

ABSTRACT

TITLE: TRANSFORMATION OF THE RURAL SOCIETY OF NORTH BENGAL FROM THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT TO THE OPERATION BARGA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MALDA AND WEST DINAJPUR (1793-1978)

North Bengal's geo-political atlas represents a different shape. In these geo-political atlases there are both hills and plane lands. In the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period North Bengal witnessed different nature and pattern of the transformation of the rural society. The study of the present thesis highlights the nature and the pattern of the transformation of the rural society of the northern part of West Bengal from the Permanent Settlement (1793) to the Operation Barga (1978). Malda and West Dinajpur played a significant role and spread a new culture in the socio-economic field. Later, North Bengal's socio-cultural variation established its own identity especially in the rural areas. In the pre-Mughal age people of Bengal used to be culturally sound. Throughout the mediaeval period culture in Bengal had closely been interlinked with the religious life of the people. Later on, Mongal-kavyas, Panchali, shrines of every cult, doctrine of Pir, Gazi and the like change the social structure of the society of North Bengal to a great extent.

After the end of the Mughal rule zamindar class emerged as a powerful section and played an important role in the socio-economic life of the society. But the rural society of North Bengal was to some extent different from the rest of India. In fact in the part of undivided North Bengal, indigenous tribal People played an important role in the rural society of North Bengal on the eve of the advent of the colonial rule. Undivided North Bengal's geo-political structure was totally different. It can be said that North Bengal was the miniature edition of India. Actually, these regions were highly enriched with natural sources. In the social life, a communal harmony

conglomerated among the different castes and creeds. Rural society was also influenced by it and as a result an inter-mingling socio-cultural atmosphere built up in North Bengal.

Colonial land revenue system played a significant role in the development of the land reforms policy of British Government. In ancient Bengal agriculture was the chief source of livelihood for the people. At the time of Akbar, his finance minister Todarmal made a khas or Rayatwari Settlement. In the mediaeval period Indian land revenue and economic system was totally dominated by the feudal system. Role of Murshid Quli Khan, the then Nawab of Bengal, was also very important.

In 1772 Hastings introduced for a whole of Bengal a five years (1772-77) experiment of farming which was known as 'quin-quennial' settlement but after the failure of this system court of directors of East India Company took a decision that no zamindaries will be auctioned and an annual easy agreement was made with zamindars. Later, when Lord Cornwallis was appointed as the Governor General, he noticed the failure of the five years settlement. He assessed the collection of revenue and land settlement. This settlement came to be known as 'Ten Years Settlement'. This 'Ten Years Settlement' became the pioneer of Permanent Settlement. Cornwallis was the first to implement the Permanent Settlement. He fixed the revenue demand from the land. In practice however, the Permanent Settlement placed the raiyats at the mercy of the zamindars.

Post-Permanent Settlement, on the other hand, witnessed several changes in Bengal such as holding of raiyats, tenant-zamindars relation, land revenue structure, gradual changes of Bengali rural societies and land lords after Permanent Settlement, abolition of zamindari system, North Bengal's rural social structure, land movements, Operation Barga etc. Post-Permanent

Settlement made a rapid change in the structure of claimed land revenue system and structure of the rural society of Malda and West Dinajpur.

This was the area where we found the several uprisings and peasant movement. Role of zamindar families and the activities of the political parties identified the problem and nature of the rural society as well as the changing status of the peasant in the rural socio-economic structure of North Bengal. In short, in the name of abolition of zamindari and land to the tiller, the post-colonial measures which were supposed to reshuffle the class configuration in the rural North Bengal, actually performed a dual function.

Several Acts like Chowkidari Act of 1871, Rent Act of 1859 and Tenancy Act of 1885 made some changes but in a limited way. Actually implementation of Chowkidari Act of 1871 was the first step to regulate the administrative power to the Indians, though in a very little way. It is true that local self government succeeded in introducing the three-tier Panchayat system.

In the first quarter of the 20th century a slow and steady change had been taking place in the field of rural politics. One thing has to be mentioned that in North Bengal, the peasants were Muslims and Namasudra class whereas the owner of the land was Hindu. The nature, structure and the pattern of land gradually changed with the passing of time. The epicenter of the rural politics became land. Later land became a tug of war between the Hindu and Muslim politicians for winning the political game i.e. political power. In the post-colonial North Bengal several developments took place in the land system: abolition of zamindari system, land reform, raiyats ceiling of holdings, bargadars provisions as to revenue, consolidation of land holdings, co-operative farming, principles of distribution of vested land, record of rights, management of lands etc.

In 1967 the United Front Government took the first major steps to initiate land reforms. Later in 1977 Leftist Government won the election and became the ruling party and started to initiate some major reforms in land sector. Left politics took a new turn by the implementation of Operation Barga in 1978. By the Operation Barga Programme many landless people got land and they emerged as a new class. However in reality, the slogan 'Langol jar jami tar' (He one who owns the plough, is the owner of the land) could not be implemented by the Operation Barga Programme. It must be noted that most of the bargadars could not hold and maintain barga land. Many peasants were compelled to sell their lands. Actually Operation Barga system was challenged by various questions. In spite of these a new pattern of the rural society emerged and cultural changes got a new shape.

So, it is clear from the above discussion that the transformation of the rural society of North Bengal from Permanent Settlement to the Operation Barga (1973-1978) bears distinct features. Agitations of the peasants and ethnic violence for the right of land drew a picture of changing rural society. The role of zamindar families was also very much important. After the abolition of zamindari system and the rise of middle class, there created a new turn about the relation of zamindar-intermediary-share croppers. The society of Malda and West Dinajpur was composed of numerous and diverse social groups. From Permanent Settlement to Operation Barga, there was a long journey. Passing of several Acts, Political parties' activities, rights of land, formation of Panchayat and implementation of Operation Barga changed the profile of transformation of the rural society of North Bengal to a great extent.