

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

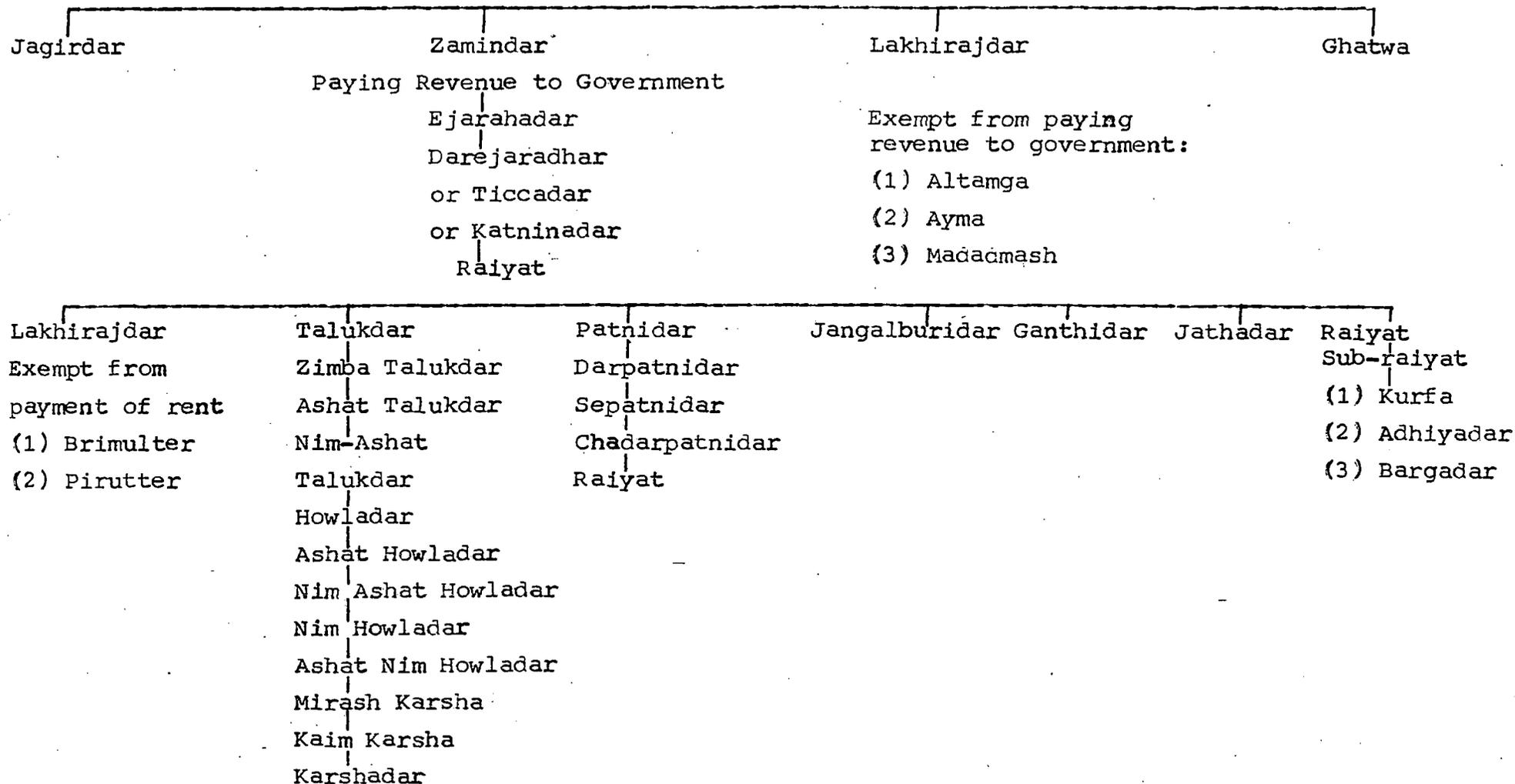
ample rights to auction purchasers for enhancing rent and for evicting ryots in case of default payment. All these provisions enormously increased the landlords' powers and subjected the peasantry to an increasing rent burden and to extreme insecurity in land rights. But, no clear definition of the tenants'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

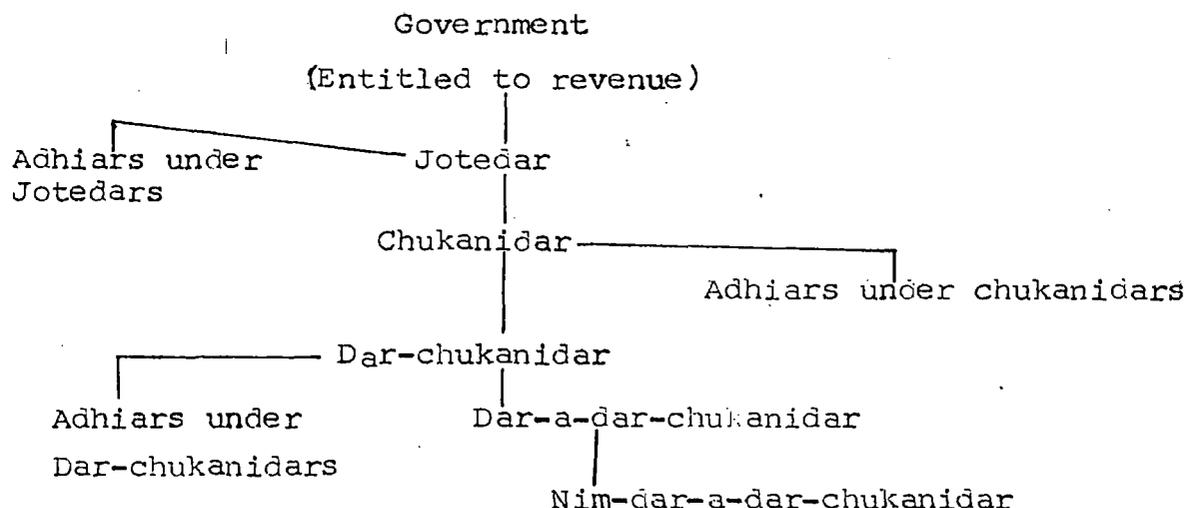
V.2.13 The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 attempted to broaden the bases of land rights. But the rights and opportunities which the Act created at different levels produced nothing of longstanding value to fulfil structural requirements of sustained and cumulative agricultural growth.

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.