to the extent as one could expect due to some built-in-characteristics of the plantation sector. Whatever little impact the plantation sector did exert on the subsistence sector was effected through this commercial interaction. A part of the procurement of many necessities of life of the plantation population was made from the surplus produces of the agrarian rural population. In the process, farmers could sale some of their products. But their demand could not rise much as most of the supplies of these articles were ensured from the sources outside the district and for other reasons. As regards the supply of requirements of the industry, it could be found that the entire

supply used to come from abroad. But it is easily discernible that there was a great potentiality of development of the industries supplying plantation related inputs and implements.

IV.4.39 Plantation industry did not attract and provide employment to the local people. The recruitment policy of the planters was largely responsible for this. Employment of labourers from outside the state at low rates of wages gave rise to a very high rate of profit and ensured a better discipline of the labour folk. The local people, perhaps, were not much interested to work in tea gardens due to low wage rates, their age-old affinity to agricultural pursuits, and since employment in land was still not much scarce and finally due to the unhealthiness of the working place. But population was growing at a very fast rate in agrarian sector due to emigration from the neighbouring districts. As a result, the excess population had no alternative but to choose agriculture as the mainstay of economic life. The cultivable land was limited, all waste lands were gradually brought under cultivation. Tea estates occupied a large amount of land, a significant part of which was kept idle. Moreover, some amount of ordinary cultivable land (jote land) was also used for expansion of cultivation. The pressure of population on land consequently got intensified, giving rise to higher degrees of sub-infeudation and fragmentation of holdings. Besides, the worse consequence that followed was an enormous growth of the adhiari (share cropping) system with a very large number of adhiars clinging on land without having any right or protection and carrying on agriculture on a bare subsistence basis. Thus the structure of land holding pattern

undergone a change in the form of inequality in land holding without, however, any change in the agrarian social structure and in the mode of cultivation.

IV.4.40 The worst effect that followed was that the development of tea industry alienated a large number of people from their lands who were the sons of the soil. Some of these people evicted from land, perhaps turned to adhiars and agricultural labourers and many of them left the place and became victims of development of the tea industry.

IV.4.41 The urban centres and the peoples therein derived some benefit from the development of the plantation sector but neither the subsistence sector nor the agrarian population derived any tangible boon and remained backward. The tea plantation have, in fact, created a dualism in the economy of the Duars region where "a capitalistic nucleus exists in symbiosis with an archaic structure. The capitalistic nucleus has failed to modify the pre-existing structural conditions . . . With large investments once made in the plantation have failed to stimulate agricultural modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation in this area"⁷⁰.

IV.4.42 Thus, it appears on all counts that, inspite of ample potentialities, the plantation sector did not exert enough tangible and conducive impact on the development of the agrarian economy of the Duars region.

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24. Out of 571.49 sq. miles of land under tea lease, only 244.06 sq. miles were actually under the cultivation of tea. The rest were set aside as agricultural land (89.46 sq. miles), grazing grounds and waste land (13.97 sq. miles), for housing (61.11 sq. miles) and cultivation (58.34 sq. miles). See Haldar, S.K., Report on Enquiry into the Living condition of Plantation Workers in Jalpaiguri District, 1951, p. 1.

25. The area under reserved forest was 497.72 sq. miles in 1901-02, 509.00 sq. miles in 1911, 532.31 sq. miles in 1931 and 561.86 sq. miles in 1941. See Xaxa, V., Agrarian Social Structure and Class Relations in Two Villages of Jalpaiguri District, doctoral dissertation submitted to Development of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT, Kanpur, 1978, p. 67.
26. Similar observation has been made by Chaudhuri, op. cit., p. 106.
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Tea District Labour Association Hand Book, pp. 38-39.
Xaxa, op. cit., p. 1664.
28. The wage structure introduced around 1891 had remained in tact till almost upto independence when the basic wage was raised from 4 to 6 annas per day for male and 3 to 5 annas per day for female workers.
See, Haldar, S.K., op. cit., p. 9.
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Grunning, J.F., Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad Pioneer Press, 1911, 9.97.
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31. Haldar, S.K., op. cit., p. 70.
32. Xaxa, V., op. cit., p. 1663.
33. Chaudhuri, A., op. cit., pp. 108-09.
34. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 23.
35. Xaxa, V., op. cit., p. 1663.
36. Ibid, p. 1663.
37. For instance the manager's salary was fixed around Rs. 700/- per month by a tea company. In contrast, the salary of the head clerk was fixed at only Rs. 85/- and that of the labourers at Rs. 4/- to Rs. 5/- in the non-plucking and Rs. 7/- to Rs. 8/- in the plucking season. Moreover, the average worker did not find work more than 3½ to 4 days per week in the cold season. Government of India, Royal Commission Labour in India, Vol. 5, Part I, p. 89.

38. Chaudhuri, A., op. cit., p. 110.
39. Xaxa, op.cit., pp. 1663-64.
40. Ibid, p. 1664.
41. Ibid.
42. Chaudhuri, A., op. cit., p. 110.
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59. Ibid., p. 61.
- 59A. Ibid.
60. Mukherjee, op. cit., p. 114.
61. Sanyal, C.C., The Meches and Totos of North Bengal, Two sub-Himalayan Tribes of North Bengal, North Bengal University, 1973, pp. 20-21.
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64. Quoted in Grierson, G.A., Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II, Calcutta, Superintendent, Government Printing, 1903, p. 36.
65. Grierson, G.A., op. cit., p. 36.
66. Sanyal, C.C., op. cit., p. 21.
67. Mukherjee, B.B., op. cit., p. 23.
68. Revenue Department Proceedings, July 1895. Proceedings numbers 118-19.
69. Chakrabarti, H.K., op. cit., pp. 63-64.
70. Chaudhuri, A., op. cit., p. 116.

C H A P T E R VIMPACT OF THE LAND-TENURE SYSTEM ON AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT DURING THE BRITISH RULESECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

V.1.1 Questions may be raised as to how much conducive was the Jotedary system under Temporary Settlement for the development and prosperity of agriculture. Was it a more favourable system than the Zamindary system under Permanent Settlement in this regard?

V.1.2 The answers to these question are, however, not in the affirmative. The results of both the systems were unfavourable for the development of agriculture, but the perspectives were different. Answers to the above questions may be found if we probe into the underlying perspectives of both the systems. We shall not, however, show the detailed differences between the tenurial arrangements in the two land systems but concentrate our attention on the relative state of development of agriculture under the two with a special emphasis on the role of the State in agricultural development under the Jotedary system in the Duars region of North Bengal.

SECTION 2 : DRAWBACKS OF THE ZAMINDARY SYSTEM
LEADING TO AGRICULTURAL BACKWARDNESS

V.2.1 Defects of the Zamindary system have been amply analysed in the literature of the contemporary period as well as that of the later periods. In the words of Sir Edward Colebrooke, "The errors of the Permanent Settlement in Bengal were two fold: first, in the sacrifice of what may be denominated the yeomanry, by merging all village rights, whether of property or occupancy, in the all devouring recognition of the Zamindar's paramount property in the soil; and secondly, in the sacrifice of the peasantry by one sweeping enactment, which left the Zamindar to make his settlement with them on such terms as he might choose to require. Government, indeed, reserved to itself the power of legislating in favour of the tenants, but no such legislation has ever taken place: and, on the contrary, every subsequent enactment has been founded on the declared object of strengthening the Zamindars' hands"¹. For example, the provisions of the original settlement of 1793 for safeguarding tenants against rack-renting were seriously amended by later regulations². In 1794, Zamindars were given powers to recover rent at the rates imposed by the lease, whether the ryot agreed or not. In 1799, the notorious Huptum regulation was introduced to avoid delay in rent realization through legal processes. This gave Zamindars unrestricted power of distraint and in many cases, of arrest of the defaulter's person. Fresh legislation in 1812 further strengthened the Zamindar's position. Again, the regulations of 1822 and 1844 gave

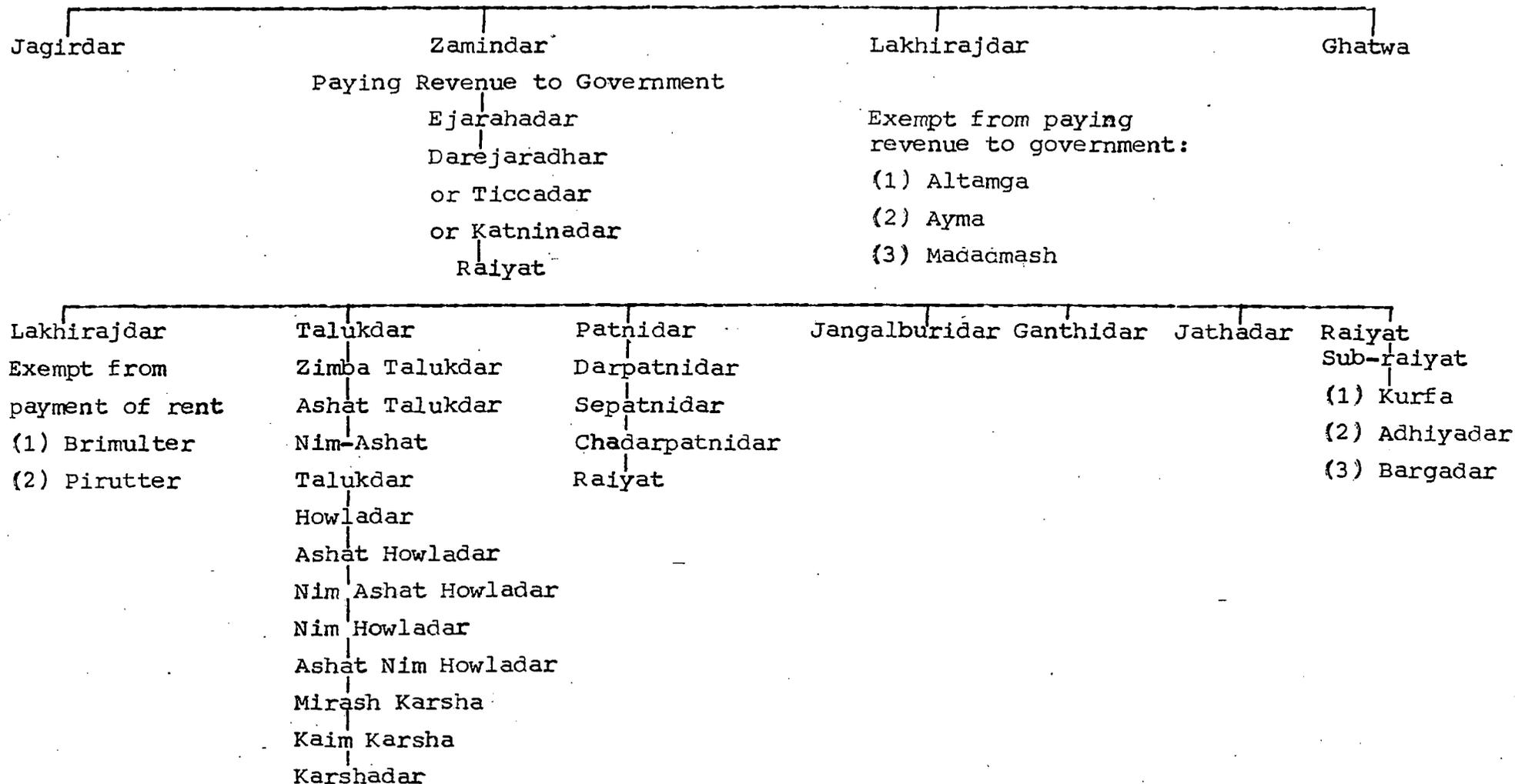
ample rights to auction purchasers for enhancing rent and for evicting ryots in case of default payment. All these provisions enormously increased the landlords' powers and subjected the peasantry to an increasing rent burden and to extreme insecurity in land rights. But, no clear definition of the tenants' rights was made in any of these regulations.

V.2.2 Between 1793 and 1880 the extent of rent increase was 120% to 180% for several permanently settled districts of Bengal³. Besides the causes of increase of cultivated lands and rising prices of agricultural produce there were some other more important causes of the increased burden of rent on the peasantry, namely, an increasing pressure of population on agriculture, imposition of high rents on newly settled lands by the Zamindars, as they had the rights to settle such lands on their own terms; and enhancement of rents by purchasers of estates sold by public auction for the realisation of revenue arrears at their discretion which they were empowered to. The last two causes were no less important than the others.

V.2.3 Another significant development of the Zamindari system was the numerous growth of sub-tenures and a long chain of sub-infeudation. The process of sub-infeudation extended to a long hierarchy of sub-tenures. The extent of sub-infeudation can be seen from the tabular presentation given by Field⁴ as shown in table V.1 below.

TABLE V.1 - EXTENT OF SUB-INFEUDATION UNDER ZAMINDARY SYSTEM

Government
(Entitled to revenue)



Source: Field, C.D., Landholding and the Relation of Landlord and Tenant in Various Countries, p. 714.

V.2.4 Heavy burden of rent and the numerous growth of sub-tenures was combined with the failure of the Permanent Settlement to introduce agricultural improvements and made the economic condition of the peasantry worse. In fact, the increasing burden of rent, abwabs etc. left little means with the cultivating peasantry to go in for such improvements. Inventions and improvements were practically unknown. Increases in the arable land took place due to the pressure on agriculture as a source of livelihood. But cultivation extended without any essential improvement.

V.2.5 The Indian Famine Commission in 1881 commented on the low quality of livestock, improved feeding being the main problem which could not be solved on account of the scarcity of land. Age-old implements were in use. Manuring was rare except for some most valuable non-food crops. Rotation of crops was seldom practised, it rested on no definite or rational principle⁵.

V.2.6 Bigger volumes of rent appropriated from the working peasantry was absorbed in the expanding scales of sub-infeudation and also, to some extent in further enrichment of the large Zamindars who acted as tax gatherers. But they were "short-sighted tax gatherers and nipped in the bud the seeds of improvement"⁶. The intermediate interests had also little role in production advance.

V.2.7 The distribution of landed property was highly skewed under Zamindari system, which also retarded the development of agriculture. The unequal distribution of landed property would be evident from table V.2 below. Table V.2 is based on the Board of Revenue Statistics for about one lakh estates in 1893 and a gross area of more than 35 million acres covered by them⁷. It can be seen from the table that in Bengal in 1893 for about 99 percent of estates and tenures held directly from Government, the estimated net rental per holder was on an average under Rs. 300/- per annum, estates and tenures paying an annual revenue of more than Rs. 50,000/- accounted for a meagre 0.04 percent of all such estates and in their case estimated annual net rental amounted to an average of Rs. 54,463/- per holder, estates liable for payment of yearly revenue between Rs. 5,000/- and Rs. 50,000/- constituted 0.77 percent of all estates and showed a little above Rs. 4000/- as annual average net rental per holder. It is clear from this table that the distribution of landed property was highly skewed. Nearly 99% of estates accounting for 48% of the gross area could hardly be considered to have any capacity for sizeable capital formation and agricultural improvements.

V.2.8 Petty Zamindars were in a reduced condition and hence was unable to invest something for the improvement of agriculture. Their income from land as well as from other sources were so insufficient that if they were deprived of their income from these sources they would have been reduced to utter destitution⁸.

TABLE V.2 - PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF ESTATES/TENURES HELD DIRECTLY FROM GOVERNMENT AND ESTIMATED RENTAL AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANNUAL REVENUE PAID BY REVENUE PAYERS

(Bengal 1893)

Revenue Payers paying Annual Revenue	Percentage of estates/ tenures	Percentage of gross area	Average area of estate/ tenure (acres)	Average Annual assess- ment per estate/ tenure (Rs)	Estimated average net rental (Rs) for estate/ tenure*	Average number of holders per estate/ tenure	Estimated net rental (Rs) per holder (6/7 Cols.)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
More than Rs. 50,000	0.04	15.44	156422	179547	326776	6	54463
Rs. 5,000-Rs. 50,000	0.77	35.48	20110	15419	28063	7	4009
Rs. 100-Rs. 5,000	13.80	39.30	1228	940	1711	6	285
Less than Rs. 100	<u>85.39</u>	<u>9.78</u>	49	16	29	4	7
	100.00	100.00					

*Obtained by deducting 6 percent collection charges and the amount of revenue assessment from Gross Rental (taken to be three times the annual revenue).

✓ Source: Sen, Asok, "Agrarian Structure and Tenancy Laws in Bengal 1850-1900" in Perspectives in Social Sciences 2, Calcutta, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 105 (table 1).

V.2.9 It can be easily understood that the means and aptitude of such proprietary interest holders were not capable of taking any initiative for agricultural improvements. As for bigger landlords with some substantial properties, there were very few instances of capital outlay for the advancement of agriculture. From them no improvements had proceeded⁹. It was the cultivators themselves who advanced upon extending agricultural production.

V.2.10 On the other hand, the capital outlay on the part of the Zamindars was "seldom more than a current loan, repayable at a very high rate of interest, or, which is worse, the repayment in commodities at a very much lower price than the market price, but as for any permanent outlay of capital in digging wells, and making tanks, there are very few instances of the Zamindars laying out capital in that way"¹⁰.

V.2.11 Sir Richard Temple in his evidence before the Indian Famine Commission of 1881 observed, "... Nothing that the man (Zamindar) saves is spent in improving cultivation or anything of that kind, it is spent for other purposes, it may benefit trade or other things, but it does not benefit cultivation"¹¹.

V.2.12 The tenancy laws in the second half of the nineteenth century did very little to improve conditions of work and living for Bengal's peasant masses. No legal restriction was imposed on sub-letting by occupancy ryot. Occupancy right was associated not

with the land and its cultivation, but with a class of owners who might be non-cultivating or might cease to cultivate on their own. In the first half of this century when Zamindari system had its days of greatest prosperity and power, it did not derive its strength by improving the modes of production because it was not felt necessary.

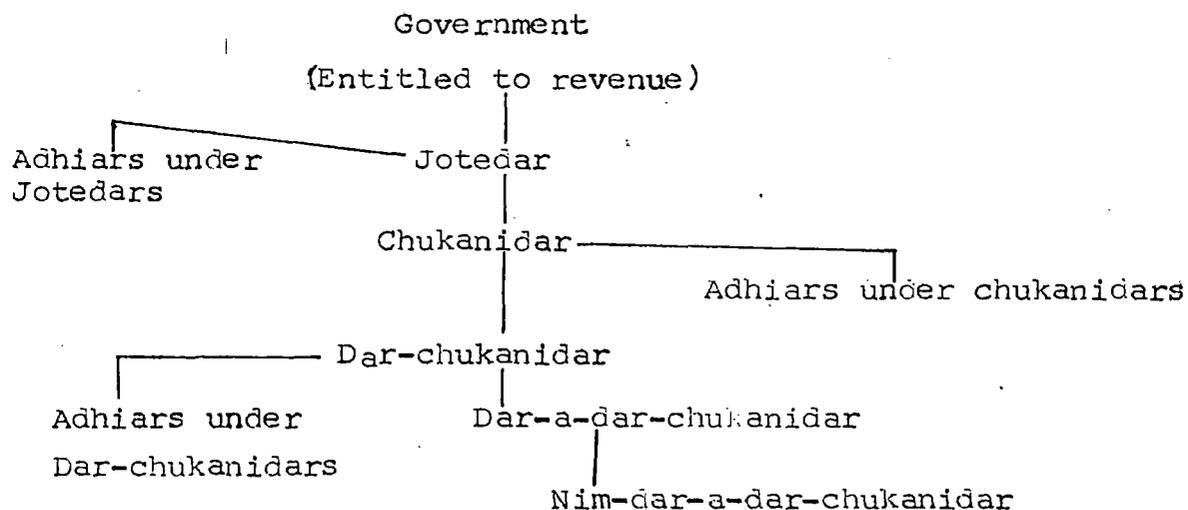
V.2.13 The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 attempted to broaden the bases of land rights. But the rights and opportunities which the Act created at different levels produced nothing of longstanding value to fulfil structural requirements of sustained and cumulative agricultural growth.

V.2.14 Under the above perspectives, it has been observed by a scholar that : "The nineteenth century ended full of dire portents for Bengal's future in the long run. An element of perpetual stagnation pervaded the agrarian economy, characterised by an ever increasing scale of sub-infeudation and divorce between ownership and actual cultivation. Legislative measures of imperial rule achieved very little to do away with this state of things"¹².

SECTION 3 : JOTEDARY SYSTEM AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

V.3.1 We have already discussed the state and nature of sub-infeudation under the Jotedary system in Chapter III. Here we may have a short view of the extent of sub-infeudation under this system, from table V. 3 below to compare it with that of the Zamindari system. Comparing tables V.1 and V. 3 we can say that the

TABLE V.3 - EXTENT OF SUB-INFEUDATION IN THE WESTERN DUARS
REGION OF NORTH BENGAL UNDER JOTEDARY SYSTEM



Source : Settlement Reports of 1889-95, 1906-16 and 1931-35.

extent of sub-infeudation was much higher in the Zamindari system under Permanent Settlement introduced in other parts of Bengal than in the Jotedary system under Temporary Settlement introduced in the Duars region of North Bengal. The real scope and extent of rack-renting was also much less in the latter than that in the former system. Normal rates of rent were less oppressive on the tenants. This is proved by the fact that this region did not witness the agitation that was generated in some other permanently settled parts of Bengal for reducing the rates of rent¹³. Moreover, it has been reported in various Settlement Reports of Western Duars that there was no discontent among the tenants about the rates of

rent fixed and the number of applications for lowering the rates were very few. That the rates of rent were comparatively lower in this part of the country than the neighbouring regions can be seen from the corresponding figures of the adjacent Cooch Behar State as shown in Table V.4 below . In fact, easy availability of land at a cheap rate of rent was the main cause of immigration of population in this region from 1891 to 1931. And the low rates of rent was the result of the availability of vast amount of virgin land waiting to be brought under cultivation.

V.3.2 It is interesting to note that while fixing the rates of rents for tenants in the State of Cooch Behar, the rates prevailing in Western Duars were also taken into consideration to check the migration of tenants from the former to the ~~later country~~ ^{latter country}. The following extract makes this matter sufficiently clear.

"In fixing the rates it is necessary not only to consider what the prevailing rates in the State are, but also to see at what rates rents are paid by Jotedars in the neighbouring districts in British territory. It is very well known that land can be had on very favourable terms in the Bhutan Duars and that many of the subjects of the State who held subordinate rights have found it advantageous to migrate to that part of the Jalpaiguri District. If we fix very high rates the possibility is that many more rayats will leave the State, and there will be a great decrease in our revenue"¹⁴.

TABLE V.4 COMPARISON OF RATES OF RENT IN THE WESTERN DUARS AND THE NEIGHBOURING STATE OF COOCH BEHAR

Class of Land	Rates per Acre					
	Western Duars (1895)			Cooch Behar State (1903)		
	Rs.	As.	Ps.	Rs.	As.	Ps.
(1)	(2)			(3)		
1. Betelnut gardens	2	12	0	12	0	0
2. Bastu or Homestead	2	0	0	9	0	0
3. Bamboo	2	12	0	3	6	0
4. Rupit (a) First class (Awal)	1	12	0	3	0	0
(b) Second class (Duiam)	1	9	0	2	4	0
5. Farangati						
(a) First class (Saium)	1	6	0	1	11	0
(b) Second class (Chaharam)	1	3	0	1	5	0
6. Doba* (Jala-fish Ponds)	1	10	6	1	8	0
7. Patit** or Waste	0	3	0	0	4	6

Sources: (i) Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 117, 19; (ii) Mukherjee, B.B. - op. cit., p. 24; (iii) Chaudhury, H.N.- op. cit., p. 554.

Notes: (i) The 1889-95 Settlement of the Western Duars was made for fifteen years and it was effective upto 1910 and hence comparable with the settlement of Cooch Behar State made in 1903.

(ii) For comparison only rates of the best tracts of both the countries have been taken into account.

(iii) Re. 1 = 16 annas; 1 Anna = 12 pices.

(iv) Items 4 and 5 are main agricultural lands.

(v) Names of corresponding classes of lands of Cooch Behar State have been put into parentheses, where they do not bear exactly same name.

* Were divided into first and second class in Western Duars. Given figures being the average of the two : 1-12-0 and 1-9-0. No such division was made in Cooch Behar.

** Were divided into culturable (laik) waste (patit) and unculturable (gar laik) waste (patit). Given figures being the average of the two : (0-6-0 and 0-3-0). No division was made in Western Duars.

V.3.3 Though subsequently pressure on land intensified in the Western Duars but that did not result in rampant sub-infeudation due to two reasons. Firstly, sub-infeudation below two degrees was prohibited by law. No doubt, inspite of prohibitions, sub-infeudation occurred by one or two degrees beyond the legally allowed limit, but the number of sub-tenants and their control over lands was virtually insignificant as is evident from table -1 of Chapter III. Secondly and more importantly, sub-infeudation was checked by the growth of the adhiari system, that was considered more profitable by the landlords than sub-leasing.

V.3.4 There was, to some extent, a similarity in the landholding pattern between the permanently settled parts of Bengal and the temporary settled Western Duars region of North Bengal. Like the former in the latter area also there had been a concentration of landholding in a few hands of landlords (jotedars). That there had been concentration of landholding in the Duars, has been evident from our discussion in Chapter III. Moreover, in both the areas there was a large number of sharecroppers who cultivated small plots of land who had no rights in land and no security of tenure. It was not possible to confer tenant right on them during the British period. This large section of the peasantry had neither means nor the willingness to adopt improved agricultural practices. Jotedars and big chukanidars were not interested in the development of agriculture. They had no aspirations and good vision of life and hence did not strife for achieving more prosperity and

better standard of living. Low needs of life made them idle and inactive. Surplus that was accumulated in their hands were spent for unproductive purposes. It may be noted that majority of the jotedars belonged to the Rajbanshi and Mohammedan communities¹⁵. Polygamy was permitted in both the communities¹⁶. Jotedar had to spend a large amount to maintain their big families. Level of literacy was very poor among the people in general¹⁷. Moreover, they were guided by customs and superstitions. All these factors retarded the progress and development of agriculture.

V.3.5 In contrast to the Zamindari areas absentee landlordism was not a very important and widespread phenomenon in the Western Duars. Here most of the big landlords were themselves cultivators. But though there was generally no divorce between ownership and actual cultivation, the above mentioned sociological features of the population were the inhibiting factors in the agricultural development in the Western Duars region.

V.3.6 In the temporarily settled tract of Western Duars, the Government itself was the Zamindar. Management of land-tenures, that is, fixation of rent and its collection was directly at Government's hands. In the permanently settled Zamindari areas of Bengal, individual Zamindars did not take necessary steps for the improvement of agriculture and the small cultivators could not initiate essential improvement in agriculture due to lack of capital. But in Western Duars, since neither big landlords and small landholders did not

and could not invest capital in agricultural development due to various socio-economic factors, it was highly imperative that the State itself as Zamindar and owner of the soil should have taken positive steps for the improvement of agriculture through the creation of irrigation facilities, introducing improved methods and techniques of production and thereby bring about prosperity and development of agriculture. But almost none of the conducive measures were taken.

V.3.7 It can be found in various Settlement Reports that the Government felt the necessity of doing something for the improvement of agriculture. But for some reason or otherwise nothing effective was done eventually and whatever had been done was done half-heartedly and therefore no palpable and significant result accrued to the tenantry. Essential improvements of agriculture was left ultimately with the tillers themselves.

V.3.8 In what follows, there are a few examples of some spheres in which measures were taken or contemplated to be taken for the development of agriculture but which did not yield expected results.

(i) Jotedars' Development Fund

V.3.9 Firstly, a fund, called "Jotedars Union Fund", was created under the initiative of Mr. Sunder¹⁸. This fund was created with a view to "improve the condition of the people by introducing new crops, sinking wells for the supply of good drinking water,

constructing village roads and c". The argument for creating such a fund by the prospective beneficiaries themselves was that the Government was under financial crisis and therefore unable to provide "all funds" for this purpose. But actually, later on Government did not contribute any sum in the fund. Thus the Colonial Government thought of providing social welfare services in their small Zamindary in the Duars without spending any amount from their own exchequer. The list of welfare activities to be performed out of this fund was, however, exhaustive and the items included in it were no doubt intended to improve agriculture and promote social welfare. These were - (1) providing wells for pure drinking water; (2) opening village roads; (3) supply of fruits and other trees to jotedars and cultivators generally; (4) getting better sickles and agricultural implements; (5) obtaining good manures for securing better outturn of crops; (6) purchasing vegetable, potato, wheat, maize, and other seed for introducing new and valuable crops; (7) helping poor cultivators with good cattle; (8) clearing jungle; (9) opening charitable dispensaries or helping them; (10) providing a supply of blankets annually for old and indigent cultivators; (11) assisting widows and orphans of cultivators who may be in distress, and any other kind of useful work which may be necessary from year to year¹⁹. But in later years it was found that the proposed objectives of the fund were very little achieved²⁰ and jotedars living near the tahsil head-quarters derived more benefits than those living in remote areas.

(ii) Creation of Irrigation Facilities

V.3.10 One thing to be noted about the list of works to be performed out of the Jotedars' Union Fund is that it did not include the creation and provision of irrigation facilities which was not altogether unnecessary at least for some parts of this region²¹. It was left entirely at the hands of the jotedars and smaller cultivators. The rainfall was normally heavy. Artificial irrigation was practised in some parts of the Duars and for some lands where transplanted variety of aman paddy was grown but which were not sufficiently low to ensure an adequate supply of water by ordinary means. Irrigation was used to be made from hill streams and jampois. Jampois were artificial channels cut by cultivators from any stream which appeared to them suitable. The total area of such irrigated land was very small²². However, the proceedings of the cultivators in cutting new irrigation channels needed careful watching as the rivers in the Duars frequently changed their courses and it did not require much to divert the entire water from a river or stream down an irrigation channel. Cases occurred in which the digging of irrigation channels had resulted in great damage to the Bengal Duars Railway and to Roads. The Government was faced with a double headed problem with these irrigation channels. Milligan in his Settlement Report observed, "much land in the Duars will go out of cultivation if irrigation is entirely prohibited and much damage will be caused to tea gardens, jote lands, railways, roads and forests if river training is entirely vetoed"²³. In fact the Government policy upto 1906 with regard to the training and tapping

of rivers, drainage and irrigation had been so undefined that most of the tenants, tea garden managers, and jotedars came to regard that sphere of activity as one where they could do as they liked with undesirable results in many places. As a result, certain Government measures were thought to be undertaken. For the new lease holders it was made compulsory to take sanction from the Deputy Commissioner to construct irrigation channels and this officer was empowered to remove any unauthorised works in this regard. But no records of such sanction could be found later on in Deputy Commissioner's office²⁴, and also no concerted and scientific effort was taken either to secure an effective control of river training or to provide irrigation facilities at the same time. Thus the Government failed in another vitally important task in the direction of improving agriculture and quality of life of the people of this region.

(iii) Promoting the Use of Fertiliser

V.3.11 Absence of Government initiative was also noticeable in another significant matter. One of the essential inputs for improved agriculture is the use of fertiliser. Its optimum use entails higher productivity in agriculture which in turn raises the income and standard of living of cultivators.

V.3.12 The main types of manures used by the cultivators was cow dung and buffalo dung. Sometimes ashes, oil cakes and decaying vegetable matters were also used as manures. These organic manures

were generally used for manuring land for tobacco, mustard seed, jute, potato and sugarcane. Sunder reported that "Many jotedars especially in Falakata and Alipur Tahsils, persuade maisals or buffalo keepers to keep their animals on fields where tobacco is to be planted, so that it may be well manured. For doing this the buffalo keepers are fed and amused with singing & c, at the cost of the owner of the field"²⁵. This report shows the earnestness of the jotedars for using organic manure to raise productivity of land.

V.3.13 However, the use of more sophisticated chemical fertiliser was not unknown at this time and mills for producing bone-meal was already established in Calcutta and Bombay²⁶. These firms appointed agents throughout Bengal for collecting animal bones. The bones were broken up and then sent in bags by railways to the mills. After being pounded at mills bone meals were exported to Europe. For the collection of bones, contractors and coolies got money from the agents of the mills. But the cultivators did not get a piece of the money, although the bones were the remains of their cattle. From these mills "thousands of tons of bones" were annually sent to Europe²⁷.

The actual sufferers from the loss of this manure were the Government and the cultivators. In the process, the country was deprived of one of its vitally needed resource which should have been kept here exclusively for the cultivators. The bones,

in each district, could be collected and then pounded in each jail by Muhammadan prisoners and sold direct to the cultivators at reasonable price. It was Mr. Sunder's opinion that the cultivators would have definitely used bone-meal as manure if they could purchase it at a low price and in their own district. He also maintained that managers of estates and district officers could show every cultivator both Hindus and Muslims, with a little tact and persuasion, the value of bone-meal and the latter would use that manure in addition to cattle dung. Sunder in his letter to the Director of the Department of Land Records and Agriculture wrote : "The cultivator wants a better manure than cattle dung and at the same time cheap. We have entirely in our hands a most valuable manure [i.e. bone-meal] which could be made available at a very low price. Why should not we keep it and encourage its use all over India? Why should we allow our cultivators to be deprived of it? They do not know its worth. Why should not we teach them this and everything else that will benefit them? It behoves us to look after their interests and do work in raising them and improving their condition in every possible direction. I ask you to think over the above questions, and to decide what should be done for the benefit of our people"²⁸.

V.3.14 At the recommendation of Mr. Sunder bone-meal started to be manufactured in Jalpaiguri jail, but the ~~output~~ of bone-meal is

reported to be insufficient to meet the demand from planters and others²⁹. But the then Lieutenant Governor thought it better to export the bone dust as that would bring a high rate of profit. This shows that the colonial Government was more eager in serving their own interest than that of the local peasants in pursuing their agricultural policy. They were least concerned about the progress and development of agriculture in this region. Mr. Sunder, however, took the initiative to induce the jotedars of Western Duars to use it widely³⁰. Results of some experiments made by Mr. Sunder in Maynaguri tahsil of Western Duars with bone-meal is presented in table V.5 below. It is evident from this table that

TABLE V.5 RESULTS OF SOME EXPERIMENTS MADE BY MR. SUNDER IN THE MAYNAGURI TAHSIL OF THE WESTERN DUARS WITH BONE-MEAL

Name of crop	Area of land	Unmanured			Manured		
		Mds.	S.	Ch.	Md.	S.	Ch.
(1)	(2)	(3)			(4)		
Bhadol paddy	1 acre	8	0	0	12	20	0
Jute	1 acre	10	0	0	19	17	2

Source: Computed from Sunder, D.H.E. - op. cit., p. 111.

Note : Mds - Maunds; S. - Seers; Ch. - Chhatak

1 Mds. = 40 seers, 16 Ch. = 1 seer.

productivity of bhadoi paddy and jute could be raised by about $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 times with the application of bone-meal as manure. But no subsequent evidence of an extensive use of this manure can be found, which indicates that either Mr. Sunder was not successful in persuading the jotedars and other cultivators to use this manure, or the later Settlement Officers did not pay importance to the matter. It is also possible that, since most of the bone-meal was exported, it was not available for local peasants. Thus, the policy of the Government deprived the peasantry to reap the benefits of one of the improved agricultural practices.

V.3.15 This particular example shows how the British officers directly connected with the people at the grass root level felt for them and contemplated for improving their lot and at the same time the indifference of the higher officers. It is also another example of Government's failure to brought about a qualitative change in the method of production in agriculture. But this important task should quite reasonably have been performed by the Government as the actual owner of the soil.

V.3.16 Mr. Milligan in his Settlement Report has very beautifully portrayed the general state of underdevelopment of agriculture of the district. He wrote, "The backwardness of agriculture throughout the district is remarkable, the more so as the climate is so favourable. Not only is the variety and in some cases the quality of the crops grown exceedingly meagre, but the implements of agriculture are absolutely primitive and agricultural livestock are

of the poorest quality. No attempt is made to exploit the possibilities which the soil and climate hold out, but the cultivators go on doggedly growing rice and jute, rice and jute and again rice and jute. It matters not that the situation of his land is much better suited for the growth of other crops, the cultivator pins his faith on rice and jute In a similar state of backwardness and inefficiency is the fishing industry of the district"³¹.

V.3.17 There was also a good potential for development of orchards and vegetable gardens. But initiatives on the part of the cultivators was lacking. Mr. Milligan mentioned many new fruits and vegetables and their improved varieties, which could be easily cultivated. A part of the money collected annually for the "Jotedars' Union Fund" was spent on experimental gardens at tahsil headquarters but due to bad management, their demonstration effect was reported to be practically nil. Hence, it was felt necessary to utilise the potentialities in this regard. Milligan observed : "There is no reason at all why every homestead in the district should not include good vegetable garden and a decent orchard. Demonstration at convenient centres and the sale of sufficient seeds and grafts at reasonable prices would, I am convinced, speedily work wonders. The ordinary rayat does not believe that any one can teach him how to grow rice, jute, tobacco and such staple crops, but he is quite glad to learn how to grow vegetables and improve his fruit trees, and will listen with interest when he is told about new and profitable crops, but he

is not by nature a speculator or a pioneer and must be shown how to produce new things and where to sell them"³². In this field, also no effective measures were undertaken either in private or Government initiatives.

V.3.18 The only improvement in the agricultural practices effected upto 1911 has been said to be the abandonment of wasteful method of cultivation by jhuming by the Meches. Absence of initiatives to adopt improved methods of cultivation on the part of the cultivators have been attributed to the facts of abundant rainfall and fertile lands of the district yielding magnificent crops of rice and jute which was used to be grown by them with a very little effort³³.

V.3.19 It should be noted that there was enough scope for producing more than one crop as the condition of soil of this region was favourable. But the double cropped area was only 6.36% in 1916 and 3.12% in 1935 of the total cropped area. Mr. Mukherjee, the Settlement Officer entrusted with the work of the last British settlement of this tract, made laziness as the main factor responsible for the insignificant double cropped area and held that the cultivator was satisfied with what he got through little effort³⁴. The incidence of rent was described to be low. As a result there was hardly any incentive to double cropping³⁵.

SECTION 4 : SUMMARY

V.4.1 Thus, it is clear from above that the role of the Government was not satisfactory in the improvement of agriculture in this region. Certain measures were rightly thought to be adopted. But thoughts were not translated into action. Measures that had been adopted were executed half-heartedly. But since the Duars area was under the direct supervision of the Government, it is reasonable to expect that it should have played a more active role in effecting the essential improvement of agriculture. The fact is that the colonial Government was more interested in collecting land revenues from the peasantry than promoting their well being. In this respect there seems to be no qualitative difference between the Bhutanese and the British regimes.

V.4.2 On the other hand, the jotedars also did not try to improve the condition of agriculture though they had the necessary capital at their disposal. This was due to their mental inertia, lack of aspiration, apathy to adopt new ventures and their love for easy going traditional life. There was concentration of land and agricultural wealth in the hands of a few landlords. Some of these jotedars were "fabulously rich". But as landlords they failed miserably. They did not invest enough for the improvement of agriculture by using improved seeds and manures or acquiring machineries for improved cultivation, so that the productivity of land could be enhanced and brought them more prosperity³⁶. But as rich and

wealthy farmers the jotedars should have taken the pioneering role so that other small farmers could emulate them.

V.4.3 Thus, it can be inferred that as far as the development of agriculture was concerned, there was no qualitative difference between the Jotedary system and the Zamindary system. In both the systems, agriculture, the main pursuit of the rural population, remained backward due to the interaction of certain uncondusive socio-economic and political factors.

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

1. ✓ Opinion of Sir Edward Colebrooke quoted in Field, C.D., Landholding and the Relation of Landlord and Tenant in Various Countries, Calcutta. Thacker, Spink and Co., 1883; p. 525.
2. ✓ Sen, Asok, "Agrarian Structure and Tenancy Laws in Bengal (1850-1900)" in Perspectives in Social Sciences, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 2.
4. Field, C.D., op. cit., p. 714.
5. Indian Famine Commission (IFC), 1881, pp. 4-6, 10.
6. Ibid., p. 7.
7. Figures in the table may not fully agree with the information about the number of estates and gross area furnished by other official sources. Some problems may also arise in regard to the estimate of rental income accruing to revenue payers. However, inspite of such statistical limitations, the table presents a good deal of quantitative precision of the state of landed property in Bengal's agriculture.
8. Anandabazar Patrika (Bengali Weekly), 10th March, 1884; Vide Report on Native Papers, Home Department, Calcutta, (R.N.P.), Weekending 15th March 1884, p. 305.
9. ✓ Hollinberry, R.H., The Zamindari Settlement of Bengal, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1879, Appendix IV, p. 69.
10. Ibid., p. 58.

11. Sir Richard Temple's evidence before the Indian Famine Commission, 1881, Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 45, London, 1885, p. 31.
12. Sen, A., op. cit., p. 73.
13. In the decade following the enactment of the rent Act of 1859, the rent question, "over the grounds of enhancement, absence of a clear definition of ryots as actual cultivators, growth of rent-receiving interests from the level of occupancy ryots and abuses of the right of distraint"; "came to a climax in many parts of Bengal and led even to violent outbursts in Pabna...." Sen, Asok, op. cit., p. 13 and p. 18. The two main causes of the agitation were "a high rate of collection as compared with other Pergunnahs, and an uncertainty as to how far the amount claimed was due. The third and auxiliary cause is to be found in the violent and lawless character of some of the Zamindars, and of the agents of others". This quotation is from Mr. P. Nolan's Report on Amendment, Vol. 1, Appendix 1, p. 13, cited in Sen, Asok, op. cit., p. 18.
14. Chaudhury, H.N., The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, Cooch Behar, 1903, pp. 555-56.
15. Sunder, D.H.E., Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889-95, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1895, p. 130. Milligan, J.A., Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District, 1906-16, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1919, p. 10. Mukherjee, B.B., Final Report on the Land Revenue Settlement Operations in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1931-35, B.G. Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1939, p. 13, pp. 136-39.

16. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 53.
17. Ibid., p. 90. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 11.
18. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 91.
19. Ibid.
20. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 23, p. 25 & p. 17.
21. Mitra, A., Census of India, 1951, District Handbook, Jalpaiguri, p. xviii. Grunning, J.F., Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1911, p. 58. Grunning held that "Irrigation is doubtless necessary in parts of the Western Duars".
22. For example, in 1935 of the total cropped area of 345,843.82 acres, only 24,066.91 acres, i.e., 6.96% land was irrigated. See Mukherjee, B.B. op. cit., p. 18, p. 103.
23. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., p. 18.
24. Mukherjee, B.B., op. cit., p. 62.
25. Sunder, D.H.E., op. cit., p. 110.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 111.
31. Milligan, J.A., op. cit., pp. 21-22.
32. Ibid., p. 23.
33. Grunning, J.F., op. cit., p. 62.
34. Ibid., p. 59 & p. 62. Mukherjee, op. cit., p. 18.
35. Ibid.
36. Mitra, A., op. cit., p. 75.

CHAPTER - VILAND 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 raiyas (i.e. the actual cultivators) was direct and no intermediary existed between the two, as it could be found in the Zamindari system. Hence, after the abolition of Zamindari 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 Zamindari 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 (raiyas)-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 rai-yats 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 have ^{been} 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 Government¹. 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.2.5 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 khas 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 it has been found that most of the big raiyats 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 landholders 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 right². 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 rural³. 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% respectively⁴. 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"⁵. 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 larger⁶. 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.1¹ 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 owners'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^{Programme}

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 ^{were} 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 season⁷ 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 achieve- ment (in thousand)	Achieve- ment (in 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 THROUGH 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	Employment generated in lakh mandays*		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	No. of sale-deeds registered		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 (1)	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.
(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)	(297422)	(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
ALL HOLDINGS		+39.40	+50.84	+55.21

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
ALL HOLDINGS		+9.74	+4.78	+3.46

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^{of} 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 ^{been a} 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% ^{in the district} 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	<u>Agricultural Census 1970-71</u>			<u>Agricultural Census 1980-81</u>		
		<u>Average size of holdings</u>			<u>Average size of holdings</u>		
		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.5.

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	Gini Co-efficients of Landholding Distribution	
	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.

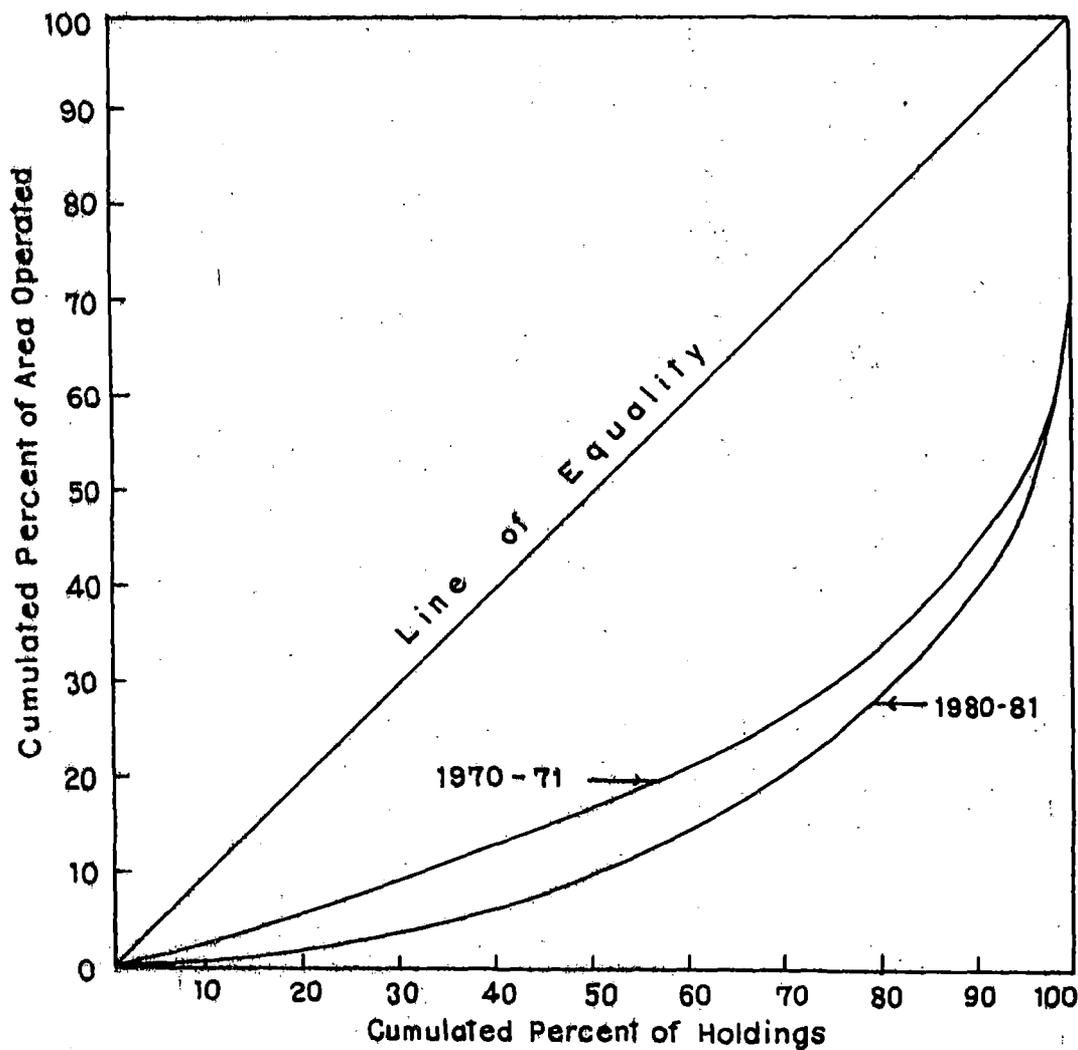


Diagram VI.1- Lorenz curve showing inequality in the distribution of Land Holding in Western Duars in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

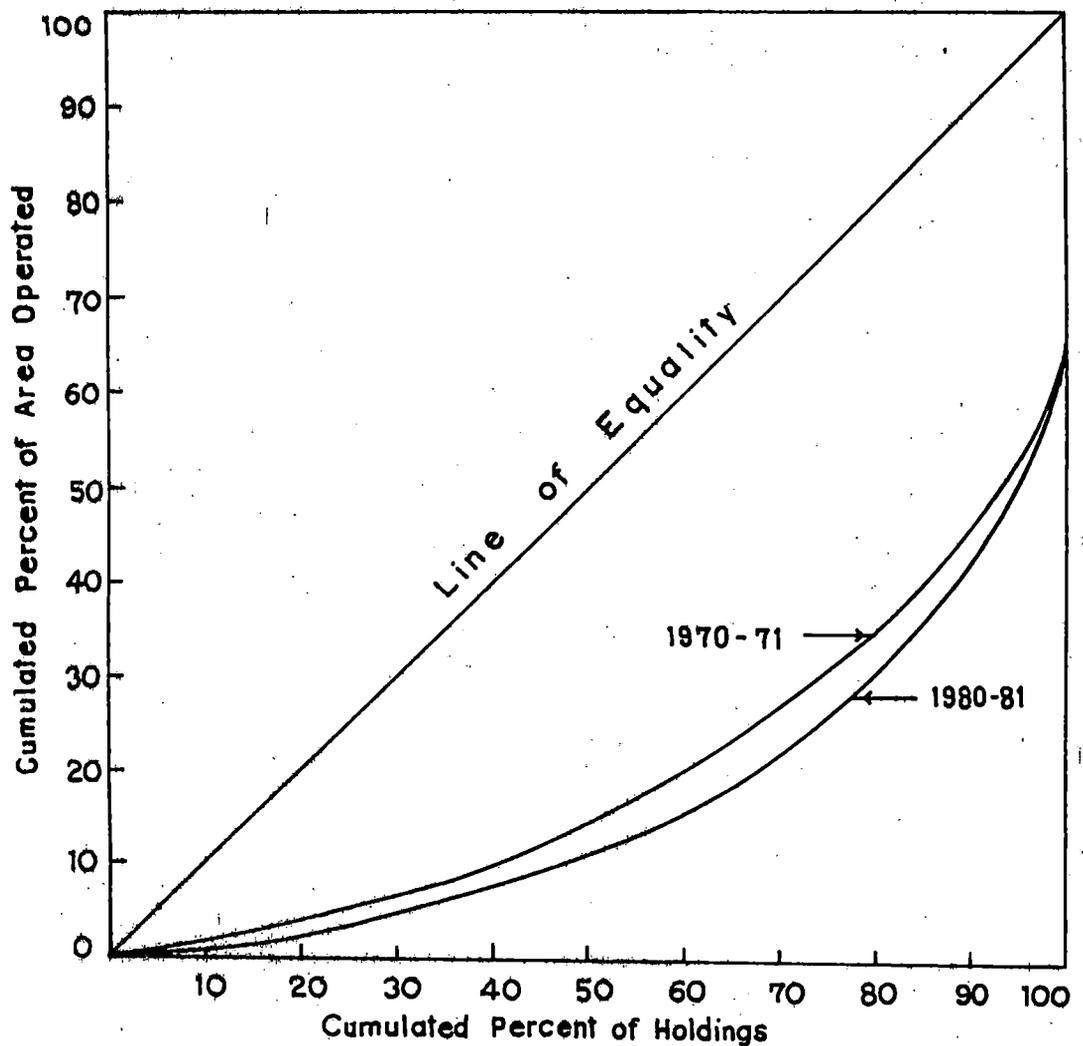


Diagram VI.2 - Lorenz curve showing inequality in the Distribution of Land Holding in Jalpaiguri District in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

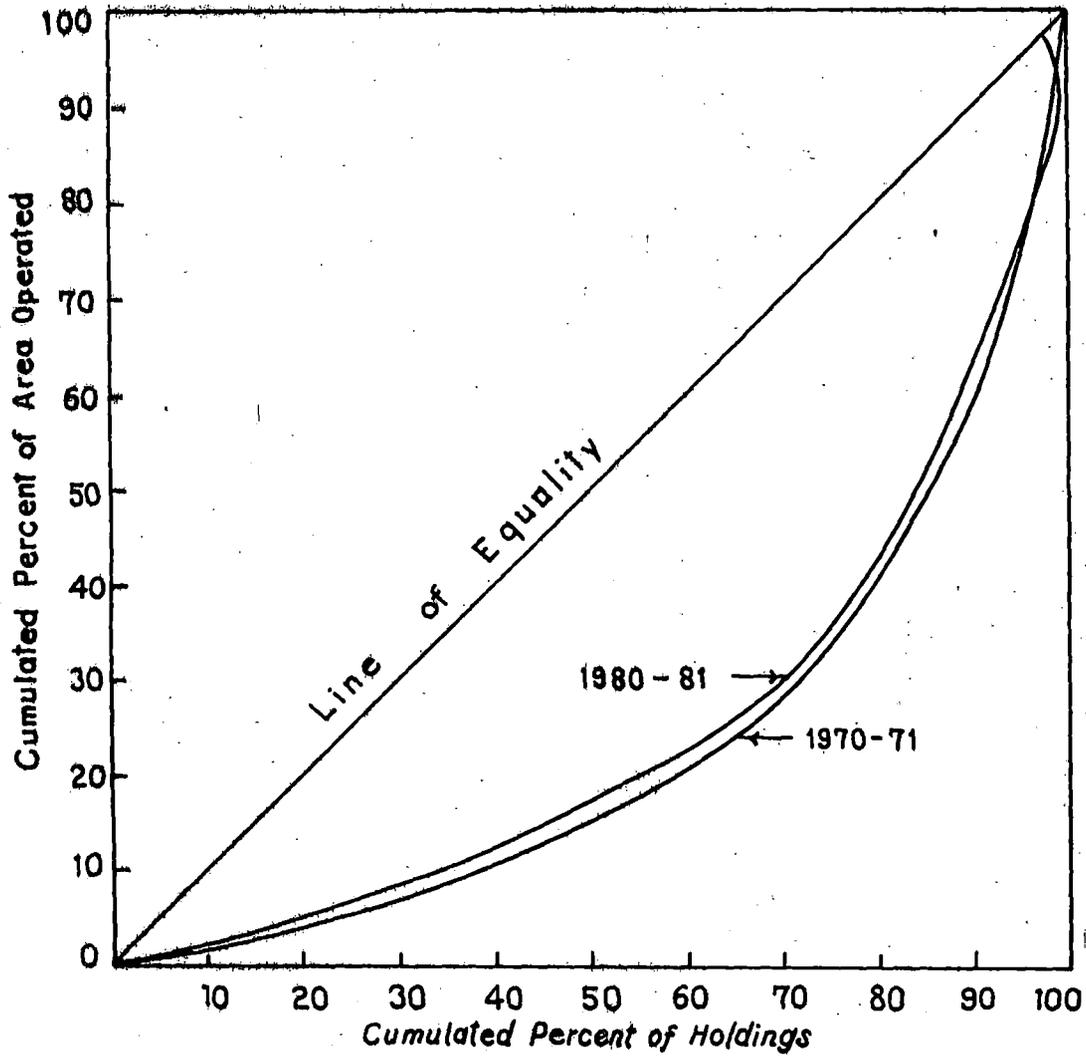


Diagram VI.3 - Lorenz curve showing inequality in the distribution of Land holding in West Bengal in 1970-71 and 1980-81.

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	1970-71	6	34
	1980-81	4	30
Jalpaiguri	1970-71	6	35
	1980-81	5	31
West Bengal	1970-71	7	41
	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"⁸.

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.

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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^{season} crop and Rabi is winter^{season} crop.
8. Bandopadhyya, D., "Land Reforms in India : An analysis" in Kurukshetra, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, October, 1986, Annual Number, p. 6.

CHAPTER - VII

GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND THE
CONSEQUENT EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY OF THE
WESTERN DUARS

SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

VII.1.1 One of the important facets of the structural changes in the agricultural economy is the growth in the number of agricultural labourers. Agricultural labourers constitute a very important component of the rural population in today's West Bengal and so also in the district of Jalpaiguri, accounting for about one-third and two-fifths of the rural workers respectively. Our data from various secondary sources would show that the district of Jalpaiguri has witnessed a very high rate of growth in the number of agricultural labourers compared to the State of West Bengal as a whole between the census periods 1951 to 1961, 1961 to 1971 and 1971 to 1981. It is necessary to inquire in some detail the causes of this high rate of growth in their number.

VII.1.2 It has been held that in the recent past "most of the leading economists have tried to penetrate the smoke-screen of value neutral econometric measurements of rates of growth of production and productivity over time and space. Attention is given much more towards understanding the changes in the modes of production. The governmental policy was to change the mode mainly through improvement in productive forces through the HYV programme in controlled

irrigation areas and to allow the production relations to adjust themselves to the induced changes in productive forces. The inhibiting and distorting effects of relations of production conducive to unfettered reproduction were discernible to careful observers even in the early period of upswing in the hinterland of the so-called Green Revolution, i.e., Punjab and Haryana. In other words, a large body of economists in India are at no state very much enamoured by the so-called technological solution of the problem of stupendous social transformation of Indian agriculture"¹. Later on, it appeared that the controversy "had bogged down in an exercise of putting labels like 'capitalism', 'semi-feudalism', 'commercial capitalism', etc., on various categories"² of modes of production. Thus it appears that in the debate on the relative importance of the raising of agricultural productivity through technological transformation and attainment of greater economic and social justice and welfare, the balance of opinion was strongly weighed in favour of the changes in the modes and scales of production, modes of surplus realisation and "much less on the social existence form of labour power which is the basic, the decisive factor in the various modes of production"³.

VII.1.3 In regard to the state of growth of agricultural labourers it becomes apparent from table VII.1 that there has been a fantastic growth in the number of agricultural labourers in the Western Duars region of the district of Jalpaiguri as well as in the whole district, compared to the State of West Bengal as a whole. The percentage

growth of agricultural labourers was +582.17% during 1951-61, +264.15% during 1961-71 and +103.5% during 1971-81 in the whole district of Jalpaiguri; while the percentage growth in the State, was +81.85% , +51.08% and +19.10% respectively during the corresponding decades. On an average, the annual addition to the agricultural labour force in the district has been to the order of 58% in the decade 1951-61, 26% in the decade 1961-71 and 10% in the decade 1971-81. While in the State this addition has been at the rate of 5%, 8% and about 2% respectively in the decades under study. In the Western Duars, the corresponding figures were about 108%, 19% and 9% respectively. It is, therefore, necessary to probe into the causes of this phenomenon and to determine as to how far it has been by real changes in the modes of production and to what extent due to the "social existence form" obtaining in the district and region of our study.

TABLE VII. 1 - RATE OF GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1951-61 TO 1971-81 (PERCENTAGES).

District/State/ Region	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81
Jalpaiguri	+582.17	+264.15	+103.50
West Bengal	+ 51.08	+ 81.85	+ 19.10
Western Duars	+1077.87	+194.44	+ 93.89

Source : Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981.

SECTION 2 : AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

VII.2.1 It would not be out of place if we start with a brief historical background of the origin of agricultural labourers in the district and in the region of our study under the British rule. It would help us to understand as to how the origin and growth of agricultural labourers corresponded with the land-tenure policy of the colonial government and would also show as to how, by the 1930s, the land-man ratio turned against the labourers which led to a worsening of their conditions. We would then examine the development during the recent decades from 1951 to 1981 when the proportion of agricultural labourers among the cultivators in rural areas reached new heights.

VII.2.2 Determination of the possible size of the class of agricultural labourers in the pre-British as well as in the first half of the British rule in the Duars region and in the district of Jalpaiguri is rather difficult, because apart from a few comments here and there, we seldom find data giving any idea about the quantitative importance of this class. It is difficult to say that there existed a class of agricultural labourers during the Bhuti period. Land-man ratio was extremely favourable as most of the lands were filled with jungles and waiting to be brought under cultivation. In the first half of the British rule the situation remained more or less unaltered due to the scarcity of cultivation. In fact, to attract cultivators, lands were leased out to jotedars at very

favourable terms compared to their counterpart in the permanently settled portion of the district as well as in the neighbouring districts⁴. It may be reiterated here that the dominant form of land management in the Western Duars was based on jotedari-adhiari system, (or in another common local parlance giri -adhiari system), which left little scope for non-adhiari hired labour employment. Sharecropping in the district of Jalpaiguri differed considerably in its form and extent from those which obtained in other parts of Bengal. "In Central Bengal, share cropping, though prevalent was more adjunct to the dominant form of ownership cultivation"⁵. But in the Western Duars region and in the district of Jalpaiguri share croppers were the mainstay in the continuation and expansion of cultivation. Jotedars and their sub-tenants used to employ adhiars to cultivate their lands in addition to their own cultivation and sub-leasing to sub-tenants. The terms of adhiari contracts were also much favourable to adhiars in the Western Duars part of the district of Jalpaiguri. Here, unlike the permanently settled part of the district, as well as most other districts of Bengal, landowners provided adhiars with all inputs and implements of agriculture and the adhiars only provided actual manual labour, but, the adhiars' share was the same in both cases⁶. Adhiars comprised of people from tribal and semi-tribal communities who came to this area to cultivate lands on favourable terms⁷. These people were lured by the chances of having some land of their own to undertake a totally labour-intensive reclamation of the areas. After reclamation, they were allowed to cultivate as adhiars without any tenancy rights⁸.

VII.2.3 Thus, adhiari or sharecropping as the dominant form of cultivation in the Western Duars region and in the district Jalpaiguri had emerged historically as the result of a combination of circumstances. Firstly, large areas of cultivable unreclaimed land resulted in a favourable land-man ratio which enabled the extension of cultivation through labour intensive methods. Complementary to this was the available sizeable labour force from tribal and semi-tribal population, habituated to low subsistence levels and practising rain-fed mono-crop cultivation with negligible material inputs. In the early part of the British rule, therefore, the main factor behind the non-emergence of a district class of landless agricultural labourers was the system of cultivation by adhiars. The adhiars, in fact, took the position of agricultural labourers though there was an obvious difference between the two. Our discussion on adhiars in Chapter III shows that adhiars were treated as labourers and denied any rights on lands cultivated by them and the produce-share they obtained was regarded as wages in kind paid to them. This is also evident from the earliest account left by Mr. Hunter. He wrote in 1872 : "There is no tendency towards the growth of a distinct class of day-labourers in Jalpaiguri District, neither renting land nor possessing fields of their own. Almost every man in the District till a little plot of ground for himself. Several of the smaller husbandmen, however, in addition to cultivating their own small patches, also tills the fields of others, receiving in return for their labour a one-half share of the crop...."⁹ Hunter further noted, "There are very few regular day-labourers or agricultural labourers in Jalpaiguri District, but men can be obtained when

required at from 3 to 4 annas (4½d to 6d) a day. The small cultivators themselves, when not actually engaged on their own fields, also hire themselves out as day-labourers"¹⁰. It also occurs from further evidence that even in the first decade of the twentieth century, agricultural labourers were extremely few in number. As Gruning in his Gazetteer of the district of Jalpaiguri in 1911 pointed out : "The landless agricultural labourer hardly exists; his place is taken to some extent by the adhiar, who cultivates a piece of land and receives half the produce. Want of sufficient agricultural labour has much retarded the extension of cultivation in the Western Duars"¹¹.

VII.2.4 Indeed, the demand for labour particularly rose very high in the first decade of this century due to the commercialisation of agriculture. The cultivation of jute rose by 113% between 1901-02 and 1907-08, while the cultivation of tobacco rose by about 6% during this time¹². It is a common fact that, the cultivation of jute requires a comparatively larger number of labourers. So also is the case of tobacco cultivation. During this period, it is not improbable that some part of the extension of commercial agriculture took place in the lands cultivated by adhiars who were evicted in the process from these lands thereby reducing some adhiars to the position of landless labourers¹³. Thus, in the process of extension of commercial cultivation, lands were made available by evicting adhiars and at the same time some demand for additional labour was met from this pool of adhiars turned into agricultural labourers. However, the scale of eviction was in all probabilities very small,

due to favourable land-man ratio and as the pace of extension of commercial cultivation did not last long.

VII.2.5 In the latter part of the 1920s and the earlier part of the 1930s, the great event which caused the immiserisation of the peasantry of the district was the Great Depression. Due to the continuous falling of prices of agricultural goods most of the jotedars and chukanidars could not pay their land revenue dues, and their lands were sold in auction by the government for the realisation of revenue arrears. Though no precise figures are available, it appears that many of the landholders were dispossessed of their lands in the process and the lands passed into the hands of the rich merchants and traders¹⁴. It can be reasonably assumed that after the Depression was over, at least some of the dispossessed peasants could not regain their earlier position and hence turned into agricultural labourers. The origin of the class of agricultural labourer in the district can reasonably be traced to this period of Great Depression of the 1930s.

VII.2.6 In the late forties, another important event which touched the peasantry of the district and that of the Western Duars was the Tebhaga movement as noted earlier in Chapter III. We have come to know that agricultural labourers also participated in this movement, though it was primarily a movement organised by the adhiars. This uprising of a large section of the peasantry has an important bearing on the growth of agricultural labour class. Although the movement took the most violent form in this district during 1946-47,

the background was actually prepared a few years ago. At the early 1940s the usual cordial relationship that was there between land-owners (giris or jotedars) and share croppers (adhiars) started to deteriorate. Adhiars began to protest against the oppression of their giris. Giris could smell the advent of such a movement. In consequence some of the adhiars were evicted from land and turned into landless labourers. That some of the adhiars had been evicted is borne out by the fact that, total land under adhi during 1931-35 settlement of the Western Duars fell by 21.69% compared to the 1906-16 settlement. Moreover, despite the fact that the number of adhiars were not recorded in the 1931-35 settlement, it is still discernible from the figures of area operated by them that their number had fallen due to eviction¹⁵. These adhiars turned out from land, had no alternative but to become agricultural labourers.

SECTION 3 : AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

VII.3.1 After independence and partition of India in 1947, large number of refugee peasants, many belonging to the Scheduled Castes from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) immigrated into the comparatively less densely populated Northern districts of West Bengal¹⁶. One of the largest recipients of refugee population was the district of Jalpaiguri. The large influx of refugees from East Pakistan was reflected in the significant growth of population in this district and in its Western Duars region in the decade 1951-61 compared to the later decades as is evident from table VII.2 below. Density of

TABLE VII.2 -RATE OF GROWTH OF TOTAL POPULATION, RURAL POPULATION AND DENSITY OF POPULATION IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION AND IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL DURING 1951-1981 (PERCENTAGES).

District/Region/ State	Rate of growth of population			Rate of growth of rural population			Rate of growth of density of population		
	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Jalpaiguri	48.63	28.76	26.55	45.63	28.05	20.33	47.65	27.27	27.14
Western Duars	41.56	27.49	29.80	42.79	25.15	22.21	41.89	26.19	31.32
West Bengal	32.77	26.87	23.17	31.79	26.38	20.36	33.11	26.63	22.02

Source : Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981.

population increased significantly as is exhibited in this table. The pace and pressure of population growth began to disturb the low level equilibrium of the system prevailing in the district. It is quite reasonable to believe that a certain percentage of the immigrant refugee peasants undertook the job of agricultural labour as a full time occupation, since not all of them came to India with enough money and capital. The continuous immigration of refugees resulted in a very sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers in the decade as is evident from table VII.1. In this decade, agricultural labourers increased by 1077.87% in the Western Duars region and by 582.17% in the whole district of Jalpaiguri. It was a very high rate indeed, compared to the 51.08% rate of growth of agricultural labourers in the State as a whole. Thus, the local, regional and demographic factors once favourable to sharecropping as a form of cultivation in the district now began to turn adverse. Proportion of agricultural labourers to total rural population and to total rural workers gradually rose as shown respectively in tables VII.3 and VII.4.

TABLE VII.3 - PERCENTAGE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS TO TOTAL RURAL POPULATION IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION FROM 1951 TO 1981

District/State/ Region	1951	1961	1971	1981
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Jalpaiguri	0.26	1.20	3.41	5.77
West Bengal	5.77	6.72	9.51	9.41
Western Duars	0.17	1.42	3.35	5.31

Sources: Census of India, Jalpaiguri District Handbook, 1951, 1961, 1971 & 1981.

TABLE VII.4 - PERCENTAGE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS TO TOTAL RURAL WORKERS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI, IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION FROM 1951 TO 1981

District/ State/Region	1951	1961	1971	1981
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Jalpaiguri	1.29	3.05	10.83	17.78
West Bengal	18.97	20.24	35.00	32.95
Western Duars	1.63	3.68	10.45	16.12

Source : Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971 & 1981.

VII.3.2 We have now made an attempt to analyse the major changes that took place in the agrarian society of Western Duars together with the district as a whole since the 50s of the present century. We have also tried to delineate the consequences of these changes on the economy of the Western Duars as well as on the economy of the district as a whole. First, there occurred an adverse change in land-man ratio due to the growth of population. No new job opportunities either in the agricultural or in other sectors were created. This affected the relationship between the agricultural labourers and their employers. The usefulness of the "patron-client relationship" declined from the point of view of the employer with steady and regular supply of labour. They were now less willing to carry the burden of an attached hired labourers, permanently tied on him, whom

he fed, provided shelter or looked after, when he had the option of hiring labour power as much or as little as he needed from the market¹⁷. The growing landlessness and joblessness, on the other hand, now meant that the ethnic composition of the agricultural labourers changed, as a large number of non-tribals and those from not so low castes entered the rural job market. Secondly, landlessness now turn to be a serious problem. "Hiring out labour was no longer supplemented by cultivation on one's own account. It was a full time occupation, as the labourer became free from any control over land, his means of production"¹⁸. Under the circumstances, it is quite obvious that labour relations could not be the same any more. One major point of departure from the earlier situation, as a consequence of the development may be that among the hired labourers the proportion of casual labourers which was very small until now, grew, while the proportion of attached workers or farm servants permanently tied to the employer declined¹⁹.

SECTION 4 : CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE GROWTH OF
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE POST-
INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

VII.4.1 Many other factors also contributed to the rapid growth in the number of agricultural labourers in the district of Jalpaiguri. Such factors may be enumerated as follows in order of their importance.

(i) The decline of the giri-adhiari system of cultivation and the growing immiserisation and landlessness, (ii) The enactment of the WBLR Act of 1955, and its implementation. (iii) The ravages of the floods of 1968-70 in Tista and its tributaries that turned large

tracts of fertile cultivated areas into barren sandy areas. (iv) Spillover of tea labour into agricultural jobs, mainly in the Western Duars part of the district. (v) Growth of comparatively more intensive farming methods. (vi) The adoption and execution of the programme of OB and the consequent eviction of sharecroppers. (vii) Lack of sufficient employment opportunities in non-agricultural sectors of the economy and (viii) the demographic factors.

VII.4.2 It may be recalled that in the British period, comparatively better placed cultivators occupied land in large contiguous clusters (called jotes) and brought them under cultivation with the help of their poor neighbours and relations. These better placed cultivators became giris (land owners and patrons) providing their poor relations (adhiars and their clients) with minimum means of subsistence and production, and developed the institution of giri-adhiari land management. In the changed situation of increasing population pressure (after independence) which raised the nominal value of lands to levels beyond their expectation, and the politico-legal attack on the rationality of the system, giris acted as one of the chief instruments of dislodging adhiars from their traditional positions²⁰. Many of the giris were in possession of lands larger in size than the average size of holdings possessed by jotedars in other areas of West Bengal. But they were less thrifty than their counterparts in other areas in circumventing the legal provisions and had lesser entrenchment in the administrative machinery. Given these hurdles in operation, the giris resorted to large-scale eviction of their adhiars and indiscriminate sale of their lands, leaving lesser scope for continuation of the traditional adhiars in the new owners' farms²¹.

VII.4.3 The "proletarianisation process" was reinforced and gained momentum after the enactment of WBLR Act, 1955. A large scale eviction of sharecroppers took place at the passing of this Act and at different stages of its implementation²². As a result, the ranks of agricultural labourers were swelled during the sixties and recorded a very high rate of growth of 264.15% in the district and 194.44% in the Western Duars region in the decade 1961-71, as shown in table VII.1. The agricultural labourers in 1971 formed as large as 11% of the total rural workers both in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the Western Duars region of the district which were only 3% and 4% respectively in 1961. As in other parts of West Bengal there was a shift away from share cropping, which was a dominant form of land management, in favour of agriculture based on hired labour. In many cases this did not involve any change of personnel, the sharecroppers were turned into agricultural labourers and denied his legal rights - but the relationship changed²³.

VII.4.4 It is important to note that though the organised movements of the sharecroppers demanded for a reasonably higher share of the produce, these movements did not pay adequate attention to the need to develop an economically viable mode of production for the farms of adhiars which are generally very small in size. Developing the economic viability of the small farms of adhiars was more necessary in the changed situation (after the decline of the giri-adhiari system) in view of the fact that the adhiars were well assured of getting at least the means and inputs of cultivation from their giris

under the earlier giri-adhiari system. Such lack of attention for an alternative mode largely nullified, within a comparatively short period, almost all the benefits of occupation and legal redistribution of surplus lands among the landless and semi-landless agricultural labourers and poor peasants. An investigation on the agricultural labourers in this district revealed that in 1976 in more than 60% cases the recipients of vested lands had already lost effective possession to others²⁴.

VII.4.5 The incidence of damage due to floods in 1968-70 was more heavy in the sadar sub-division of the district of Jalpaiguri²⁵. Cultivated land in this area got thick layer of sand deposits converting one of the most fertile areas of the district into sandy barren lands for quite sometime. Reclamation attempts were made with the help of CARE aid. But it could be found by the investigation mentioned above that holdings of poorer owners of that area were passing away out of their hands at throw away prices²⁶. The floods not only affected the rural poor of the area but also a large number of middle and rich peasants who were turned into near destitutes. It may be reasonably believed that the Census of 1971 included some of these affected persons as landless agricultural labourers.

VII.4.6 In the district of Jalpaiguri, there is a large overlap between non-permanent plantation labour (locally called bigha labour) and casual agricultural labour. The total labour force employed in the tea plantations of Jalpaiguri being very large (1.71 lakh in 1961), any shift in its size can not but affect the pool of

agricultural labour. Since 1965, Indian tea, especially Jalpaiguri tea started facing adverse conditions in the international market. This unfavourable market situation continued through the quinquennium, 1965-70. It had its after effect in the form of lower production targets and consequent shrinkage in the employment of seasonal labour which constituted about 40% to 50% of the total labour force²⁷ in the plucking season. There occurred a large scale transfers of ownership of tea gardens (particularly the foreign ones) and speculative and trade interests intruded on a large scale. Considerable erosion of capital resources occurred due to inefficiency in the management of the gardens²⁸. In total, there was perceptible slump in the tea industry during the decade 1961-71. Moreover, in this period, the State Government had to impose an area-wise ceiling on employment of permanent labour in tea gardens. In consequence, tea plantations not only lost their pull on the growing surplus labour force in the district, they even started pushing out a growing number of unemployed members of tea garden labour families. There was a considerable spill over from the plantation into agricultural occupations during the second part of the decade 1961-71. It may be recapitulated here that from a considerable earlier period, there was tendency amongst the plantation workers to purchase cultivable land in the fringe of tea gardens and settle down as cultivators or agricultural labourers after their retirement or retrenchment from the gardens²⁹. The above factors acted conjointly to help the swelling in the number of agricultural labourers in the district.

VII.4.7 It is often held that "the process of relative impoverishment of small peasants and the swelling rank of agricultural labour are complementary to the process of capitalist and large-scale production"³⁰. It needs to be examined in the present context of our analysis as to how the capitalist production in agriculture and the growing force of agricultural labour has been complementary to each other in the district and region of our study. The period of our analysis would approximately be between mid-sixties (when the "New Strategy" in agriculture was launched) to mid-eighties of the present century.

VII.4.8 In the past, the major interest of intreprenurial activity of the Jalpaiguri gentry was centered around tea. Like in any other small town gentry, the babus of Jalpaiguri also possessed some landed property which were usually cultivated by adhiars. Cultivation used to be undertaken for the fulfilment of domestic consumption needs rather than as an economic venture and having little market orientation. The creation of new potentials in agriculture at the discovery of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) of seeds and due to slump in tea business, the attention of the town gentry turned towards high yielding food crops cultivation. Moreover, with the steady rising prices of food crops, the landed gentry began to undertake agriculture more as a business proposition rather than an element of a semi-feudal life-style. The introduction of cultivation of HYV food crops gradually spread in other blocks of the district and began to be practised mainly by well-to-do farmers and efficient and hard

working small farmers in the seventies and the eighties. This would be evident from the figures of various tables presented below to highlight the different aspects of the progress of modern cultivation in the district. From these tables, the increase in the use of various inputs which are concomitant features of the HYV programme will also be clear. New entrepreneurs, who adopted the HYV programme of crop raising, evicted the traditional sharecroppers either through mutual agreement or under duress. The above mentioned investigation revealed that a part of this dispossessed labour force was engaged as agricultural labourers in the modernised farms of the new entrepreneurs³¹.

VII.4.9 In this district a fast increase in the number of agricultural labourers has also been associated with more intensive land use and comparatively more capital-intensive forms of cultivation. A marked rise in wheat production and considerable diversification of crops can also be noticed during the period as is evident from table VII.5 and VII.6 above. There has been a steady increase in the consumption of fertilisers (table VII.7). Area under irrigation appears to be not so high (table VII.8) but the number of irrigation installations has risen considerably. Productivity of crops has also increased steadily as shown below in tables VII.9 and VII.10.

TABLE VII.5 - DISTRIBUTION OF AREA (IN HECTARES) UNDER HYV OF MAJOR CROPS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1972-73 TO 1986-87

Crop/Year	1972-73		1982-83		1986-87		Percentage increase between 1972-73 & 1986-87	
	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.
(10)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Aus paddy	4,798	4,106	14,315	11,245	23,633	18,658	392.56	354.41
Aman paddy	7,611	7,039	30,892	24,260	54,189	40,617	611.98	477.03
Wheat	331	686	31,453	22,473	25,335	21,020	2621.26	2964.14

Note: HYV - High Yielding Variety; JAL. - Jalpaiguri; W.D. - Western Duars.

Sources: (i) A Note on Agricultural Activities of Jalpaiguri District, District Agriculture Office, Jalpaiguri, 1979.

(ii) Annual Plan on Agriculture, 1983-84 and 1987-88, Jalpaiguri, Principal Agricultural Office, Jalpaiguri, 1985 and 1989.

TABLE VII.6 - DISTRIBUTION OF AREA (IN HECTARES) UNDER LOCAL VARIETY OF MAJOR CROPS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1972-73 TO 1986-87

Crop/Year	1972-73		1982-83		1986-87		Percentage Increase/Decrease between 1972-73 and 1986-87	
	JAL.	W.D.	JAL	W.D.	JAL	W.D.	JAL (8)	W.D. (9)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Aus paddy	32,363	24,522	63,268	50,988	23,633	18,658	-26.98	-23.9
Aman paddy	1,55,072	1,20,449	1,29,147	95,281	1,26,163	90,673	-18.64	-24.7
Oil seed	3,104	2,791	13,861	9,302	14,035	9,273	+352.16	+232.25
Pulses	1,606	1,372	6,458	5,108	14,688	12,239	+814.57	+792.05
Jute	19,953	13,235	26,568	16,518	31,626	21,411	+58.50	+61.7
Tobacco	1,601	1,536	2,914	2,782	3,131	3,064	+95.57	+99.4

Notes: (i) It is reported that no area was put under local wheat since 1975-76. A Note on Agricultural Activities of Jalpaiguri District, District Agriculture Office, Jalpaiguri, 1979, p. 43.

(ii) JAL. - Jalpaiguri, W.D. - Western Duars.

Sources : As mentioned in table VII. 5 above.

TABLE VII. 7 - CONSUMPTION OF FERTILISER* (IN M.T.) IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION IN 1972-73 AND 1986-87

District/State	Consumption of fertiliser		Percentage increase
	1972-73	1986-87	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Jalpaiguri	1,414	10,606	650.07
West Bengal	1,018	7,424	629.27

Note : M.T. - Metric Ton

* Nitrogen, Potassium and Calcium taken together

Sources: As mentioned in table VII.5

TABLE VII.8 - EXTENT OF IRRIGATION FACILITIES CREATED IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1981-82 AND 1986-87

Items/year	1981-82		1986-87		Percentage increase	
	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Net irrigation potential created(hec.)	43,401.00	31,377.00	58,294.35	44,303.71	34.32	41.20
Gross irrigated area (hec.)	22,727.20	15,981.00	31,987.00	23,670.38	40.74	48.12
Percentage of cropped area irrigated	7.61	8.37	8.70	10.33	35.74	36.44
Total number of irrigation installations	1,905	1,448	3,658	2,780	92.02	91.99

Note: JAL. - Jalpaiguri; W.D. - Western Duars

Source : As in table VII.5 above.

TABLE VII.9 - INDEX NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL AND IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI (BASE : TRIENNIUM ENDING CROP YEAR 1971-72)

District/ State	1981-82 Cereals	All combined	1982-83 Cereals	All combined	1983-84 Cereals	All combined	1984-85 Cereals	All combined	1985-86 Cereals	All combined
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Jalpaiguri	78.03	102.02	62.87	101.68	86.99	111.25	85.67	111.82	86.88	113.71
West Bengal	89.14	101.22	82.89	99.78	118.57	130.59	123.99	135.14	125.37	138.12

Source: Economic Review, 1987-88, Statistical Appendix, Government of West Bengal.

TABLE VII.10 - YIELD OF SELECTED CROPS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL
(YIELD IN KGS PER HECTARE)

State/District	Rice	Wheat	Other Cereals	Total Cereals	Pulses	Total food grains
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Jalpaiguri						
1960-61	1044	600	622	1035	282	1606
1970-71	1126	889	775	1119	410	1109
1980-81	1113	1866	774	1131	570	1115
1984-85	1009	1731	1224	1041	473	1028
1985-86	1028	1703	1377	1086	542	1054
West Bengal						
1960-61	1184	743	556	1166	505	1073
1970-71	1239	2410	781	1305	564	1224
1980-81	1442	1672	902	1443	455	1358
1984-85	1557	2418	1243	1602	586	1538
1985-86	1573	2421	1373	1617	628	1546

Source : Govt. of West Bengal, Economic Review 1987-88, Statistical Appendix, pp. 66-67 & pp. 68-69.

VII.4.10 It has been found that mainly two sets of entrepreneurs brought about these changes - "the very hard working and efficient refugee cultivators (mainly belonging to Namasudra community of West Bengal) cultivating on a small but intensive scale, and (b) the gentlemen farmers using their better command over private and public resources"³². It is to be noted that in the main, the agencies responsible for these latest changes in the agriculture of the district, were not, however, the communities which had been traditionally entrenched in this particular sphere of production³³ (viz., the Rajbansis, either jotedars or adhiars). Since these changes were brought about by replacing, rather than by transforming the earlier traditional mode, and people practising that mode, a large number of Rajbansis, have been reduced to the position of a surplus agricultural labour force. Thus, it can be found that the development of capitalist mode of production in agriculture is associated with a high rate of growth in the number of agricultural labourers. The additional employment demand created by the new entrepreneurs is failing to absorb the growing bulk of displaced adhiars and small farmers and hence swelled the number of agricultural labourers.

VII.4.11 There can be no denying the fact that the growth of employment in non-agricultural sector has not been commensurate with the growth of agricultural labourers, where the latter can find employment for a reasonable time. The result was that in the occupational distribution of rural workers in the district of Jalpaiguri and that in the Western Duars region, the percentage of agricultural labourers increased rapidly while the percentage of

cultivators steadily decreased and that of non-agriculturists slowly decreased. These changes would be evident from Table VII.11 below.

TABLE VII.11 OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL WORKERS
(PERCENTAGES) IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND
IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1951-1981

Occupation/ year	1951		1961		1971		1981	
	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.	JAL.	W.D.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Cultivators	50.68	86.31	46.34	55.77	42.77	39.86	36.94	34.94
Agricultural labourers	1.29	1.63	3.05	3.68	10.83	10.46	17.78	16.12
Non- agriculturists	48.03	12.06	50.61	40.55	46.40	49.68	45.28	48.94

Source : Census of India, Jalpaiguri District Hand Book,
1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981.

It can be found from this table that the proportion of non-agricultural workers in total rural work force has recorded a continuous decline from 1961 to 1971. The fall in this proportion has been higher in this decade than the latter decade of 1971-81. These changes over decades indicate that in the last decade more job opportunities have been created rural areas of Jalpaiguri in non-farm sectors. But, the fact which should

be taken into consideration is that in the same decade the number of agricultural labourers has recorded a growth of about 104%. That the demand for labour from non-agricultural sector is not adequate is evidenced from a finding in 1976 that "the level of wage rate in the agricultural sector was not allowed to rise anywhere near the stipulated legal rate of Rs. 7.50 per day even in busier seasons of the agricultural year"³⁴. Table VII.12 below shows that though compared to 1976-77 an increase of 33.6% in the average daily wage rates was recorded in 1979-80, still it did not reach the stipulated minimum. This low rate of wages indicates that the rural employment

TABLE VII.12 - MINIMUM WAGES FIXED AND ACTUAL AVERAGE DAILY WAGES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL DURING 1969-70 TO 1979-80

District/ State	1969-70		1976-77		1979-80	
	Minimum wage	Actual wage	Minimum wage	Actual wage	Minimum wage	Actual wage
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Jalpaiguri	5.50	3.50	8.10	5.18	8.10	6.95
West Bengal	5.60	3.29	8.10	5.63	8.10	6.75

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

(ii) Land Utilisation and Other Statistics, Department of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal, 1981.

creation programmes of the State Government such as NREP, RLEGP, IRDP etc. could not create sufficient demand-pull for employment of agricultural labourers and hence failed to make any perceptible dent on rural poverty. As was noted earlier even in agriculture the intensive cultivation by new entrepreneurs could not absorb sufficient number of growing agricultural labour force. As for tea industry, which has been the biggest employer of labourers in the district, it can be found that labour employment is actually falling since 1952³⁵.

VII.4.12 In the above delineation effects of demographic changes on the growth of agricultural labour and rural poverty have already been taken into consideration. Some further points may be added here on this issue. Demographic factors induce changes in the distribution of land, and also bring about a change in the ratio of agricultural labourers to cultivators. The growth of population often forces a peasant family with land to undertake agricultural labour as a secondary occupation, which after a certain period of time leads some members of a family to perform agricultural labour as the main occupation. Demographic pressure, therefore, generates and therefore accentuates the pauperisation process. Table VII.13 shows the growth of population and that of net cultivable area in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the Western Duars region, from 1951 to 1981. From the table it becomes obvious that the land-man ratio has definitely deteriorated over the period due to the fact that the rate of growth of net cultivable area is very small while the rate of growth of population is very high.

TABLE VII. 13 - GROWTH OF POPULATION AND GROWTH OF NET CULTIVABLE AREA IN THE DISTRICT OF JALPAIGURI AND IN THE WESTERN DUARS REGION DURING 1971-81

Item/District/ Region	Jalpaiguri	Western Duars
Growth of net cultivable area	+1.95%	+15.30%
Growth of population	+26.55 %	+29.80 %

Sources: (1) Census of India, Jalpaiguri District Hand Book, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981.

VII.4.13 The decline in land-man ratio contribute directly to predictable changes in the distribution of land. It may be safely inferred that it is the decline of this ratio in the district of Jalpaiguri and in the Western Duars region that has led to proliferation of marginal and small holdings and a steady fall in the average size of holdings. The question of size of holdings is of obvious relevance to the determination of households which have to seek wage work within agriculture outside their own farms or in non-agricultural activities³⁶. The more important point that is to be taken into consideration is certainly not the size of holding but whether it can generate subsistence for the peasant. The issue of increases in agricultural productivity, that could compensate for a declining average size of holdings is, therefore, crucial to the pauperisation process. It may be maintained that the ability of the small and marginal farmers to survive is, no doubt, derived in part

from the support the agricultural sector receives through various measures, including those specifically meant to benefit the small farmer, but it is also derived from their participation in markets as sellers of produce. The earlier debates on the relatively higher productivity of land in the small farm sector have clearly shown both higher labour intensities and higher valued crop-combinations as two of the most important features of small farm agriculture. However, whether it is the extent of family labour use or the crop-combination, the choices at the household level are dictated by a largely unchanging resource base and constraints upon its use. But, as Krishnaji points out, "when families grow in size, as they surely do, and the resource bases do not expand, wage work is the only option left"³⁷. It follows, therefore, that demographic pressure has also contributed substantially to the growth of agricultural labour force in our region of study.

VII.4.14 Thus, in the Western Duars region and in the district of Jalpaiguri as a whole, there are two facets of agriculture today; on the one hand, a slow but steady diversification on modern lines, and on the other, greater landlessness and immiserisation of ^a large section of the peasantry. The situation could have been viable if there had been other avenues in the economy which could fully absorb the growing agricultural labour force into some other productive enterprises, either within or outside the agricultural sector. In

the absence of any modern institutional arrangement based on co-operative endeavour of the poorer peasantry in order to build up labour-intensive production units in agriculture, this accentuation of the problem of rural poverty has become a major issue in the entire course of agricultural development in the region of our study.

1. Bandopadhyaya, N., "Causes of Sharp Increase in Agricultural Labourers, 1961-71 - A case study of Social-Existence Forms of Labour in North Bengal", Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, December 1977, p. A-111.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Chaudhury, H.N., The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement, Cooch Behar, 1903, pp. 555-56.
5. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-111.
6. Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, 1872, p. 280.
7. The largest section of such share croppers belonged to the broad ethnic group called Rajbansis in Jalpaiguri, Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-113.
8. Our discussion in Chapter III shows this. Milligan, J.A., Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Jalpaiguri District, 1906-16, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Dept., 1919, pp. 88-93.
9. Hunter, W.W., op. cit., p. 279.
10. Ibid., p. 278.
11. Grunning, J.F. Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad Pioneer Press, 1911, pp. 96-97.
12. Ibid., p. 59.
13. Roy Chowdhury, T.K., "Land Control : Class Structure and Class Relations in Western Duars (1871-1905)" in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vol. XXX, No. 1, June, 1987 (off print), pp. 39-40.

14. Barman, U.N., Uttar-Banglar Sekal O Amar Jibansmriti (in Bengali), published by Shri Bijoy Kumar Barman, Jalpaiguri, 1392 (B.S.), pp. 50-61. Barman writes : ".... In this way tens of thousands of people dependent on land were ruined in the Depression of the 30's decade. Its memory was, no doubt, more miserable, than the blow of socialism of the present day". Ibid., p. 57.
15. This fact has been elaborated in Chapter III of this dissertation.
16. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-113.
17. Dasgupta, B., "Agricultural Labour under Colonial, Semi-Capitalist and Capitalist Conditions - A Case Study of West Bengal", Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, Vol. XIX, No. 39, September 1984, p. A-142.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-115.
21. Ibid.
22. Dasgupta, B. - op. cit., pp. A-142-43.
23. Ghose, A.K., Agrarian Reforms in West Bengal- Objective, Achievements and Limitations, ILO, Geneva, 1980.
24. The investigation was undertaken by Prof. N. Bandopadhyaya in the first half of 1976, at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, under the auspices of the Planning Commission, Government of India.
25. Wide tracts of Berubari - Mandalghat and Ranghamali-Moamari regions were severely affected.
26. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-115.
27. Ibid.
28. This trend continued upto 1981. Please see, Chakrabarti, H.K. & Bagchi, K.K., "The sick Tea Industry of North Bengal", Paper No. 4, Group II, 3rd Annual Conference of Bangiya Arthaniti Parishad, Jadavpur University, March 1983.

29. We have already mentioned about this trend in Chapter IV.
30. Krishnaji, N., "Land and Labour in India - The Demographic Factor", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXV, Nos. 18 & 19, May 5-12, 1990, p. 1037.
31. Bandopadhyaya, N. - op. cit., p. A-117.
32. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-117.
33. Ibid.
34. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. A-117.
35. Labour employment in tea industry, ^{had}fallen from 3,22,679 in 1952 to 2,13,000 in 1980. Cited in Chakrabarti H.K. & Bagchi, K.K., op. cit., p. 4.
36. Krishnaji, N., op. cit., p. 1041.
37. Ibid., p. 1042.

CHAPTER - VIII

IMPACT OF LAND REFORM MEASURES WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IMPACT OF
OPERATION BARGA PROGRAMME IN THE
WESTERN DUARSSECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION

VIII.1.1 In this chapter we shall study the impact of land reform measures introduced by the Government of West Bengal with special reference to ~~the~~ "Operation Barga" (OB) programme on the agricultural productivity and land relations in six villages we have investigated in our region of study. It is based on a field investigation conducted during 1985-86.

VIII.1.2 The aims of land reform programmes are mainly two fold, viz., to bring about an egalitarian distribution of land and to raise agricultural productivity by giving title to land to the actual cultivators and providing security to their tenures. Among all states of India, in West Bengal, the largest amount of ceiling surplus lands have been declared vested and most of these lands have been distributed to the landless and land poor cultivators¹. Security of tenure has been given to a large number of bargadars (sharecroppers, called adhiars in the Western Duars region) who were virtually tenants-at-will since long. However, doubts have been

raised from time to time as to the actual amount of benefits conferred upon them and questions have been raised regarding viability of the small farm economy of the bargadars who are generally marginal landholders². It is often said that, although the first objective of land reforms has been achieved to some extent, the second objective has not largely been fulfilled³. It is argued that in the absence of credit and infrastructural facilities and a host of other supportive measures it may not be possible to confer any tangible benefit upon the bargadars and upon the farmers in general. In order to give a positive shape to the land reforms efforts, in West Bengal, a comprehensive piece of legislation enacted in 1979 (amendment to West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955) was followed by an executive programme called "Operation Barga" (OB).

SECTION 2 : WHAT IS OPERATION BARGA

VIII.2.1 OB is a special drive to register the names of bonafide bargadars (to ensure their legal rights) undertaken with the active assistance of not only the bargadars themselves but also of peasants' organisations and self-governing institutions within a stipulated period of time with due sense of urgency and seriousness⁴. This programme was started at the latter half of 1978. It is not a new legislation. Although it may not be regarded as a "radical step", it can definitely be called a "bold step" to improve the plight of bargadars.

VIII.2.2 It has been laid down in the WBLR Act, 1955, that the name(s) of bargadars should be recorded in the village record-of-rights⁵. This work had been started in 1974, but till the end of 1977 the performance was not at all satisfactory. Typically bureaucratic method of recording the names of bargadars failed to achieve any significant success. The "camps" for recording the names of bargadars used to be held previously in a "comfortable" place within a village which was in most cases the house of the local landlord. The "beneficiaries", i.e., the bargadars and the peasant organisations, were never contacted, prior to setting up of such camps. The work of recording of names used to start during day time when most of the bargadars were at work in the fields. Consequently, recording was very poor. At last, when the bureaucratic machinery was made aware of the real situation in May 1978, two "re-orientation camps" were held in the districts of Midnapore and Hooghly, where a group of bargadars, agricultural labourers and poor peasants had free and frank discussions with the government officials for three days⁶. It was realised from these discussions that the bargadars were too much afraid to come forward to record their names due to possible future retaliation by the landowners. It was felt that this fear had to be overcome by continuous discussion with the beneficiaries prior to actual recording of names. The meetings had to be organised when bargadars were at leisure in the evenings and the camps would be held in public place, preferably in the school premises. In fact, the entire procedure of the OB as was followed later on was suggested by the actual beneficiaries⁷.

VIII.2.3 The process of OB had been divided into the following five stages⁸.

(i) To identify the priority pockets with large concentration of bargadars. This basic task was to be done in consultation with the local peasants' organisations.

(ii) To form squads comprising the Settlement Kanungos, Junior Land Reform Officers and experienced Amins and such other officials to conduct the whole work. Usually, the Additional District Magistrate (Land Reform) led these squads.

(iii) To organise evening meetings with the bargadars and owners of land. In these meetings government officials and workers of different local peasant organisations explained to the bargadars the advantages of recording their names. Through discussions bargadars were made to overcome their fear. These meetings were generally held in public places preferably at primary school premises as near as possible to the residence of bargadars. List of bargadars was usually prepared with incidental thereto on the basis of the information made available by the local people in the meeting. Enlisted bargadars were asked to be present in the next date on the plot or plots they cultivated for verification in public.

(iv) Reconnaissance and physical verification of the number of bargadars. Investigating officers kept systematic notes

on it. After completing the notes regarding actual bargadars, a draft list was prepared and published in a conspicuous place of the selected pocket for 24 hours inviting objection against any entry in the list. If any objection was filed, the dispute was decided by a Revenue Officer at the spot after giving an opportunity of being heard to the interested parties. The operation was completed within three days in small areas, and in larger areas within the time as may be prescribed by the higher authority.

(v) The recording of the names of bargadars in the record of rights. In most cases bargadars were given interim certificates of records at the end of "operation" after due verification.

VIII.2.4 The above method of recording the names of bargadars through OB is qualitatively different from the traditional revenue court approach. It was, indeed, a landmark in the history of evolution of rights of bargadars and in giving security to their tenures. In all intents and purposes, it was tilted in favour of the bargadars.

VIII.2.5 Attempts have been made in the past to estimate the probable number of bargadars in West Bengal. These estimates have been made on the basis of surveys and studies conducted by government and non-government agencies. There are conflicting views about the probable number of bargadars in West Bengal⁹. However, it appears

from different estimates that the number of bargadars in West Bengal is somewhere between 20 to 25 lakhs. The basis of calculation is to divide the area under barga cultivation by the average size of barga holding. The total area under barga cultivation is estimated to be 25 lakh acres by taking into account the Flood Commission's (1940) estimate of percentage of area under barga. The estimated average size of barga¹⁰ holding is between 0.97 acre and 1.25 acres¹¹. On this basis, the total number of bargadars in West Bengal is estimated to be between 20 and 25 lakhs.

VIII.2.6 Calculation of probable number of bargadars in the recent period before initiating the OB programme has been made in Jalpaiguri district in the following manner¹². Area under modern irrigation has been excluded from agricultural land for the purpose of computing probable number of bargadars in a mouza (village), because it has been presumed that in irrigated areas capitalist trend of production has set in and in the process bargadars have been evicted. It is further assumed that approximately one third (30%) of non-irrigated agricultural land is under barga cultivation. It was apparent to the authorities "from records" that each bargadar has around 1.5 acres of non-irrigated land under barga cultivation. Under the above presumptions and assumptions, the probable number of bargadars have been found out by dividing 30% of non-irrigated agricultural land by 1.5 (the assumed average size of barga holding).

SECTION 3 : A SIMPLE METHODOLOGY FOR THE INVESTIGATION
OF THE SIX VILLAGES UNDER STUDY

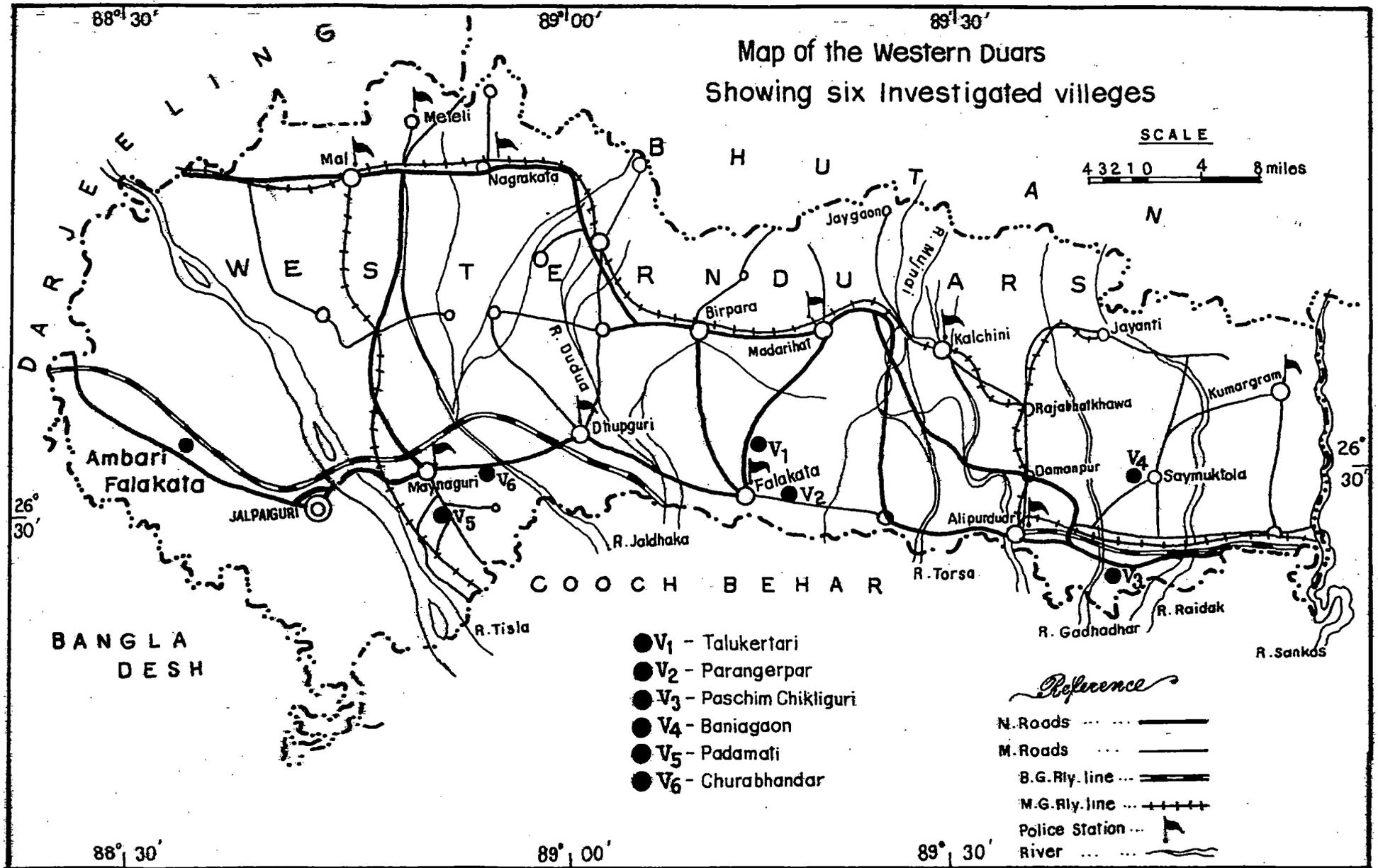
VIII.3.1 For our study we have selected six villages (namely, Talukertari, Parangerpar, Paschim Chikliguri, Baniagaon, Padamati and Churabhandar) from three Settlement Circles (namely, Falakata, Alipurduar and Maynaguri) of the Western Duars region of the district of Jalpaiguri¹³. All of these Settlement Circles have been divided into three categories : (a) Circle with the highest incidence, (b) Circle with the medium incidence and (c) Circle with the lowest incidence of recorded bargadars. Villages of each of these Circles have been arranged into two categories in accordance with the incidence of recorded bargadars. From each of these three Circles two villages have been selected, one with the highest incidence of bargadars and the other with the lowest. After selecting the villages, we have investigated all the bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded) of each village. Table VIII.1 below shows the position of the Settlement Circles regarding the recording of bargadars.

TABLE VIII.1 NUMBER OF BARGADARS IN VARIOUS SETTLEMENT CIRCLES
OF THE WESTERN DUARS REGION OF THE DISTRICT OF
JALPAIGURI : PROBABLE AND RECORDED :
1985-86

Settlement Circles	Estimated probable number of bargadars	Number of bargadars recorded	Percentage of recorded bargadar over probable number
Maynaguri	11,022	3,474	31.52
Dhupguri	7,658	5,154	67.30
Mal	6,856	3,603	52.55
Falakata	8,806	8,593	97.58
Alipurduar	24,660	16,299	66.09
Total :	59,002	37,123	62.92

Source: Office of the Settlement Officer,
(Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri & Darjeeling)
Cooch Behar, 1986.

VIII.3.2 From the table above, it can be seen that the highest number of bargadars have been recorded (97.58% of the probable number) in Falakata Circle. In Maynaguri Circle the lowest number of bargadars (31.52% of the probable number) have been recorded. Among the circles where percentages of bargadars recorded lie between the two extremes, Alipurduar Circle has been chosen.



Map. 4.

VIII.3.3 Table VIII.2 shows the position of selected villages in respect of recording of bargadars against probable number of bargadars. It can be seen from the table that, there are 1289

TABLE VIII.2 POSITION OF SELECTED VILLAGES IN RESPECT OF RECORDING OF BARGADARS IN RELATION TO PROBABLE NUMBER OF BARGADARS : 1985-86

Settlement Circles	Villages	Probable number of bargadars	Number of bargadars recorded	Percentage of bargadars recorded over probable number
Falakata	Talukertari (V ₁)	172	160	93.02
Falakata	Parangerpar (V ₂)	197	39	19.80
Alipurduar	Paschim Chikliguri (V ₃)	141	166	117.73
Alipurduar	Baniagaon (V ₄)	277	16	5.78
Maynaguri	Padamati (V ₅)	380	261	68.68
Maynaguri	Churabhandar (V ₆)	122	30	24.59
Total :		1289	672	52.13

Source : Office of the Settlement Charge Officer, Jalpaiguri, 1986.

probable number of bargadars in total in all the six selected villages taken together. About 52% of the probable number of bargadars have got their names recorded in the record-of-rights. It can be

further seen from the table that although recording of bargadars in Alipurduar Circle has been 66%, one of the villages within this Circle, viz., Paschim Chikliguri has been curiously enough found to have recorded nearly 118% of the probable number of bargadars, whereas another village within this Circle, viz., Baniagaon has been found to have recorded only about 6% of the probable number of bargadars. Incidentally, this latter village holds the lowest rank in the matter of recording of bargadars among all the villages we have investigated.

VIII.3.4 However, calculation of probable number of bargadars in the method mentioned in paragraph VIII.2.6 above does not seem to be realistic, because exactly 30% of non-irrigated land may not be under barga cultivation in a village and the average size of barga holding may not always be 1.5 acres. Under such circumstances the probable number of bargadars in a village is bound to be different where these assumptions do not hold good. From the point of view of the probable number of bargadars calculated in the method noted above, the performance of recording of bargadars under the OB programme would appear to be different from the actual performance when the actual number of bargadars in a village is compared with the number of recorded bargadars. Table VIII.3 below shows the non-irrigated land, land under barga cultivation and average amount of land per bargadar in the villages of our investigation. It can be seen from the Table below that percentage of actual non-irrigated

TABLE VIII. 3 NON-IRRIGATED LAND, LAND UNDER BARGA
CULTIVATION AND AVERAGE AMOUNT OF LAND
PER BARGADAR IN THE VILLAGES INVESTIGATED :
1985-86

Villages	Total non-irrigated land (in acres)	Total land under barga (in acres)	Percentage of land under barga	Actual number of bargadars	Average amount of land (in acres) per bargadar
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	898.00	371.36	42.23	176	2.11
V ₂	988.00	107.16	10.85	57	1.88
V ₃	706.00	229.68	32.53	174	1.32
V ₄	1385.00	51.43	3.71	37	1.39
V ₅	1900.00	533.12	28.06	272	1.96
V ₆	611.00	108.65	17.78	41	2.65
Total :	6449.00	1401.40	21.73	757	1.85

Source : Field investigation.

agricultural land under barga cultivation and the average amount of land per bargadar is different in different villages. In some villages there are wide difference between the assumed area under barga cultivation (for the calculation of probable number of bargadars) and the actual area under barga cultivation and also between the assumed and actual average size of barga holdings. The

table, in essence, shows that the difference between the probable number of bargadars and the actual number recorded is smaller in those villages where the difference between the assumed amount of land under barga (i.e., 30% of non-irrigated agricultural land) and the actual ^{amount} of land under barga, and/or the difference between the assumed average size of barga holdings (i.e. 1.5 acres) and the actual average size of barga holding is smaller and vice versa. To be more realistic, a large amount of land to be under barga cultivation and the existence of a higher number of bargadars would depend upon : (i) the existence of larger number of big landholders, (ii) the presence of larger number of absentee landholders, (iii) widespread prevalence of non-capitalistic mode of production, (iv) existence of many alternative avenues of non-farm employment opportunities and (v) lower fertility and less suitable location of agricultural lands of the prospective lessors. Therefore, the adopted method of estimation of probable number of bargadars is only a rough and tentative one.

VIII.3.5 Thus, our investigation reveals that the position of selected villages in respect of recording of bargadars in relation to actual number of bargadars is a little different from what is revealed by official figures presented in Table VIII.2. The position of the selected villages in respect of performance of OB programme in recording the names of bargadars in relation to actual number of bargadars is as presented in Table VIII.4 below.

TABLE VIII.4 PERFORMANCE OF OPERATION BARGA IN RECORDING BARGADARS WITH RESPECT TO ACTUAL NUMBER OF BARGADARS IN THE SELECTED VILLAGES:

1985-86

Villages	Actual number of bargadars	Number of bargadars recorded	Percentages of bargadars recorded over actual number
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	176	160	90.91
V ₂	57	39	68.42
V ₃	174	166	95.40
V ₄	37	16	43.24
V ₅	272	261	95.96
V ₆	41	30	73.17
Total	757	672	88.77

Sources : (i) Office of the Settlement Charge Officer, Jalpaiguri.

(ii) Field investigation.

It can be seen from this table that, actually there are 757 bargadars in total in the six villages of our investigation. Thus the overall recording in all the villages taken together has been 88.77% of the actual number of bargadars which is quite satisfactory. Our investigation also shows that for the individual villages too the recording has been satisfactory. The table above shows that

except village Baniagaon (V_4) in Alipurduar Circle, the percentage of recording varies between 68% to 96% of the actual number of bargadars in all other villages. Nevertheless, the percentage of bargadars recorded over actual number as shown by official estimates follows the same pattern as revealed in our personal investigation. Through investigations we have found some reasons for higher recording in some villages and lower recording in other villages. These reasons have been analysed in the next section.

VIII.3.6 In the six villages we have investigated, altogether 757 bargadars have been interrogated of whom 672 were recorded and 85 were unrecorded. Bargadars comprise two categories of cultivators, viz., exclusively bargadars and owner-cum-bargadars (i.e., partly owners and partly bargadars). Though the main focus of our study was on bargadars, we have also interviewed three other categories of cultivators, viz., those who are exclusively owner-cultivators, those who are owners-cum-lessors (i.e., partly owners and partly lessors) and the landless agricultural labourers. Distribution of various types of cultivators and the agricultural labourers whom we have interviewed has been shown in Table VIII.5 below. It should be noted here that we have interviewed all the cultivator households of the six villages barring a very insignificant number who have entirely leased out their lands. Some of these persons were found to have been generally engaged in occupations other than agriculture and some of them could not cultivate lands due to physical disability

TABLE VIII.5 DISTRIBUTION OF CULTIVATORS IN THE VILLAGES
INVESTIGATED BY OWNERSHIP STATUS : 1985-86

Villages	Exclu- sively owners	Exclu- sively bargadars	Owners-cum- bargadars	Owners cum lessors	Agri- cultural labourers	Total Number
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	119	71	105	170	58	523
V ₂	146	8	49	49	44	296
V ₃	15	30	144	37	12	238
V ₄	77	2	35	32	33	179
V ₅	21	49	223	123	39	453
V ₆	78	5	36	40	55	214
Total	456	165	592	449	241	1903

Source : Field investigation.

or having no major cultivator member in the family. Distribution of area operated by different types of cultivators has been shown in Table VIII.6 below.

TABLE VIII.6 AREA (IN ACRES) OPERATED, LEASED IN AND LEASED OUT
BY DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF CULTIVATORS IN THE
VILLAGES INVESTIGATED : 1985-86

Villages	Exclu- sively owners	Exlu- sively bargadars	Owners-cum- bargadars			Owners-cum- lessors			Totals of Cols. (2), (3), (6) and (9)
	Area owned and opera- ted	Area opera- ted	Area owned and opera- ted	Barga (leased in) land	Total area operated Col. (4)+ Co. (5)	Area owned	Leased out land	Area owned and operated Col. (7)-Col. (8)	
(1)	2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
V ₁	721.37	200.22	349.66	171.14	520.80	1334.50	357.36	977.14	2419.53
V ₂	919.80	12.24	99.12	94.92	194.04	453.25	107.16	346.09	1472.17
V ₃	65.70	73.10	307.10	156.58	463.68	381.84	204.68	177.16	779.64
V ₄	460.46	2.40	76.27	49.03	125.30	224.64	51.43	173.21	761.37
V ₅	107.52	134.26	644.78	398.86	1043.64	1175.88	527.12	648.76	1934.18
V ₆	468.95	13.25	64.44	95.40	159.84	324.40	108.65	215.75	857.79
Total	:2743.80	435.47	1541.37	965.93	2507.30	3894.51	1356.40	2538.11	8224.68

Source : Field investigation.

SECTION 4 : CAUSES FOR VARIATIONS IN RECORDING
OF BARGADARS IN THE VILLAGE INVESTIGATED

VIII.4.1 We have enquired into the causes for variations in recording the names of bargadars in different villages. In our investigation we first made an attempt to see as to whether there is any relation between literacy of bargadars and recording of their names. Table VIII.7 below shows the percentage distribution

TABLE VIII.7 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED
AND UNRECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING
TO LITERACY

Villages	<u>Recorded bargadars</u>			<u>Unrecorded bargadars</u>		
	Literate	Illiterate	Total	Literate	Illiterate	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	40.00	60.00	100.00	37.50	62.50	100.00
V ₂	61.54	38.46	100.00	44.44	55.56	100.00
V ₃	46.99	53.01	100.00	37.50	62.50	100.00
V ₄	56.25	43.75	100.00	61.90	38.10	100.00
V ₅	61.30	38.70	100.00	54.55	45.45	100.00
V ₆	40.00	60.00	100.00	54.55	45.45	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

of recorded and unrecorded bargadars according to literacy. The percentage distribution of bargadars according to

literacy shows that in villages V_2 , V_4 and V_5 larger percentage of literate bargadars have recorded their names while in villages V_1 , V_3 and V_6 smaller percentage of literate bargadars have recorded their names; on the other hand, in villages V_4 , V_5 and V_6 a higher percentage of literate bargadars have remained unrecorded while in villages V_1 , V_2 and V_3 a lower percentage of literate bargadars have remained unrecorded. Therefore, no uniform pattern can be discerned between literacy of bargadars and recording of their names. It indicates that literacy has little to do with recording or unrecording. Recording was, however, found to be determined by other factors as discussed below.

VIII.4.2 We have categorised the recorded bargadars in accordance with the reasons assigned by them for recording their names. This is presented in Table VIII.3 below. It is evident from this table that in all the six villages, panchayat members played an active role in getting names of bargadars recorded. In three villages, viz., Talukertari (V_1), Paschim Chikliguri (V_3) and Padamati (V_5), the peasants' organizations have played the most important part in recording the names of bargadars. In village Parangerpar (V_2) and Baniagaon (V_4) government officials were instrumental in recording the names of bargadars in most of the cases. In village Churabhandar (V_6) majority of the bargadars and in village Parangerpar (V_2) comparatively larger number of bargadars have got their names recorded at their self-initiative. Comparing table VIII.5 with tables VIII.2 and VIII.3 it can be said that overall

TABLE VIII. 8 CLASSIFICATION OF RECORDED BARGADARS
ACCORDING TO REASONS FOR RECORDING AND
THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Villages	Reasons for recording				
	Self- initiative	Initiative of govern- ment officials	Persua- sion by panchayat members	Persua- sion by peasants' organi- sation	Total No.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	33(20.63)	10(6.24)	53(33.13)	64(40.00)	160(100.00)
V ₂	14(35.90)	18(46.15)	7(17.95)	-	39(100.00)
V ₃	35(21.08)	9(5.42)	60(36.15)	62(37.35)	166(100.00)
V ₄	-	12(75.00)	4(25.00)	-	16(100.00)
V ₅	51(19.54)	25(9.58)	74(28.35)	11(42.53)	261(100.00)
V ₆	13(43.34)	7(23.33)	10(33.33)	-	30(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages of total.

recording has been higher in those villages (V₁, V₃ and V₅) where panchayat members and members of peasants' organisations have persuaded the bargadars to record their names. On the other hand, overall recording has been smaller in those villages (V₂, V₄ and V₆) where one of these two factors were either absent or did not play so important role and recording was done in most cases at the

self-initiative of the bargadars and at the initiative of the government officials. Thus, it comes out that the most important determinant factor for recording of a higher number of bargadars was the persuasion by members of peasants' organisations. It was found that bargadars, very often, had the apprehension of displeasing their landowners in the event of recording their names. Bargadars feared that once they got their names recorded, landowners would retaliate by denying financial and other kinds of material and non-material assistance to them. In many cases, panchayat members and members of peasants' organisations have played a very vital and active role in such a situation. They persuaded the bargadars to overcome their fear-psychosis by making them understand the advantages of recording their names. It can be found from table VIII.7 that field-level government officials took initiative and persuaded bargadars in many cases in villages V₂, V₄ and V₆ to record their names. In village V₄, as many as 75% of the bargadars were recorded at the initiative of the government officials. 9% ~~may be~~ noted that V₄ is a tribal village. In this village, no bargadar was found to record his name at his own initiative. Role of the peasants' organisation was also absent and persuasion of the panchayat members did succeed in recording only 23% of the bargadars. It thus comes to light that most of the bargadars in this village would have remained unrecorded if government officials did not take the initiative for recording their names.

VIII.4.3 We have also enquired into the causes of not recording their names by some bargadars. Classification of unrecorded bargadars according to causes for unrecording and their distribution has been shown in table VIII.9 below. The most important reason for non-

TABLE VIII. 9 CLASSIFICATION OF UNRECORDED BARGADARS
ACCORDING TO CAUSES OF UNRECORDING AND
THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Villages	Causes of unrecording			Total Number
	Avoiding confrontation	More advantagecus	Loyalty	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
V ₁	4(25.00)	9(56.25)	3(18.75)	16(100.00)
V ₂	5(27.78)	10(55.56)	3(16.66)	18(100.00)
V ₃	2(25.00)	4(50.00)	2(25.00)	8(100.00)
V ₄	14(66.67)	5(23.81)	2(9.52)	21(100.00)
V ₅	4(36.36)	5(45.46)	2(18.18)	11(100.00)
V ₆	3(27.27)	6(54.55)	2(18.18)	11(100.00)
Total	32(37.65)	39(45.88)	14(16.47)	85(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of unrecorded bargadars in respective villages.

recording, for all the villages taken together appears to be the fact that, bargadars preferred to remain unrecorded as it was more advantageous to them. One of the inducement to recording the names of bargadars was that if they got their names recorded they would possibly get the benefits of institutional finance. Panchayat and peasant organisation members succeeded in many cases to convince the bargadars with such arguments, but not in all cases. In some (45.88%) cases bargadars thought that to remain unrecorded would be more advantageous from the point of view of getting financial assistance from their landlords as credit availability from financial institutions, they felt, to be limited. The second important reason for unrecording was the avoidance of confrontation of bargadars with their landlords. As noted earlier, bargadars were afraid of igniting the wrath of their landlords in the event of getting their names recorded. Bargadars being generally financially weaker than landowners, preferred to avoid any dispute or confrontation with their landlords and hence abstained themselves from recording their names. Moreover, in some cases, bargadars were dissuaded from recording their names by their landowners. There are, however, some bargadars (16.47%) who remained unrecorded due to their loyalty to their landowners. This group of bargadars generally comprised of those type of bargadars who were cultivating lands on barga from their landlords for several generations. Due to their age-old loyalty to their landlords, they felt it unethical to record their names, and remained unrecorded with the firm belief that landlords would not evict them.

SECTION 5 : BARGADAR-LANDOWNER RELATIONSHIP

VIII.5.1 We discuss below the various aspects of the bargadar-landowner relationship from the information we could have collected by interrogating all the bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded) of the six villages we have studied.

VIII.5.2 The main pillar of the bargadar-landowner relationship is the mode of division of the produce. Table VIII.10 below shows the modes of sharing the produce between recorded bargadars and their landowners in the villages we have investigated. It is evident from

TABLE VIII. 10 DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING TO CROP-SHARE RATIO (RECORDED BARGADAR: LANDOWNER)

Villages	Crop share ratio				Total Number
	75:25	67:33	50:50	100:0	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	-	8(5.00)	152(95.00)	-	160(100.00)
V ₂	4(10.26)	-	30(76.92)	5(12.82)	39(100.00)
V ₃	21(12.55)	10(6.02)	106(63.85)	29(17.48)	166(100.00)
V ₄	-	-	16(100.00)	-	16(100.00)
V ₆	3(10.00)	2(6.67)	22(73.33)	3(10.00)	30(100.00)
Total	71(10.57)	61(9.08)	492(73.21)	48(7.14)	672(100.00)

Source: Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

this table that, the predominant mode of sharing the produce was 50:50 and this mode comprises 73.21% cases of recorded bargadars. It may be noted here that this 50:50 mode is also widely prevalent in other parts of Bengal¹⁴. But in North Bengal and in Jalpaiguri district in particular, it is more common¹⁵. Widespread prevalence of this mode in the Western Duars is a tradition since very early times. The term "adhjar" (meaning sharecropper) which was in vogue throughout the Bhutia and the British periods in the Western Duars, literally meant 50:50 sharing of the produce by the landowner and the sharecropper (i.e., adhjar or bargadar).

VIII.5.3 It is seen from table VIII.10 that in 10.57% cases, the recorded bargadars were getting 75% of the produce - the legally allowed share. In 9.08% cases, the recorded bargadars were getting two-thirds share of produce and in 7.14% cases bargadars were not giving any share of produce to their landowners and appropriating the entire produce. It may apparently seem to be rather strange. Our investigation, however, revealed that it happened in cases where either the landowners were absentees or where there appeared to be lack of bonafideness in the claim of landowners' ownership of barga lands and bargadars thought that those lands were ceiling surplus vested lands of the owners. Absentee landowners were found to be residents of the nearby urban areas and engaged in some non-agricultural occupations, and hence control over the bargadars was not possible. Moreover, bargadars were found to have been in

advantageous position when they were politically organised.

VIII.5.4 Modes of sharing of total costs of cultivation seemed to us to be another reason for the prevalence of different modes of produce sharing between recorded bargadars and their landowners. Table VIII.11 below shows that 17.71% of recorded bargadars were

TABLE VIII.11 MODES OF SHARING OF TOTAL COSTS OF CULTIVATION
(RECORDED BARGADAR : LANDOWNER)

Villages	Cost-share ratios				Total number
	100:0	67.33	50:50	40:60	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	-	8(5.00)	137(85.63)	15(9.37)	160(100.00)
V ₂	9(23.08)	-	27(69.23)	3(7.69)	39(100.00)
V ₃	50(30.12)	10(6.02)	97(58.43)	9(5.42)	166(100.00)
V ₄	-	2(12.5)	13(81.25)	1(6.25)	16(100.00)
V ₅	54(20.69)	41(15.71)	153(58.62)	13(4.98)	261(100.00)
V ₆	6(20.00)	2(6.57)	20(66.66)	2(6.67)	30(100.00)
Total:	119(17.71)	63(9.37)	447(66.52)	43(6.40)	672(100.00)

Source: Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

sharing 100% of the total costs. It was found that bargadars who appropriated the full share of the produce shared 100% of the total costs. Besides, bargadars who were sharing 100% of the costs received 75% share of the produce which, it should be noted, is the legal share. Thus, these two groups, comprising 17.71% of the total recorded bargadars were actually those, 10.57% of whom were getting 75% share of the produce and 7.14% were appropriating total share of the produce. Table VIII.11 further shows that in 9.37% cases, cost was shared in 67:33 ratio, but table VIII.10 shows that in 9.08% cases produce was shared in 67:33 ratio. Therefore, it comes out that 0.29% of the bargadars, inspite of sharing higher (i.e., 67%) costs were sharing the produce in the ratio of 50:50. This happened in village V₄. It appeared to the reason that bargadars were custom bound and loyal to their landlords in these cases. It is further revealed from table VIII.11 that in 6.40% cases landowners shared 60% of the total cost, whereas table VIII.10 shows that they were sharing 50% of the produce with their bargadars in these cases. According to legal provision, landowners are required to contribute 100% share of the total cost to share 50% of the produce. Table VIII.10 exhibits that in 73.21% cases produce is shared in 50:50 ratio. But the cost was not shared in 50:50 ratio. It was revealed to us that among the bargadars who shared produce on the basis of 50:50 ratio, 66.52% shared the cost also on 50:50 basis, but in the remaining 6.69% cases; 6.40% shared the cost on a 40:60 basis and 0.29% on a 67.33 ratio. It is thus clear that in

each of such cases, according to legal provision, landowners should have to actually contribute 100% share of the total cost to get 50% share of the produce which they have actually received. Thus, our field investigation reveals that in majority of the cases the legal provisions in favour of bargadars, regarding division of the produce, have by and large, remained ineffective. It also comes to light that the days of absentee landlordism is over and in future it may not be possible to retain agricultural land by absentee owners. In such a situation, it appears that "land to the tiller" slogan is going to be true. But, as our study reveals, though in most cases right and security of tenure of bargadars has been legally established, they have been mostly remained unable to secure their right share of the produce.

VIII.5.5 From our interviews with the bargadars and their landowners it was possible to deduce several reasons for such a state of affair. Classification of bargadars according to reason for not getting legally allowed shares and their distribution is shown in table VIII.12 below. It can be seen from this table that the most important reason was the honouring of the custom and tradition of sharing the produce in 50:50 ratio by bargadars with their landowners. In 68.35% cases bargadars could not secure the legally allowed share for this reason. It transpired from our field investigation that in a situation where bargadars are accustomed largely to observe the tradition and custom, it is difficult to implement the provisions of laws favourable to them. Another reason for inability to secure

the proper share of produce was the weaker bargaining power of bargadar. "Weaker bargaining power" here means that a bargadar's

TABLE VIII. 12 CLASSIFICATION OF RECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING TO REASONS FOR NOT GETTING LEGALLY ALLOWED SHARE OF PRODUCE AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION

Villages	Reasons for not getting legally allowed share of produce				Total number
	Debt obligation to land-lord	Honouring tradition and custom	Bargadar's weaker bargaining power	Reasons not specified	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	22(13.75)	91(56.88)	37(23.12)	10(6.25)	160(100.00)
V ₂	3(10.00)	21(70.00)	4(13.33)	2(6.67)	30(100.00)
V ₃	16(13.79)	67(57.76)	33(28.45)	-	116(100.00)
V ₄	1(6.25)	10(62.50)	2(12.50)	3(18.75)	16(100.00)
V ₅	33(15.94)	154(74.40)	13(6.28)	7(3.38)	207(100.00)
V ₆	6(25.00)	13(54.17)	5(20.83)	-	24(100.00)
Total	81(14.65)	356(64.38)	94(17.00)	22(3.97)	553(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

position is financially not so sound, politically not so organised and powerful and socially not so influential as to create effective pressure on their landowners and secure the legally allowed share, though in such cases the bargadar may not be financially obligated or their loyalty to their landowners may not be great. The third factor responsible for the traditional 50:50 sharing of produce was the debt obligation of bargadars to their landlords. It was found that some landlords did not charge any interest or charge a nominal interest for the advances and loans given by them to their bargadars. In such cases, bargadars were found to be very much loyal to their landlords and agreed to the traditional sharing of the produce, though the landlords in these cases did not contribute 100% share of the total cost of cultivation. In a small number of cases, however, the reason could not be specified.

VIII.5.6 It is revealed from Table VIII.11 above that in no case any landowner was found to bear 100% of the cost of cultivation after their bargadars have recorded their names. But during our investigation we were reported both by landowners and bargadars that before recording their names some percentage of bargadars were getting 100% of the total costs of cultivation from their landowners. In such cases, landowners used to take 50% of the produce. These facts indicate that some percentage of bargadars have lost their landowners' favour in terms of cost sharing. The tables VIII.10 and VIII.11 show that after bargadars have recorded their names, landowners have

stopped sharing any part of the total cost in 10.57% cases and are getting 25% share of produce as provided by law. In 82.29% cases, however, they are getting 50% share of the produce (which is logically a undue higher share) without sharing the 100% of costs (the due share prescribed by legal provision) due to the reasons discussed above.

VIII.5.7 We shall now depict below the mode of sharing of produce between unrecorded bargadars and landowners. This is shown in Table VIII.13 below. It can be seen from this table that as in the case of

TABLE VIII.13 DISTRIBUTION OF UNRECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING TO CROP-SHARE RATIO : (UNRECORDED BARGADAR : LANDOWNER)

Villages	Crop-share ratio		Total number
	60:40	50:50	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	4(25.00)	12(75.00)	16(100.00)
V ₂	2(11.11)	16(88.89)	18(100.00)
V ₃	-	8(100.00)	8(100.00)
V ₄	3(27.27)	8(72.73)	11(100.00)
V ₆	2(18.18)	9(81.82)	11(100.00)
Total	11(12.79)	74(87.21)	85(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses shows percentages to total number of unrecorded bargadars in respective villages.

recorded bargadars, in the case of unrecorded bargadars too the most common mode of sharing of the produce was 50:50. In case of unrecorded bargadars 50:50 sharing was found to prevail in 87.21% cases but 60:40 mode was prevalent only ^w12.79% cases. It is also noticeable that unlike the case of recorded bargadars where modes of sharing of produce altogether was found to be four, in case of unrecorded bargadars only two modes were found to exist.

VIII.5.8 For an explanation of the causes of existence of these two modes of sharing of produce we may look at table VIII.14 below, where modes of sharing of total costs of cultivation between

TABLE VIII.14 MODES OF SHARING OF TOTAL COSTS OF CULTIVATION (UNRECORDED BARGADAR: LANDOWNER)

Vill- ages	Cost-share ratios					Total number
	100:0	60:40	50:50	40:60	0:100	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	2(12.50)	4(25.00)	7(43.75)	1(6.25)	2(12.50)	16(100.00)
V ₂	3(16.67)	3(16.67)	10(55.55)	-	2(11.11)	18(100.00)
V ₃	-	2(25.00)	6(75.00)	-	-	8(100.00)
V ₄	2(9.52)	2(9.52)	14(66.67)	1(4.77)	2(9.52)	21(100.00)
V ₅	1(9.09)	3(27.27)	4(36.37)	3(27.27)	-	11(100.00)
V ₆	-	3(27.27)	6(45.45)	2(18.18)	-	11(100.00)
Total	8(9.41)	21(24.71)	47(55.24)	8(9.41)	6(7.06)	85(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of unrecorded bargadars in respective villages.

unrecorded bargadars and their landowners have been shown. This table reveals that total cost was shared between them in five different ratios. Total cost was entirely borne by unrecorded bargadars in about 9.41% cases and that by landowners in 7.06% cases. But since only two modes of produce sharing are prevalent, it means that bargadars and landowners involved in these cases shared the produce either in 60:40 ratio or in 50:50 ratio. It was found that bargadars who shared 100% of the total cost received 60% of the produce, i.e., 15% less than the legally allowed share to bargadars. But it was found that in 7.06% cases, landowners who shared the 100% of the total cost, got produce in 50:50 ratio. In these latter cases, it becomes evident that unrecorded bargadars were also getting the proper share of produce according to legal provision. It appeared that in such cases landowners were tradition bound and following the custom of the earlier days. The patron-client relationship between landowners and bargadars are still present in these cases. Landowners, who shared 60% of the total costs of cultivation in 9.41% cases (shown in Table VIII.14) were also found to share 50% of the produce (shown in Table VIII.13) with their bargadars. Some reasons, as in the case of landowners who contribute 100% of the total cost and share 50% of the produce, apply in this case. It can further be seen from Table VIII.14 that in 24.71% cases bargadars contribute 60% of the total cost but share the produce in 50:50 ratio. Probably here, due to competition for barga land, bargadars, who had agreed to bear 60% of the total cost

got land under barga cultivation. Truly speaking, it appeared from our survey that in our areas of investigation landowners who want to lease out land (prospective lessors) were a very few in number while cultivators who want to lease in land (prospective leases, i.e., bargadars) were many. This is so because as we have shown in Chapters VI and VII that the number of medium and large categories of landholders are either remaining more or less constant, or decreasing, the number of marginal categories of landholders are rising rapidly over time. As a result, there are keen competition among the latter two groups of cultivators to get land under barga which consequently moves the terms of bargadari contract to the disadvantage of the unrecorded bargadars. This is a qualitative change from the earlier days of the Bhutanese as well as British administrations with reference to the bargadar-landowner relationship. It also came to be known from our investigation that most of the landowners who could not cultivate a portion of their lands during one or more agricultural seasons for some reason or the other, preferred to keep it fallow than to lease it out under barga due to the apprehension that once a plot of land was leased out under barga, the bargadar would get his name recorded and it would be almost impossible to resume the land so leased out under the personal cultivation of the landowner amidst the recent socio-political situation in the rural areas. Under such circumstances, a landowner, unable to cultivate his lands for some time, preferred either to keep it fallow or lease out only to a bargadar whose allegiance was beyond question. For the same

reason, sometimes it so happened that landowners leased out same plot or plots of land to different bargadars in alternate years so that no bargadar could cultivate a plot of land for consecutive years and get his name recorded.

VIII.5.9 It may be noted here that different constituents of costs were found to be shared in different ratios between recorded bargadars and their landowners. Table VIII.15 shows the modes of sharing of

TABLE VIII.15 MODES OF SHARING OF THE COSTS OF SEED
(RECORDED BARGADAR : LANDOWNER)

Villages	Cost-share ratios				Total Number
	100:0	60:40	50:50	40:60	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	35(21.88)	-	109(68.12)	16(10.00)	160(100.00)
V ₂	10(25.64)	3(7.69)	25(64.10)	1(2.56)	39(100.00)
V ₃	60(36.14)	-	95(57.23)	11(6.63)	166(100.00)
V ₄	2(12.50)	-	11(68.75)	3(8.75)	16(100.00)
V ₅	91(34.87)	16(6.13)	134(51.34)	20(7.66)	261(100.00)
V ₆	9(30.00)	3(10.00)	16(53.33)	2(6.67)	30(100.00)
Total	207(30.80)	22(3.27)	390(58.04)	53(7.89)	672(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

seed costs between recorded bargadars and their landowners. It is exhibited in the table that, as in the case of produce sharing and total cost sharing, seed costs were also shared in the 50:50 ratio in most cases. This mode constituted 58.04% cases of recorded bargadars. In 30.80% cases, cost of seed was entirely borne by the bargadars. Only in 3.27% cases seed cost sharing took place in the 60:40 ratio and in 7.89% cases the prevalent mode was 40:60. It can also be found that in no case landowners shared 100% of the entire cost of seed. The reasons behind the prevalence of different modes of sharing the costs of seed are not far to seek. Bargadars who did not give any share to the landowners were found to bear 100% of the cost of seed. Bargadars having a relatively strained relationship with landowners after recording had to bear either 100% of the seed cost or 60% of it. Cases in which 50:50 sharing mode is followed, bargadars and landowners obeyed the custom and tradition. Landowners shared 60% of the cost of seed where cordial relationship prevailed between landowners and bargadars and the former showed patronage to the latter.

VIII.5.10 All bargadars, as revealed from our field investigation, were not found to use chemical fertiliser in their lands. It was found that for all the six villages taken together about 48% of the bargadars used chemical fertiliser. Some of the reasons for not using chemical fertiliser were found to be either want of capital or apprehension of adverse effect of the application of

chemical fertiliser, or sufficient availability of organic manure or lack of initiative or a combination of all these. The most important reason for not using chemical fertiliser in most cases seemed to us to be the lack of capital of the bargadars. However, in a sizeable number of cases it was also found that bargadars did not use chemical fertiliser as they thought that its continuous application would ultimately tell upon the productivity of their lands and hence they refrained themselves from using it. The other two causes as mentioned earlier appeared to us to be less important. Number of recorded bargadars in different villages who used chemical fertiliser during our period of survey and the modes of sharing its cost have been shown in Table VIII.16 below. It can be seen from this table

TABLE VIII.16 MODES OF SHARING OF THE COST OF CHEMICAL FERTILISER (RECORDED BARGADAR : LANDOWNER)

Vill- ages	Cost-share ratios					Total number
	100:0	60:40	50:50	40:60	0:100	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	17(19.60)	8(7.33)	68(62.39)	5(4.59)	11(10.09)	109(100.00)
V ₂	3(23.08)	1(7.69)	6(46.16)	2(15.38)	1(7.69)	13(100.00)
V ₃	21(29.58)	4(5.63)	37(52.11)	1(1.41)	8(11.27)	71(100.00)
V ₄	1(16.67)	-	3(50.00)	1(16.67)	1(16.67)	6(100.00)
V ₅	13(12.04)	-	78(72.22)	9(8.33)	8(7.41)	108(100.00)
V ₆	3(17.65)	1(5.88)	11(64.71)	-	2(11.76)	17(100.00)
Total	58(17.90)	14(4.32)	203(62.65)	18(5.56)	31(9.57)	324(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

that in case of nearly two-thirds of the total number of recorded bargadars using chemical fertiliser, the cost was shared in the 50:50 ratio. As in the cases of sharing of total costs, sharing of seed costs and sharing of produce, the 50:50 sharing of the costs of chemical fertiliser has also become a custom in most cases. In 17.90% of cases, bargadars shared the entire (100%) cost. This group of bargadars who shared the 100% of the cost of chemical fertiliser comprises those bargadars who get 75% of the produce and those who did not give any share to the landowners. The special feature of the bargadar-landowner relationship that is discernible from this table is that in 9.52% of cases, landowners shared the entire cost of chemical fertiliser. It was found that in such cases, landowners having better means of finance, either from own source or from market source could easily afford to bear a relatively higher share of the cost of chemical fertiliser. This was done by them in the interest of higher production that would bring them higher amount of produce within the existing mode of produce sharing. The simultaneous existence of other two numerically less important modes of sharing of the cost of chemical fertiliser could be explained in the same way as that in the case of modes of sharing of the cost of seed.

VIII.5.11 Our investigation showed that all bargadars used some amount of organic manure in their lands. In most cases, they used cowdung as organic manure that was gathered in their farm-yards and in some cases they used ashes as organic manure that was obtainable from burnt dry cowdung, herbs and straws which are often used as

fuels. Landowners generally used the organic manures in their own cultivated lands and in a few cases, applied a part of it to bargadars to use in the lands leased out to the former. Bargadars applied organic manure in the barga lands mainly from their own source. They rarely used purchased organic manure, since market for it hardly exists in the rural areas of Duars. Doses of application of organic manure, therefore, depended upon the possession of cattle population by bargadars and the amount of ashes gathered and to a little extent on the amount supplied by their landowners. Modes of physical sharing of the use of organic manure between recorded bargadars and their landowners can be seen from Table VIII.17 below.

TABLE VIII.17 MODES OF PHYSICAL SHARING OF ORGANIC MANURE
USED (RECORDED BARGADAR : LANDOWNER)

Villages	Physical share ratios		Total number
	75:25	100:0	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	12(7.50)	148(92.50)	160(100.00)
V ₂	5(12.82)	34(87.18)	39(100.00)
V ₃	23(13.86)	143(86.14)	166(100.00)
V ₄	-	16(100.00)	16(100.00)
V ₅	26(9.96)	235(90.04)	261(100.00)
V ₆	-	30(100.00)	30(100.00)
Total:	66(9.82)	606(90.18)	672(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

Note : Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

It is exhibited that in about 90% cases, bargadars used 100% of the organic manure from their own source and only in about 10% cases their landowners supplied 25% of the physical amount of organic manure used.

VIII.5.12 It was found in our investigation that many of the bargadars received loans from various sources and for various purposes. Percentage distribution of recorded and unrecorded bargadars who received loans from various sources is presented in Table VIII.18 below. It is seen from this table that, all the six villages taken together, on an average 78.87% of the recorded

TABLE VIII.18 PERCENTAGE OF DISTRIBUTION OF LOANEE
RECORDED AND UNRECORDED BARGADARS IN
THE VILLAGES INVESTIGATED

Villages	Category of bargadars	
	Recorded	Unrecorded
(1)	(2)	(3)
V ₁	71.88	62.50
V ₂	82.05	61.11
V ₃	83.73	75.00
V ₄	93.75	80.95
V ₅	78.93	63.64
V ₆	76.67	54.55
Total :	78.87	67.06

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

bargadars and 67.06% of the unrecorded bargadars received loans from different sources. The percentage figures in different villages vary from 71.88% to 93.75% for recorded bargadars and 54.55% to 80.95% for unrecorded bargadars. It is, therefore, evident that on the whole, recorded bargadars have received loans in larger percentage of cases than that of the unrecorded ones. This difference arises due to the fact that recorded bargadars have received loans from institutional sources in higher percentage of cases than that of the unrecorded ones as shown in Table VIII.19.

VIII.5.13 Table VIII.19 below shows the percentage distribution of recorded and unrecorded bargadars who received loans from various

TABLE VIII.19 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED AND UNRECORDED BARGADARS RECEIVING LOANS FROM INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES

Villages	Category of bargadars	
	Recorded	Unrecorded
(1)	(2)	(3)
V ₁	33.75	18.75
V ₂	15.38	22.22
V ₃	60.84	25.00
V ₄	31.25	28.57
V ₅	47.89	27.27
V ₆	20.00	36.36
Total	44.20	25.88

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

financial institutions. It is revealed that about 44% of the recorded bargadars received loans from institutional sources while nearly 26% of the unrecorded bargadars received loans from these sources. It, therefore, shows that recorded bargadars received loans in larger percentage of cases than that of the unrecorded bargadars. The reason is not far to seek. One of the inducements to the bargadars for recording their names, as noted earlier, was that, if they got their names recorded, they would receive loans from institutional sources which were directed and persuaded by the government to provide the bargadars with loans where the government would provide guarantee and pay subsidies for such loans. It may be argued that mere recording the names of bargadars to give them secured barga rights is not adequate enough to ameliorate their poor economic plight. One of the follow up tasks, as a measure to free the bargadars from the clutches of money lenders, is to make available the facilities of institutional credit system to as many bargadars as possible. It is, however, apparent from our study that only 44.20% of the recorded bargadars (as shown in Table VIII.17) have received the facilities of institutional credit system. It, therefore, indicates that the financial institutions and the government have still to do much to make the institutional credit facilities available to the recorded bargadars. Nevertheless, our general impression was that bargadars who have recorded their names were now getting institutional credit facilities in larger numbers during our period of survey than in the pre-recording years. The sources of borrowing by recorded bargadars can be seen from Table VIII.20 in

which percentage distribution of loanee recorded bargadars according to sources of loan has been shown.

TABLE VIII.20 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LOANEE RECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING TO SOURCES OF LOAN

Villages.	Sources of loan				Total
	Institu- tions	Land- lords	Mahajans	Others	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	46.96	20.00	11.30	21.74	100.00
V ₂	18.75	12.50	21.88	46.87	100.00
V ₃	72.67	13.67	5.04	8.62	100.00
V ₄	33.33	20.00	26.67	20.00	100.00
V ₅	60.88	16.50	8.74	14.08	100.00
V ₆	26.09	30.43	13.04	30.43	100.00
Total	56.04	16.98	9.81	17.17	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

VIII.5.14 It is evident from the table above that the largest percentage of recorded bargadars received credit facilities from financial institutions which included commercial banks, regional rural banks (granin banks), co-operative banks and co-operative societies. In 56.04% cases loans were made available from such institutions. Thus, it can be said that the scope of institutional finance has been largely extended to the bargadars in recent times.

These financial institutions are now increasingly participating in the task of rural development. With the larger availability of institutional credit, exploitation of bargadars by their landlords through credit mechanism has decreased considerably. The table above also shows that, in the villages we have investigated, only 16.98% recorded bargadars took loans from their landlords. The role of Mahajans (money lenders) also appear to be less important now. Mahajans met the credit needs of only 9.81% of recorded bargadars. Our investigation showed that loans advanced by mahajans were always associated with an exorbitant high rate of interest of even 120% per annum. The source categories as "others" which included creditors like neighbours, friends and relations of bargadars, appeared to be a relatively important one. In as much as 17.17% cases, loans were obtained from this source.

VIII.5.15 The importance of various sources of loans in case of unrecorded bargadars was a little different. Table VIII.21 below shows the percentage distribution of loanee unrecorded bargadars according to sources of loan. It is revealed in this table that like the recorded bargadars, unrecorded bargadars also obtained loans in largest percentage of cases from the source categories as "institutions". But, where as loans were obtained from this source in 56.04% of cases for recorded bargadars, in case of unrecorded bargadars the percentage figure stands at 39.29% only. The reason for this difference is that, unrecorded bargadars could not get the credit facilities specifically meant for the bonafide bargadars as

TABLE VIII.21 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LOANEE UNRECORDED BARGADARS ACCORDING TO SOURCES OF LOAN

Villages	Sources of loan				Total
	Institu- tions	Landlords	Mahajans	Others	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	30.00	40.00	100.00	20.00	100.00
V ₂	36.36	36.36	-	27.28	100.00
V ₃	33.33	16.67	-	50.00	100.00
V ₄	35.29	41.19	11.76	11.76	100.00
V ₅	42.85	28.57	14.29	14.29	100.00
V ₆	66.66	16.67	16.67	-	100.00
Total	39.29	33.33	8.77	19.30	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

the former had no certificate of bonafidencess as bargadars. Whatever loans the unrecorded bargadars could procure from financial institutions were not loans meant exclusively for patta holding (i.e., recorded and hence treated as genuine) bargadars, but as small farmer doing agricultural business or other rural economic activities. It can also be found from Table VIII.21 that compared to recorded bargadars, unrecorded bargadars received loans from their landlords in larger percentage of cases. It indicates that the relationship between unrecorded bargadars and their landlords was more cordial

and close compared to that between recorded bargadars and their landlords, as far as credit relation was concerned. In case of loans obtained from mahajans the percentage figures show that there was no marked difference between unrecorded and recorded bargadars. But in case of loans taken from the source termed "others" it can be seen that the percentage figure for unrecorded bargadars is a little higher than that for recorded bargadars. This implies that this source was also an important one in case of the unrecorded bargadars.

VIII.5.16 It would be pertinent here to discuss the nature of interest payments involved in loans obtained from various sources. It is to be noted that loans obtained from institutional sources was always associated with a rate of interest which may be called "market rate of interest", fixed by the financial institutions at the direction of the central bank. Rates of interest charged by different financial institutions, however, varied slightly. But, loans obtained from "landlords" and "others" were not always associated with high rates of interest, rather those loans sometimes carried high rates of interest and was often available free of interest. Table VIII.22 below shows the distribution of recorded bargadars receiving loans from "landlords" and "others" according to nature payment of interest thereon. It is evident that in case of loans received from landlords, recorded bargadars had to pay high rates of interest in nearly 59% cases while in about 41% cases loans were found to be interest free. "High rates of interest" varied from 5% p.m. to 10% p.m., i.e., from

TABLE VIII.22 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED BARGADARS RECEIVING LOANS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES ACCORDING TO NATURE OF PAYMENT OF INTEREST

Villages	Sources of Loan					
	Landlords			Others		
	With high interest	Without interest	Total	With high interest	Without interest	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	56.52	43.48	100.00	52.00	48.00	100.00
V ₂	75.00	25.00	100.00	46.67	53.33	100.00
V ₃	63.16	36.84	100.00	33.33	66.67	100.00
V ₄	33.33	66.67	100.00	66.67	33.33	100.00
V ₅	61.76	38.24	100.00	41.38	58.62	100.00
V ₆	57.14	42.86	100.00	28.57	71.43	100.00
Total	58.89	41.11	100.00	43.96	56.04	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

60% to 120% p.a. Loans obtained from "others" were interest free in 56% cases and high rates of interest were required to be paid in about 44% cases. That landlords did not charge any interest from loans given to their recorded bargadars is not at all a strange fact. Interests free loans were often associated with some ulterior motives. Landlords, in fact tied their bargadars in the bond of loyalty and dependency through such loans. Bargadars had to perform some economic and extra-economic functions¹⁶ without any remuneration

due to this type of debt obligation. In the process, bargadars lost their independence and paved the way for their exploitation by the landlords. Our finding in this respect is corroborated by some other studies also¹⁷. There is generally an informal social bond and relationship between bargadars and their neighbours, friends, relatives etc. They have mutual interdependence among them. They often help each other in times of need. The fact that a large part of loans obtained from the source named "others" were interest free is largely explained by the existence of these informal social and human relationship. Loans obtained from "landlords" without interest is also explained to some extent by these factors. On the other hand, the percentage of cases in which high rates of interest were to be paid for loans received from "others" were due to the lack of these human relationship or were due to the existence of a business motive of creditors.

VIII.5.17 The credit relations between unrecorded bargadars and their landlords was a little different. This would be evident from Table VIII.23 below which shows the percentage distribution of unrecorded bargadars who received loans from landlords and others according to nature of payment of interest. It can be seen that in case of unrecorded bargadars, landlords gave loans in larger percentage of cases (68.42%) without charging any interest compared to the recorded bargadars (41.11% cases). This indicates a better relationship between unrecorded bargadars and their landowners

TABLE VIII.23 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF UNRECORDED
BARGADARS RECEIVING LOANS FROM VARIOUS
SOURCES ACCORDING TO NATURE OF PAYMENT
INTEREST

Villages	Sources of loan					
	Landlords			Others		
	With high interest	Without interest	Total	With high interest	Without interest	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	25.00	75.00	100.00	50.00	50.00	100.00
V ₂	50.00	50.00	100.00	33.33	66.67	100.00
V ₃	-	100.00	100.00	66.67	33.33	100.00
V ₄	42.86	57.14	100.00	50.00	50.00	100.00
V ₅	-	100.00	100.00	-	100.00	100.00
V ₆	-	100.00	100.00	-	-	-
Total	31.59	68.72	100.00	45.45	54.55	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

compared to the recorded bargadars and their landowners. However, at the same time it implies a greater dependence of unrecorded bargadars on their landowners than that of recorded bargadars on their landowners. In case of loans received from others, percentage figures indicate that there was no significant difference in this case between recorded and unrecorded bargadars.

VIII.518 It is also important to analyse the purposes for which bargadars took loans. This would indicate as to in how many cases loans were utilised for productive purposes. In this respect we have not shown the figures separately for recorded and unrecorded bargadars, rather we have shown the figures for recorded and unrecorded bargadars taken together. This is because the purposes of taking loan is influenced and determined by the socio-economic condition of bargadars and not by their recording status. Table VIII.24 below shows the percentage distribution of loan receipt

TABLE VIII.24 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LOAN RECEIPT
BARGADARS* BY PURPOSES OF TAKING LOAN

Villages	Purposes of taking loan			
	Consumption	Production	Contingencies	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
V ₁	34.40	47.20	18.40	100.00
V ₂	32.56	39.53	27.91	100.00
V ₃	11.72	73.10	15.17	100.00
V ₄	28.13	53.12	18.75	100.00
V ₅	19.25	56.81	23.94	100.00
V ₆	31.03	41.38	27.59	100.00
Total	22.66	56.56	20.78	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

* Recorded and unrecorded taken together.

bargadars (recorded and unrecorded taken together) by purposes of taking loans. It can be found from the table that 56.56% of bargadars

took loans for productive purposes. It was found that bargadars used this type of loans for the purposes of raising agricultural production which in turn helped to raise their income and also to repay the loans in time. Our investigation revealed that bargadars also took loans for the purpose of consumption to maintain their families in times of need and specially in lean periods. It can be seen from the table that in nearly 23% cases loans were taken for the purpose of consumption. A close examination of this purpose of taking loans showed that it sometimes contributed indirectly to raise the incomes of bargadars' households. With this type of loans, bargadars could often manage their families during the gestation periods of the agricultural or non-agricultural projects undertaken by them. It appeared that if consumption loans were not available, bargadars would have to spend a part or whole of the loans taken for productive purposes for consumption and would have lead to the failure of the schemes undertaken by them. Hence, in many cases, bargadars appeared to be very much in need of consumption loans. But it should be noted that consumption loans were found to be procured by bargadars from "landlords" and "others" and not from any institutional sources, since no financial institutions give loans to bargadars for the purpose of consumption. Loans obtained for "contingencies" were found to be mostly used for non-productive purposes like expenditures for different kinds of social functions, illness, litigation etc. Loans taken for contingencies therefore, often damaged the household economy of the bargadars. Our data show that in nearly 21% cases loans were taken by bargadars for contin-

gencies. This type of loans was found to be often associated with very high rates of interest. During our investigation it appeared to us that in some cases loans, specially those sanctioned by the government and obtained through the financial institutions, were not made available in time due to bureaucratic delays and hence those loans could not be gainfully utilised by bargadars.

VIII.5.19 One of the important facets of credit relations is the repayment of loans by bargadars. There can be no denying the fact that smooth functioning of the institutional credit system depends upon the regular repayment of loans. Table VIII.25 below shows the percentage distribution of bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded taken together) according to nature of repayment of loans. It is exhibited that about 67% of the borrower-bargadars were repaying their loans regularly, whereas about 21% were repaying irregularly

TABLE VIII.25 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF BARGADARS*
ACCORDING TO NATURE OF REPAYMENT OF
LOANS TAKEN FROM INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES

Villages	Nature of repayment of loans			Total
	Regular	Irregular	Not at all repaying	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
V ₁	66.67	12.28	21.05	100.00
V ₂	70.00	20.00	10.00	100.00
V ₃	51.46	33.01	15.53	100.00
V ₄	54.55	36.36	9.09	100.00
V ₅	80.47	13.28	6.25	100.00
V ₆	80.00	20.00	-	100.00
Total	67.40	20.69	11.91	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

* Recorded and unrecorded taken together.

and nearly 12% were not repaying at all, during the period of our investigation. The last two groups taken together form as large as 30% of the total number of borrower-bargadars. This is, indeed, a discouraging feature. Irregular repayment and non-repayment of loans by such a large percentage of borrowers is a problem, since, financial institutions, for obvious reasons, become reluctant to advance further credit to the defaulting borrowers and to the irregular repayers and also feel shaky to finance prospective borrowers.

VIII.5.20 It could be found that bargadar-borrowers could not and did not repay their loans for several reasons. These reasons demand a close scrutiny. Table VIII.26 exhibits the percentage distribution of loanee bargadars (recorded plus unrecorded) according to non-

TABLE VIII.26 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LOANEE BARGADARS*
ACCORDING TO CAUSES OF NON-REPAYMENT AND
IRREGULAR REPAYMENT OF LOANS

Villages	Causes of non-repayment and irregular repayment			Total
	Poverty	Misutilisation of loan money	Wilful defaulter	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
V ₁	68.42	-	31.58	100.00
V ₂	66.67	33.33	-	100.00
V ₃	56.00	18.00	26.00	100.00
V ₄	20.00	40.00	40.00	100.00
V ₅	52.00	32.00	16.00	100.00
V ₆	50.00	50.00	-	100.00
Total	55.77	19.23	25.00	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86

* Recorded and unrecorded taken together.

repayment and irregular repayment of loans by reasons. It is revealed that nearly 56% of the defaulters were not repaying loans taken from various financial institutions due to poverty, about 19% of them could not repay on account of their misutilisation of loan money, and 25% of them did not repay wilfully. Bargadars, who could not repay due to their poverty were found to have consumed away a part or whole of the amount of loan or their schemes could not bring sufficient income so as to repay the loans. Moreover, sometimes the loans had been spent for unproductive purposes. The group of bargadars who could not repay on account of misutilisation of the loan money were found on investigation to have mostly diverted their loan money in some uses other than the originally planned one and the new venture was a failure. In some cases, a part or whole of the amount of loan was used for consumption purposes or spent in unproductive business. The wilful defaulters were not repaying for some unspecified reasons. But from our investigation, it appeared that, it was their hope that in some future year the loans, especially those sanctioned by the government, would be written off fully or partly and so they did not repay.

SECTION 6 : PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN
BARGA AND NON-BARGA LANDS

VIII.6.1 One of the twin objectives of land reforms is to raise agricultural productivity. Security of tenure has been given to the bargadars through the recording of their names in the record-of-

rights with the anticipation that guaranteed barga rights would induce and actuate the bargadars to cultivate the barga lands properly and would make it possible to raise the productivity of land. It is therefore very important to see as to whether due to the confirmment of security of tenure, after the OB programme, productivity of barga lands has increased compared to the non-barga lands in the villages of our investigation.

VIII.6.2 Table VIII.27 shows the production and productivity of rice in barga and non-barga lands. It is to be noted that while

TABLE VIII.27 PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN BARGA LANDS AND IN NON-BARGA LANDS

Vill- ages	Total barga lands (acres)	Total non- barga lands (acres)	Production of rice in barga lands (quintals)	Production of rice in non-barga lands (quintals)	Producti- vity in barga lands (quintal/ acre)	Producti- vity in non-barga lands (quintal/ acre)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	371.36	2048.17	2822.34	15361.28	7.6	7.5
V ₂	107.16	1365.01	696.54	9009.07	6.5	6.6
V ₃	229.68	549.96	1378.08	3244.76	6.0	5.9
V ₄	51.43	709.94	329.15	4756.60	6.4	6.7
V ₅	533.12	1401.06	3465.28	9527.21	6.5	6.8
V ₆	108.65	749.14	749.69	5468.72	6.9	7.3
Total	1401.40	6823.28	9441.08	47367.64	6.74	6.94

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

calculating total barga lands, lands of those who are exclusively bargadars (i.e., exclusively leasees) and those who are owner-cum-bargadars have been added together. On the other hand for calculating total non-barga lands (i.e., land under own cultivation), own lands of "exclusively owners", own lands of "owner-cum-bargadars" and own lands of "owner-cum-lessors" have been added together. Table VIII.27 shows that productivity in barga lands was 6.74 quintal per acre while that in the non-barga lands was 6.94 quintal per acre. This implies that there was no significant difference between the productivities in barga and non-barga lands during the period of our survey. Therefore, it can not be inferred that one system of cultivation is superior to the other.

VIII.6.3 Table VIII.28 exhibits the production and productivity of lands of exclusively bargadars (recorded and unrecorded taken together) and those of exclusively owners. It can be seen that productivity of rice in the lands of exclusively owners was 6.85 quintal per acre while the productivity in the lands of exclusively owners was 6.67 quintal per acre. This reveals that productivity in the lands of exclusively owner cultivators was a little higher than that of the exclusively bargadar cultivators. The productivity difference might arise due to a little more intensive use of inputs in case of exclusively owner cultivators.

TABLE VIII.28 PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN THE LANDS OF EXCLUSIVELY OWNERS AND IN THE LANDS OF EXCLUSIVELY BARGADARS

Villages	Area (in acres) operated by exclusively owners	Area (in acres) operated by exclusively bargadars	Production (in quintal of rice in the lands of exclusively owners	Production of rice (in quintal) in the lands of exclusively bargadars	Productivity in the lands of exclusively owners (quintal/acre)	Productivity in the lands of exclusively bargadars (quintal/acre)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	721.37	200.22	5698.82	1401.54	7.9	7.0
V ₂	919.80	12.24	5886.72	79.56	6.4	6.5
V ₃	65.70	73.10	394.20	445.91	6.0	6.1
V ₄	460.46	2.40	2900.90	15.36	6.3	6.4
V ₅	107.52	134.26	709.63	872.69	6.6	6.5
V ₆	468.95	13.25	3235.76	90.10	6.9	6.8
Total	2743.80	435.47		2905.16	6.86	6.67

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

VIII.6.4 We have also calculated the productivity differences between the lands of recorded bargadars and unrecorded bargadars. This has been shown in Table VIII.29 below. It is evident from this table that there was almost no difference in productivities of lands of recorded and unrecorded bargadars. Productivity of rice in the lands

TABLE VIII.29 PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN THE LANDS OPERATED BY RECORDED BARGADARS AND UNRECORDED BARGADARS

Vill-ages	Area (in acre) operated by recorded bargadars	Area (in acre) operated by unrecorded bargadars	Production (in quintal) of rice in the lands of recorded bargadars	Production (in quintal) of rice in the lands of unrecorded bargadars	Productivity in the lands of recorded bargadars (quintal/acre)	Productivity in the lands of unrecorded bargadars (quintal/acre)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	305.60	39.84	2200.32	274.90	7.2	6.9
V ₂	65.83	31.68	429.90	212.26	6.5	6.7
V ₃	225.76	20.48	1331.98	122.88	5.9	6.0
V ₄	22.08	35.07	141.31	217.43	6.4	6.2
V ₅	524.57	22.11	3304.79	139.29	6.3	6.3
V ₆	78.90	29.48	536.52	197.52	6.8	6.7
Total	1222.74	178.66	7942.82	1164.28	6.50	6.52

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

of recorded bargadars was 6.50 quintal per acre whereas that in the lands of unrecorded bargadars was 6.52 quintal per acre. Hence, from the data presented in the above three tables, it can neither be inferred that productivity of barga lands have risen after the confirmment of secured barga right on bargadars, nor can it be concluded that barga cultivation is either superior to or inferior

to ownership cultivation.

VIII.6.5 In our opinion, the reason for the no marked differences in productivities in ownership cultivation and barga cultivation and between the lands of recorded bargadars and unrecorded bargadars, lie in the fact that lands in all these cases were cultivated with the similar archaic technique of production, with almost equal doses of labour and capital, and under the condition of non-availability of any irrigational facilities. Thus, our study reveals that one of the very important objectives of land reform measures, namely, raising of agricultural productivity through the conferment of secured barga rights to bargadars, has not been fulfilled in our region of study. This finding unequivocally points out to the fact that land reform measures as an effort to raise agricultural productivity can be achieved only if it is combined with other aspects of agrarian reforms, namely, creation of irrigational facilities, adequate and timely provision of credits and other agricultural inputs to bargadars, consolidation of small and fragmented holdings of bargadars along with some technological and improved agricultural practices.

SECTION 7 : BARGADARS AND AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

VIII.7.1 In the absence of any income data on the bargadars, we have made an attempt to describe their economic plight through our investigation in which we addressed ourselves to the questions as to

how many bargadars possess both bullocks and ploughs, how many of them do not possess either of these and how many of them partly possess these, how many are to work as agricultural labourers to supplement their incomes from their own and/or barga lands, for how many days they are employed as casual agricultural labourers and whether the bargadar himself or some of his family members are employed as part time or full time workers in non-farm jobs. We have also investigated as to whether the pure agricultural labourers received wages equal to the minimum wages fixed by the government. In the following paragraphs we would describe these aspects of the economic lives of bargadars and agricultural labourers.

VIII.7.2 Traditional method of cultivation is practised by farmers in the villages of our investigation. It requires possession of at least a plough and a pair of bullocks by a farmer in this method of cultivation. Lack of any one of the constituent parts or both of it makes him unable to undertake cultivation in his own capacity. A bargadar has either to hire in plough and/or bullocks or to lease out to other bargadars or to keep the lands fallow in the event of non-possession or dispossession of plough and/or bullocks. Table VIII.30 shows the distribution of bargadars on the basis of possession of plough and bullocks. It can be seen from this table that 88.39% of the recorded bargadars possessed both ploughs and bullocks, while 8.48% of them possessed neither bullocks nor ploughs. Bargadars who

TABLE VIII.30 DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED BARGADARS ON THE BASIS OF POSSESSION OF PLOUGHS AND BULLOCKS

Villages	Possession of a recorded bargadar				Total number
	Both bullocks and ploughs	Ploughs only	Bullocks only	Neither ploughs nor bullocks	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
V ₁	142(88.75)	-	4(2.50)	14(8.75)	160(100.00)
V ₂	36(92.31)	1(2.56)	-	2(5.13)	39(100.00)
V ₃	133(80.12)	8(4.82)	-	25(15.06)	166(100.00)
V ₄	15(93.75)	-	-	1(6.25)	16(100.00)
V ₅	240(91.95)	8(3.07)	-	13(4.98)	261(100.00)
V ₆	28(93.33)	-	-	2(6.67)	30(100.00)
Total	594(88.39)	17(2.53)	4(0.60)	57(8.48)	672(100.00)

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86

Note : Figures in parentheses show percentages to total number of recorded bargadars in respective villages.

possessed either ploughs or bullocks only constituted 2.53% and 0.60% respectively of the total number of recorded bargadars interviewed. Many of the bargadars in the groups who possessed plough only and those who possessed neither ploughs nor bullocks were likely to become landless in the near future and to become pure landless agricultural labourers. Landowners are likely to resume barga lands from such bargadars who do not possess either ploughs or

bullocks. This is because of the legal provision that in the case of failure of a bargadar to cultivate barga lands without proper reason or failure to cultivate it properly and/or personally, the landowner would be able to resume the barga land under his self-cultivation¹⁸. Thus, it appeared that some of the recorded bargadars not owning ploughs and bullocks were waiting to join the rank of landless agricultural labourers. Therefore, the mere guarantee for secured barga cultivation is not much meaningful to such bargadars.

VIII.7.3 Our investigation revealed that a good number of bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded) had to undertake the work of agricultural labourers in the field of other farmers in their own villages or in the neighbouring villages for earning additional income to maintain their families. Table VIII.31 below shows the distribution of bargadars (recorded and unrecorded taken together) who casually worked as agricultural labourers to supplement their incomes from land. We may name these bargadars as "Bargadars-cum-Agricultural Labourers" (BACL). It is evident from this table that as many as 402 out of 757 bargadars we have interviewed (i.e., 53.10% of the total number) were working as casual agricultural labourers in addition to cultivating their own and/or barga lands. These figures, therefore, suggest that a large chunk of the bargadar households could not earn sufficient income from their lands and hence had to work as agricultural labourers to earn additional incomes.

TABLE VIII.31 DISTRIBUTION OF BARGADARS (RECORDED PLUS UNRECORDED) WHO CASUALLY WORKED AS AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS (BARGADARS CUM AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS-BACL)

Villages	Total number of bargadars interviewed	Number of bargadars casually working as agricultural labourers	Percentage of bargadars casually working as agricultural labourers
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	176	107	60.80
V ₂	57	27	47.37
V ₃	174	102	58.62
V ₄	37	18	48.65
V ₅	272	131	48.16
V ₆	41	17	41.46
Total	757	402	53.10

VIII.7.4 But it is natural that augmenting and supplementing the landed income would also depend on the sufficient availability of works in agricultural operations throughout the year. It may be possible only if agricultural operations become diversified through the introduction of high yielding varieties of crops by creating necessary infrastructure, multiple cropping etc. Unfortunately, agriculture in our villages under study is very much traditional,

mono-cropped and lack diversification of the type as mentioned above. Hence, it could be found that in majority of the cases, the BACLs did not find employment for the whole year. Distribution of BACLs who worked for more than or less than six months i.e., 180 days per year is presented in Table VIII.32. It is evident from this table that only 29.60% of the BACLs could find casual employment for more

TABLE VIII.32 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF BACLs EMPLOYED FOR MORE THAN OR LESS THAN 180 DAYS PER YEAR

Villages	BACLs Working for less than 180 days per year	BACLs Working for more than 180 days per year	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	68.22	31.78	100.00
V ₂	74.07	25.93	100.00
V ₃	78.43	21.57	100.00
V ₄	72.22	27.28	100.00
V ₅	64.12	35.88	100.00
V ₆	76.47	23.53	100.00
Total	70.40	29.60	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

than 180 days per year, while 70.40% of them were employed for less than 180 days per year. It was apparent from our investigation that the group of BACLs who did not find employment for "180 days or more" per year could hardly manage to be employed for 90 to 120 days, i.e.,

3 to 4 months in a year. On the other hand, the other group of bargadars who were found to be employed more than 180 days per year appeared to be employed very marginally above 180 days.

VIII.7.5 We have also presented in Table VIII.33, the distribution of bargadar households on the basis of employment of at least one member from each household. From this table it is evident that, of the total 757 bargadar households, only from 269 households (35.71%

TABLE VIII.33

DISTRIBUTION OF BARGADAR HOUSEHOLDS
FROM WHERE AT LEAST ONE MEMBER IS
EMPLOYED IN NON-FARM OCCUPATIONS

Villages	Total number of households	Number of households from where at least one member is employed in non-farm occupations	Col. (3) as percentage of Col. (4)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
V ₁	176	77	43.75
V ₂	57	24	42.11
V ₃	174	66	37.93
V ₄	37	10	27.03
V ₅	272	79	29.04
V ₆	41	13	21.71
Total	757	269	35.71

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

of the total) at least one member was employed in non-farm jobs during the period of our survey. Like the job of agricultural labourers, these non-farm jobs also help bargadar families to raise their level of income. But, it should be noted that compared to ~~the~~ demand, the availability of non-farm job opportunities, as the data in Table VIII.33 reveals, were extremely meagre.

VIII.7.6 Landless agricultural labourers are the most vulnerable section of the agrarian rural population. Legislations have been passed in favour of the bargadars. Some parts of these legislations have also been implemented. But very few legislations have been passed in favour of the agricultural labourers. The minimum wages legislation enacted in 1948, to be realistic, has largely remained in the pages of law books and has hardly been implemented in practice. Wages of agricultural labourers, in fact, depend upon the demand for and supply of their number. It would, therefore, be interesting to review the position of agricultural labourers in regard to their receipt of minimum wages fixed by the government in peak and off agricultural seasons. Table VIII.34 below shows the percentage distribution of agricultural labourers on the basis of their receipt of minimum wages (cash and kind taken together) during "peak" and "off" agricultural seasons. It is evident that in peak seasons 48.96%; i.e. nearly half of the total agricultural labourers received wages which was less than the minimum. On the other hand, in off seasons, 91.70% of them received less than minimum wages and only 8.30% of

TABLE VIII.34 PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL
LABOURERS ACCORDING TO THE AMOUNT OF
WAGES RECEIVED DURING PEAK AND OFF SEASONS*

Vill- ages	Seasons of receiving wages					
	Peak season			Off season		
	Approximate to minimum wages**	Less than minimum wages	Total	Approximate to minimum wages	Less than minimum wages	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
V ₁	62.06	37.94	100.00	10.34	89.66	100.00
V ₂	47.73	52.27	100.00	11.36	88.64	100.00
V ₃	33.33	66.67	100.00	8.33	91.67	100.00
V ₄	45.45	54.55	100.00	6.06	93.94	100.00
V ₅	41.03	58.97	100.00	5.13	94.87	100.00
V ₆	47.27	52.73	100.00	7.27	92.73	100.00
Total	48.96	51.04	100.00	8.30	91.70	100.00

Source : Field investigation in 1985-86.

* "Peak" seasons indicate the periods when agricultural operations are in full swing. "Off" seasons are the periods when agricultural operations are few. In our region of study, peak seasons are approximately the periods from May to August and then from mid-November to mid-March. The rest of the periods are the off seasons.

** Minimum wages was Rs. 12.01 (cash and kind taken together) for an adult male labourer during the period of our field survey.

them received wages approximately equal to the minimum. The reasons are not difficult to understand. Agricultural labourers are mostly unorganised and could not raise their wages through collective action. Moreover, as non-farm employment opportunities are limited, their supply far exceeded their demand, specially in off agricultural reasons. These are the reasons for which minimum wages legislation could not be implemented in practice.

SECTION 8 : SUMMARY AND SOME SUGGESTIONS

VIII.8.1 In regard to the success of the OB programme in respect of recording the names of bargadars in the investigated villages it could be found that the programme has achieved a fair degree of success when recording of bargadars is compared with the actual number of bargadars. But the recording of bargadars, when compared with the estimated probable number of bargadars, the performance of the programme does not appear to be satisfactory. The official calculation of the probable number of bargadars, however, in the method discussed earlier, is not realistic for the reasons already noted. Therefore, it may be inferred that the overall performance of the OB programme in recording the names of bargadars in relation to the actual number of existing bargadars in the villages of our investigation has been up to the mark.

VIII.8.2 From our study, it did not come into view that there is any functional relation between recording and literacy of bargadars. The determinant factors were - persuasion by panchayat members and peasants' organisations and initiative of government officials. Among these three factors, the most important was the second one. It can be found that on an average, the highest percentage of recording (35.27% of the total) had taken place at the persuasion of the members of the peasants' organisations. It can be observed that wherever the peasants' organisations had played an active role, the overall recording had been higher. On the other hand, the villages in which comparatively larger cases of recording had taken place at the own initiative of bargadars, the overall recording had been lower. These two factors largely explain the higher recording in some villages and lower recording in other villages. However, in all the villages, it had been possible to record a considerable number of bargadars at the persuasion of panchayat members. Bargadars in most cases were afraid to come forward to record their names. But when they were backed by panchayat members or peasants' organisations or government officials, they were able to overcome their fear and hesitation and came forward to record their names.

VIII.8.3 In regard to sharing of produce and costs between land-owners and bargadars, we have found that even after the execution of the OB programme, the legal provisions have hardly been effective in changing the traditional 50:50 sharing of produce and costs. In

most cases a recorded bargadar got 50% share of the output. He had to bear the major share of all costs. Thus, though barga rights have been guaranteed to bargadars, it has not been possible to secure the legally allowed share of produce for bargadars due to several reasons. The main reason is the observance of tradition and custom both by bargadars and landowners in this respect. The other two reasons, viz., bargadars' weaker bargaining power and bargadars' debt obligation to landlords, are not less important. The existing law appears to be inadequate in so far as it does not provide for mixed cost-sharing which is widely practised in the Duars region of Jalpaiguri district as well as in other parts of West Bengal¹⁹. However, from the relevant section of law it logically follows that landowners, in cases of mixed cost sharing where they bear less than 100% share of the costs of cultivation, should share less than 50% share of produce. But our study reveals that inspite of bearing less than 100% of the costs, the landowners got 50% of produce in most cases. This indicates that bargadars were largely deprived of their legitimate shares. The relevant legal provisions have not been fully implemented in practice due to the observance of custom by landowners and bargadars and also due to the vulnerable socio-economic condition of bargadars. The case of unrecorded bargadars, in respect of sharing of produce and costs was a little different from that of the recorded bargadars. The 50:50 mode of sharing of produce took place in higher percentage of cases for unrecorded bargadars than that of the recorded bargadars. In respect of cost sharing, the 50:50 mode was prevalent in smaller number of cases for unrecorded bargadars.

than those of the recorded ones. The special feature in case of unrecorded bargadars in regard to cost sharing was that in a small percentage of cases, landowners did share the entire cost of cultivation but shared 50% of produce with their bargadars. This happened due to the prevalence of old patron-client relationship with the landowners and their unrecorded bargadars.

VIII.8.4 In regard to the availability of institutional finance to recorded bargadars our study shows that though the Government has taken steps in this direction, much remains to be done still now. Only about 44% of the recorded bargadars received institutional finance. This implies that a large number of them are still to be covered by this facility as a "follow up" operation and after recording their names. Nevertheless, recorded bargadars were found to be in a privileged position than the unrecorded ones, so far as the provision of institutional finance was concerned.

VIII.8.5 Besides institutional source, bargadars procured loans from other sources as well. The new feature that was discernible in this respect was that dependence of bargadars on their landlords had lessened considerably. But their dependence on mahajans (money lenders) was still great. Loans taken from mahajans were always and invariably associated with very high rates of interest. Bargadars also took loans from "others" which included relatives, friends neighbours etc. It was found that in a big percentage of cases, loans

obtained from "landlords" and "others" were interest free. But the interest free loans were sometimes associated with certain ulterior motives of "landlords" and "others". Through interest free loans, landlords in fact tied their bargadars in the web of dependency. Bargadars had to perform some economic and extra-economic functions in lieu of interest free loans. Due to debt obligations of this type, bargadars were often bound to accept less than the legally allowed shares. The distinguishing feature of credit relations between landlords and their unrecorded bargadars was that, unrecorded bargadars obtained loans from their landlords in larger percentage of cases than that of the recorded bargadars and also those loans were interest free in larger percentage of cases of unrecorded bargadars than that of the recorded bargadars. This implies, on the one hand, the prevalence of more cordial relationship between unrecorded bargadars and their landowners than that between the recorded bargadars and their landowners, and a greater dependence of unrecorded bargadars on their landowners compared to the recorded bargadars.

VIII.8.6 Bargadars had to take loans for various purposes. The most important of these was the purpose of agricultural production. The other two purposes were - loans for consumption purposes and contingencies. The last mentioned purpose sometimes damaged the viability of the household economy of bargadars, as these loans were often used for unproductive pieces of business.

VIII.8.7 Position of repayment of loans taken from institutional sources appeared to be unsatisfactory. It could be found that nearly 12% of the bargadars were not repaying at all, while about 21% were repaying in an irregular manner. It could be found that majority of the bargadars could not repay due to poverty. Some one fifth of them could not repay due to the misutilisation of loan money. There is another group, which form as large as one fourth of the total number, who did not repay wilfully inspite of having the necessary means. The reason appeared to be their notion that those loans would be written off in some future year.

VIII.8.8 A comparison of productivity of barga lands and non-barga lands showed that there was no significant difference in productivities in the two types of lands. Differences in productivities in the lands of exclusively owner cultivators and that of exclusively bargadar cultivators was also insignificant. Moreover, a comparison of productivities in the lands of recorded bargadars and unrecorded bargadars also showed that the difference was negligible. The main reason for such a state of affair appeared to be the fact that, in all cases, lands were cultivated with similar traditional and archaic techniques of production, almost equal initiatives, absence of improved agricultural practices and non-existence of irrigation facilities. Therefore, it can not be inferred that barga cultivation is either superior or inferior to ownership cultivation, and that productivity of barga lands has risen in the lands of recorded bargadars than that of the unrecorded bargadars.

VIII.8.9 Condition of poverty, vulnerability and precarious existence of a section of bargadars is exhibited by the fact that about 8% bargadars have neither ploughs nor bullocks. Another 3% have either ploughs only or bullocks only. At least some of the bargadars from these categories were waiting to join the ranks of agricultural labourers. Guaranteed barga rights are not much meaningful to such bargadars.

VIII.8.10 It is revealed from our study that more than half of the bargadars have also to work as agricultural labourers to supplement their incomes from land. Not only the bargadars themselves, but some of their family members also have to work as casual agricultural labourers. But, though such large number of bargadars as well as some of their family members seek employment in agricultural operations, they did not get employment throughout the year. Agriculture is not a perennial and diversified occupation here, rather it is mainly mono-crop, seasonal and traditional in nature. Hence, most of the casual workers did find employment only for some months in a year. It was found that about 70% of the bargadars intending to work as casual agricultural labourers got employment for less than six months in a year. Although avenues of non-farm employment appeared to be very meagre, still a certain percentage of the family members of the bargadars' families were employed in non-farm jobs. It was also found that, only in case of one third of bargadars' households, at least one member was employed in non-farm occupations.

VIII.8.11 The most neglected section of rural people are, however, the landless agricultural labourers. They are numerically greater than that of the bargadars. Security in their economic lives are very much lacking. As they are dependent on the wage income and since employment opportunities in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors are meagre at present, it is certain that most of them live below poverty line. Due to various unfavourable conditions prevailing in the countryside, minimum wages legislation could not be implemented. Moreover, due to the unorganised nature of agricultural labourers, they are unable to secure the minimum wages fixed by the government. Our investigation reveals that, though during busy agricultural seasons ("peak" seasons) majority of agricultural labourers were able to receive wages equal to or sometimes a little above the minimum wages, still a considerable percentage of them could not secure wages equal to the minimum wages. In the slack seasons ("off seasons") when agricultural operations are few, a negligible part of them got wages equal to minimum wages and most of them (91.70% of the total agricultural labourers interviewed) received wages which were much below the prescribed minimum. It was felt that to ensure the stability in the rural structure it is imperative to take necessary measures to protect the interests of this class of people.

VIII.8.12 We have failed to investigate the incidence of eviction of bargadars for want of reliable data. On the basis of approximate information collected from various categories of cultivators, it appeared to us that there were certain cases where there had been

eviction of bargadars both before and after the recording of bargadars through OB. It was found that a certain number of exclusively owner cultivators owning small amounts of land and some of the agricultural labourers were erstwhile bargadars. These erstwhile bargadars did not record their names on good faith, but, the landowner evicted them prior to or just after launching of the ^{OB} programme. In most cases, eviction had taken place without and in some cases, with very small amount of monetary compensation to the bargadars by their landowners. Similar cases were found in case of owner-cum-bargadars. Sometimes, eviction was made in lieu of writing off of the loans of the bargadars. Some exclusively bargadar farmers were evicted just before recording their names. In such cases, it was stated that, landowners paid a nominal amount of money to the bargadars and debarred the latter in recording their names. This sort of eviction with the payment of a lump sum amount to the bargadars has taken place in a few cases even after recording of their names by submitting "istafanama" (withdrawal) by bargadars to the government authorities. Evictions in all cases, as it appeared, had been made unlawfully. It is very difficult, indeed, to stop eviction of the kind mentioned above by any piece of legislation when bargadars themselves yield to the pressure (both economic and extra-economic) of the landowners. It can be stopped, if and only if, bargadars can build up a strong economic base of their own and minimise their economic dependence on the landowners. During the time of our investigation, it occurred to us that the position regarding

the eviction of bargadars has stabilised and no new case of eviction came to our notice. Perhaps, both recorded and unrecorded bargadars and their landowners are now interested to maintain the status quo after the OB programme.

VIII.8.13 It may be relevant to make some general comments and observations on the success of the OB programme and the implementation of the recent land reforms legislations in the Duars region of North Bengal.

VIII.8.14 It may be recalled that the movement for security and better terms of sharecropping has inherited a legacy of strength and continuity from the British period, specially since the late 1940's. At that time concern was voiced not only against the eviction of bargadars and emphasis was placed on building up active resistance to eviction but also a strong movement was launched for securing a better (two-third) share to the bargadars. But, the setting up of a viable production organisation has always received inadequate attention. The land reform measures in general and the OB programme in particular may be said to have achieved a partial success. This is revealed by the fact that though barga rights have been guaranteed, there is widespread persistence of the traditional mode of sharing of produce irrespective of recording and presence of political awareness and organisation in most of the villages. To eliminate the old patron-client relationship between landowners and tillers, it may be

necessary to make the small and marginal farms of bargadars economically viable.

VIII.8.15 Our study highlights the fact that in changing and shaping the agro-economic condition, the role of the two facets of the productive forces, i.e., both the technological and institutional forces, are important and interdependent. The improvement of one without changes in the other can not bring about significant progress.

Agriculture is undertaken with an archaic technique of production by the farmers in our region of study. There are no facilities of irrigation provided by the government. Use of this vitally important input in private initiative appeared to be quite inadequate. Without the application of proper doses of fertiliser, without the introduction of high-yielding varieties of seeds, and without the diversification of cropping pattern etc. agriculture can not become a remunerative pursuit. In the absence of all these conditions, level of production has remained at a very low level. It is easily discernable that whatever might be the pattern of landholding and whatever measure of land reforms be introduced and implemented there is no possibility of raising productivity of land and improving the quality of life of the farming population if some technological and biological innovations, at least at a moderate scale, are not applied.

Along with these, the creation of irrigation and other basic infrastructural facilities are vitally necessary. In the absence of such facilities, farmers in the region of our study would not be able to keep up with those in the areas having these necessary pre-requisites for agricultural development.

VIII.8.16 Moreover, it is often held that the number of persons falling in the category of landless labourers is far greater than the number of bargadars and no attempt has been made to extend the benefits of land reforms to such people²⁰. There can be no denying the fact that landless agricultural labourers, apart from bargadars, are in worse condition than bargadars, and need attention. Solutions for ameliorating the poor economic condition of the poor agricultural labourers may be sought in redistributive justice, elimination of inefficiency in the agrarian system by developing it in scientific lines, urbanisation, expansion of non-farm employment opportunities and a host of other packages.

VIII.8.17 It may be suggested that consolidation of holdings and co-operative farming should be adopted to give vigor and viability to the small and marginal farm economy of the bargadar and non-bargadar cultivators. However, in West Bengal, of all reform measures, achievements in land consolidation have been the poorest²¹. In the post-land redistribution phase little efforts have been made towards consolidating the holdings of the beneficiaries and bringing them under one compact block. But as long as the agrarian economy is marked by the presence of a sizeable number of rich and middle peasants having proprietary rights on land, it may also be suggested that the small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and poor artisans should have "communal" ownership of land and other means of production, where these small producers' co-operative with government

support may be helpful towards raising the productivity of land of the latter group of people. For this it may also be necessary to usher in technological improvements in the agricultural front crowded by the small and marginal farmers.

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2. The estimated average size of barga holding is between 0.97 acres and 1.25 acres in West Bengal, and 1.5 acres in the district of Jalpaiguri. See paragraphs VIII.2.5 and VIII.2.6 of this chapter and notes 10, 11 and 12 below. In the six villages we have investigated the actual average size of barga holding is 1.85 acres. See table VIII.3 of this chapter. All these figures indicate that bargadars generally belong to the small farmer category. It is to be noted that farmers holding land 0-1 hectare have been categorised as marginal farmers in the Agricultural Censuses.
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4. Ghosh, R., "Agrarian Programme of Left Front Government", Economic and Political Weekly, June 20-27, 1981, Review of Agriculture, p. A-50.

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7. Ghosh, R., op. cit., p. A-50.
8. West Bengal Government Memorandum Concerning Operation Barga, Memo No. 12304(23) GE dated Calcutta, the 5th July, 1978.
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10. Board of Revenue, Government of West Bengal, "Land Reforms in West Bengal", Statistical Report, IV, 1980.
11. Datta, P.K., Statistics of Bargadars and Extent of Barga Cultivation in West Bengal, Directorate of Land Records and Survey, Government of West Bengal, May 1981.
12. The relevant information have been collected from Settlement Charge Office at Jalpaiguri.
13. An introduction to the selected villages is given in the Appendix to the present chapter. A detailed description of demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these villages has been given in this Appendix.

14. Studies by Ashok Rudra (in 1976) and N. Bandopadhyaya (in 1982) also revealed that this 50:50 mode of sharing the produce is the most common mode. See Rudra, Ashok, Paschim Banger Bargadar (in Bengali), Calcutta, Kathashilpa, 1982, p. 2 and table 1 in p. 45. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. 122, p. 144.
15. See Rudra, Ashok, op. cit., p. 2. Bandopadhyaya, N., op. cit., p. 144.
16. Bargadars have to perform certain works for their landlords without any remuneration, such as supply labour for agricultural operations in the field of landlords, assist the landlords in marketing of goods, perform some household works of landlords etc.
17. Rudra, Ashok, op. cit., pp. 17-18.
18. Section 17(1a) and 17(1b) of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955.
19. That mixed cost-sharing arrangements are prevalent in other parts is also revealed by other studies. See, Basu, S.K. and Bhattacharyya, S.K., Land Reforms in West Bengal - A Study on Implementation, Calcutta, Oxford Book Company, 1963, pp. 33-37. Rudra, Ashok, op. cit., pp. 5-9, pp. 46-47 (tables 3 and 4).
20. Rudra, Ashok, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward" in Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, June 20-27, 1981, pp. A-64-A-68. Bandopadhyaya, N., " 'Operation Barga' and Land Reforms Perspective in West Bengal - A Discursive Review", in Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, June 20-27, 1981, p.A-42.
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CHAPTER - IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

IX.0.1 Broadly speaking, the present study is an exercise in analysing, as far as practicable, the origin and development of land-tenurial relations and its consequences in different periods of history, especially from the days of the Bhutanese administration down to the present age in the Duars region of the district of Jalpaiguri of the northern part of West Bengal. Although historical periods have their own distinctive features, they more or less form inseparable parts of one continuous process. A relatively longer period has been chosen in our study for a comparative analysis of the changes in tenurial relations and their economic consequences. The evolution of the relationship between the tenants, the landlords and the Government has, in course of more than two hundred years, taken place in three definite periods which we have termed as the Bhutanese, the British and the modern periods respectively.

IX.0.2 In the Bhutanese period, land-tenure "system" as used in the modern sense, did not develop. The historical materials as we could have collected, permitted us to believe that the Bhutias did not introduce anything new in land-tenurial arrangement in the region of our study, but allowed the customary Cooch Behari arrangement to prevail as long as their demands for revenue were fulfilled. Most of the historical records that were available to us suggest that the mode of collection of land revenue of the Bhutias was

oppressive. The Western Duars region was a free squeezing field to the Bhutias. In such an arrangement of revenue collection our study suggests that the Bhutias constantly violated the existing tenurial arrangements with the result that the tenure holders did not have any privilege of enjoying uninterrupted rights in their properties. It is our belief that the peculiar revenue collection arrangement of the Bhutias gave temporary property rights to any person who would be in a position to fulfil their demand for revenue and this, our study suggests, was oral which amounted to complete absence of any property rights in the modern sense. The whole tenurial arrangement was based on a very fragile foundation leading to its instability. In an insecure tenurial condition, our study suggests that any development, worth its name, in agriculture was not possible. Therefore, the whole economy became stagnant and the inhabitants of the Western Duars region were compelled to face endless sufferings at the hands of the Bhutias who did not care to live permanently in the region.

IX.0.3 Our study points out the fact that the Britishers after annexation of the Western Duars made an attempt for the first time to systematise the tenurial as well as land revenue arrangements of the region. However, the Britishers, after annexing the territory, initially kept the land relations undisturbed for sometime. Thereafter, they gradually introduced changes and reforms. As an attempt to systematise the land relations, they conducted periodical surveys and settlements of land. Lands were measured and classified. Revenues

were fixed keeping in view the qualities, location and relative development of various parts of the region. Lands were leased out to capitalist farmers called jotedars. Various forms of leases were issued in different times. These leases governed the terms and conditions of holding land. Occasionally, conditions laid down in leases were reformed so as to cope with the changing situations. The Bengal Tenancy (B.T) Act, 1885, was applicable here only in a restricted manner. Legal matters relating to land were guided by the Bhutan Duars Act, 1864, Waste Land Claims Act, 1863 and Scheduled District Act, 1874 and finally by the B.T. Act which was extended to this area since 1899 with some modifications. Rights and obligations of jotedars were specified in the form of leases and sub-infeudation was permitted by one degree only below jotedars, called chukanidars whose rights and status were clearly defined and rental obligation specified.

IX.0.4 From our study it is revealed that contrary to the intention of the government further sub-infeudation below the permitted degree could not be checked as there were no provisions for punitive action. Our study suggests that as a result there remained always a scope for rack-renting of unrecognised sub-tenants below chukanidars. Moreover, we have pointed out in our study that a bulk of the peasantry called adhiars (sharecroppers) had no rights in or title to land. They were treated like agricultural labourers, though literally they were the tillers of soil. They were exploited

to the best advantage of their landlords. All efforts for improving their status or giving them some rights were frustrated by the vested interests. This exploitation and oppression of the adhiars by their landlords reached at such a state at the later years of the British rule that adhiars organised a strong movement to end those exploitations. They also raised demand for a higher share of the produce. Though the struggle ultimately failed, it made the bulk of the peasantry conscious of their legitimate rights and actually prepared the ground for progressive legislations in their favour in the post-independence period.

IX.0.5 But the socio-economic scenario of Western Duars went on changing constantly during the British period. Population in the tract rose gradually. Land became a salable asset. There were commercialisation of agriculture and gradual monetisation of the economy of Duars. Our study revealed that on the development of land market lands gradually began to pass into the hands of money lenders and traders. In certain cases, it gave rise to the phenomenon of absentee landlordism, although the original policy of the government was to settle lands only with resident cultivators. It was seen that there was no bar on acquiring land by non-resident non-cultivators, and no measure was taken to check the growth of absentee landlordism. We have suggested in our study that this new phenomenon had further accentuated the growth of sub-infeudation and adhiari (sharecropping) cultivation. The unique feature of land relation in the Western Duars was no doubt the jotedari-adhiari

system. But most of the jotedars owned large areas of land. As there were no ceiling on landholding, they owned as much land as possible under their management. Thus the ownership of land was concentrated in a few hands of jotedars, whereas the landless tillers began to swell in number. The study has further revealed the fact that the control of land passed from the indigenous holders of land to newcomers often giving rise to social tensions, the evil effect of which is felt even today.

IX.0.6 It should, however, be noted that the Britishers with a view to keep the possibility of raising land revenue from time to time, gave temporary rights to landholders. Moreover, as the entire region had a great possibility for tea cultivation, temporary rights for cultivating land for agricultural purposes opened up the possibility of transferring agricultural land into tea lands.

IX.0.7 Tea industry was introduced in the region within a decade of the inception of the British rule. Large investments of capital were made in it, and the government paid a lot of attention for its development. Development of rail and road communications mainly served the purpose of this industry. This study shows that in most of the cases this was done at the cost of the interest of the agricultural sector. Tea lands were leased out at lower rates of rent than agricultural lands. Arrangements were made to provide the required lands for tea cultivation. It is also suggested in our

study that although surplus was generated in the plantation sector, it was very seldom reinvested for the benefit of the subsistence agricultural sector. The employment of local people stayed at a minimum level in the tea plantations. Almost the whole army of tea garden labourers were recruited from outside the region. Even food and other consumption requirements of the plantation labourers were used to be procured from outside the region. Moreover, requirements of the industry for implements, machineries, fertilisers, tea chests etc. were used to be collected not from within but from outside the region and sometimes even from outside the State. The plantation industry utilised the agricultural sector for the satisfaction of a small fragment of their demand, resulting in the underdevelopment of the subsistence segment of the Duars economy. Our study, thus, points out that the plantation sector mostly developed as enclaves and did not produce any spread effect on the peripheral underdeveloped socio-economic milieu. Perhaps the most deleterious effect of the development of tea industry was the uprooting of some of the sons of the soil like the Mechés who became the victims of development of tea industry.

IX.0.8 The study further highlights the fact that the role of the Government as well as that of the capitalist jotedars were minimal in the improvement and development of Duars agriculture. Although the Government did think of taking several steps for the improvement of agriculture, unfortunately no concrete steps were

undertaken. On the contrary, the government was much more interested and careful in raising the maximum possible revenue from this area rather than looking after the prosperity and betterment of the people. Thus, from the point of view of exploitation of the inhabitants of the Western Duars, one is entitled to conclude from our study that there was no qualitative difference between the Bhutia and the British system of revenue collection. The study further points out that the jotedars and some chukanidars with large chunks of land also failed miserably in this respect. They were contented with whatever they could produce from land and procure from adhiars and sub-tenants. Their needs were minimum. They were idle and lethargic and mostly unconcerned to have a better standard of living. It was their idleness which was largely responsible for their contentment with the easy-going traditional life. It is thus suggested in our study that inspite of the fact that some of the rich landowners possessed substantial amount of surplus, there was no reinvestment of the surplus for the improvement of land, and consequently agriculture of this region had to remain in a backward state with production remaining at the rock-bottom level. It was not possible for the small farmers to invest sufficiently in agriculture due to lack of capital and resources, consequently production technique more or less remained traditional.

IX.0.9 Our study, however, points out that in the post-independence period, the land-tenure system has undergone major changes. Instead of different types of land-tenure system and application of different

types of land laws, all parts of the State have been brought under simple and uniform tenurial and revenue system and same set of laws has been made operative for the whole State. With the enactment of new legislations, all sorts of intermediary interests in land have been abolished and direct relationship has been established between the State and its tenants. The State has now returned to the Raiyatwari system of land-tenure. By enacting uniform land laws for the whole State, complexities in legal matters relating to land affairs have been sought to be dispensed with. Adhiars (i.e., bargadars) have been given the security of their tenures, and their share of produce has been raised. They have been provided with legal safeguards in such a way that it has become almost impossible for a landowner to evict his adhiar. On the whole, they have been provided with such rights and status that they are now almost semi-raiyas (tenants). But our study suggests that provision of such rights and safeguards is inconsistent with a two-tier Raiyatwari system of land-tenure, because, although an adhiar can not legally be called a raiyat, in practice he enjoys some of the rights and privileges as enjoyed by a raiyat. Thus, it may be said that the employers of adhiars, viz., their landowners, are intermediaries. In our view, to remove such inconsistency the adhiari or bargadari (sharecropping) system should be abolished, and all adhiars may be given the raiyati right by providing compensation to the owners of the adhi land where the beneficiaries may be asked to share a part of the burden of compensation.

IX.0.10. The study further suggests that the enactment of beneficial laws for bargadars has not been an unmixed blessing for them. From the enactment of the Bargadars' Act, 1950, upto the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955 with its subsequent amendments of the sections pertaining to the provisions for safeguarding the rights of bargadars, many of them have been evicted by their landowners. The study shows that a large section of the bargadars have been reduced to the status of agricultural labourers.

IX.0.11. The enormous growth of agricultural labourers may be considered as one of the most important changes that the Duars economy of North Bengal along with other parts of West Bengal has witnessed since the attainment of independence of India. Our study has attempted to trace some of the causes for the growth of agricultural labourers in the region of our investigation. Break down of the jotedari-achhiari system, rate of growth of population, absence of alternative sources of livelihood of the rising number of population, eviction of bargadars and the decline of the bargadari system are some of the important causes identified by us. The end result is that there has been a gradual pauperisation of a large section of the rural population. As there are no alternative avenues of employment for the agricultural labourers, they are bound to accept, in most cases, wages at rates lower than the government stipulated minimum wage rates. That various rural employment and development programmes have not been able to make a perceptible dent on the rural poverty is evident from the swelling number of pauperised labour force in the rural front. Though in the district as a whole, new agricultural strategy of production has been introduced since ^{the} seventies of this

century, it has failed to absorb sufficient number of labourers. In addition, wherever it has been adopted, it has been largely seen that the landowners have evicted their bargadars, swelling the size of landless labourers.

IX.0.12 The structure of landholding as revealed in our study has also undergone some noticeable changes. The Lorenz Curves show that land has been concentrated in a few hands over time. The **Agricultural Census** data show that the number of marginal landholding has recorded a very big rise over the decade 1970-71 to 1980-81. The data further show that the agrarian economy in our region of study like other parts of West Bengal, is now dominated by the small and marginal farmers. The average size of holdings of almost all categories of operators has shown a decline over the period. Especially the average size of holdings of small farmers has been reduced to such a level that it can hardly be described as "economic". Our study shows that such a high pace of marginalisation is responsible for the immiseration of the peasantry.

IX.0.13 Our investigation in six villages of the Duars region in respect of success of the Operation Barga programme in particular and land reforms in general has brought to surface some important findings. Our study shows that recorded bargadars are now in a secured position than the unrecorded ones. But the mode of sharing of produce has remained by and large 50:50, even when bargadars

provide the entire or most part of the cost of cultivation. The loyalty of bargadars to their landowners and the prevalence of age-old custom and tradition in the country side have appeared to be the main reasons for such a state of affair. It has been found that bargadars' dependence on landowners has declined so long as the satisfaction of consumption needs through borrowings are concerned. Some arrangements have been made to provide finance to bargadars from institutional sources, but on the whole they still depend on other forms of non-institutional sources of finance for which they borrow mostly on unfavourable terms. Our study also highlights the fact that recording has nothing to do with increasing the productivity of land. Yet our another finding is that mere legal provision may not be enough to ameliorate the poverty of the rural masses. It should be accompanied by other supportive measures. Any rural reform programme should take cognizance of this fact.

IX.0.14 But land reform programme, in most cases, has become land-centered only, whereas all round development of agriculture does not simply depend upon redistribution of land. Certain infrastructural development of non-land origin is a sine-qua-non of agricultural development which calls for agrarian reform. But it is a fact that in the absence of land reform measures, there is a danger that programmes designed for the benefit of the poorer sections may be pocketed by a small number of dominant rural elites who generally wield enormous control over the society. Therefore, land reform measures should always precede any agrarian reform measure. Together with this, what is most needed is a viable production organisation

of the marginal and small farmers. To achieve this goal, husbandry by these groups of farmers may be organised through cooperative and collective organisations for which appropriate legal measures should be evolved. This new form of agricultural organisation may also help in utilising land more intensively in the event when the size of holdings has a tendency to become small day by day and when there has appeared little scope for extending cultivation.

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER III

I. A Short History of Annexation of Western Duars to British India

The British Government first came into contact with Bhutan in 1772. The Bhutias invaded the Cooch Behar State and, on its Raja applying for help, a force was sent to his assistance which drove out the invaders and pursued them into their own territories. Through the interaction of the Regent of Tibet, a treaty of peace between the East India Company and Bhutan was concluded in 1774. A few years later in 1783 an attempt was made to promote commercial intercourse with Bhutan, but Captain Turner's mission to that State proved unsuccessful. After this there was little intercourse until the occupation of Assam by the English in 1826. It was then found that the Bhutias had seized several tracts of country lying at the foot of the mountains, called the Duars or passes. They agreed to pay a small tribute, but failed to do so and used their command of the passes to raid into British territory. In consequence of this Captain Pemberton was sent to Bhutan, but his negotiations yielded no definite result and, as all attempts to obtain redress and ensure security to the inhabitants failed, the Assam or Eastern Duars were wrested from the Bhutias, and the British Government agreed to pay them Rs. 10,000 a year as compensation for the loss, subject to their good behaviour. But no improvement followed; the Bhutias continued to commit outrages on British subjects in the Duars, and scarcely

a year passed without the occurrence of several raids on British territory, headed by Bhutia officials, in which the inhabitants were plundered, killed or carried off as slaves.

In 1863 Mr. Ashley Eden, C.S. was sent as an envoy to Bhutan, to put a stop to these depredations and outrages and to demand reparation. But he was grossly insulted in Bhutan darbar and was compelled to sign two documents agreeing to make over the Assam and Bengal Duars to Bhutan, and to surrender all run-away slaves and political offenders. It is said that Mr. Eden had signed the said documents with an endorsement that he was being compelled to sign it under duress. About 300 Indians and several Britishers had been detained as captives in Bhutan at that time. All requests for their release went unheeded. Thus the previous time-serving treaty made by the Britishers with the Bhutias was put to an end.

The Britishers then admitted that the Bengal Duars was populated by a race which had no affinity with the Bhutias and had long suffered from their tyranny, but who were closely allied with the people of Bengal and were expected to co-operate cordially with the British authorities. On the 12th November 1864, the British Government issued a proclamation permanently annexing the Bengal Duars; and it was determined that an expedition should advance in four columns, which were to take up their several posts at Diwangiri, Sioli, Pasakha and Dalinkot.

In the war that followed, the Bhutias had to suffer a heavy defeat. The Bhutan Government at last came to terms and conceded to the demands of the Britishers. On the 11th November 1865, a treaty of peace and friendship was concluded between the Britishers and Bhutan according to which the Indo-Bhutan boundary was permanently settled along the mutually accepted line and the Bhutias gave up all claims to the Duars region. It was a treaty of friendship and fair dealings for the future. An annual subsidy of Rs. 50,000 was granted to Bhutan Government which was to depend entirely on the will and pleasure of the British Government and on the good conduct of the Bhutias. Shortly after this, the Indo-Bhutan boundary was permanently marked by a joint survey and by fixing permanent boundary pillars along the entire Indo-Bhutan border.

II. Land Laws of Western Duars

A few years after the formation of the district of Jalpaiguri in 1869, the Western Duars part of it was included in the list of scheduled district under the Scheduled Districts Act (Act XIX of 1874). Under this Act the head of the district administration was called the Deputy Commissioner. After this Act was passed some of the laws applicable in regulated territories came to be applied to the non-regulated territory of Western Duars. The Government of India Act 1919, declared the Duars of the Jalpaiguri district as a backward tract and the Governor General was vested with the powers of issuing notifications directing that an Act to the Indian Legislature shall not be applicable to the

non-regulated territory except with such modifications as he may direct. The Governor-General was also empowered to authorise the Governor of a province to issue similar notifications in respect of Act of the local legislature.

Being a non-regulated area and a scheduled district, the Western Duars region enjoyed a special position regarding the application of land laws.

The Acts and Regulations that were applicable in other parts of Bengal did not come into force in the Western Duars unless, those were specifically extended to this area. The area was kept as one for the purpose of Khas management of the Government. It was divided into five Government Estates or Tahsils, namely, Maynaguri, Falakata, Alipurduar, Bhalka and Ambari Falakata and each of the Estates was treated as a Touzi.

To deal with this area an Act known as the Bhutan-Duars Act was passed in the year 1869. It remained in force till the end of 1895 when it was repealed. So long as it was in force, it excluded the operation of Civil Procedure Code in Express terms. The jurisdiction of ordinary civil courts was barred from the matters relating to the immovable property, Revenue and Rent. Jurisdiction in matters relating to Revenue was to be exercised by officers appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor and they were to be guided by the provision of Regulation VII of 1822, which was a regulation declaring the principles of land revenue settlement and for preparing record-of-rights etc.

However, there was no provision relating to suits regarding immovable property and rent. There was therefore, until 1895 no definite rent law for the Western Duars.

The Scheduled District Act (Act XIX of 1874) was declared to be in force in the Western Duars in 1875. In the same year another Act called Waste Land Claims Act (Act XXIII of 1863) was also extended to this area.

The Bhutan Duars Act was repealed in 1895, although the validity of action taken under the Act was safeguarded. In the same year, the Bengal Rent Act of 1859 was extended to the Western Duars, with its amending Acts of 1862. These Acts remained in force until Bengal Tenancy Act was extended to the Western Duars in the year 1899. Bengal Revenue Sales Act 1859 and 1868 were also applicable to the area, though these were of limited practical value. The Bengal Tenancy (BT) Act did not, therefore, bring about any great improvements in the position of majority of tenants in Western Duars who were left to be governed by the terms of their leases. The BT Act was extended in the Duars with the following modifications.

Firstly, the BT Act did not apply to the lands previously or subsequently granted under written leases for the cultivation of tea or for reclamation under the Arable Waste Lands Rules. Secondly, nothing in the Act which was inconsistent with any rights or obligations of a Jotedar, Chukanidar, Dar-chukanidar, Adhiar or other tenants of agricultural lands as defined in the settlement

proceedings theretofore approved by the Government or with the terms of a lease, theretofore granted by the Government of any such tenant, was to be held to override these rights and obligations.

The B.T. Act thus did not apply at all to any lands in the Duars leased under the Waste Land Rules. It applied to jotes already in existence at the time when the British took possession from Bhutan. Even here the terms of the leases issued to such Jotedars prevailed over the Bengal Tenancy Act when the two came in conflict. The Jotes to which B.T. Act applied were called Old Mal Jotes.

The rights and obligations of all classes of tenants in the Western Duars were governed by the Waste Land Rules issued from time to time and the terms of the leases granted to the tenants. All leases in the Western Duars were issued by the Government. Even when the leases were issued by private persons, the terms of the leases could not be different from the terms of the standard leases approved by the Government for this purpose.

III. Evolution of Various Forms of Jotes and Leases

After the British annexation certain original settlers were found to occupy certain jotes. These jotes were described by Mr. Sunder who carried out the settlement operation of 1889-95 in the Western Duars, as Mal Jotes. The term Mal Jote originally applied to those jotes which were found to exist at the time of

annexation of the Duars from Bhutan as contrary to new jotes created later on.

For over twenty years after annexation, jotes were settled under the provisions of the Act XVI of 1869 and the Waste Land Rules of 1875. The Waste Land Rules of 1888 was framed to systematise the land policy and to define the rights and obligations of all classes of tenants.

Mr. Sunder settled three types of jote with jotedars. These were (1) Mal Jotes as defined above (2) Time Expired Jote was a jote which existed prior to Mr. Sunder's settlement and was settled under Arable Waste Land Rules, the preliminary lease of which had expired, and (3) Arable Waste Land Jote was a jote the preliminary lease of which had not expired during the commencement of Sunder's settlement. This third type of jote was settled with the jotedars at their requests and with the permission of the Commissioner by cancelling the preliminary lease and superseding by a lease for 15 years, the term of Sunder's settlement.

But all the three types of jotes were settled by Sunder issuing only one type of lease, namely, the "Mal Jote Lease".

Between 1895 and 1905 Sunder's Mal Jote lease was issued by the Deputy Commissioner to some jotes which were preceded by 5 years preliminary lease under Arable Waste Land Rules. But the proper form of renewal of these jotes should have been the Renewed Arable Waste Lands Lease.

After 1905 for a few years, preliminary leases under Arable Waste Land Rules were issued to all new settlers. But at the time of consideration of new lease forms, only amalnamas were issued with a promise of a lease in future.

Thus when Mr. Milligan started his settlement operations in 1906, he found four classes of jotes for which he prepared leases. These jotes were :-

- (1) Jotes settled by Mr. Sunder under Mal Jote Leases.
- (2) Jotes settled subsequently under Renewal Arable Waste Land Leases.
- (3) Jotes settled under Arable Waste Land preliminary leases and
- (4) Jotes created under amalnamas for the reclamation of Waste land for which lease was then to be issued.

Mr. Milligan, however, could not issue renewed leases for the Jotes in existence at his time. This work devolved upon the Deputy Commissioner's staff.

At this time according to Government orders distinction was made between two types of Mal Jotes, namely :-

- (1) Mal Jotes which existed before 1888.
- (2) Mal Jotes which originated after promulgation of the Arable Waste Land Rules of 1888.

Renewal of the first type was made in Old Mal (O.M.) form. This type constituted jotes recorded and styled by Mr. Sunder as Mal Jote, that is a jote which had existed before Sunder's settlement. The B.T. Act applied to this class of jote subject to some restrictions.

The second class was renewed in Restricted Mal (R.M.) form and constituted jotes of the following three kinds:

- (1) Time expired jotes for which Mr. Sunder issued Mal Jote lease.
- (2) Arable Waste Land Jotes recorded by Mr. Sunder and for which he issued Mal Jote lease.
- (3) Mal Jotes granted by the Deputy Commissioner between 1895 and 1905.

The Bengal Tenancy Act was not applicable to the R.M. leases as these leases were granted by Government for reclamation.

During Mr. Mukherjee's settlement (1931-35) D form and A form leases were issued. D form was the form of renewal of preliminary reclamation lease under the Waste Land Rules of 1888. A form lease was issued under the rules of 1917 to all amalnama jotes recorded by Mr. Milligan. All new settlements made after ^{Mr.} Milligan were issued in A form lease.

Both A and D form leases were outside the purview of the Bengal Tenancy Act. This Act was also inapplicable in cases of Santhal Colony jote leases and special jote leases as these jotes were originally granted for reclamation.

Besides D form and A form, three other forms were also sanctioned by the Government.

These were :-

- (1) Ar Form Lease - This form was granted for renewal of leases granted in form A.

(2) E Form Lease - It was the form of lease for Mal Jotes in the Western Duars granted subsequent to the promulgation of the Arable Waste Land Rules of 1888, that is, restricted Mal Jotes.

(3) F Form Lease - Renewed lease was issued in this form for Mal Jotes in the Western Duars, that is, Old Mal Jotes.

Thus, the RM and OM Jotes were renewed in forms E and F respectively. Like A form, Ar form lease was also protected from the operation of the B.T. Act.

Besides the above lease forms the following lease forms were also approved by Government during Mr. Mukherjee's settlement:-

- (1) Lease for lands of late Colonel Hedayet Ali.
- (2) Renewed form of lease for the settlers in the Santhal Colony.
- (3) Chukanidars' lease.

Thus, under different lease forms six types of jotes were recorded during Mr. Mukherjee's settlement (1931-35) in the Western Duars. These were :-

- (1) O.M. Jote.
- (2) R.M. Jote.
- (3) D Form Jote.
- (4) Ar Form Jote.
- (5) Santhal Colony Jote Lease.
- (6) (i) Special Lease for colonel Hedayet Ali's grant in Falakata Tahsil.

- (ii) Special Jote leases taken by the tea companies for cultivation by their labour force.
- (iii) Ordinary leases in O.M., R.M., D, or Ar Form of the tea companies in respect of which they had executed a special agreement for cultivation of land by their labour force.

IV. Incidents of Different Classes of Tenures

(a) Incidents of a Jote

It can be found from various Settlement Reports of the British period that a Jotedar's interest ~~is not transferable~~ was heritable and transferable with certain restrictions.

An Old Mal Jote could be transferred to any one domiciled in the district of Jalpaiguri who derived his income mainly from landed interests or tea cultivation. A Restricted Mal Jote could be transferred to a Tea Company or one who resided on or near the jote. In a 'D' form jote transferee must reside on or near the jote. In both Old Mal Jote and Restricted Mal Jote even a share could be transferred. For the transfer of a 'D' form jote, prior permission of Deputy Commissioner was required for transferring a share. In case of 'Ar' form lease, transfer without the permission of Deputy Commissioner was prohibited. Inheritances and transfers affecting any jote were to be registered with Deputy Commissioner within six months of their taking place.

A jotedar had rights to sublet and he could cultivate the land himself or with the help of adhiars but with some restrictions.

An Old Mal Jote or Restricted Mal Jote could be sublet to a bonafide resident-cultivator only. A 'D' form Jote could be sublet to any one. But the sub-lease in all cases was forbidden from further subletting. In 'O.M.', 'R.M.', or 'D' form jotes adhiars could also be employed.

An 'Ar' from Jote could not be sublet at all, nor could adhiars be employed. Theoretically, the degree of permanency varied with different classes of jotes, though in practice they were all permanent. In cases of O.M., 'R.M.' and 'Ar' from jotes, all conditions of the lease, including that of renewal could be revised at the time of the renewal of the lease. In case of 'D' form lease, there was no such provision. Theoretically, therefore, an 'O.M.', 'R.M.' or 'Ar' form jote could be determined after one renewal, whereas 'D' form jote was more or less permanent subject only to the fulfilment of the conditions of lease.

Tea could not be cultivated without the prior permission of Government on an 'Ar' form and Restricted Mal Jotes. In case of O.M. Jote there was no such restriction. Tea could be cultivated in 'D' form jotes upto 200 areas only.

Jotedars were prohibited from establishing any hat on their jotes. All markets and hats in Western Duars were exclusive property of Government. A separate organisation called "Western Duars Market Fund" was created to manage the hats. The receipts from the hats were used for the improvement of hats and for maintenance of dispensaries, etc.

All the leases contained a stipulation that if at any time the leased lands were required for a public purpose, the lands could be resumed without payment of any compensation.

(b) Incidents of a Chukani

A chukanidar was one who held land under a jotedar. As mentioned above most of the jotedars had a right to sublet to a chukanidar but not further. It follows, therefore that a chukanidar had no right to sublet his lands. The jotedar was bound by the term of his agreement with the Government to issue a written registered lease (form of which was approved by Government) to all his chukanidars and in that written lease, right to sublet was not granted, but adhiars could be employed.

A chukanidar was, in theory, an actual cultivator who was to reside on or near the jote. The rent of a chukanidar was fixed for the term of a settlement and was not liable to be enhanced during its currency. The margin of profit allowed to jotedars was fifty per cent above the rate at which the Jotedar's rent was assessed for the land sublet.

A chukani interest was heritable, but chukanidar had no right to transfer his interest without the permission of his jotedar.

The degree of permanency allowed to a chukanidar was the same as that of the jote containing it, unless Government at any time thought it proper to modify any of the conditions. A chukanidar

could not be ousted from his holding even when he was not in occupation for over twelve years. Although a chukani interest was created by a jotedar, the Deputy Commissioner had the power to cancel any chukani or forfeit the right of renewal if the chukanidar was found to have contravened any of the conditions of the lease.

After independence, by the Estates acquisition Act of 1953, all chukanidars who held under jotedars have been classified as raiyats.

(c) Tea Gardens, Their Leases and Incidents

A big area of the Western Duars is covered by tea gardens. All tea gardens held leases granted by the Government. Preliminary leases were granted for five years at the first instance. On the expiration of this period and on the leases fulfilling the requisite conditions, the leases were then used to be renewed for thirty years and so on for similar periods in perpetuity. The right to graze cattle, to build factories and labour colonies, the right to grow plantation and forests and the rights of cultivation were also settled along with these leases. The Government reserved the right to resume any lease granted to any Company or part thereof, for public purposes. Tea garden leases were heritable and transferable. For a part transfer, prior permission of the Deputy Commissioner was required. A tea garden lease had no right to sublet, except without prior and express permission of the Deputy Commissioner. For establishing hats for the facility of the labourers, prior permission of the Deputy Commissioner was required.

There had been cases of Tea Companies purchasing jote lands in the vicinity for their requirement either for plantations or for other purposes. Prior permission of the Deputy Commissioner had to be obtained in these cases for conversion of jote lands into tea gardens and the Company was liable to pay adequate compensation to the sub-tenants, if any.

With the application of the Estates Acquisition Act, 1953, the intricacies of the land laws of the Western Duars as outlined above have disappeared. The land laws of Western Duars have become similar to those as elsewhere in West Bengal and the tenants enjoy similar rights and privileges in the Duars with the coming into force of the Land Reforms Act, 1955.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VIII

THE SIX INVESTIGATED VILLAGES IN PROFILE

It would be quite relevant to give a description of the six villages we have investigated. Some information on these villages have already been presented in the main body of our analysis. Some additional information is given here, ~~which are deemed necessary.~~

Talukertari : V₁

The village Talukertari of Falakata Police Station (P.S) fall under Falakata Settlement Circle and is a part of Mairadanga Gram Panchayat (G.P) of Jalpaiguri district. It is situated at 5 kms north of Falakata town. A metalled road passes through its western boundary which originates at Falakata and leads towards Madarihat. This village is bounded in the north by villages Chhoto Salkumar and Sibnathpur, on the east by villages Sibnathpur and Lochhmandabari, on the south by villages Mairandanga and Satpukumia and on the west by villages Satpukumia, boundary of P.S. Maharihat and village Chhoto Salkumar.

The total area of this village is 695.62 hectares, of which 259.37 hectares are not available for cultivation. In 1981, total population of this village was 2992 persons of which 1549 were males and 1443 were females.

Talukertari is inhabited by peoples of different castes and tribes. Among the scheduled castes, the Rajbanshis are predominant and among the schedule tribes the (a) raons are predominant. According to 1981 Census, 47.99% of the population belonged to scheduled castes and 13.74% were scheduled tribes. Literacy is very poor in this village. Only 16.31% of the population were literates in 1981.

In total 523 households were covered by the survey, of which 58 were of agricultural labourers. The condition of agricultural labourers was a little better in this village as far as their wages were concerned. The nominal wage rate was about Rs. 8/- with lunch per day. Sharecropping was widely prevalent in this village. There was generally good relation between recorded bargadars (sharecroppers) and their land owners, and the produce of land was shared between them in a 50:50 ratio in most cases.

There is practically no arrangement for irrigation in this village. The method of cultivation is traditional. However, cultivators who have come from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) appeared to be more enterprising than the others. Some persons were engaged in various other occupations in this village.

Parangerpar : V₂ [J.L. No. 22]

The village Parangerpar of Falakata P.S. of Jalpaiguri district is a part of the Settlement Circle of Falakata and of Falakata G.P. It is situated at 4 Kms north east of Falakata town.

A State Highway passes through its southern boundary. The village is surrounded in the north by villages Harinathpur and Jogendrapur and the boundary is marked by the river Buritorsa, in the east by village Chuakhola, in the south by Falakata town area and in the west by village Baganbari.

The total area of the village is 570.41 hectares of which 86.42 hectares are not available for cultivation. Parangerpar is multi-caste and multi-community village. About 12% of the population were scheduled castes and 7.28% were scheduled tribes according to 1981 Census. But majority of the people are upper caste Hindus. There are very few Muslim households in this village.

In terms of educational status, this village is fairly advanced compared to the other five villages we have investigated. About 53.41% of total population of this village were literate according to the Census of 1981. Landlessness was comparatively high. 44 out of the 296 households surveyed did not own any land. Wages of agricultural labourers were comparatively high in this village than in the other villages we have investigated due to the availability of some non-farm jobs in the neighbourhood. Apart from agricultural labourers, there were persons in this village who worked as casual labourers in tea gardens.

Many of the cultivators of this village have received loans from various institutions. Moreover, they were very much accustomed to taking loans through mortgaging land to local mahajans (money lenders) or neighbours. The system of mortgaging land is called subbandhak. Most of the bargadars appeared to be highly indebted.

Like other villages of our investigation bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded) were less articulate in establishing their rights and found to share the produce of barga land on a 50:50 basis with their landlords.

The methods and techniques of cultivation were found to be very much traditional. Barring the case of a lone very big landlord (Mr. Nandura Barman, son of late Sitanath Barman), all other cultivators in the village appeared to be non enterprising. Lands in this village are not so fertile. There is a private irrigation canal (locally called jampoi) in this village but was found to be defunct. Productivity of land was found to be low.

Paschim Chikliguri : V₃

The village Paschim Chikliguri is in the Alipurduar P.S. and Settlement Circle and Parokata G.P. of the Jalpaiguri district. It is situated at a distance of 18 kms south east from Alipurduar town. On its northern boundary lie villages Uttar Chikliguri and part of Purba Chikliguri villages, on the east lie villages Purba Chikliguri and Chikliguri, on the south lie the boundary of Cooch Behar district and on the west lies village Kumarijan. A metalled road touches its northern boundary which runs from Alipurduar to Kamakshaguri. The nearest marketing centre is at Purba Chikliguri hat which is at a distance of about 2 kms from the centre of the village Paschim Chikliguri. There is a branch of the Uttar Banga Kshetriya Gramin Bank at village Chikliguri, 2 kms away from the centre of village Paschim Chikliguri.

According to 1981 Census the village Paschim Chikliguri had a population of 1136 souls of which 595 were males and 541 were females. Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population constituted 43.31% and 1.85% of the total population. Compared to all other investigated villages this village has a large number of Muslim households. Literacy among people was not so high. Nearly 28% of the population were literate in 1981. Out of the total 322 literate persons 87 were females.

Although incidence of agricultural labourers was not too much, yet number of sharecroppers was comparatively large in this village. Out of the total 238 households, 12 belonged to agricultural labourers and 174, belonged to sharecroppers (exclusive plus owner-cum-sharecroppers). Wages of agricultural labourers were found to be as less as Rs. 5/- to Rs. 6/- without meal. This was due to the meagre availability of non-farm jobs.

In this village some lands were found to be possessed by two absentee landholders who live in Alipurduar town. Sharecroppers of these landowners were found neither to share cost of cultivation with the landowners nor to give any share of produce to the landowners. There were a few instances of eviction of sharecroppers in this village. It was found that landowners gave some lumpsum amount to the sharecroppers and debarred the latter either in recording their names or evicted them once for all.

The total area of this village is 342.30 hectares of which 36.36 hectares are not available for cultivation. There are no

irrigation facilities. Cultivation is carried on in the traditional method. Productivity of land is very low. Agriculture is rain-fed and lands are mostly mono cropped. Cultivators are by and large very poor. Many of them have taken loans from both private and institutional sources. But repayment position appeared to be very poor.

Baniagaon : V₄

Village Baniagaon belongs to Alipurduar P.S. and Settlement Circle and a part of the Samuktala G.P. of the district of Jalpaiguri. This village is 22 kms away from Alipurduar sub divisional town and bounded on the north by villages Joypur and Baniadabri, on the east by villages Samuktala and Patotola, on the south by village Pukhuria and on the west by village Madhya Sibkata and Srinathpur Tea Garden.

Sociologically, Baniagaon is an Adivasi (tribal) village.

Of the total population of 1492 persons, 1465, i.e., 98.19% were tribals in 1981. Majority of the tribal population belongs to Santal tribe. There are also a few households of Oraons tribe. There is no scheduled caste household in this village. Most of the Santals practise the religion of Christianity. Literacy among the people is very poor. In the 1981 Census it has been shown that about 12% of the total population were literate (4% of the total).

There are very few bargadar holes in this village, but the number of agricultural labourers are comparatively higher than that of the other investigated villages. Of the total 179 households surveyed in this village, 33 belonged to the agricultural labourers.

Farily a large number of bargadars have remained unrecorded. Even those who have recorded their names were not conscious at all about their rights. Naturally, produce of land was found to be divided between bargadars (both recorded and unrecorded) and their landowners in the 50:50 ratio inspite of the fact that only 50% or less of the cost was borne by the latter. Both the parties were satisfied with the arrangement. Bargadars appeared to dislike any kind of dispute or confrontation with landowners and therefore a good relation was found to be prevailing among them.

The special feature of this village is that most of its people are accustomed to drinking liquor of every kind. Peoples spend a lot of money in liquor consumption. This often leads them to indebtedness. They are idle and lack any aspiration. It appeared that unless their habit of taking liquor can be changed it is not possible to change their material condition.

The total area of this village is 592.92 hectares of which 28.38 hectares are not available for cultivation. There is no system of irrigation. Method of cultivation is traditional and the cultivators in general are not so enterprising as to introduce improved agricultural practices. Therefore, level of production has remained at a low level.

Padamati : V₅

The village Padamati belongs to Maynaguri P.S. and Settlement Circle and a part of Padamati G.P. of Jalpaiguri district. The nearest town Maynaguri is at a distance of 16 Kms from it. In its

northern boundary lie villages Penchahati, Barakamat and Bhotpatti, in its eastern boundary lie villages Bhotpatti and Khaerkhal, in its southern boundary lies Cooch Behar district and in its western boundary lie villages Penchahati and Dharmmapur.

There is a hat in this village which sits every Thursday and Saturday.

The Village Padamati is a larger multi-caste and multi-community village of Jalpaiguri. But socially it is dominated by scheduled castes, the majority of whom are the Rajbanshis. Of the total population of 4882, the scheduled caste population comprises as large as 71.24% of the total population. There is no scheduled tribe household in this village but there is fairly a large number of Muslim households. Literacy among the people is very poor. Only about 17% of the population are literate. Of the total 453 households surveyed 39 belonged to agricultural labourers and 250 belonged to small farmers. Majority of the small farmers were found to lease in land from owner-cum-lessor cultivators. Traditional 50:50 sharing of produce between landowners and bargadars was widely prevalent in this village like other investigated villages.

The village has a total area of 1843.52 hectares of which 362.37 hectares are not available for cultivation. Total agricultural land is 1953.12 acres of which 53.12 acres are irrigated by tube wells. Like other investigated villages cultivation in improved methods is not worthy of mentioning.

Churabhandar : V₆

The village Churabhandar belongs to Maynaguri P.S. and Settlement Circle and a part of Churabhandar Gram Panchayat (G.P) in the district of Jalpaiguri. It is situated at a distance of 7 Kms from Maynaguri town. In its northern boundary lie villages Ratherhat and Bhangarhat, in the east lie villages Bhangarhat and Hashdanga and Bhangamali and in the west lie villages Tekatuli, Nirendrapur and Bosilardanga.

In 1981, the village had a population of 2100 persons of which 1086 were males and 1014 were females. Though a multi-caste multi-community village, the scheduled caste population constituted 85% of the total population. Number of Hindu upper caste households and Muslim households are very few.

In terms of educational status, the village is a backward one. About 21% of the population were literate according to 1981 Census. The male literacy was higher than female literacy. Landlessness is rampant in this village. Out of the total 214 households surveyed, 55 households belonged to agricultural labourers.

It was found in this village that most of the poor cultivators and bargadars have adopted family planning measures at the initiative of the Panchayat members. Evidence of eviction of bargadars by landowners, in the name of personal cultivation, came to our notice. It was found that many of the agricultural labourers were the erstwhile bargadars.

Most of the cultivators of this village appeared to be politically conscious and strongly support some or other political

party. Of the total bargadars recorded, a big percentage have been recorded at the initiative of the members of the peasants' organisations. Economic disparity in this village appeared to be very sharp. Agricultural labourers are very poor. Their wages were Rs. 6/- per day with one meal during the period of our investigation. But agricultural work was available only for a few months of a year.

The total area of this village is 449.75 hectares of which 104.55 hectares are not available for cultivation. Of the total agricultural land of 631.25 acres only 10.00 acres were found to be irrigated by private canal (jampoi) and another 10.25 acres were irrigated by tubewells. Except the cultivation of HYV crops by two big enterprising cultivators, the cultivators in general, practises usual traditional method of production. Though some of the cultivators received the facilities of institutional finance, it appeared that more cultivators should be brought under its coverage.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abwab	Minor taxes and dues.
Achi, Adhiari	Sharecropping
Adhiar	Sharecropper.
Amalnama	A written order or warrant to a revenue collector.
Aman	Winter rice crop.
Anna	In old coins 4 <u>pie</u> s made one anna and 1/16th of a rupee.
Babu	A middle or upper middle class Bengalee gentleman.
Benamdar	Holder of a <u>benami</u> purchase.
Benami	Nameless, faceless, fictitious, fraudulent; purchase of land under false name to escape provisions of law.
Bhadralok	A Bengalee gentleman who earns his living without engaging in physical labour.
Bhuta	Advance of an amount of paddy by <u>jotedars</u> to <u>achiars</u> @ 50% interest per annum. It was a custom prevalent in the Western Duars during the British rule.
Bigha	An amount of land measuring about 1/3rd of an acre.
Bigha labour	Non-permanent plantation labour.
Barga, Bargadari	Sharecropping.

Bargadar	Sharecropper.
Chhatak	A unit of weight (= 1/16 <u>seer</u> or ¼ poa).
Chita	Document in which area of land is recorded.
Chukani	Holding of a <u>chukanidar</u> .
Chukanidar	In the Western Duars under the Bhutanese and British rule the <u>chukanidars</u> were a class of under-tenants of the <u>jotedars</u> .
Coolie	Plantation labourer.
Dao-tax	Capitation tax.
Dar-chukani	Holding of a <u>dar-chukanidar</u> .
Dar-chukanidar	Under-tenant of a <u>chukanidar</u> in Western Duars during the British rule.
Dar-a-dar-chukanidar	Under-tenant of a <u>dar-chukanidar</u> in Western Duars during the British rule.
Debraja	Head of the secular administration in Bhutan.
Dewniya	Headman of a village.
Dharmaraja	Spiritual head of State and the supreme hierarch in Bhutan.
Diwani	Office of a <u>cewan</u> (principal official administering finance), his responsibility and function.
Duar	Door, gate or pass.
Durbar	Assembly or court at the head quarter of a king.
Endi	Silk cloth.
Gabur	Headman of a village, specially of a tribal one.

Ghora bandha	Levy collected by <u>jotedars</u> , for maintenance of their horses, from <u>adhiars</u> .
Giri	Landowner, generally a big one.
Gramin	Rural
Gur	Molasses.
Hal	Plough. Also about 15 <u>bighas</u> of land.
Hari Sabha	A religious gathering.
Hat	A weekly rural market.
Hathi bandha	Levy collected for maintenance of <u>jotedars'</u> elephants, from <u>adhiars</u> .
Istafanama	Withdrawal in writing.
Jampoi	A private irrigation canal.
Jhum, Jhumming	Shifting cultivation.
Jote	Holding of a <u>jotedar</u>
Jotedar	A land holder or farmer. The class of tenant with whom lands were settled by the Britishers in the Western Duars.
Jotedari, Jotedary	Tenure of a <u>jotedar</u> .
Jumma	Payment of a fixed deposit. The total of a territorial assessment.
Kanungo	A subordinate revenue officer.
Karja	Loan. A consumption loan.
Katham	A revenue collector appointed by the Government of Bhutan in Western Duars.
Kharif	Crop harvested in winter season.
Khas	Own, direct.
Khatian	Record-of-right.
Kubaliyat	A written agreement, especially signifying assent as the counterpart of a revenue lease.
Lathi	A stick.

Mahajan	A money lender
Maisal	Buffalo keeper
Maiya pora	A levy collected by <u>jotedars</u> , for educating their daughters, from <u>adhiars</u> .
Maund	A measure of weight (= 40 <u>seers</u>).
Mondal	A village headman
Mouza	A unit of revenue collection. A <u>mouza</u> may have one or several clusters of inhabitants.
Muktear	A lawyer of inferior grade.
Nagra	Tribal drums.
Nahara	An advance of 12 <u>maunds</u> of paddy made by a <u>jotedar</u> to an <u>adhiar</u> , @ 50% rate of interest per annum, when the latter took land in <u>adhi</u> from the former.
Nij dakhal	In one's own possession.
Nij kholan	In one's own threshing ground.
Nim-dar-a-dar-chukanidar	Tenant below the grade of <u>dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u> in Western Duars in the British period.
Panchyat	A committee of villagers to which a cause is referred for investigation and decision.
Pargana	A revenue collecting unit comprising of several <u>taluks</u> .
Patta	A lease granted to the cultivators on the part of the Government.
Pattadar	Holder of a <u>patta</u> .
Pilo, Penlop, Penlow	Governor of a division in Bhutan.
Peskar	An assistant of a judge who keeps and presents documents before the judge.

Prochan	A village headman. Head of a <u>gram</u> (village) <u>panchayat</u> .
Proja	Sharecropper.
Rabi	Crop raised in summer season
Raikat	Chief of a fort.
Raiyat, Ryot	A tenant, having customary rights in land.
Raiyatwari, Ryotwari	Areas originally settled direct with the cultivators individually, mostly in Madras and Bombay provinces in the British period.
Sadar	District head quarter.
sal	A tree famous for its valuable timber. Its botanical name is <u>Shorea Robasta</u> .
Sardar	A gang leader.
Seer	A measure of weight (approximately 2 lbs.).
Sepahi posa	A kind of levy imposed on <u>adhiars</u> by <u>jotedars</u> , for the maintenance of <u>jotedars'</u> guards.
Subah	A Lieutenant Governor in Bhutan. It is a title of Bhutanese Officers under the Penlops who were in charge of the <u>cuars</u> and the mountain passes leading to Bhutan.
Sud bandhak	A system of mortgaging of land where the mortgagee occupies and enjoys the land as long as the loan is not repaid.

Sunnud	Title deed. A document conveying to an individual emoluments, titles, privileges under the seal of the ruling authority.
Tahsil	A revenue sub division.
Tahsildar	Revenue collector of a <u>tahsil</u>
Taluk	A revenue unit generally consisting of a number of <u>mouzas</u> .
Tasia-chukanidar	A tenant below the grade of <u>dar-a-dar-chukanidar</u> in the Cooch Behari land-tenure system.
Terai	The forest-clad foot-hills of the Himalayas.
Thana	A police station.
Touzi	A revenue account showing, under the name of each payer of revenue, the total amount as it falls due by monthly instalment. Estate number at the collector's office.
Zamin̄dar, Zemindar	Proprietor of land with whose rights and recognitions it was not intended to interfere.
Zamindary, Zemindary	The lands or village or villages under <u>Zamin̄dar</u> . The office or jurisdiction of a <u>Zamin̄dar</u> .
Zinkaff	A messenger, relating to the collection of revenue of the Government of Bhutan.

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