

CHAPTER-SEVEN

ABOLITION OF THE ZAMINDARI SYSTEM, LAND ACQUISITION ACT, 1955 AND RURAL SOCIETY

Before the partition, the undivided Dinajpur district was under Rajshahi Commissioner of the province of East Bengal and Assam.¹ Acquired in 1765 under Dewani Grant the *zamindari* then covering an area of 4119 square miles, and corresponding to modern Dinajpur mostly, and north-eastern Malda.² After the Grant of *Dewani* at that time included mainly in the *faujdari* of Rajmohal, and partly in the *zamindari* of Dinajpur, and the division Bheturia Chak of Rajshahi. At that time of Permanent Settlement comprised in three-districts Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Purnia.³ The district had no Sub-division and was judicially under the District Judge of Rajshahi. Malda district was formed in 1813 and on the other hand Dinajpur district was formed in 1872. When Bengal was divided in 1947, Dinajpur was the *Sadar* and Balurghat and Thakurgaon were the two Sub-divisions.⁴ The western portion of the district was included with West Bengal. A new district was formed named West Dinajpur with Balurghat as its headquarters. Later in 1992 West Dinajpur divided into Uttar Dinajpur (28.2.1992 177-L.R/6M-7/92 U/S Bengal District Act, 1836) and Dakshin Dinajpur (28.2.1992 177-L.R/6M-7/92 U/S Bengal District Act, 1836)⁵

If we cast our hindsight into the chain of things and cause of events in North Bengal before 1947, we get into the view of different anti-British events involving people of different levels of social life for the attainment of *swaraj* i.e. independence. In the colonial period the people, who had no taste of power generations by in the traditional legacy of caste-dominated economic system, social ethics and religion but cherished all expectation for radical change in the post-colonial constitution and administrative ambience, found themselves discrimination, apathy, negligence, exploitations, and subjugations by the

indigenous rules who in the name of democracy and people's government wrested power, where from they through the making of so called new policies for nation building pushed the marginalized peoples to the remote peripheries away from the centers of modern amenities and neglected all that were expedient for the amelioration of the improvised millions including the peasants, divided communities, ethno-radical groups and the tribes.⁶ But the post-independence North Bengal gives us different pictures.

Tebhaga movement of 1946 and the Naxalbari incident of 1967 dwindled under the groan of partition of India and the aftermath of refugee crisis. The marginalized peasants and tenants whose cause was exposed by the Tebhaga found themselves in a new situation after the abolition of *zamindari* system and the introduction of land ceiling which, though increased the quantity of vested land under the government, yet owing to the want of law and government decision to distribute vested lands among the landless peasants and agrarian labourers the poverty-stricken peoples's condition remained unchanged devoid of any improvement.⁷

The history of North Bengal related to construction and reconstructions is still going on. For this reason, in the tribal society there were several voices, not single voice that means the tribal society of Jalpaiguri-Duars and Terai regions of Darjeeling and the tribal society of Malda and West Dinajpur (present Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur) were not same.⁸ Only similarity is that all are tribals. These are three factors that made them separate viz. history, geography and environment. One view is enough to classify the statement that so far discussed. Eminent Muslim writer Abul Basar wrote- "the Muslims who are surrounded by Hindu community and the Hindu who are surrounded by the Muslim community are different by their attitudes."⁹

This opinion is same in the case of tribals of Malda, Dinajpur Jalpaiguri, Duars and Darjeeling. Tribals of Duars demanded for the establishment of Hindi speaking school,

colleges. On the other hand the inhabitants of the tribals of Malda and Dinajpur accepted Bengali as their mother tongue. This was happened due to environmental reason.¹⁰ These were some historical background for this transformation of people of these regions. Kasiswar Chakraborty framed a religious and social movement of the tribals named Satyam Sibam movement. The main aim of this movement was to gather religious and social consciousness among the *Santhals*. The direct effect of the movement was that in Malda and Dinajpur converted Christians were few in number. Tribals came in Malda and Dinajpur during the time of the English East India Company especially after the Santhal revolt of 1855-56. But majority of tribals came in Malda and Dinajpur from their homeland northern Orissa, Bhagalpur, Chotonagpur, Santhal Pargana etc.¹¹ During the time of post mutiny, tribals were clearing the jungles of *Barind* area (Bulbulchandi, Habibpur, Bamongola, Gazole of Malda; and Tapan, Gangarampur of West Dinajpur) transformed into cultivated land. These tribals of *Barind* turned into peasants. Actually Bengal, Bihar and Orissa constituted the majority of *Santhal* population.¹² Following table give us detailed picture-

Table No: 1.14 (Increase of Santhal Population in the Census Report of 1951 and 1971)

Year	Name of the District	Population
Census of 1951	Malda	72,000
	West Dinajpur	94,000
Census of 1971	Malda	90,285
	West Dinajpur	1,30,173
Source: Paschim Banga Pradeshik Krishak Sabha (ed.), <i>Krishak Sangram, Voices of Paschim Banga Pradeshik Krishak Sabha, Special Issue of Santhal Vidraha</i> , Kolkata, 2005, p.83		

Malda and West Dinajpur is purely agrarian district. Agricultural land was the chief source of income. Common people's dream aspiration was all related with land. But migration created lot of problem among the inhabitants of these regions. After partition, land turmoil started throughout North Bengal. It was seen that in politics, Muslims were not conscious enough to participate any political parties. They had no tension about politics. It was also seen that major Muslim population was involved in cultivation. Some Bengali Muslims established themselves in the field of education, science and technology.¹³ It is interesting to note that in the frontier region, Muslim population gradually increased with the passing of times. But elite Muslims were migrated to East Pakistan. In the case of Hindus they were compelled to leave their homeland i.e. forced migration. Asok Mitra has written that after partition many immigrants Hindu applied for service.¹⁴ Rural and urban people exchanged their properties. After partition only a fence created lot of differences among the two countries (India-Bangladesh). After the comings of the refugees, pressure of land gradually increased. Actually coming of the refugees from neighbouring countries compelled the government to pass the abolition of the *Zamindari* Act of 1953.

Before 1967, previous government failed to introduce land reform to address the problem of landlessness of those who were capable of tilling lands; and apathetic was the government policy as to deal with the growing meance of refugee influx from East Pakistan and Assam to North Bengal for most of the migrated people belonged to the peasantry. And those who are the inhabitants, in a night they lost their homeland and treated as refugee.¹⁵ The coming of the refugees increased more economic hardships in North Bengal. Migration of people from Nepal changed demographic profile of the district of Darjeeling and subsequently Duars also. Demographic diversity leading to ethno-racial, ethno-linguistic conflicts, identity crisis and socio-political tensions. Socialist or Communist movement in the name of Naxalite movement mainly related with land rights. Ethno-racial and linguistic

movement like GNLFF movement, Uttarakhand, UTJUS and later on Kamtapur movement organized by rural *Rajbanshis*, created many changes in the history of North Bengal. A radical change took place in the socio-economic field of the *Rajbanshi* society of North Bengal from 1947 to 1979.¹⁶ It should be mentioned that in North Bengal new middle classes were the emerging force. This middle class raised their demand of political identity. In the language of political science it is called Identity movement.¹⁷ This middle class actually known as neo-middle class.¹⁸

The relation between land and people is like between mother and her child. The fighting for land therefore has been going on all through the ages among people, nation and countries. Peasant, tenants and cultivators were perished by the hands of *zamindars*, *jotdars* and *mahajans*. Many tenants became bonded labours by the hand of landlords. But this system changed after independence when West Bengal legislative Assembly passed West Bengal Bargadars Act in 1950.¹⁹ Some rights of the peasants were recognized by this Act. It can be said that it was one of the effects of Tebhaga movement.²⁰ The tall promises made to the Indian peasantry, to win their active support in the struggle for political freedom, were sought to be redeemed, in West Bengal, after independence, through legislations. Of course two are directly relevant regarding land, viz. the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act, 1953 (Act I of 1954) and the West Bengal land Reform Act 1955 (Act X of 1956)²¹

The main objective of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953 was to abolish the *zamindari* system and the abolition of inertmediaries. Later WBEA Act of 1953 and the abolition of *Zamindari* Act were discussed in the Legislative Assembly. In a debate Srikumar Bandhyopadhaya mentioned that these Acts created a landmark in the land reform system of West Bengal.²² It was thought that the land being the important socially valued asset was considered as the determediaries factor in transforming the socio-economic structures of the agrarian society. The landlords and the big land owners historically occupied

a predominant position in the society. On the one hand, a large section of landless people were exploited by the system of landlordism. In this way there arose a class conflict between the two antagonistic classes viz. the land owing class and the landless class. The unequal distribution of land is the primary reason of inequality and exploitation in the rural society of Bengal. The urgent necessity of land reforms was very much realized by the government in power to abolish *zamindari* system and intermediaries on the land. But the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 had some loopholes and as a result the government had failed to overcome that shortcomings.²³ It was found that a large portion of land was still lying in the hands of the big *jotdars* and *raiyats*.

By the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 it was said that no *raiyat* should hold land in excess of the ceiling area.²⁴ But many *jotdars* hold large number of land throughout North Bengal. In Duars a *jotdar* kept 25 acre land by the name of his elephant.²⁵ Otherwise the *jotdar* of Haldibari was kept some parts of land for his one and only son Amer Ali Pradhan as a owner.²⁶ There was land parts like as 25 acre of Amer Ali, 25 acre of Ali Pradhan 25 acre of Amer Pradhan and 25 acre of Pradhan Ali.²⁷ These two events were true. In Malda district *zamindar* Kalu Muhammad Chowdhury of Aihoo kept much land by the name of his servants, elephants and horses.²⁸ In West Dinajpur Bhola Das Laha of Binsira kept atleast 300 acre land. He kept some parts of his land by the name of his elephant *Haimainti*.²⁹ In Kumarganj police station of Elandori village *jotdar* Jagodish Mondal kept many lands by the name of different family members. Many *zamindars* and *jotdars* mutated their land in the names of *Debottar*, *Wakaff*, orchard etc.

By this issue a debate continued in the Legislative Assembly. In the Legislative Assembly the member cited before the house hypocrisies that are being played in the name of *Debottar*. Instances of these hypocrisies were being shown by the members one by one. Sacricastically member Haripada Chatterjee commented, "It seems that the whole Bengal is

immersed in the sea of devotion. Our adloescent State Minister (Tarun Kanti Ghosh is indicated) is dancing with drums and cymbals on the road.”³⁰ *Zamindars* and *jotdars* tried their best to save their lands but in reality, they failed. Because government policy of vesting excess land among the peasants, cultivators and later implementation of Operation Barga, changed the land structure of rural people.

The implementation of the WBEA Act of 1953 began in 1955. Even after almost thirty-five years the new record of rights undertaken under it, are still in the making of course of the tardy progress, it is daily becoming evident that the Act itself had failed to fulfill its vowed object. It also aimed at rescuing the peasantry from relentless extortion and ruthless oppression by the intermediaries and at taking them in the protecting fold of the administration. The termination of the intermediary control on land and the cultivators had been done in paper all right. But the intention of the law had allowed to slip through the loopholes in the legal and administration web.³¹

Question natuarally arises as to how and why it has come to be so. From 1765 to 1793 lot of developments took place. After the Grant of *Dewani*, British government tried to collect revenues from land but they failed in this process. In 1784 Pitts India Act was passed.³² By this Act the East India Company interfered the land and land revenue matters of India. In 1786 Lord Cornwallis appointed as Governor General. He made a change in the land system. Permanent Settlement was passed in 1793. Now *zamindars*, *jotdars*, *mahajans* and *naibs* exploited the poor peasants and cultivators. The hundred years following the introduction of the Permanent Settlement, albeit it was the golden age for the British imperialism and capitalism, was one of unmitigated darkness for Indian agriculture. Agriculture declined and villages decaged under the repression perpetrated by the *zamindars*.³³

After the passing of Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 peasants and *rai-yats* got some relief. From the second half of the 20th century common people organized against the *zamindari* system. Rabindra Nath depicts a picture in his '*Russiar Chithi*'.³⁴ He deeply criticized *zamindari* system and expresses his view that this system should be abolished.³⁵ Anyway British government set up a Land Revenue Commission in 1938 under the authority of Sir Francis Floud. The Commission submitted its Report in 1940 and mentioned that ³⁶ i) *zamindari* system was anachronistic and it should go along with other intermediary rights, ii) the tenants should come straightway under the State and iii) no one was to hold land more than 10 acres. The recommendations were not to the liking of the government and the *zamindars* and so the Report went to the cold storage.³⁷

After five years it was brought out to be examined by the Bengal Administrative Enquiry Committee of 1945 under the chairmanship of Sir Archibald Rowlands as regards the feasibility of the recommendations.³⁸ It added that the revenue system was defective. Still, however, the tradition stayed. The Agrarian Reforms Committee met next and it too echoed the views and recommendations of its predecessors. In order to overthrow the *zamindari* system a Bill was published in a Gazettee in 5th May, 1953 and that Bill transformed into West Bengal *Zamindari* Acquisition Act of 1953 (Act No I, 1954).³⁹

In 1362 B.S West Bengal government give notification to all the districts of West Bengal. One example is as follows- No 166521 Ref. 4th November 1954 In pursuance of Sub-section (4) of Section 4 of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act of 1953 (West Bengal Act No I, of 1954), The Governor having been satisfied that the following notification under sub-section (1) of that sub-section has been published in the first instance as required under sub-section (3) of that Section, is pleased hereby to issue the said notification in the Official Gazettee: ⁴⁰

NOTIFICATION

No 12534 L. Ref indated the 16th August 1954 In exercise of power conferred by Sub-section (1) of section 4 of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act of 1953 (West Bengal Act of 1954, the Governor is pleased to declare that with effect from the 1st day of *Baishak* of the Bengali year 1362, all Estates and the rights of every intermediary in such Estate situated in the districts shall vest in the state free from all encumbrances.⁴¹

By the Act of 1953 government became powerful about land and land reform movement. In the district of Alipurduar there some sub-*raiyats* who were under the authority of government. In the case of lease/ transfer there were few restrictions of the government. Role of intermediary was very important in this Act. At that time Land Revenue Minister of West Bengal, Benoy Krishna Chowdhury gave the proposal that little middleman should pay rehabilitation grant. Some new lines were drawn in the case of '*Bonaified*' and '*Not Bonaified*' transfers of land in the West Bengal Act xiii of 1954.⁴²

After independence some areas of Bihar were added to West Bengal. It was actually done in the case of Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories Act 1956).⁴³ But transfer of territories from Bihar to West Bengal created lot of problems. A movement rose under the leadeslip of TASSO. The chief spokesman of TASSO is Pasarul Alam.⁴⁴ TASSO demanded a separate district in the transferred region of a parliamentary constituency. Now TASSO is acting as a ring of chair between the other sub-regional movements of North Bengal and the sons of the soil of Islampur. Another way to that acquisition was to turn titles into *Debottar*, *Pirottar*, *Wakaff* which enjoyed exemption.⁴⁵ Rich *jotdars* and *zamindars* were frequently hide their land in this process. Land revenue survey had been in progress since 1950 in the Duars of Jalpaiguri district and as soon as the Act was announced in 1953, many landlords transferred large acres of agricultural lands of tea-gardens using two types of fake instruments-rent receipt without any date and a registered *mukhtinama* (deed of release).⁴⁶ In a

Sub-divisional court of Jalpaiguri district negligence came to such a pass that year after year, cases were granted expert decrees in favour of the intermediaries as no one appeared on the side of the government.

In Coochbehar district a father transferred the excess 64.58 acre agricultural land to his son (date 30/11/1953).⁴⁷ In this case Collector performed a great role. But the *bargadar* of the land was neglected and later *bargadar* started movement to get back excess land and the *bargadar* denied giving portions of crops to the owner of the transferees. Different parts of North Bengal give us different pictures about land and its related matters.

In the hill areas of Darjeeling district there was no upper limit of ceiling. A tea garden of 5042.88 acres in the district of Darjeeling had been lying abandoned by the owners since long.⁴⁸ The committee with good reasons recommended resumption of the entire Estate. Lands in the district of Darjeeling were leased out to tea garden owners under the Bengal Waste Land Rules.⁴⁹ One of the terms and conditions of the lease was the said demised lands or any part there of which may at any time be required for a public purpose may be acquired by the government without payment of any compensation whatever on proportionate reduction being made in the rent payable hereunder, provided that the value of any existing improvement effected by the lessee or his predecessor in interest shall be asserted shall be assessed by the Deputy Commissioner and shall be paid to the lessee.⁵⁰

As directed by the Act, the Settlement Department prepared record-of rights showing therein the lands vested in the State as surplus to the owners, passed them on to District Collector for further action and from 1957 to 1959 a problem broke out due the topographical change.⁵¹ By procrastination the government has abetted in the wrongful enjoyment of vested lands by unlawful occupants. Vested lands would have led to complications. In many cases throughout North Bengal many recovered lands were found at the initial stage and it might have been put to cultivation through the state agricultural

department. Government deployed the landless cultivators as *bargadars* and after final settlement of vesting of excess lands; they might have been distributed to these *bargadars*.⁵²

After 1956 Coochbehar State got included in West Bengal. A new Revisional Settlement Operation (RSO) was formed with the district of Jalpaiguri – Malda and West Dinajpur and later this RSO organized divided into two parts ⁵³ i) Malda-West Dinajpur RSO and ii) Coochbehar-Jalpaiguri-Darjeeling RSO. Throughout North Bengal West Bengal Government listed a detailed description of excess land from August 1967 to September 1969 ⁵⁴

Malda – 6599.70 acre

West Dinajpur – 21,538.98 acre

Coochbehar – 9,482.56 acre

Jalpaiguri – 12,207.53 acre

Darjeeling – 4,534.01 acre

Still the question remains, why the remaining land established as excess has not been vested. The answer has already been given- the owners have retained their hold indirectly and overtly by various legal devices. Actually some seeds of problem made turbulence by the West Bengal Land Acquisition Act. In order to overcome the short comings of the Land Acquisition Act of 1953, the government had to enact another regulation known as the West Bengal Land and Land Reforms Act of 1955. (Act X of 1956) ⁵⁵ The enforcement began with a few section in 1956, more came in 1965 and by 1971 almost all the sections were operative, different sections at different times. This enforcement by instalments was surely not concluded to ensure smooth sailing for the Act.

Land survey for record-of-rights required under the Act was taken up in several districts. In North Bengal land survey was started in 1971 in the districts of Darjeeling and West Dinajpur (excepting Islampur Sub-division). The West Bengal Land and Land Reforms Act of 1955 was based on three important principles such as ⁵⁶ i) to determine the ceiling of land holdings, ii) to redistribute the land and iii) to decrease the rent of a *raiya*s etc. Land Reforms included mainly the re-distribution of land in favour of the landless and the small cultivators and tenancy reforms. On the contrary, in wider sense land reforms included all changes in agrarian structures even the credit and marketing system. Actually land reforms were implemented in West Bengal only after 1977 when the Left Front government thought it necessary to fragment the large land holdings and to establish equality in land relations.

The Land Reforms Act was originally meant for agricultural land only. Any way, as it stands, of its objectives four are of prime importance to us ⁵⁷ i) limitation of the highest quality of land for a family, ii) right of inheritance for the *bargadars*, iii) discontinuance of ejection of the *bargadars* and iv) restrictions on alienation of land by schedule tribes. Land reforms, in fact, are to be equated with many terms such as ceiling surplus land or vested land, *barga* recording or land to tiller policy, homestead land or land to the homeless people, the redistribution of vested land among the landless people through issuing *patta* or establishing the right of the landless people on land by issuing *patta*.⁵⁸ Apart from these there are also many other factors relating to land reforms like to identify agri or non-agri land, irrigated to non-irrigated land, to vest the ceiling surplus land of the big *raiya*s or the *jotdars* to check or control the unauthorised extraction of earth without conversion or to convert agri-land to non-agri land etc. for industrial or tea garden purposes etc.⁵⁹

By the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955 it is stated that every *raiya* or large land holder has the duty to furnish return about the particular of land excess of the ceiling area. However the return containing the full description of the land which he proposes

to retain within the ceiling area applicable to him under section 14 M and a full description of the land which is in excess of the ceiling area such other particulars may be prescribed.⁶⁰ The ceiling as under the Acquisition Act had not been given effect to in the three hill Sub-divisions of the district of Darjeeling. It was now extended to them with effect from the first of January, 1978 as defined in Section 14R of West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955.⁶¹ Topographical differences between hills and plains are vast. The productivity of hill lands depends very largely on lie, the gradient of the slope, the attitude belt and the side of the hill etc. The lands are further subject to the incidence of rocky components and land slide that are frequent. Per acre yield can not be the same for the hills and the due to these natural differences.

The ceiling area, is however, different with respect to various classes of *raiyats*, irrigated or non-irrigated land, and it varies from 2.50 standard hectares to 7 standard hectares if the family consisting of more than 5 members. The ceiling surplus land of a *raiyat* is vested under section 147 of the WBLR Act 1955 and therefore acquired by the government as vested land in order to redistribute the land among the landless poor people mouzawise.⁶² A *raiyat* shall on and after the commencement of this Act be the owner of his holding and the holding shall be heritable and transferable and in the case of mortgage of *raiyati* holdings there were some limitations.⁶³

Section 14P, in determination the ceiling area, any land transferred by sale, gift or otherwise or partitioned, by a *raiyat* after 1969, but before the date of publication of the West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1971 in the official Gazettee, shall be taken into accounts.⁶⁴ Section 14S has give the rights of vesting of land in the excess of ceiling area.⁶⁵ Section 15, certain safeguards for holding cultivated by *bargadars* are shall not apply to the holding of a *raiyat* or any part of it which is cultivated by a *bargadar* so long as cultivation by a *bargadar* continues. Continuation of right of cultivation on *bargadar's* death

and share of produce payable by *bargadar*. In certain cases *bargadars* were entitled to recover his share.⁶⁶

The chapter containing sections 22 to 38 dealing with the provisions of revenue has been omitted by West Bengal Land Holding Revenue Act 1979 which came into force with effect from 14.4.1981, vide Notification no-793/1 Ref. 6/M/44/81.⁶⁷ West Bengal Land Reforms Act give much importance about Co-operative farming societies. Rabindranath Tagore was himself also encouraging the Co-operative system. From 1950 agricultural system connected with Co-operative system.⁶⁸ *Jotdars* and rich farmers were benefitted by the illegal use of Co-operative system.⁶⁹ But it was for the time being. West Bengal Co-operative Societies Act of 1973 played a significant role in the rural life of North Bengal. In many cases society solve many problem of the peasants and cultivators. In the socio-economic infrastructure of post-independence North Bengal Co-operative Societies developed the process of cultivation. New relations build up between peasants and Co-operative Societies.⁷⁰

Any way, before implementation of WBEA Act of 1953 and WBLR Act of 1955 several Acts were passed in paper but the backbones of the cultivators were never got strength. These Acts were as follows ⁷¹

- i) The Bengal Alluvion and Diluvion Regulation Act, 1825
- ii) The Bengal Alluvion and Diluvion Regulation Act, 1847
- iii) The Bengal Alluvion and Land Settlement Act, 1885
- iv) The Bengal Rent Act, 1859
- v) The Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885
- vi) The Coochbehar Tenancy Act, 1910
- vii) The West Bengal Bargadars Act, 1950

In spite of the passing of these Acts, *barga* eviction continues in different parts of North Bengal. Though it is stated under the Act of WBEA Act of 1953 and WBLR Act of 1955 that *barga* can never be evicted but in practice there are many cases of *barga* eviction. The laws that were enacted during the year 1953 and 1955 were widely discussed in the Legislative Assembly. Member Bankim Chatterjee commented, "I do not think this Bill is related to abolition of *zamindari* system. The rights that are conferred upon the *zamindari* are being brought by the State of West Bengal. So, this is not an abolition of that system, rather it is acquisition of land and in lieu of money. Rather there is no trace of development in social, agricultural and the developments of the peasants in this Bill."⁷² The *jotdar* simply starts '*Bhagchas Case*' as per the crop cycle of a year and the intension of the *jotdar* is to make the *bargadar* a defaulter of the share-crop and ultimately the case is referred to the civil court. In most cases it is found that the *bargadar* owing to their poverty can hardly cope up with the *jotdars* and are ultimately the case is referred to the civil court. In most cases it is found that the *bargadar* owing to their poverty can hardly cope up with the *jotdars* and are ultimately evicted.

We can say that the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 were the most outstanding pieces of legislation. The first Act abolished the estates created by the Permanent Settlement in 1793.⁷³ The *zamindars* who were legally conferred proprietary rights to collect revenue for the government and reap intermediaries profits at the expense of *raiyat*'s rights were expectedly dismissed by the free government. This was virtually an agrarian revolution by legislation to benefit the rural poor. But like all legislation, this was also reduced to becoming a paper tiger by the vested interests.⁷⁴ Only little change was found in the rural social climate. But there is a need of a more change in the transformation of the rural society.

A new law was, therefore, necessary to plug the loopholes. The West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 was invoked for this purpose. Actually Left Front government later implemented the policy of land reforms of Harekrishna Konar.⁷⁵ Its guidelines included equitable distribution of vested land, record of *raiyyat*'s ceiling process and proper land use of approved holdings. In the section II B of the Amendment Act of 1971-72, the family unit was clearly defined and land quota fixed accordingly.⁷⁶ The Act fixed ceiling finally around 18 acres (1 hectare being equal to 2.471 acres). In the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953, the permissible ceiling was 25 acres of arable and 20 acres of non-arable lands.⁷⁷ The 1972 downward revision of land ceiling was therefore a major attempt at redistribution of land to make the rural society more radically egalitarian.⁷⁸

With the passing of time government has taken some serious steps about land and land reforms movement. One of the rigorous measures of the government was that government has succeeded in procuring large portions of land throughout West Bengal and from it distributed some lands among the land less people. Excess lands were under the authority of government (By the Act of Regulation IV).⁷⁹ *zamindars*, *pattanidar*, *parpattanidar* were acquired large portions of land.⁸⁰ By the abolition of *zamindari* system and implementation of Land Acquisition Act, excess lands should revealed. But *jotdars*, *zamindars* and *mahajans* hid their land by forgery. In many cases, political leaders were involved in the rural areas of North Bengal.

In the mean time State government has launched a new programme of land reform since 1978, titled Operation Barga. Operation Barga opened new windows in the transformation of the rural society. So far by the exploitations of *zamindars*, *jotdars*, and land owners exploited the poor peasants and cultivators but after the eviction of *zamindari-jotdari* system a fresh air came into the life of poor peasants and cultivators. After the implementation of Operation Barga, rural-urban people mixing and rural society classified.

Three-tier Panchayat systems made a rapid demographic change in the rural society of North Bengal. North Bengal's economy, culture and social structure swept into a new dimension.

But two different pictures were found in the transformation of the rural society of North Bengal. After the implementation of Operation Barga an atmosphere created that a cultivator can get economic freedom in his life. But situation of the northern part of West Bengal was totally different. Especially in northern part of North Bengal like Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, Terai and Coochbehar were different. Eminent economist Biplab Dasgupta mentioned in his CADP Report that Land Reforms Act of 1955 and Operation Barga of 1978 enriched the cultivators of South Bengal.⁸¹ But in North Bengal this system could not resist the number of landless peasants. Apart from these numbers of landless peasants gradually increased.

Hence, the social structure of the rural society of North Bengal was totally changed in the post-colonial period. In Pabna and Bogra numbers of tribals were very few. Tribals came in Dinajpur from outside or after the Permanent Settlement. Malda was one of the oldest districts of North Bengal. The cause of the formation of the Malda district is explained to be in consequence of the following Extract from the Report of the Superintendent of Police, Lower Province, dated 18th February 1813.⁸² Malda was closely connected with northern part of Bihar such as Purnia, Kathihar, Darbhanga district etc. Inhabitants were Maithili, Marwari, Hindu and Muslims. From Chotonagpur many *Santhals* settled in Malda. Hunter remarks that Malda presents ethnologically the aspect of a border district. The population is almost eventually divided into Hindus and Muslims: the *Santhals* however constitutes about six percent of which only $\frac{1}{3}$ are returned as animist by religion.⁸³

The Hindus fall into three main divisions; the *Behari* castes mostly resident in the *diara* tracts whose language is Hindu: the castes with affinities in the *Koch* such as the *Rajbanshi*, *Poli* and *Deshi*. Amongst the Muhammadans *Sherhabadis* were majority in

population.⁸⁴ Among the *zamindars* and *jotdars* many of them were *Behari*. Due to *Bargi* attack many people came from southern part of Ganga and settled in Malda. So in the rural society of Malda a great change took place due to intermingling of several castes, creeds and religion.

In the pre-colonial period Malda was an important part of Dinajpur but after partition Malda's geo-political atlas changed. *Zamindar* families role were also important at that time. Chanchal Raj Estate was significant. *Raja* Sarat Chandra Roy, who received the title of *Raja* in 1911, resided at Chanchal and was well known for his social measures and the benefit of his tenantry.⁸⁵ Krishnalal Chowdhury and Gir Gosain played a significant role in the *zamindari* system of Malda.⁸⁶ In Malda several caste, creed and religions mixed and a cosmopolitan culture developed. In 1930 an economic crisis broke out all over Bengal. In the *Barind* area of Malda debt of peasants gradually increased. Sugata Mukherjee described that rural peasant's debt increased due to economic depression of 1929 after that this debt gradually increased.⁸⁷ Land of the *Santhals* also transferred to the hands of *mahajan*. After the eviction of peasants from his lands, many *mahajans* appointed these peasants as a share-cropper of his own land. Hunter gave description about the *mahajani* system of Malda. If a tenant could not fulfill the demand of the *mahajans*, his land will be confiscated by the *mahajans*.⁸⁸

After the passing of Bengal Agricultural Debtor Act of 1935, *mahajani* system was abolished. But later *mahajans* were replaced by rich peasant's i.e. *jotdar-mahajan* group. Settlement office of Malda described this process- let us suppose that a tenant has three holidays. He falls into debt and mortgages one of them, which were eventually sold up. The *mahajan* takes possession, and according to the general customs, allows the tenant to continue on the land as an *adhiar* (share-cropper). The tenant bears all the expenses of cultivation and receives $\frac{1}{2}$ of the produce of his share. Subsequently further borrowing

jeopardized another holding; until the cultivator became a share-cropper.⁸⁹ In the third quarter of the 20th century this system changed but the condition of the tribal oriented *Barind* area of Malda remained same.⁹⁰

West Dinajpur district is rather peculiar in shape but filled in natural resources. Water resource, geology, flora and fauna also create a climate of a new light in the social life of the district. In 1951 there were only three towns in the district viz. the towns of Raiganj, Hili and Balurghat. The combined populations of these three towns were 41,940 persons and urban population formed only 4.3% of the total population of the district.⁹¹ In 1961 the number of towns increased to six, the new towns being those of Islampur, Gangarampur and Kaliaganj and these six towns among them accounted for a population of 98,969 persons in 1961 which formed 7.5% of the population of the district.⁹² The decade, therefore, marked an increase in urbanization, though not to the extent desirable. The urban populations increased by 136% against the increase of 31% in the rural sector.⁹³

West Dinajpur was a region where the people of several castes like *Rajbanshis*, *Polias*, *Koches*, *Santhals*, *Orawans*, and Muslims developed a new social structure in the rural society.⁹⁴ After the partition of India a section of people came from Pabna, Bogra, Maymensingh, Barishal, Dhaka, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Dinajpur. These people were mainly immigrants. Apart from these many peoples came from neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and gathered in West Dinajpur. They belonged to *Sarki*, *Damai* and *Kami* by caste. Due to this mixing of people of different regions social relationships and social practices for the transformation of the rural society reached to a new height. After 1971 i.e. Bangladesh war of independence, a large section of people migrated from Bangladesh and they took shelter in West Dinajpur.⁹⁵ Most of these people were culturally *Bangalee*, in religion, Hindu and their mother tongue was Bengali. So three types of folk languages developed in West Dinajpur⁹⁶ i) Balurghat Sub-division- *Kotivarshio* folk language, ii) Raiganj Sub-division-

Deshi Poli or *Kamrupi* folk language and iii) Islampur Sub-division- *Suryapuri* language. Apart from these *Chotonagpuri* and *Sadri* Sub-language also developed.

According to Grierson the form of Bengali spoken in the district may be taken as the specimen of the northern dialect of Bengali. According to him this northern dialect of the Bengali language is the result of the influence of the language of the *Koches* on the Bengali language.⁹⁷ Charu Chandra Sanyal thought that the *Koches* were non-Aryan in origin, some of them adopted Hinduism and became *Rajbansis*. The Hinduised social group of the area mentioned above included the *Pans*, *Polias* and *Deshis* of Dinajpur and *Koches* of the above district and Purnia district of Bihar. The local Muslim in this region is believed to be converts from *Rajbanshis*, *Koches* or their Sub-divisions.⁹⁸ All of them speak the dialect called *Rajbanshi*. Though the present trend is running in naming the language as '*Kamtapuri*'. The *Deshi* people along with other people of north east India speak in *Kamtapuri* language. So several languages (especially, Bengali with different pronunciation and modes) of North Bengal with their regional varieties created a transformation of the rural society.

By the passing of Land Acquisition and Land Reforms Act, rural societies structure was changed and North Bengal's rural tenants' society changed with the passing of times. In the undivided Bengal most of the *zamindars* were by caste Hindu and Muslim. Especially in North Bengal most of the *jotdars* were *Rajbanshi*. *Rajbanshis* were also divided in two parts- *Rajbanshi* Hindu and *Rajbanshi* Muslim. Most of the peoples were interested in land. Their occupation related with agriculture. Actually, they were the inhabitants of agricultural based society. Some picture found in Jalpaiguri, Duars and Terai region of Darjeeling. From '*Prabashi*' it was known that though Duars was under the authority of Jalpaiguri district but always remain neglected. But Duars was mines of natural property of West Bengal and tea garden was also one of the important source.⁹⁹ In the colonial period Duars was non-regulated area. When Duars came under the suzerainty of British, these

regions came under the authority of British settlement. In these regions, *jotdari* system was introduced in a new way and many owners of the tea gardens of Duars were intermediaries' class.¹⁰⁰ In Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar peasants were *Rajbanshi*. But in the rest of Bengal a different picture found where *zamindar* was high caste but the peasants and cultivators were subaltern Hindu and Muslims. There were lot of differences between the *zamindars* and *raiya*s.

But in North Bengal there were no major difference between *jotdars* and *adhiars*. It is difficult to identify that who is *jotdar* and who is *adhiar*. Because socially and culturally both of them belonged to same geo-political atlas. In North Bengal most of the peasants and cultivators were *Deshi*, *Polia*, *Namasudra* and Muslims. In this region, relations between *jotdar* and *adhiar* were not bitter. After the abolition of *zamindari*, *jotdari* system and the passing of Land Reforms Act of 1955, land related *Rajbanshis* were in a great crisis. By this Act most of the *jotdars* became landless cultivator. Because the government fixed the ceiling of land as 25 acre.¹⁰¹ Most of these lands were unfertile and there were no irrigation facilities. Most of the peasants and cultivators of these regions were not well aware about the use of modern technology and improved fertilizer to their land. As a result of which production of crops were minimum and also the rate of production was very slow. On the contrary, Vardhaman-Hugli-Birbhum were far ahead than North Bengal because by the facilities of irrigation, production of crops gradually increased.¹⁰² Moreover, peasants of these regions knew how to use technology and fertilizer in the agricultural field. As a result Vardhaman became the granary of West Bengal. On the other hand, peasant agitation gradually increased in North Bengal.¹⁰³ Later Naxalbari crisis was built up.

In May, 1969, the Naxalities formed the CPI (ML) which appeared to be a monolithic party stubbornly advocating the Chinese path; by 1972 the splintered Naxalite movement petered out, although a few factions seemed to be active in 1979-80, regrouping

their forces and even treading Parliamentary path.¹⁰⁴ It is noteworthy that the Naxalite insurgency began in 1967 when non-Congress ministers had been formed in number states in eastern and northern India; West Bengal was under the control of the United Front Ministry in which the CPI (M) was the partner. In the country as a whole the *Kishan Sabha* was hardly leading any militant peasant movement in early 1960's; the Naxalities seemed to be sure that the Indian peasant was open to a revolutionary appeal, since peasant discontent had become intense.¹⁰⁵

One incident must have to mention that¹⁰⁶ "Stephen Orawn of Bairiguri at the area of Majerguri tea Estate of Alipurduar was murdered for protesting against the looting of a huge amount paddy by their paid lumpen of proprietors of the tea Estate. In spite of Stephen's gruesome murder he was not compensated even by a small amount of paddy." This type of scattered incident took place in different parts of North Bengal. Peasant, cultivator, tenant's demand came out by this movement but a new ideological crisis breakout between the left minded people. When the flame of this movement faded away, small tea gardens were formed. As a result of which rich peasants became turned into poor peasant and poor peasants turned into landless peasants.

Crisis became severe when immigrants entered North Bengal. For the time being coming of the immigrants created new enthusiasm in the economy of this region. But due to the gradual increase of immigrants especially coming of weak sections of the people from Nepal, created lot of problem in North Bengal. Apart from these due to Bongal Kheda movement of Assam, number of immigrants increased and the comings of the Tibetan immigrants created a great crisis in the economic life of North Bengal. Although the geographical situation of North Bengal was also responsible. Throughout India, North Bengal was the only region which covered with four foreign states. It must be remembered that North Bengal carries the burden of immigrants' crisis. But in the case of Vardhaman there was no

such problem. Hence some serious issues connected to North Bengal. In the pre-colonial and colonial model there were no such major differences about the agrarian and social structure of North Bengal. Actually, North Bengal perished from colonial and post-colonial period also. Colonial government failed to introduce a uniform policy throughout Bengal.¹⁰⁷ Especially northern part of Bengal always neglected. A scattered ununiform model of North Bengal was gifted from colonial rule.

For this reason Punjab, Maharashtra are developed but Bengal remained same. Though West Bengal is a river based fertile region but in agriculture Punjab is far ahead than Bengal. When deep political crisis shattered Punjab at that time Punjab produced record amount of production of crops because due to irrigational facilities. In irrigation Punjab is far ahead than any state of India. Though West Bengal is a river based state but Punjab is more advanced in agricultural segment. On the other hand, in industrial sector Maharashtra and Gujrat are far ahead than West Bengal.¹⁰⁸

Although Bihar, Jarkhand and Orissa are rich in minerals, natural sources and gradually turned economically weak. *Marwaris* of Rajasthan became the chief framer of business in eastern India but in Rajasthan there was no industry. Most of the Prime Ministers of India are selected from Uttar Pradesh but Uttar Pradesh is economically and educationally weak state. So development is a complex matter. From this background we have to discuss the peasant crisis of the northern part of North Bengal. Some constitutional protection changes the entire scenario of the rural society of North Bengal.¹⁰⁹

The peasant who holds below than 1 *hal* (16 *Bigha*) their land can not be purchased by any non-peasant. Peasants can sell their lands for family needs. In this case government can purchase these lands from the peasants' i.e. government organization. One thing must be mentioned that government organization should be Co-operative because most of the rural peasants are well aware about the works of Co-operative bodies, their systems

and works.¹¹⁰ But if the organization is bureaucratic in infrastructure, obstacles came for the peasants. Although ploughing the lands, production of crops and its ownership remained by the hands of peasants. Gradually peasants pay the revenues of the government. In this way peasants and cultivators were not evicted from their lands and landless peasants gradually decreased. It is very important for the peasants of North Bengal.

Historically it must be remembered that in the geo-political atlas of North Bengal most of the *Rajbanshis* were depended upon land. *Rajbanshis* whether they were Hindu or Muslim were belonged to a land related demographic society.¹¹¹ In the undivided Bengal of Rajshahi division most of the non-Muslims were belonged to backward community or *Kshatriya*. In Dinajpur district these people came to be known as *Polia*. In Rangpur they were known as *Bahe*. Among them a lawyers of Rangpur organized them who was known as Panchanan Barma. He started to organize the people of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Malda, Howra, Maymensingh, Goalpara of Assam (present Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar) some parts of Purnia in Bihar district (present Islampur Sub-division of Uttar Dinajpur) in 1905.¹¹²

North Bengal especially northern part of *Tistabanga* was a land that was depended on agriculture. Agriculture was the main source of lifeline of economy. Majority of the population depended on agri-economy. This agricultural dependence not only found in colonial period but also post-colonial period witnessed such dependence. Several conferences of the *Rajbanshis* mentioned this issues and it was discussed that *Rajbanshi-Kshatriyas* should give preference about distribution of land. Social and political tension of northern part of North Bengal was not new. In this tension, many peasants lost their land especially agricultural land.

Panchanan Barma was a *jotdar*. We got this information from all the government records of Coochbehar.¹¹³ *Jotdars* of *Tistabanga* and the *zamindars* of east, west, south

Bengal were not same. In the land of *zamindars* there were no relation between *zamindar* and land. But *jotdars* were different. Land and *jotdars* were interrelated deeply. Hence politics, agriculture and culture were interrelated. Besides *jotdar* and *deunia*, *giri* was the headman; on the same time he was peasant also.¹¹⁴ But the rest of Bengal gives us different pictures where the person who involved in politics was a owner of land but did not cultivate land. So the feeling of Panchanan Barma in the case of land was totally different, he felt the problems of the peasant by heart and soul. He was anxious about the land problem of the peasants.

In the colonial period *zamindar* and *jotdars* were masters of land. In the *Nawabi* period it was seen that upper caste Hindus was the owners of the land. After the introduction of Permanent Settlement this system was gradually expanded where owner of the land was Hindu and the peasants were Muslims and non-caste Hindus. In the northern part of North Bengal, peoples belonging to Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, plain lands of Darjeeling and parts of lower Assam, Goalpara and Kamrup were belonged to same religious sects.¹¹⁵ In these regions owner of land and peasants belonged to the same religious community and anthropological class. In the case of East Bengal peasants or *raiya*s were not surrounded in this context. Hence it is now needed to discuss on religion and caste. But both these regions of North Bengal there came the word anthropological community instead of non-caste. Religion was not important matter. There were two types of dichotomy that flows differently both in *Tistabanga* and East Bengal. (eastern part of Bengal) As for example in Rangpur, Siliguri, Goalpara and Kamrup most of the big *jotdars* belonged to *Rajbanshi-Kshatriya* clan.¹¹⁶ But in Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur caste-Hindu and Mussalman *jotdars* were majority in population. Although a part of Mussalman *jotdars* belonged to *Rajbanshi* clans. On the contrary, most of the *raiya*s were a part of *Rajbanshi* clans. Later Panchanan Barma formed a *Kshatriya Samiti*.¹¹⁷ He was the pioneer of *Kshatriya* and *Rajbanshi* movement.

But there were lot of differences between the pre-independence and post-independence *Rajbanshi* societies. In 1874 Goalpara, the *Rajbanshi* concentrated district of northern Bengal, was separated from Bengal and merged into the newly created province of Assam.¹¹⁸ This separation of Goalpara from northern Bengal had greatly damaged the traditional belt of the *Rajbanshi* homogeneity. In the census of 1931, *Rajbanshi* community declared as 'depressed' class. But due to the protest of Panchanan Barma, government compelled to change the name of depressed class and the new name was given as Government Schedule i.e. *Rajbanshi* Schedule.¹¹⁹ A new crisis began about the *Rajbanshi* of Assam and *Rajbanshi* of Bengal. With this view, they have founded the *Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammilani* in Assam in difference with the *Rajbanshi-Kshatriya Samiti* of Bengal. The *Rajbanshis* of Bengal have finally believed that the *Koches* and the *Rajbanshis* are two separate communities. Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma was the chief exponent of this view.

The *Rajbanshis* of Assam did not support the *Kshatriya* movement of Panchanan Barma. In 1921 the peasants of Goalpara started an agitation against the *zamindars* under the leadership of Jnan Mondal, a *Rajbanshi* social leader. Rai Saseb requested Jnan Mondal to start the *Kshatriya* movement but the latter did not agree with him. So, a conflict started between the two. The reality was that the *Koch-Rajbanshis* of Assam could not subscribe the view of Rai Saheb on the origin of the *Koch-Rajbanshis*.¹²⁰ After independence a golden opportunity had come to the *Rajbanshi* of Assam and West Bengal for reunion. The Government of India had appointed a commission i.e. the State Reorganisation Commission in 1953 to meet the demand of the linguistic states. But the problem was not solved. So far Coochbehar was a princely state. But after the lapse of the paramountcy like the other princely states, the fate of the state of Coochbehar also became an issue of hot bed discussion as to whether Coochbehar should be merged with West Bengal or Assam. A tug-of-war was started. It was the most critical hour to the *Rajbanshi* community. It was true that

both Goalpara and the princely state of Coochbehar were the land of the *Rajbanshis*. But the urban areas of both Goalpara and Coochbehar were predominantly non-*Rajbanshi*.¹²¹

After the passing of Land Acquisition Act and the abolition of *zamindari* system, *Rajbanshi* were deprived throughout North Bengal. *Rajbanshi jotdars* became beggar. Social structures of the *Rajbanshis* were shattered. Another important part of the rural society of North Bengal was that both Hindu and Muslim *Rajbanshi*'s social status, social structure and their mobilization changed. Declining *Rajbanshi* society which was depended on land became landless day by day.¹²² To know the cause of this a branch of the Town Committee decided to carry on a census regarding this situation.¹²³ North Bengal's most of the cultivated lands were gradually transferred by the hands of the cultivators and dominated by the land hungers.

But in the post-independence phase the canvas of the rural society of the *Rajbanshis* gradually changed. Due to land transfer issue an ethnic movement started throughout North Bengal. *Bodo*, *Kamtapur*, *All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union* (AKRSU), *Kamtapur Peoples' Party* (KPP), *Greater Coochbehar Democratic Party* (GCDP) organized themselves..¹²⁴ *The Greater Kamta United Forum* works for their own identification and establishments in the soil of North Bengal and the eastern part of north east India. Perished peasants, land less peasants and cultivators' condition remained same both in the colonial and post-colonial rule. After the passing of Land Acquisition Act and the abolition of the *zamindari* system, rural society's structure was totally changed. In spite of that it is a historical fact that this reforms consciousnessly led to a birth of an elite class in the rural society. In the first quarter of the 20th century a slow and steady change was taking place in the field of the rural politics and it was by the hands of land. Whatever may be the historical circumstances it is a hard truth that the most of the land owners were the cast Hindus but the

cultivators were the Muslims and non-caste Hindus. So the land became a tug-of-war between the Hindu and Muslim politician for winning the political game i.e. political power.

Politics of land and land of politics gradually accelerated. In Pakistan Land Reforms Act (1951) was passed but after that no land reforms were there but in India especially in West Bengal Land Reforms started in 1967 when the United Front Government came to the power.¹²⁵ When Pakistan got the power they treated land as feudal lord. Now land became treated as political issue not communal issue. United Front Government took the first major steps to initiate land reforms.¹²⁶ The minister in charge of land revenue of the new government was Harekrishna Konar, a veteran CPI (M) peasant leader. Soon after taking office, he announced a policy of quick distribution of vested land among the landless and stopping of eviction of share-croppers. In 1972 Congress came to power under the Chief Ministership of Siddhrartha Sankar Roy. In 1977 Leftist government won the election and became the ruling party and started initiative of some major reform in land sector.¹²⁷ When Left Front government came to power in West Bengal many landless people got land and they emerged as a new class. But due to the fruits of land reforms a section of rural population shifted to urbanization. A new pattern of the rural society emerged in North Bengal and cultural changes got a new shape.

Abolition of the *zamindari* system, Land Acquisition Act of 1955 and the implementation of Operation Barga had done lot of changes in North Bengal's rural society. Although North Bengal which can be represented as northern North Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Darjeeling) and southern North Bengal (Malda, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur) represents different geographical atmosphere. From Tebhaga to Naxalbari (1946-1967) and abolition of *Zamindari* Act to implementation of Operation Barga (1955-1978) created lot of changes in the rural life of North Bengal. Malda has a close contact with purnia, Kathihar, Darbhanga. Many *Maithali*, *Marwari* lives in Malda.¹²⁸ In the second half of the 19th century

many *Santhals* came from Chotonagpur, Rajmahal and other adjacent regions.¹²⁹ After *Bargi* invasion and Chuar revolt many people came to Malda.¹³⁰ West Dinajpur mainly ‘*polia*’ dominated district. *Pathan, Koch* and *Kirat* dynasties king Bana ruled Dinajpur.¹³¹ During the time of the English rule many *Santhals* came to Dinajpur and made their homeland. They were clearing the jungles and converted it to cultivated land. After partition many people came from East Pakistan and made their homeland in Dinajpur.

After the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971, the rural society of Malda and Dinajpur changed in many ways. A large number of refugees coming from adjacent Rajshahi district of East Pakistan started to settle in the municipal area of Englishbazar (Malda district). The Commissioner of Municipality mentioned scarcity of water, electricity, proper drainage system and crisis in other municipal facilities due to the influx of refugees’ repeatedly.¹³² Due to political crisis of Pakistan from 1965-1971, many Hindu immigrants took shelter in West Dinajpur. From the Census Report of 1971 it was known that 2,90,500 people took shelter in West Dinajpur.¹³³ From the Report of Boarder Statistics that out of six lakh Hindus, at least three lakh Hindu immigrants took shelter in West Dinajpur and on the contrary some Muslims migrated from West Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Purnia and Bihar; also took shelter in East Bengal.¹³⁴ At that time due to Naxal movement and emergency crisis, a turmoil continued in Bengal especially West Dinajpur. Many refugees took shelter in the houses of big *jotdar* of West Dinajpur. Population gradually increased in Balurghat (District town of West Dinajpur).¹³⁵ Actually whole North Bengal suffered a serious refugee crisis.

Table No. 1.15 (Refugees in North Bengal in and Outside Government Camps and Colonies)

Districts	No.of government colonies	Population in government colonies	Refugees outside camps and colonies	Total refugee population
Malda	12	12,339	69,004	72,924
West Dinajpur	11	3,865	1,58,095	1,62,949
Jalpaiguri	9	7,850	1,42,306	1,50,156
Darjeeling	2	3,375	26,668	30,043
Coochbehar	12	6,550	2,22,118	2,27,827

Source : *Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal* (Statement issued by the Government of West Bengal on 15th December 1958), cited in P. Chowdhuri, 'Refugees in West Bengal : A Study of the Growth and Distribution of Refugee Settlements within the CMD'; Occasional Paper No. 55, Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta, 1983.

After 1971 many *zamindar*, *jotdar* and common people exchanged their properties. But some of them resided their own motherland even after the partition.¹³⁶ Several families exchanged their properties. As for example Nirod Bandhu Ghosh of Dakra, Raghunathpur (Present Dakshin Dinajpur) exchanged their properties with Didar Ali Sardar and Sabarak Sardar of Kanchan, Naoga (Present Bangladesh).¹³⁷ Sailen Ghosh of Gangasagar (Dakshin Dinajpur) exchanged their properties with Faraz Seikh of Kanchan.¹³⁸ *Zamindar*

Rahamat ullah Chowdhury of Mallahar Estate of Banshihari (Dakshin Dinajpur) visited Bangladesh several times but he could not find any proper people to exchange his properties.¹³⁹ Later he decided to stay in West Dinajpur. From the source of Refugee Rehabilitation Directorate, Government of West Bengal (1971), it was known that 42, 93,000 immigrants came in West Bengal.¹⁴⁰ According to the Census of 1971 the district (West Dinajpur) had a population of 1,859,887 and tenth among the districts in terms of population.¹⁴¹ The decadal growth for 1961-71 was 40.50 % which was the highest for any district.¹⁴² Hence the refugee pressure changed the scenario of North Bengal especially West Dinajpur. By the hands of refugee crisis rural society has changed in many ways.

Especially rural societies of Malda and West Dinajpur have changed with the passing of times. After the implementation of Operation Barga rural peasants and cultivators got land and a new form of rural society gradually emerged. Apart from these by the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1973, three-tier Panchayat system was first applied in 1978 and in that year three-tier election was held in three segments viz. *Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti* and *Zila Parishad*.¹⁴³ There is no doubt that by this election rural people got administrative power in their villages. In this way rural society formed which directed by the needs of the common people of rural areas. Educated rural people dominated the contemporary society. So land reforms, implementation of Operation Barga and Panchayat system changed the life of the people of rural society of North Bengal.

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