

LAND REFORMS IN BANGLADESH

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PREFACE

Bangladesh is a most backward country. Its backwardness emerges from the predominance of its agrarian sector. Apart from a few insignificant number of people, almost all of its total population depends upon agriculture for livelihood. A large majority of them are very poor having no ownership rights on the vital property of land. Here the problem of poverty deeply lies in its land ownership system. The pattern of land ownership and poverty are inter-related. Thus an attempt is made here to study the various land reforms measures, hitherto been brought out by successive governments in Bangladesh to restructure the land ownership system. Also, an attempt is made here to suggest further possibilities of such restructuring.

There is no unanimity on the concept of land reforms. Some have defined it as land to the landless, while others have conceived it broadly, including the developmental programmes. Doreen Warriner has defined in her study: 'land reform means the redistribution of property or rights in land for the benefit of small farmers and agricultural labourers.' The UN prefers a broad definition,

that it conceives 'land reform as an integrated programme of measures designed to ^{eliminate} ~~estimate~~ obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in the agrarian structure'. Such a programme involves changes of land tenure as well as improvement of agricultural service institutions. In the present study, the land reform means 'land to the tiller' which is close to the former definition.

The present study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the salient features of Bangladesh agriculture. It mainly focuses on the state of condition in agricultural production. The second chapter deals with the significance of land reforms vis-a-vis economic development. Apart from the farm-size and productivity debate, it also deals with the desirability and feasibility of land ceiling limits. The third chapter deals with the agrarian structure of Bangladesh. It examines the nature of land distribution and its change over time. It also deals with the identification of classes in Bangladesh agriculture. The fourth chapter deals with a review of legislative enactments, their implementation and efficacy. A critical appraisal of land reform policies including summary and concluding observations are made in the final chapter.

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CHAPTER I

SALIENT FEATURES OF BANGLADESH AGRICULTURE

Bangladesh is a country with large population, acute poverty and very limited natural resources. It is eighth largest country in the world, having a population of about 80 million. It spans an area of 56,000 square miles with a total cultivated area of barely 22.5 million acres. It has one of the highest densities of population in the world.

Bangladesh is an overwhelmingly agricultural country. About 90 per cent of its labour force lives in rural areas of which approximately 30 per cent suffers from unemployment or underemployment. About 60 per cent of its GNP is derived from the agriculture. The rural structure shows that a large number of holdings are small. The pattern of landownership shows large disparity in agriculture.

Under these conditions, land reforms assume considerable significance. Therefore, an attempt is made to study land reforms in Bangladesh. Before proceeding to analyse land reforms in Bangladesh, it is essential to know about certain characteristics of Bangladesh agriculture so that the significance of land reforms could be analysed against this background.

Importance of Agriculture

The agricultural sector occupies a position of outstanding importance in the economy. This can be observed from the view-point of agricultural sector's contribution to the national income. About three-fifth of the GDP was generated in 1961 from agriculture and its proportion in 1978 has slightly declined to 57 per cent.¹

A large number of working force is employed in this sector. In 1960 the agricultural sector employed 87 per cent. of the labour force while in 1978 has declined only to 74 per cent.² This indicates the overwhelmingly agrarian nature of Bangladesh economy which has not undergone any basic transformation during these years.

Population Pressure on Land

The population is growing alarmingly and its current growth rate is estimated to be about 3 per cent per annum. The density of population was 1306

1. Queroshi M.L., Survey of Economy, Resources and Prospects of South Asia (Sri Lanka, 1981) P. 42.

2. Ibid., P. 56.

per square mile in 1970-71, which is one of the highest in the world.³ The total population in 1979 was 82.7 million. The limited availability of land becomes all the more critical in view of the growing pressure of population.

Table 1.1
Pressure of Population on Land 1961-81

	1961 actual	1971 estimated	1981 estimated
Cropped Area in Acre per capita	0.42	0.30	0.20
Population per Cropped Acre	2.38	3.40	5.00
Rural Population per Cropped Acre	2.30	3.15	4.70

Source: M.A. Zaman, Land Reforms in Bangladesh to 1970, Land Tenure Centre, University of Wisconsin - Madison, (Research Paper No.66, 1976) P. 6.

The above table indicates that for every person, depending almost exclusively on land as a source of income, the available acreage was only 0.42 on the average in 1961 and it is estimated to decline further to half of this size in 1981, in view of growing population.

3. Khan A.R., The Economy of Bangladesh (London, 1972) P. 10.

In other words, for every cropped acre at least four persons are dependant in rural areas of Bangladesh. Thus the large majority of the population are depending on agriculture in the absence of non-agricultural occupations.

Pattern of Land Usage

More than 90 per cent of the total population live in about 64,000 villages, and most of them have less than 200 families in each.⁴ A village in Bangladesh means agglomeration of homesteads along with a contiguous area of land. There are some disadvantages in optimum usage of its surface area for cultivation. It is subject to heavy flooding during the rainy season. This makes expansion in acreage impossible during this season.⁵ Secondly too many ponds in certain parts of the country indicates the problem of considerable wastage of cultivable lands in these areas.⁶

4. Quazi, A., 'Village Overspill, Hindustan Times (New Delhi, 24.8.1979).

5. Khan A.R., n. 3, P. 10.

6. Quazi A., n. 4, P.

Table 1.2Changes in Land Under Cultivation

	('000 acres)			
	1965-66	1969-70	1975-76	1977-78
Cultivated land	21601	21763	20968	20693
Current fallow	703	731	1597	1839
Cultivable waste	1225	742	662	665
Cultivable land	23956	23296	23221	23196
Harvested land	29541	32841	31135	31192
Cropping intensity (in percentage)	137	151	140	151

Source: Hossain M., Foodgrains Production in Bangladesh, Performance Potential Constraints (BIDS, Dacca) (Himeo) P. 9 Table 3.

The above table indicates the changes in cultivated and cultivable area from 1965 to 1978. During this period, there was a reduction in potentially cultivable land to the extent of about 160 thousand acres, presumably because of the demand for land for housing to accommodate the growing population. This has resulted largely in the reduction of land already under cultivation. Over this period fallow lands have increased by one million acres, which indicates that a large amount of land went out of cultivation.

However, cultivable waste land has been reduced to a large extent. The harvested area increased by about 3.3 million acres over the period 1965-70 owing to an increase in cropping intensity but there after it remained almost at the same level.

Cropping Pattern Output and Yield

The cropping pattern is very much influenced by the climatic features and basic investment in agriculture. Secondly, the cropping pattern and agricultural operations are in balance adopted to flood conditions and weather variations. Paddy, jute and pulses are important crops in Bangladesh agriculture. The other crops are wheat, oilseeds, sugarcane, tobacco, tea etc. They are minor crops compared to the earlier ones.

Bangladesh agriculture is overwhelmingly dominated by mono-crop viz, paddy. It covers three-fourth of the gross cropped area. The area under jute, the second important crop as well as the principle cash and foreign-exchange earning crop is about 6-7 per cent of the total cropped area. The area under all varieties of pulses covers around 10 per cent of the total cropped area. Thus these three crops together cover

Table 1.3

Percentage of Total Gross Cropped Area under Different Crops

1960 & 1976

Different Crops	Small Farms		Medium Farms		Large Farms		Total Farms	
	1960	1976	1960	1976	1960	1976	1960	1976
Paddy	76.54	75.79	76.60	76.82	77.06	69.55	77.07	74.50
Wheat	0.66	1.80	0.90	1.10	0.85	0.85	0.84	1.16
Pulses	5.53	8.64	6.61	8.54	6.42	12.20	6.42	9.62
Oilseeds	2.54	2.28	2.92	2.37	2.87	4.35	2.87	2.81
Jute	5.75	8.39	5.03	7.24	4.76	4.79	4.76	6.77
Sugarcane	0.65	0.83	0.92	0.31	0.92	0.43	0.92	0.43
Other crops	8.63	2.88	6.83	3.59	7.13	7.77	7.13	4.63
Cropping Intensity	166.74	184.18	151.58	171.72	135.96	163.62	147.93	171.62

Source: Government of Bangladesh, The Year Book of Agricultural Statistics of Bangladesh, 1976-77, BBS, Dacca.

more than 90 per cent of the total cropped area.

One important thing to be noted in Bangladesh agriculture is that, it is virtually mono-cultured. The absence of diversification in agricultural production indicates the basic weakness of agriculture.

(See table 1.3).

It is evident from the above table that the cropped area under major foodgrain crop viz, paddy has declined over the period of 1960 to 1976. Wheat and pulses have improved significantly. The principal cash crop of Bangladesh agriculture viz, jute has shown an improvement over this period. The area under sugarcane covering very little cropped area, declined mildly over this period. In larger farms cropped area under more labour intensive crops like paddy is being reduced while at the same time the cropped area under less labour intensive crops like pulses and oilseeds have expanded. On the other hand, in case of small farms the cropped area under more labour intensive crops like jute has expanded.

The production of rice increased from 11.8 million tons in 1969-75 to 12.5 million tons in 1978-79, an increase of 6 per cent over a period of nine years. This small increase in production was the result of an equally modest increase in acre yields. The yield

Table 1.4**Output and Yield Per Acre of Major Crops**

Year	RICE		JUTE		SUGARCAKE		TEA		WHEAT	
	Output (million tons)	Yield/ Acre (Maund)	Output (million Bales)	Yield/ Acre (Maund)	Output (million tons)	Yield/ Acre (Maund)	Output (million lbs)	Yield/ Acre (Maund)	Output (million tons)	Yield/ Acre (Maund)
1969-70	11.8	12.6	7.2	14.6	7.4	506.7	48.0	7.6	0.1	9.5
1970-71	11.0	12.2	6.7	15.2	7.7	511.6	7.6	0.3	0.1	9.6
1971-72	9.8	11.6	4.2	12.5	5.7	446.2	29.6	2.9	0.1	9.8
1972-73	9.9	11.4	6.5	14.7	5.5	456.6	56.6	6.7	0.1	8.2
1973-74	11.7	15.1	6.2	15.7	6.5	475.6	65.8	8.1	0.1	9.7
1974-75	11.1	12.5	4.0	12.3	6.6	475.9	66.6	7.4	0.1	10.0
1975-76	12.6	13.4	4.5	15.4	5.9	487.4	67.9	0.4	0.2	15.8
1976-77	11.6	12.9	4.7	15.0	6.4	487.7	78.3	8.1	0.3	17.6
1977-78	12.8	14.0	5.4	14.9	6.7	477.7	79.9	8.0	0.3	19.2
1978-79	12.5	15.1	6.4	15.7	7.0	459.7	82.8	8.5	0.5	26.9

Source: Bangladesh Economic Survey 1978-79, quoted from Qureshi, M.L., Survey of Economic Resources & Prospects of South Asia (Sri Lanka, 1981), p. 65.

per acre fluctuated from year to year but the trend was upwards. The production of jute was subject to wide annual fluctuations due to price variations.⁷ The acre yields were subject to annual fluctuations but have shown some increase in recent years. In the case of sugarcane the output and acre yields, showed some decline. Tea has registered some increase in acre yields. Wheat is a very small crop, but the output and acre yields have shown dramatic increase. (See table 1.4).

Table 1.3

Index Number of Food Production of Bangladesh
(Base: 1969-71=100)

	1969-71	1975	1976	1977	1978
Foodgrain production	100	109	102	110	109
Per capita foodgrain production	100	100	91	96	93

Source: Qureshi M.L., Survey Economic Resources and Prospects of South Asia, (Sri Lanka, 1981) P. 49.

The above table indicates that the growth of foodgrain production during 1969-78 was less than the population growth. It will also be seen from the table that the per capita foodgrain production over this period declined.

7. Khan AR., Poverty and Landlessness in Rural Asia (ILO Study, Geneva, 1977) P. 158.

Thus, the overall growth in foodgrain production was neutralized by the increase in population.

Population Growth and Food Supply

A large deficit of foodgrain production in Bangladesh is leading to the country's dependence on food imports. The availability of foodgrains per head has fallen from 83.5 grams per person in 1963-64 to 807 grams per person in 1975-76. The decline in food intake was the highest in fats and oils (52 per cent) followed by meat (41 per cent) and fish (33 per cent) and also pulses (15 per cent) which form an important source of protein for the poorer people.⁸

Detailed data about the trend in the rates of growth in cereal production in different districts is shown in table 1.6. These trend rates are compared with 1974 census population growth rates to indicate the number of districts experiencing deficit in food supply. It can be noted that the rate of growth in food production was higher than that of population in only three districts, namely, Chittagong, Noakhali and Mymensingh. Fourteen among seventeen districts had negative growth in per capita food production

8. Hussein H., Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Asia: A Review of Recent Experiences in Selected Countries (BIDS, Dacca, 1979), (Mimeo) P. 45.

Table 1.6

Rates of Growth in Foodgrain Production
in Different Districts 1964-65 to 1977-78

Districts	Rates of Growth in Cereal Production,		Rates of Population Growth	Growth in per capita Food Production.	
	Actual ₁	Expected ₂		Actual ₁	Expected ₂
Dacca	1.17	1.49	3.1	-1.93	-1.61
Mymensingh	2.87	3.39	2.5	0.37	0.69
Faridpur	0.11	0.49	1.9	-1.79	-1.41
Chittagong	4.06	3.07	2.9	1.16	2.17
Chittagong H.T.	0.66	1.60	2.2	-1.54	-0.60
Nonkhali	3.66	4.70	2.4	1.26	2.30
Sylhet	0.77	2.62	2.4	-1.63	0.22
Comilla	1.05	2.66	2.2	-1.15	0.46
Rajshahi	0.56	1.06	3.3	-2.74	-2.24
Dinajpur	1.05	1.85	3.2	-2.15	-1.35
Rangpur	1.27	1.76	2.8	-1.53	-1.04
Dogra	1.27	1.75	2.7	-1.43	-0.93
Pabna	1.58	1.78	2.8	-1.22	-1.02
Barisal	1.46	1.93	1.9	-0.44	0.03
Khulna	-0.59	0	2.9	-3.49	-2.90
Jessore	1.64	2.23	3.3	-1.64	-1.07
Kushtia	0.27	0.48	3.8	-3.53	-3.32

Notes: 1) Estimated from semi-logarithmic trend line fitted on the entire series.

2) Estimated from the trend line based on the series excluding 1971-72 and 1972-73 (for dissociating the adverse effect of the war of liberation and the rehabilitation of refugees who went to India).

Source: Hussain, M., Foodgrain Production in Bangladesh Performance, Potential and Constraints (Mimeo) (BIDS, Dacca, 1979). P. 8.

and it is expected that the deficit would continue at least in eleven districts. Thus the deficit of foodgrains is very acute in Bangladesh and consequent external dependence on food supply has been witnessed over the last two decade.

Apart from the need to have a sustained growth of 3 to 5 per cent per year to keep pace with population and increasing income per head, A.R. Khan, suggests that there is the need for a once-for-all jump of about 15 per cent otherwise foreign exchange has to be wasted for the imports of food.⁹

Adoption of New Technology

The adoption of modern technology and the use of high yielding varieties is spreading very slowly in Bangladesh. By 1977-78 only about 16 per cent of the total foodgrain area was brought under HYV.¹⁰ A very small per cent of the area say 12 per cent, was under mechanised irrigation system in 1979-80. Per acre usage of chemical fertilizers for cultivated land in that year was only 36 lbs. Between 1973-74 and 1979-80, distribution of fertilizer increased at an annual rate of 14.4 per cent against 16.3 per cent before independence (1969-61 to 1969-70). The first

9. Khan A.R., I.A. 3, P.45.

10. Hussain H., M.7, P. 38.

plan target of providing irrigation facilities up to 22 per cent of the total cultivable land was achieved only a little more than half of the fixed target by the end of the Plan.¹¹ During the same Plan period the 2nd draft Plan observes, the distribution of seeds suffered from the bottlenecks of procurement and delivery system.¹² Thus the spread of new technology in Bangladesh has been not quite satisfactory.

Poverty in Rural Bangladesh

Bangladesh is overwhelmingly rural and more than 90 per cent of the population live in rural areas. The combination of a very unfavourable average resource endowment and a high degree of inequality has resulted in an unprecedented concentration of extreme poverty in rural areas.

11. Government of Bangladesh, The Second Five Year Plan 1980-85 (Draft), Planning Commission, (May, 1980, Dacca), PP 1-11.

12. Ibid P. 11.

Table 1.7Incidence of Poverty in Rural Bangladesh

Year	<u>Absolutely Poor</u>		<u>Extremely Poor</u>	
	House-holds	Popu-lation	House-holds	Popu-lation
1963-64	51.7	40.2	9.8	5.2
1968-69	84.1	76.0	34.6	25.1
1973-74	86.7	78.5	54.1	42.1
1975 (First Quarter)	70.3	61.8	50.5	41.8

Source: Khan A.R., 'Poverty and Inequality in Rural Bangladesh' in Poverty and Landless-ness in Rural Asia (ILO Study, Geneva, 1977), P. 158.

The above table indicates the sharp increase in rural poverty between 1963-64 and 1973-74. The percentage of people under absolute poverty¹³ has increased in Bangladesh from 40 to 62 per cent between 1963 and 1975. Another notable point is that in 1963-64 only 5 per cent of the rural population was categorised as extremely poor¹⁴ but this proportion rose to over 40 per cent by mid-seventies.

13. Only 90 per cent of the calorie needs of the 'absolutely poor' are satisfied. Khan A.R., ibid. P. 147.

14. Only 80 per cent of the calorie needs of the 'extremely poor' are satisfied. Ibid., P. 148.

Real Wages of Agricultural Labourers

Agricultural labourers occupy bottom position of the agrarian structure. They are the poorest people in the economy. Their main source of income is wages. A large section of rural population is dependent on wages as their major source of income. An assessment of their real income over time could also throw some light on the level of poverty in rural areas. The money wages of agricultural labourers have improved over the period of 1949 and 1975, but their real wages declined sharply during late forties and fifties. In the later decade, there was a steady rise in real wages. Again after 1964 real wages started to decline. The sharp fall in the early 1970s may be due to absolute decline in agricultural output. Secondly, the growing population pressure and the absence of non-agricultural labourers. (see table 1.8).

It has been seen that modest increases in yields per acre have not been adequate to meet the demands for growing population. While several factors have contributed to stagnation in the agricultural sector (e.g. inadequate inputs and infrastructure), these are not unrelated to the defective agrarian structure and the "mode of production" in Bangladesh agriculture. It is in this context that reform of "relations in production"

Table 1.8

Agricultural Wages in Bangladesh
(Taka per person per day)

Year	Money Wage (taka) (1)	Index of Cost of Living (1963-64=100) (2)	Real Wage $\frac{(1)}{(2)} \times 100$ (3)
1949	1.92	81.4	2.36
1950	1.62	76.2	2.13
1951	1.56	78.2	2.00
1952	1.52	77.2	1.97
1953	1.38	80.6	1.71
1954	n.a.	75.4	n.a.
1955	1.32	68.6	1.92
1956	n.a.	80.7	n.a.
1957	1.70	85.4	1.99
1958	1.85	96.1	1.93
1959	1.85	95.5	1.94
1960	1.95	94.9	2.06
1961	2.18	95.9	2.27
1962	2.25	102.0	2.21
1963	2.41	102.2	2.36
1964	2.65	99.7	2.66
1965	2.34	105.4	2.22
1966	2.40	126.1	1.90
1967	2.60	135.3	1.92
1968	2.75	134.6	2.04
1969	3.12	140.3	2.22
1970	2.98	132.8	2.24
1971	3.15	n.a.	n.a.
1972	3.93	246.4	1.60
1973	5.59	351.5	1.59
1974	8.04	565.2	1.42
1975 (1st Half)	9.43	735.6	1.28

Notes: n.a.: not available Source: M.H. Khan, Poverty and landlessness in Rural Asia, (Geneva, 1977) P. 151.

in agriculture through land reforms assumes crucial significance. Accordingly we shall turn to the significance of land reforms in Bangladesh agriculture in the next chapter.

Chapter IILAND REFORMS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"Countries with retarded economic growth are in general characterized by a large proportion of their population depending on subsistence agriculture. Therefore, among the actions intended to release the forces which may initiate or accelerate the process of economic growth, agrarian reform usually receives a high priority. The principle seems to have been accepted that in conditions of agricultural over-population, individual peasant holding is the best economic policy".¹

This observation exactly conforms to the conditions prevailing in Bangladesh economy. An overwhelmingly dominant part of the population depends upon agriculture in Bangladesh. Agricultural land is divided in lakhs of dwarf-sized farm holdings while ownership of large areas of cultivated land is in the hands of a few big landlords. Hunger for land is very much acute in Bangladesh. The dignity of the human element is considered, here, in terms of ownership of agricultural land.

1. Dandekar, V.M., 'Economic Theory and Agrarian Reform Oxford Economic Papers, Vol. 14, No.1, 1962. P. 69.

In such countries, the agricultural land becomes a crucial part in their developmental efforts. The main obstacle to development in these countries is the institutional structure. The predominant agricultural countries face a dilemma as to what type of development is suitable to them. Thus the process of development has to be clearly defined. Prior to analysing the policy measures which corrects the asset structure in agriculture. In this connection Lewis' and Myrdal's approaches are briefly analysed here.

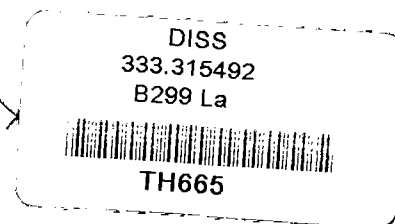
Economic Development

Arthur Lewis² propounded two-sector model approach to the problem of economic development consisting of the farm and non-farm sectors. In this model the farm sector is characterised as backward, traditional agriculture and the non-farm sector mainly organised, industrial sector. This approach highlighted the institutional dichotomy existing between the farm and non-farm sector. The farm sector functions as a supplier of surplus labour and wage goods to the non-farm sector. The main analytical consequences were seen to be availability of labour at constant real wage to the non-farm sector and the consequent generation of an increasing mass of surplus in the form of profits in the farm sector. It drew an optimistic picture of a steady

process of expansion that all profits are invested, constrained only by the eventual rise in real wages. This view of development was notable for stressing the significance of the availability of a marketable surplus of wage goods at stable prices and provided a convenient starting point for the "dual economy" models and for the formulation of developmental policies for developing economies.

This approach obscures the complexity of the production and exchange processes at work in the economy. It is clear that the aggregative treatment of farm sector as well as non-farm sector suppresses important heterogeneities within which generate conflicting developments, ultimately affecting the overall accumulation process.³

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2. Lewis, W.A., 'Development With Unlimited Supplies of Labour' The Manchester School Economic and Social Studies, Vol. 22, No.2, 1954. PP. 139-91.
 3. Bhardwaj, Krishna, 'Towards A Macro Economic Framework For A Developing Economy: The Indian Case' Manchester School Economic and Social Studies, Vol.47, No.3, 1979. P. 272.



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The other approach of economic development of these countries was propounded by Gunnar Myrdal.⁴ Myrdal's approach was more realistic compared to earlier one, in dealing the problem of economic development. Development, is defined "as an improvement of the host of undesirable conditions in the social system that have perpetuated a state of underdevelopment."⁵ This approach not only suggests the rise of productivity i.e. higher output per head of the population but also an improvement in the levels of living. It raises an important and realistic pre-condition of great equality for speeding up production and development.

Summing up the hitherto laid down equalization of property rights in agriculture, Myrdal generalizes that in South Asian region, there have been no revolutionary disturbances in property relationships with agrarian structure. Myrdal rejects the concept of land to the tiller on the ground that it is afflicted with certain practical defects and proposes an alternative of nationalisation of land holdings. In his opinion

4. Myrdal, Gunnar, Asian Drama An Inquiry Into The Poverty of Nations, (Abridged in one volume by Seth S. King) (Great Britain, 1977). P. 29.

5. Ibid., P. 30.

opinion large-scale ownership per se should not be regarded as an evil if it provides genuine gains in efficiency and productivity.⁶

According to his own arguments, if 'soft' states are not in a position to implement the policies of redistribution of lands, how it can be possible for them to nationalise the whole agricultural land? Although Myrdal's approach unfolds the heterogenities of the agrarian structure, while dealing with development problem, he sidetracks the issue by suggesting the large-scale ownership on the basis of efficiency and productivity. The crucial thing in the land reform policies are the demolition of the monopoly of a few on land property. This will create an atmosphere to intensifying the work on land by cultivators and thereby contribute to increased production.

It is incorrect to say that investing more in modernization of agriculture can solve the problem of economic development. One of the widely noted consequences of the green revolution in India is the accentuation and concentration of the surplus in the hands of the rich peasantry. Another notable thing

6. Ibid., P. 232.

is that increased productivity in agriculture has not led to an assured supply of marketable surplus on terms favourable to industry. On the other hand, the concentration of surplus in the hands of the richer peasantry has not, in all cases furthered the ploughing back of productive capital into agriculture to the extent possible.⁷

Land Reform and Economic Development

Land reform is not a modern phenomenon. Since the days of Adam Smith land tenure reforms have been debated in various classical and Marxist literature,⁸ although the concept of contemporary land reform is new in the sense that it is being linked to the developmental implications and to its possible contribution to improved agricultural productivity and expanded employment.⁹

7. Bhradwaja, K., ibid. P. 282

8. Smith, Adam, An Enquiry Into The Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations, (Modern Library Edition, New York); Ricardo, David, The Principles of Political Economy, (John Murry, London); Marx, Karl, Communist Manifesto, (International Publishers, New York).

9. Dorner, Peter, Land Reforms and Economic Development (Great Britain, 1972). P. 17.

Agriculture plays an important role in the process of transformation of backward economy into developed one and there are many interactions and inter-dependencies between agriculture and industry. The agricultural sector must contribute both capital and labour to the non-agricultural sector in the process of development. Secondly the transfer of manpower from agricultural to non-agricultural occupation is inherent in the over-all transformation process of development. The process of development is directly linked with land tenure institution prevailing in the agricultural sector. The land tenure system embodies those legal and contractual or customary arrangements whereby people in farming gain access to productive opportunities on the land. The land tenure structure determines the pattern of income distribution and thereby the development process.

The less industrialized countries like Bangladesh heavily depend upon the agricultural sector and the prevailing land tenure in that sector as a determinant to the development process. A one-sided emphasis on economic growth as earlier pointed out, enhances the gulf between rich and poor. Thus an increase in investment and introduction of new techniques in agriculture are not substitutes for land reforms. Indeed, land reform becomes increasingly imperative

as the rate of adoption of new techniques increases. Hence land reform becoming increasingly urgent in many of the less industrialized countries to accelerate the process of development.

Large Versus Small Farms

The subject of land reform is becoming highly controversial. Some argue that under distributive land reforms equality and growth will come in conflict with each other. The argument is based on two main propositions. Firstly, it is held that there is economies of scale in agricultural production as in industry. Secondly the concentration of income and wealth is required for a high savings rate and thus for high investment and capital formation in agriculture.¹⁰

Returns to scale refer to the technical efficiency in the engineering relationship between inputs and outputs. Increasing returns to scale in agriculture might be expected if crops requiring farm machinery would need some minimum scale in order to utilize the machinery fully. But this consideration is generally of limited relevance to countries like Bangladesh, where scarcity of capital and abundance of labour recommend the use of

10. Rahman, Atiqur, 'The debate over Land Reform in Bangladesh Some Issues Reconsidered,' Asian Affairs Vol. 1, No. 1 (Dacca, 1980). P. 53.

non-mechanized techniques, certainly from the social point of view. Recent production function studies on Brazil and India reported constant or decreasing returns to scale.¹¹

The relationship between high saving rate and concentration of income is also unsupported empirically.¹² The big land owners in developing countries use their surplus for luxury consumption and for purchasing land from and money lending to the poor, both of which finance the consumption of the poor.¹³

In the developed countries of Western Europe and Japan, the landlord classes were sufficiently entrepreneur minded to use rents (or at least a large share of them) for capital formation. The real disadvantage about agricultural rents in underdeveloped countries is not so much that they are high, but rather that they are too often used up for luxury consumption and too seldom invested in new productive ventures. When the luxuries

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11. Berry, D.A. and W.R. Cline, Farm Size, Factor Productivity and Technical Change in Developing Countries, (ILO, Geneva, 1976).
12. Hussain, Mahabub, Agrarian Reform and Rural Development In Asia. A Review of Recent Experiences In Selected Countries (Mimeo), (Dacca, 1979). P. 122.
13. Tai, Hung Chan, Land Reform And Policies. A Comparative Analysis, (Berkeley, 1974). P. 38.

have a high import content, or rely to high degree of traditional handicrafts and service occupations in the home country, they largely fail to set off progressive capital accumulation.¹⁴

The dominant influence on saving was family income. When the income was held constant there was, in fact, a negative relationship between savings and landholdings.¹⁵ This suggests that creation of smaller holdings should not curtail agricultural savings. A redistribution of land can help in limiting the extraction of surplus through rent and usury by a non-productive class from the actual producers. These producers can use their increased incomes for increasing the productivity of land, or for consumption, which at the current low level of income, may help to increase labour productivity through better nutrition and health.

It should be mentioned that the existence of large size ownerships does not necessarily mean that land would be cultivated in large scales. In backward agriculture like Bangladesh it frequently gives rise to absentee landlordism and tenancy cultivation on small scale or partial landlordism where the large land owner cultivates

14. Dorving, P., 'Flexibility and Security in Agrarian Reform Programmes', in Agrarian Reform and Economic Growth in Developing Countries, (US Department of Agriculture, 1962). P. 37.

15. Berry, R.A., and Cline, W.R., n. 11. PP. 144-48.

a part of his ownership holding under his own management, parceling out the rest in small plots to a number of tenants.

Table 2.1

Pattern of Surplus Utilization in
Rural Bangladesh 1974

Income, Sur- plus And Heads of Investment	Mymensingh			Comilla		
	Large Owner ₁	Small Owner ₂	Ten- ant ₃	Large Owner ₁	Small Owner ₂	Ten- ant ₃
Income (Taka/III)	21998	5406	6769	22955	4839	5248
Surplus (Taka/III)	9883	239	329	8761	336	473
Surplus as per- centage of Income	44.9	4.4	4.8	38.2	6.9	9.0
Non Productive Investment	87.6	36.0	30.3	82.3	49.1	62.8
Productive Investment	12.4	64.0	69.7	17.7	50.9	37.2

Note: 1) Owning more than 7.5 acres, 2) Owning less than 2.5 acres, 3) Partly rented.

Source: Rahman, A., Agrarian Structure and Capital Formation
A Study of Bangladesh Agriculture, (Unpublished
Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, England).

The above table reveals that small owners and tenants utilise a larger portion of their surplus for productive investment in agriculture than large owners do. This means that the marginal rate of capital formation is higher for smaller cultivators. It suggests that creation of small holdings should not necessarily curb

agricultural capital formation. Indeed, a redistribution of land would reduce the exploitation through rent and usury by leisure classes. The poor people can use their increased income for overcoming malnutrition, which will help to raise their efficiency in production. Thus the small farmer use their surplus for capital formation and for raising the production efficiency.

Farm Size and Productivity

The debate on size of holding and productivity per acre was started after the publication of farm management studies (FMS) in India.¹⁶ The main proposition centred around this debate was inverse relationship between yield per acre and size of the holding. This debate was continued in Bangladesh also.

A.K. Sen who initiated this debate, stated in his paper that the smaller farms are characterised by peasant family cultivation and the large farms by wage-based capitalist cultivation. Production is then carried on to the point in smaller farms where the marginal productivity

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16. i) Government of India, Studies in the Economics of Farm Management, (these studies initiated in 1954-55 were conducted in the states of Uttar Pradesh Punjab, Bombay, Madras, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh).
- ii) Government of India, Farm Management in India A Study based on Recent Investigations, (April, 1966).
17. Sen, A.K., 'An Aspect of Indian Agriculture', The Economic Weekly, (Annual Number, February, 1962).

of labour is zero (or atleast less than the prevailing market wage rate) and stops on the capitalist farms at the point where the marginal product equals the market wage. Hence the smaller farmers are able to obtain greater output per acre by using more labour than the larger farms.

Khusro, A.H.¹⁸ has attempted to explain inverse relationship in terms of the hypothesis that soil fertility goes on decreasing with the increase in the size of the farms, which accounts for low productivity per acre in bigger farms. Khuro substantiates his argument by showing that land revenue (which he assumes as a 'reasonable' index of fertility of land) per acre goes on declining as farm size expands. This proves that fertility factor is quite significant for explaining the inverse relationship between size of holding and productivity per acre.

Mahabub Hussain¹⁹ has also attempted to explain inverse relationship between farm size and productivity in Bangladesh agriculture. Hussain explains that the negative size effect on land productivity in a situation where

18. Khusro, A.H., 'Returns to Scale in Indian Agriculture' Indian Journal of Agriculture Economics, (October - December, 1964).

19. Hussain, M., 'Farm size, Tenancy and Land Productivity: An Analysis of Farm Level Data in Bangladesh Agriculture' Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, July, 1977).

the pre-capitalist organisation of production exists and market has a limited role and cultivators have differential access to various resources.²⁰

In traditional agriculture with backward production forces, there is indeed more scope for variation of labour than of material inputs. A cultivator favourably endowed with labour can use more labour through a combination of (a) More use of labour in individual crop activities (b) more intensive use of land during the year and, (c) the choice of labour intensive crops.²¹

Table 2.2

Productivity of Land Labour by Farm Size

Size Group (in Acres)	Productivity of land (in taka)	Output per Acre (in Taka)	Cropping intensity (in %)	Productivity of Labour (in Taka/Mandays)
0 - 2.49	552	372	149	7.61
2.5 - 4.99	560	375	149	8.13
5.0 - 7.99	463	336	138	7.62
7.5 & over	326	258	126	6.49
All Farms	449	316	142	7.38

Source: 'Farm Size and Productivity in Bangladesh Agriculture: A case study of Phulbar Farms', Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. 3 No. 1. P. 478.

21. Hussain, M., p.19 P. 289.

The above table indicates that productivity of land is more or less the same upto 5 acres but then it decreases sharply with the increase in size. Secondly, cropping intensity and output per acre²¹ are also inversely related to farm size. Thus less intensive cultivation of land in larger farms and low output per acre are both responsible for the low productivity of land.²² So whatever conception of productivity is used, larger farms in the area are less efficient in the use of land than the smaller farms.²³ Except very small farms, labour productivity is also inversely related to farm size. This indicates larger farms are also less efficient in the use of labour than smaller farms.

21. 'output per Acre' is defined as, output per unit of gross cultivated land. Ibid., P. 477
22. Productivity of land is defined as output per unit of net cultivated land. Ibid., P. 477
23. Hussain has estimated farm size and land productivity variables from the disaggregated farm data of all the 95 farms from Phulpur village. The relations estimated by the ordinary least square method gave the following results:

$$Y_1 = 570 - 15.43x, \quad R_2 = 0.0734$$

(5.7)

$$Y_2 = 383 - 7.52x, \quad R_2 = 0.0595$$

(3.1)

Where Y_1 is productivity of land in a farm (in taka) Y_2 'out put per acre' in a farm (in taka) and x the size of that farm. The size of the coefficient of farm size is negative in both the relations indicating the inverse relations between farm size and productivity of land and also output per acre. Further, the value of the coefficient is significantly different from zero at one per cent level as indicated by the value of the standard error given in parentheses below the coefficient. Ibid., P. 479.

Hossain also explains how labour intensity varies with farm size. In the absence of mechanised cultivation in this area, the range of substitution between land and labour is very small in a crop once it sown. It is risk on the part of farmer, if he tries to employ less labour than required for various farm operations like harvesting, woods clearing etc. one can reduce labour use per unit of land only in case of land preparation where a farmer can plough the land, say, three times before sowing instead of the required five times. Even in this case the yield will get affected. So in the face of labour shortage²⁴ a farmer can only economise the use of labour by allocating relatively more land among the less labour intensive crops. And if it happens that less labour intensive crops are also less productive and there is labour shortage relative to land, it is quite rational on the part of large farmer to devote more land to the less productive crops.²⁵ It is found that jute and paddy are more productive and more labour intensive.²⁶

24. Although a general labour shortage is meaningless in countries like Bangladesh, yet during peak seasons, there also the problem of labour shortage arises. Ibid., PP. 486.

25. Ibid., PP. 482-83.

26. Ibid., P. 486.

Land Availability and Feasibility of Distributive Reform

After considering the economic logic of distributive reform, naturally the question arises, whether sufficient land is available in Bangladesh to have substantial redistributive effect in favour of the poor. The most common argument against land redistribution through land ceiling measures in Bangladesh is that at the existing low land-man ratio in rural areas and the existence of large proportion of landless and near landless households as possible claimants of such lands, this is not at all a viable policy. To quote one US Agency report, 'the number of landless and near landless are too great to address in contemporary Bangladesh by a simple strategy of land redistribution, however systematic the effort'.²⁷

In this connection one has to consider the three important constraints, pointed out by Lipton. One of the constraints is that the holdings created through redistribution of land should be a viable one. Secondly, the gap between the ceiling and the minimum viable holding should not be too small to be sustainable politically or to rule out managerial diversity. Finally, the landless must be integrated within the reform.²⁸

27. Jannuzi, F.T., and J.T. Peach, Report on the Hierarchy of Interests in Bangladesh, (Washington, 1977). P. 77.

28. Lipton, M., 'Towards a Theory of Land Reform' in David Lohman, (ed.) Agrarian Reform and Reformism, (London, 1974), pp. 253-87.

Table 2.3

Expected Surplus Land Under Alternative
Land Ceilings 1979

Land ceiling (in acre)	House holds	Surplus land as percentage of all land	Holdings of 1.67 Acre After Redistribution		
			As % of all households owning less than 1.67 acres	As % of owners having less 1.67 acre & Agri. Wage labourers	As % of cultivators owning less than 1.67 acres
10	1.7	9.8	85.6	75.0	113.2
7.5	2.7	13.6	39.6	83.5	126.1
5.0	5.4	20.2	46.6	98.2	148.2

Source: Hussain, M., Desirability and Feasibility of Land Reforms in Bangladesh, (Mimeo, Dacca, 1979) P. 22.

One can apply the above criteria to agricultural reform policies in Bangladesh, to see whether the distributive reform policies are feasible. In this connection the data on expected surplus land under alternative land ceilings is available. If the surplus land is to be distributed among the non-viable landholders, as well as among the landless for creating viable holdings, then even a 5 acre ceiling would not generate sufficient land (see table 2.3). It is assumed that the minimum viable holding in Bangladesh agriculture is 1.67 acres or 5 bighas.²⁹ If the aim is to turn

29. The IRDP Benchmark survey in Mymensingh returned that an average farm of 1.67 acre size under unirrigated conditions produce a food surplus (Contd...)

the marginal cultivators into viable holders, then even a 10 acre ceiling can release the land necessary for this purpose.

The ceiling at 10 acre level affect not even two per cent of all rural households. But the exempting the landless and near landless from the land redistribution programme would become meaningless of these programmes. Once these programmes are effectively implemented, there is every possibility of shrinkage of the employment opportunities to these classes.

Table 2.4
Occupational Distribution of Different Land
Owning Groups 1979

Occupation	Land-less (%)	Having land upto 0.5 acres of cultivated land (%)	All Heads of House holds (%)
Cultivation	2.8	22.8	30.9
Agri. Wage Labour	33.6	26.5	19.6
Cottage Industry	19.5	21.0	15.6
Transport and Construction works	5.4	33.3	3.6
Trades and Business	17.6	11.0	12.8
Service	8.0	6.0	6.9
Other (Beggars, Students, Widows etc.)	12.9	9.4	11.2

Source: Rehman, A., 'Rural Power Structure: A Study of Union Parishad Leaders in Bangladesh', The Journal of Social Studies, No. 4 (Dacca, 1979).

29. (Contd..) of the extent of 33 per cent of the family needs. So under irrigated conditions 1.67 acre level can be taken as an above subsistence' or viable holding. See Hussain, M., Desirability Feasibility of Land Reforms in Bangladesh (Mimeo, Dacca, 1979) P. 20.

The criteria of land to the tiller applied then the problem can be resolved to the greater extent. One can look at the occupational distribution of different landowning groups obtained from the 1979, BIDS, survey given in table 2.4 shows that about 2.8 per cent of the landless are cultivators and another 33.6 per cent are agricultural labourers. Among the near landless also only about 50 per cent are employed in agriculture either as wage labourers or cultivators. So if the above said criteria is applied for the eligibility of getting land, then about a half of the landless will automatically be excluded from the land redistribution programme. Then the other half of the landless, those who are actually working on land would be benefited out of this criteria.

Thus the resultant equalitarian land distribution would mean that some stake of production will be provided to the previous landless. The other effect of this programme is that it will erode the rural power base of the landlords. Both these processes are inter-related. This will create a better condition for the landless to participate in production activity without institutional constraints. It is true that the land redistribution programme is not a sufficient condition to increase the production and to raise the levels of living but it is a necessary condition to accelerate the pace of development.

The purpose of the study is only to focus on this, hence it is confined to the necessary condition. Thus the policy of land to the tiller is very much relevant and viable in Bangladesh economy.

Chapter III

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE OF BANGLADESH

The land reform measures adopted by successive governments in Bangladesh can be understood properly by first examining the country's agrarian structure. In this study the agrarian structure (or the land system) is understood to mean the institutional framework of agriculture; it includes the distribution of ownership in land; the forms of land tenure (e.g. public or private ownership tenancy) and the forms of agricultural employment (such as share cropping serfdom, wage paid labour)¹.

This chapter consists of three sections. In the first section the evolution of agrarian system of East Bengal during the British period is examined. A brief historical review of pre-1947 agrarian structure would be dealt with in this section. In the second section the main changes that took place in East Bengal land system during Pakistan regime is discussed. In the third section we shall examine the existing agrarian structure of Bangladesh and attempt to identify the different agricultural classes.

1. Varriner, D., Land Reforms Principles and Practice (London, 1969) P.

Evolution of Agrarian System
In East Bengal during British Period

Prior to the British, land ownership rights in Bengal vested neither in the state nor in the fiscal agents known as zamindars but in cultivating masses.² In 1793, British colonialists, after several experiments, introduced the "Permanent Settlement" in Bengal. This Permanent Settlement created the zamindari class in rural side, as land proprietors in the English sense of managing, transferring and mortgaging land as they pleased. But the zamindars were not owners of these lands. A zamindari tenure was, therefore, a form of political and socio-economic authority or control. Moreover, his tenants and sub-tenants and sub-sub-tenants all held similar kinds of power and privilege each based upon similar kind of settlement and agreement.³

This settlement fixed permanently the land revenue at ten-eleventh of the rental value of land and the zamindars were allowed to retain the remainder, i.e., one-tenth of the state share plus any future increment that might result from the extension of cultivation

2. Mukerjee, B., Land Problems of India, (Calcutta, 1933) P. 16.

3. Frykenberg, R.E., (Ed.) 'Introduction Analytical and Historical Prospects', in Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia, (New Delhi, 1979) P. 8.

or other causes.⁴ This zamindari system had created, in course of time, a large number of rent collecting intermediaries merged between the zamindars and the actual tillers of the land. In some districts, it reached astounding proportions, a single estate having fifty or more rent receivers between the zamindars at the top and the actual tillers of the land at the bottom.⁵ These intermediaries were interested only in collecting the rent from the cultivators. They were hardly shown any interest to improve the agricultural production.⁶ Moreover, the state enacted two acts, Rent Act of 1859 and Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, which further strengthened these intermediaries rather than improving the conditions of overwhelming majority of the tenants, sub-tenants and tenants-at-will.⁷ They remained outside the protection of law and had to bear this host of rent receivers. During the period of great depression (1929-33), the ranks of insecure and rack-rented tenants and share croppers had swollen further. Many of the hereditary occupancy tenants also lost their land during the years of great depression.⁸

4. Dutta, K., et al., Bangladesh Economy, (New Delhi, 1973) P.119.

5. Ibid., P. 120.

6. Abdullah, A., 'Land Reforms and Agrarian Change in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, January, 1976), P. 68.

7. Dutta, K., et al., n.4, P. 120

8. Ibid., PP. 120-21

The agrarian structure which evolved during British period in undivided Bengal, thus reflected large disparities in the ownership of land with absentee landlordism. The landlords were keeping aloof from any kind of risk of production and investment. This system resulted in mushroom growth of middlemen between zamindars and the actual tillers. They were not only adopting other than economic pressures on working peasantry to exploit them, but also creating an atmosphere of insecurity of tenancy.

To alter the situation in 1938 the government of Bengal appointed a land revenue enquiry commission, known as the Flood Commission, with the main object of going into the question of retention or abolition of the zamindari system. This commission after exhaustive enquiries recommended in 1940 the abolition of the zamindari system, and the elimination of all grades of rent receivers on payment of suitable compensation. However, these recommendations came into force only after a decade due to various reasons. The factors causing delay were mainly world war II, severe famine, communal riots and partition of Bengal. All these conditions delayed Flood's recommendations to be translated into reality and until 1950 nothing tangible came out of the Commission's recommendations.

Evolution of the Agrarian System
in East Bengal during Pakistan Period

At the time of partition, Permanent Settlement had extended almost all over East Bengal. The total area of East Bengal was divided under four major types of estates. Table 3.1 shows that the permanently settled estates were in large number say, 80 per cent of the cultivated area occupied by these estates. In addition to the permanently settled estates, there were a sizeable number of revenue free estates, chiefly in the nature of grants made by the Mughal emperors to loyal servitors and honoured by the British rulers, though many of these were later resumed. And also there were some temporary settled private estates,

Table 3.1

Types of Estates in East Bengal

Category	Number	Area (million acres)
Permanently settled revenue paying estates	73,157	37.37
Revenue free estates	44,300	1.97
Temporary settled estates	2,387	8.34
Crown estates	3,243	3.65

Source: Government of Pakistan, Economy of Pakistan, (Karachi, 1951)

where settlements were made after some amount of disaffection and some crown estates were also existing, which were called 'Khasmahals'.⁹

Apart from these estates, the following categories of people were connected with agriculture and had different interests in land. These various interests involved in agriculture may be conveniently divided into six broad categories. They are as follows:¹⁰

1) The proprietors, whom we call zamindars let out the lands on rent to the cultivating population or tenure holders.

2) The tenure holders who generally took settlement of land not for cultivation but for making income by sub-letting it on higher rent to either another tenure holder or ryots.

3) Superior tenants who enjoyed fixed rents, permanent heritable and transferable rights in their lands.

4) Inferior tenants, these type of tenants were liable to eviction at the expiry of contractual agreement

10. Siddiqui, E., The Political Economy of Land Reforms in Bangladesh, (Mimeo, Dacca, 1979), PP. 22-23.

Not exceeding 12 years and without transferable rights, on the average inferior tenants were paying the double amount of rents when compared to the superior tenants.

5) Share-croppers were tenants-at-will, renting in land on a year to year basis. The contract was oral, and they were paying generally fifty per cent of the gross produce as rent. They had absolutely no protection under the law.

Table 3.2

Area Rcnt etc. by Categories of people
Holding Different Rights Over Land 1950 11

Number of Tenures	1702
Number of Superior Tenants interests ('000)	9372
Area under Superior Tenants ('000 acres)	17,926
Number of Inferior Tenants ('000)	3108
Area under Inferior Tenants ('000 acres)	2172
Average size of the Superior Tenants (acres)	1.85
Average size of the Inferior Tenants (acres)	0.69
Rent per acre of Superior Tenants land	Rs. 3.19
Rent per acre of Inferior Tenants land	Rs. 5.68

Source: Government of Pakistan, Economy of Pakistan, (Karachi, 1951) P. 69.

11. The data claim to refer to 1950, but a comparison with Flood's Committee Report 1940 reveals, that only some modifications have been made for the partitioned districts. Thus the figures related to 1939-40. The categories which have shown are legal categories, the same person may hold more than one interests, and conversely more than one person may be co-sharer in the same interest. Therefore the number of tenures need not be equal to the number of tenure-holders.

6) Landless agricultural labourers, who were neither owning land nor they were leasing in land. They were totally alienated from the means of production viz, land.

It is clear from the above table 3.2 that twenty million acres, or roughly seventy per cent of the land was operated by various types of tenants or ryots. The area under superior tenants was very high. It also shows that inferior tenants were poorer than superior tenants. They were having not only smaller average holding, but also had to pay a higher rent per acre compared to the superior tenant. However, the above table is silent about the land cultivated by agricultural labourers and share croppers, since they were not recognised as tenants of any category.

Divergent estimates on the area cultivated by share croppers and agricultural labourers is available. According to Fikud's enquiry in 1938-40 (with corrections to obtain Bangladesh figures as before), seventy-four per cent of the total area enquired into was cultivated by family labour, nineteen per cent by share croppers, and only seven per cent by hired labour.¹² This estimate reveals that the importance of wage labour is less

12. Abdullah, A., ibid., P. 72.

than that of share cropping. The same Floud Commission conducted fairly large sample study of the way people earn their living, which shows reverse estimates about share croppers and agricultural labourers. It enquired 11,314 families, among them 12 per cent lived 'mainly or entirely' as share croppers while another 18.6 per cent lived 'mainly or entirely' as agricultural labourers.¹³

Table 3.3

1951 Census Data on Tenurial Pattern

Status	Number	Percentage
1. Owning all land tilled	3743082	35.3
2. Owning part and Renting part	4394889	40.9
3. Renting all land tilled	621299	5.9
4. Renting and also working hire	410721	3.9
5. Landless labourers	1513629	15.0
6. Total	10623620	100.0

Source: Government of Pakistan, Census 1951, Vol. I, (East Pakistan), (Karachi, 1951)

If the Floud Commission's sample study estimates are compared with the 1951 census data presented in table 3.3, then the Floud's figures come quite close to those provided by 1951 census. If it is assumed, that

13. Ibid., P. 73

all the people in third and fourth categories of the above table, were living 'mainly' as labourers or share croppers then it would appear that 2.54 million i.e., twentyfive per cent of the total agricultural labour force were 'mainly' share croppers and agricultural labourers.

Table 3.4

Distribution of Families by Size of
Land Holding 1938-39

Total Number of Families	Average Holding per Family(acres)	<u>Percentage of Family Holding</u>					
		Below 2acre	2-4	3-4	4-5	5-10	Above 10acre
11316	4.02	45.0	11.0	9.3	7.5	16.1	7.7

Source: Government of Bengal, Report of Land Revenue Commission (Sir Francis Floud), VI Vol. (Alipore, 1940) P.115.

Note: 1) Percentages do not add up to hundred because of cumulated rounding off.
2) Floud Commission collected data for entire Bengal before partition, after excluding the areas which now in East Bengal, the relevant data is presented in the Table 3.4.

The data presented in the above table was collected by Floud Commission on the distribution of land holdings among families in East Bengal. It is clear from the table, that though the average size of the holding was four acres, about half of the families were owning below

two acres of land. Among them also, as it has been earlier pointed out, twentyfive per cent of them were not owning any land; either they might be landless labourers or living as bargaders. At the same time a little more than seven per cent of the families were owning more than ten acres of land.

During the time of partition, thus, the general picture that emerges was one of a peasant economy dominated by the superior occupancy tenants. Although zamindari system was still continuing, however, the zamindars were very much isolated from the mainstream. One reason is that the muslims formed the bulk of the peasantry and the zamindars were mostly Hindus.¹⁴ The hatred against zamindari oppression added with communal feeling was pronounced at that time in isolating the zamindars. The 'Tebhaga' struggle can be cited here as a best example of this hatredness.¹⁵ This struggle was launched by share croppers against zamindars on the issue of produce sharing. During the partition time the communal frenzy forced the Hindu zamindars to migrate to India and subsequently in the year 1950, the government of East Pakistan brought out a legislation called East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, which abolished zamindari system in East Bengal.

14. Sen, S., Agrarian Relations in India, 1793-1947, (New Delhi, 1979), P. 195.

15. Ibid., PP. 195-207.

All these conditions created a favourable situation to the superior occupancy tenants during the initial years of Pakistan regime, to strengthen their position in the East Bengal agrarian structure. Notwithstanding the legal prohibition of sub-letting, this blatant form of tenancy was also existing during that period. Landlessness was very much widespread and not less than one-fourth of the rural families were not owning any piece of land.

Size Distribution and Ownership of Land Holdings:-

After the enactment of East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, the data relating to size distribution and tenurial pattern are available. It is useful to study the emerging agrarian structure in East Bengal until liberation. The Agriculture Census of East Pakistan 1960 and Master Survey of Agriculture 1968 refer to the size distribution of operational holdings. Thus it refers to the amount of land owned plus the net amount of land obtained under share cropping and other forms of rental arrangements. The percentage distribution of farms and farm areas have shown in table 3.5.

Table 3.5Size Distribution of Land Holdings

Size Group (in acres) (1)	Percentage of Farms (2)	Percentage of Farm Area (3)	Percentage of Farms (4)	Percentage of Farm Area (5)
Under 1	24.31	3.24	24.96	4.24
1 to 2.5	27.32	13.01	31.67	17.08
Small Farms	51.63	16.25	56.63	21.32
2.5 to 5.0	26.31	26.40	26.32	29.97
5.0 to 7.5	11.38	19.30	9.20	17.17
7.5 to 12.5	7.21	19.14	5.25	15.52
Medium Farms	44.90	64.84	40.77	63.66
12.5 to 25.0	3.06	14.11	2.16	10.93
25.0 to 40.0	0.35	2.91	0.36	3.30
40.0 and above	0.08	1.89	0.08	1.17
Large Farms	3.49	18.91	2.60	15.42

Source: Figures in Columns 2 and 3 are based on Pakistan Census of Agriculture, 1960 and figures in columns 4 and 5 Master Survey of East Pakistan Agriculture, 7th round, 1968.

If we take 2.5 acres to 12.5 acres size as our dividing line between large and small holdings, then large farms constituted only about 3.5 per cent of all farms but operated 19 per cent of the total area in 1960. The proportion of such farms declined by late sixties such that they constituted only 2.6 per cent of all farms and operated about 15 per cent of the total

farm area. It is also clear from the above table that the majority of farms belong to small farm group i.e., less than 2.5 acres with total land holding varying between 16 and 21 per cent. More significantly, a quarter and above of farms had to face a near landless situation as these are less than one acre in size and their share in the total holding is less than 5 per cent. The share of medium farm group has changed very little.

This trend in the pattern of distribution of land holding can be explained by the growing pressure of population on land and the law of inheritance leading to sub-division and fragmentation of holdings. This has resulted in many farm households in other groups being pushed into the small size group. According to 1960 Census of Agriculture, 90 per cent of the farms accounting for 96 per cent of the farm area, were subject to fragmentation. Nearly 30 per cent of the farms and 97 per cent of medium and large size farms were subject to fragmentation.¹⁶ The advantages of large size farms were reduced by greater fragmentations.

16. Report on the 1960 World Census of Agriculture Cited in I.N. Mukerjee, 'Economic Problems and Prospects of Bangladesh', International Studies Vol. 13, No.2,

So far the operational farms have been analysed which does not truly reflect the disparities that exists in Bangladesh agriculture. In case there is prevalence of considerable proportion of renting of land, then ownership and operational holdings differ considerably. As it is pointed out by A.R. Khan,¹⁷ in case of Bangladesh, the 'ownership distribution' was far more unequal than the distribution of holdings shown in table 3.5. Large farm owners rent out a portion of land to the small owners.¹⁸ Thus the small farms have smaller ownership units than operational units whereas for the bigger farmers the operational units are smaller than the ownership units. So the ratio of ownership units to operational units decrease with size.

Tenurial Pattern of Holdings:- The data on land tenure system in Bangladesh of this period can be obtained from the 1960 census and 1968 Master Survey of Agriculture. The tenurial farms can be broadly classified into three as, owner farms, owner-cum-tenant farms, tenants, operated land either on cash rent or on share cropping basis.

17. Khan, A.R., Poverty and Landlessness in Rural Asia, (Geneva, ILO study, 1977). P. 136.

18. Ibid., P. 136

Table 3.6Bangladesh Land Tenure

Type of Tenure	Average Size of Farms (acres)		Percentage of Farms		Percentage of Farm area	
	1960	1968	1960	1968	1960	1968
Owner farms	8.1	2.7	61	66	82	83
owner-cum-Tenant farms	4.3	4.0	37	30	-	-
Tenant farms	2.4	3.0	2	4	18	17
Total	3.5	3.2	100	100	100	100

Source: Pakistan Census of Agriculture, 1960 and Master Survey of East Pakistan Agriculture, 1968, 7th round.

The average size of farms in Bangladesh was found to be 3.5 acres in 1960 and data relating to 1968 indicated a decline in the average size to 3.2 acres. At the time of partition, as it was pointed out earlier, the average size was 4 acres. Regional variation in the average size of holding was not very significant. The average size does not change much whether one considers landholding on ownership or operational basis.¹⁹

The tables 3.5 and 3.6 clearly indicates that the decline in the average size of the farms during sixties was due to growing importance of small farms and the

19. Alamgir, N., 'Some Aspects of Bangladesh Agriculture' Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, 1975). P. 267.

declining importance of large farms. However, the average size of holding is small and its distribution is highly skewed.

The magnitude of the various tenant farms can be found out by examining in two different ways. Firstly, area under different tenurial systems, secondly, the number of cultivators operating under different tenurial systems.²⁰

Table 3.8
Percentage of all Cultivators Aged
Ten Years and Above by Land Tenure
Status in Bangladesh 1961 and 1974

Land Tenure	Percentage Distribution	
	1961	1974
Owner cultivator	35 (58)	31 (49)
Owner cultivator-cu- share cropper	11 (18)	13 (21)
Share cropper	3 (5)	3 (5)
Agricultural Labourer	19 (19)	25 (25)
Unpaid family labour	32 -	28 -
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)

Source: 1961 Census of Pakistan, 1961, Vol. 2, East Pakistan, and 1974 Census Data.

20. Mukherjee, I.N., 'Agrarian Reforms in Bangladesh' Asian Survey, (California, 1976), P. 459.

According to 1960 Agricultural Census and 1968 Easter Survey of Agriculture the area under owner farms including area under owner-cum-tenant farms was 82.83 per cent in the sixties. The detailed data about how much land was rented from others and how much of it was owned is not available for 1968. The data of 1960 of this nature has been shown elsewhere. (see page 61). The area operated by pure tenancy, (that is those who lease in land and do not own any land) was only 18 per cent. Thus the ownership form of tenure was predominant in Bangladesh and the pure tenancy was not significant.

The table 3.7 shows cultivators under various forms of tenurial systems. The classification of 'unpaid family labour' in the table does not reflect any distinct category, hence, the percentage is redistributed in all other categories in proportion to the numerical strength of each of these categories.²¹ These adjusted figures are given in the table in parantheses. It is evident from the table that all little more than 40 per cent of the cultivators in Bangladesh were cultivating land under unfavourable tenurial conditions. And their ranks swelled further to not less than 50 per cent of the cultivators in

21. However it may not be correct to adjust like this. In owner cultivator group there may be a fraction which does not use the family labour at all due to various social reasons. See also footnote given by Mukherjee I.N., R.20, P. 454.

mid seventies. Share croppers are negligible according to the data shown in the above table. However the proportion of landless labourers have grown from 19 to 25 per cent.

Agricultural Labourers:- Agricultural labourers are different from share croppers. They neither own farm land nor they lease in. They are landless. They depend for their livelihood on employment in agriculture. They are the lowest category and occupy the bottom position of the Bangladesh agrarian structure. The number of agricultural labourers has increased both absolutely and as a proportion of the agricultural population. This process of increased proletarianization was brought by the conversion of families owning small amounts of land into households of landless workers. According to the censuses 1951 and 1961, the number of landless agricultural labourers increased by 63 per cent in ten years while cultivators as a whole increased by 33 per cent.²² The number of landless labourers as a percentage of total cultivators went up from 14.3 per cent in 1961 to 19.8 per cent in 1967-68. The increase in the absolute number of landless labourers was staggering! In one-and-a-half decades since 1951 they increased by

22. Abdullah, A., et al., 'Agrarian Structure and the IRDP Preliminary Considerations', Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, April, 1976). P. 212.

two-and-a-quarter times, an annual compound rate of 5 1/4 per cent.²³

Evolution of Agrarian
Structure in Post Liberation Period

Pattern of Land Ownership:- The Summary Report of the 1977 Land Occupancy Survey in Rural Bangladesh has given the latest figures about the existing landownership pattern. The data presented in the table 3.8 shows the size of the holdings, percentage of households, percentage of area and the average size of the families. One limitation of the data is that it does not indicate the distribution of big landholdings beyond 15 acres.

Table 3.8

Size Distribution of Total Owned Land in
Rural Bangladesh in 1977

Size of the Farms	Percentage of Households	Percentage of Area	Average Size of the Family
Small farms ¹	81.84	37.22	5.86
Medium farms ²	15.50	44.41	8.36
Large farms ³	2.66	18.36	10.44

Note: 1) 1 to 3 acres; 2) 3.1 to 10 acres;
3) 10.1 to 15 acres.

Source: Summary Report of the 1977 Land Occupancy Survey in Rural Bangladesh. (Dacca, 1977).

Over eleven million families and over sixty nine million people in Bangladesh live in rural areas.²⁴ The overall average size of the rural family is around six. The average size of the family is directly related to the size of the holdings. The large farms constituted only 2.6 per cent of all farms but owned about 18 per cent of the area. The overwhelming majority of the rural families say more than 80 per cent of the total, owned 37 per cent of the land. More significantly, a little more than half of the rural households had to face near landless situation, and area under them being only 7 per cent of the total. At the same time less than one per cent of the households having more than 15 acres of land owns about seven per cent of the total land. Thus the small farm households are steadily growing at the cost of medium and large farms in Bangladesh agriculture.

Tenurial Pattern of Holdings:- On the status of tenurial pattern of holdings a pilot agricultural census conducted in sixteen thanas during the year 1976 is available. In order to find out the magnitude of the tenurial pattern of holding there can be applied two criteria. One is an examination of the area under different tenurial systems and another is the examination of various forms of work done on the holdings.

24. Alim A., Land Reforms in Bangladesh, (Dacca, 1979) P.83

Table 3.2Banqladesh Land Tenure Holdings 1960 & 1976

Type of Holding	Average size of Farms (acres)		Percent- age of Farms		Percent- age of Farm area	
	1976	1960	1976	1960	1976	1960
Owner farms	3.27	3.12	58.44	52.26	54.67	53.64
Owner-cum-					26.35 ^o 18.75 ^r	28.19 ^o 17.05 ^r
Tenant Farms	3.83	4.26	41.15	32.33	45.10	45.24
Tenant farms	2.01	2.42	0.41	15.41	0.23	1.12
Total	3.50	3.54	100	100	100	100

Note: 'o' owner farm area; 'r' rented farm area.

Source: Basic Census Data of Pilot Census 1976, (Dasca, 1976).

It is clear from the data presented in the above table that the average size of all the farms have been declined except owner farms. The slight improvement in owner farms may be due to statistical error, because the 1976 data is confined only to sixteen thanas compared to 1960 Census data.

In Banqladesh an overwhelming majority of the farms are owner farms. The owner farms have grown at the cost of pure tenant farms. The sharp decline in pure tenancy

indicates that it is steadily disappearing, and also, the area under these farms declined largely. At the same time the area under part tenants has slightly improved. Thus the pure form of tenancy is being eliminated in Bangladesh agriculture.

The explicit data about the number of cultivators operating under different tenurial systems is not available for 1977. The year 1974 data of this nature as given earlier, indicates that about half of the cultivators in Bangladesh agriculture are operating under unfavourable conditions.

Alienation of Agricultural Land:- Land alienation among farmers can take place in two ways. Firstly, distress sales out of indebtedness of small and marginal farmers. Secondly, investment of large farmers on land purchases land alienation will lead to polarisation and concentration of land property among few in rural areas.

A survey of eight villages in different parts of the country was carried out, on land transactions during 1972 to 1974 by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). The data is presented in the table 3.10

Table 3.10Profile of Buyers and Sellers of land during
1972-74 in eight Villages of Bangladesh

Category of Transactors	<u>Percentage of the total Land Transacted</u>	
	<u>Coming from the group</u>	<u>Going to the group</u>
Small farmers	46.4	17.5
Medium farmers	24.2	20.0
Large farmers	11.5	32.7
Business man	3.6	9.9
Others	14.2	19.9

Source: Alamgir, M., Bangladesh: A case of Below Poverty Equilibrium Trap, (Dacca, 1979) pp. 106 & 108.

It is clear from the above table that during this period large farmers increased their holdings through purchases of land. Of the total land transacted during this period in these villages, 12 per cent came from large farmers but 33 per cent went to them.

During the period under consideration, farming became very profitable due to high prices of agricultural products. Further, with the diffusion of the HYV technology, profitability of farming increased even more, thus adding more incentive for large farmers to acquire more land while on the other hand, increasing indebtedness among small farmers forcing them to sell their assets.²⁵

25. Alamgir, M., Bangladesh: A Case of Below Poverty Level Equilibrium Trap (Dacca, 1978), p.110.

Thus the transfer of land property from small to large farmer is leading to landlessness among peasantry. Periodic famine conditions are also adding to this problem. Due to the non-availability of data this problem has not dealt here.

Landlessness in Bangladesh:- Landlessness is growing alarmingly in Bangladesh. Although landlessness is not a new thing in this country, its magnitude during the post liberation period has grown to a very large extent. Four types of landless categories have shown in the table 3.11

Table 3.11

Landlessness in Rural Bangladesh in 1977

Categories	Number of Households	Percentage of Total	Number of Persons	Percentage of Total
1) Landless	1,311,670	11.07	5,884,927	8.13
2) Landless	1,476,503	12.46	1,188,644	1.72
3) Landless	3,685,733	32.79	18,703,472	27.10
4) Landless	1,811,276	15.29	9,598,436	13.82

- Note: 1) A rural household which claims ownership of no land.
 2) A rural household that does not claim ownership of homestead land, but which may or may not claim ownership of land.
 3) A rural household that does not claim ownership of any land other than homestead land. Such a household may or may not claim ownership to homestead land.
 4) A rural household that claims ownership to some and other than homestead. Such household may or may not claim ownership to the homestead land.

Source: Summary Report of the 1977 Land Occupancy Survey of Rural Bangladesh, (Dacca, 1977)†

It is assumed that those households, who possess 0.5 acres and less are also included in landless categories. It appears from the above table that 71 per cent of the households are landless and they involve 51 per cent of the population. The number is yet to increase with the increase of population. But the rise in landlessness cannot be explained by demographic factors alone.²⁶ As it was pointed out earlier, land alienation was also contributing to this factor.

Identification of Agrarian Classes

The land reform measures undertaken by various governments in Bangladesh since 1947 has brought out certain definite changes in the agrarian structure. The net result of it was the disappearance of zamindari system. Moreover, the implementation of the land legislations, to some extent has also changed the land relationship. Therefore, to understand the classes in agriculture, as it exists now, in terms of their income and status in the rural economy, it is necessary to separate them into various categories on the basis of the actual relations of production. These agrarian classes can be broadly divided into seven. They are as follows:

26. Khan, A.R., N.16, P.156.

1) Feudal landlords: This class does not physically participate in the major agricultural operations. They generally lease out land to the tenants. They not only extract rent but also indulge in illegal exactions and usury business. They can be identified with zamindars. But this class has almost disappeared.

2) Semi-feudal landlords: They do not physically participate in the major agricultural operations. This class is neither completely feudal nor capitalist, but a mixture of both. A major portion of their income accrues from exploitation of rent, wage labour concealed tenancies like share cropping etc. This type of class is there in rural areas of Bangladesh. They are the most powerful group.²⁷

3) Capitalist landlords: They do not physically participate in the major agricultural operations and their major portion of income is derived from the exploitation of wage labour in agriculture. There is a lot of controversy on the existence of this type of class in Bangladesh. One thing can be said that, after the introduction of HYV technology in mid-sixties, capitalist landlords are emerging in Bangladesh.²⁸

27. Siddiqui, H., et al., A Study of the Impact and Implementation of Land Reforms Measures Introduced so far in four selected villages (Memo, Dacca)

28. Abdullah, A., 'Formulating a Viable Land Policy for Bangladesh Which Do We Need to Know', Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, 1978).

4) Rich Peasant: Either rich peasant or his family physically participates in the major agricultural operations and are not content with supervision alone. Utilisation of wage labour is dominant compared to the family labour. He is a surplus producing farmer. It is arbitrary to identify with large farmer mentioned earlier. They constitute less than three per cent of the rural households.

5) Middle peasant: They physically participate along with their family in agricultural operations, either on their own land or on leased-in land. They may employ wage labour to a certain extent, but the family labour input is dominant. Medium farmers and hybrid variety of tenants to a large extent, can be identified with this class. They constitute around fifteen per cent of the households.

6) Poor Peasant: They cultivate land almost entirely with family labour. They may occasionally seek work as agricultural labourer on other farms. This category fits the small farmers mentioned earlier. They constitute above 80 per cent of the households.

7) Agricultural Labourers: Those who earn their income mainly by working on the farms of others on a wage basis. These families generally own only a hut or

homestead land but in certain cases they may a small plot of land say 0.5 acre and less, and the wage income predominate overall other income. More than 70 per cent of the households are landless and they involve 51 per cent of the population.

The above categories have been worked out arbitrarily on the basis of available data, with a view to having a broad idea about agrarian relations in Bangladesh. The next chapter shall deal the analysis of legislative enactments, its implementation and its efficacy.

Chapter IVLAND REFORMS IN BANGLADESHLEGISLATIVE ENACTMENTS, IMPLEMENTATION, EFFICACY

The study of the agrarian structure of Bangladesh had shown the deteriorating economic condition of the peasant masses. With a view to restructuring the agrarian set up, various governments in Bangladesh had taken a number of measures and intervened directly¹ to reform the agrarian structure. This intervention had assumed the form of land legislations and its implementation by government agencies. This chapter deals with the land legislations enacted by various governments and its implementation along with the underlying political processes in Bangladesh. A brief historical review of British period legislations followed by the various land legislations enacted by successive governments in Bangladesh will be analysed. This will be followed in the end by a brief analysis of existing nature of power structure. These aspects shall be covered under three heads: 1) Land reform legislations; 2) Critical appraisal of land reform measures and their implementation and 3) the nature of power structure in rural Bangladesh.

1. Joshi, P.C., Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspectives, (New Delhi, 1976), P. 87.

Land Reform Legislations

(A) Pre Liberation Period:

i) The Permanent Settlement Regulation, 1793: The Permanent Settlement regulation was introduced by Lord Cornwallis during the year 1793, mainly, for the purposes of land revenue administration and prompt payment of land revenue to the government. This regulation ensured to the government realisation of a secure revenue, punctually, and with unflinching regularity. During the initial period of Permanent Settlement there were only two types of tenants or raiyats, viz, 1 'Rudkasht' (Self cultivating) and 'Paikash' (non self cultivating) raiyats and they were paying rents according to the customary pargana rates.²

The tenant's position in the Permanent Settlement regulation was vaguely defined and this gave handle to the zamindars to make arbitrary assessment of rent. The zamindars were using the loopholes in the regulation to their advantage to exploit raiyats. Thus the Permanent Settlement had left the ryots at the mercy of zamindars.

In order to solve the problems of tenants, in 1859 the British government had enacted the Rent Act. For the first time the occupancy rights of the tenants were

2. Alin A., Land Reforms in Bangladesh, (Dacca, 1979), P.29.

recognised in this Act. The tenants who were holding the lands at their disposal continuously for 12 years were conferred with this right. And their rents could not be enhanced except on specific and reasonable grounds provided in the Act.³

However, this act and its subsequent amendment in 1869 failed to remove the growing friction between the zamindars and tenants. Zamindars were adopting coercing methods on tenants to exploit them and to prevent them from acquiring occupancy rights. They were creating insecurity of tenancy to the tenants. Continuance of this situation resulted, consequently, in large scale agrarian conflicts and anti-zamindari riots during the years of 1872 and 1876.⁴ In view of growing discontent, one more legislation was enacted in 1885, called the Bengal Tenancy Act. This Act classified the tenants as tenure holders, raiyats and under raiyats. It had provided more rights to the tenants according to their grades.⁵

3. Chandra, B., The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India, (New Delhi, 1977), P. 445.

4. Ibid., P.446

5. The act periodically underwent several important amendments in 1928, 1938 and 1940.

Thus, it led to the existence of broadly three types of tenancies in Bengal before independence. They were superior tenants enjoying occupancy, transferability and inheritency of interests and fixed amount of rent. Secondly, inferior tenants, were also called non-occupancy tenants. They were liable to eviction at the expiry of contractual agreement, not more than for 12 years, between them and proprietor or superior tenants. Transferable right was absent in their case but with the permission of their proprietor, they could sublet the land. Thirdly, under raiyats were also called bargadars. They were renting lands on year to year basis. Their contracts were oral and paying half of the produce as rents to their proprietor. The legislations brought out by British government had not given any benefit to those type of tenants.⁶

In 1885 and 1906 the Indian National Congress and Muslim League came into being respectively. In 1929, the Muslims belonging to the Congress formed the All Bengal Proja Samity. The Congress, Muslim League and Proja Samity were representing the same interests of the feudal and urban middle classes. The only difference

6. Roy, S.P., Peasant Revolt and Democratic Struggles in India (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 1972), PP. 155-69; Ahmed, M., The Peasant Problem (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 1954), P.39. cited from Siddiqui, K., Political Economy of Land Reforms in Bangladesh, (Mimeo, 1978), PP. 36-37.

was, that the above mentioned classes of Hindu community were represented by the Congress where as their Muslim counterparts were represented by the Muslim League and Proja Samity. Unlike the Congress, these two organisations were supporting the peasant cause, because bulk of the peasantry was constituted by the Muslim community. This can be seen clearly during 1928 Assembly debate, on the amendment to the Bengal Tenancy Act, the members of the Congress stood with Zamindars while the members of both Proja Samity and Muslim League sided with the peasants. However, in practice, these expressions of solidarity rarely proved to be anything beyond the ideology of vote catching.⁷

In 1937, the Krishak Proja Party declared in its election manifesto, abolition of zamindari without compensation, reduction of rents, abolition of feudal exactions, establishment of debt conciliation boards etc. When the Krishak Proja Party won the election and came to power, it had not done anything beyond appointing a Commission under Sir Francis Floud in 1938. This Commission had taken two long years to come to the conclusion that the zamindari system was an untenable proposition.

7. Ibid., পৃষ্ঠা, P. 49.

At the time of 1946 election campaign the Muslim League was, in unequivocal terms, promised abolition of zamindari system without compensation. The League came out victorious with thumping majority. In the early 1947, League government in Bengal introduced the State Acquisition and Tenancy Bill. This Bill could not become an Act due to the partition. The same government introduced another bill regarding share croppers, Bengal Bargadar (Provisional) Control Bill, which recognised the bargadars right to two-third share of the crop and more secure tenancy. However the Bill could not become Act, due to powerful pressure from the landlords.

11) The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act (EBSATA):- After partition in 1947, in the reconstituted assembly of East Bengal (then East Pakistan) a bill was introduced called, the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Bill. By and large the bill was similar to the 1947 bill introduced earlier in the all Bengal Assembly.

This bill proposed abolition of zamindari system but not without compensation and put a ceiling limit of 200 bighas per family or 10 bighas per member in contrast to the 100 bighas in the earlier bill. Secondly, on the

issue of giving protection to the share croppers the bill had no specific provision. Compared to the earlier Dargadar Control Bill it was diluted on the issues like two-third share and secure tenancy for the share croppers.

After more than two years of deliberations and amendments, the bill finally became an Act. A decade after the Flood Commission's recommendation, the most obnoxious system of Permanent Settlement was abolished once for all in East Bengal. Although this Act abolished 150 years old zamindari system, and put ceiling limit upto 100 bighas, it neglected the share croppers problem of produce sharing. Sharecropping was not recognised as a form of tenure.

Initially the main provisions of the Act were as follows:⁸ 1) All rent receiving interests in all lands (agricultural and non agricultural) were to be acquired by the government. The actual tillers of the soil will thus become direct tenants under the government. All raiyats (later to be called Malikis or Proprietors) would have permanent heritable and transferable

8. Abdullah, A., 'Land Reform and Agrarian Change in Bangladesh', Bangladesh Development Studies (Dacca, 1976), pp. 80-81.

rights and will be entitled to use their land in any way they like.

2) Sub letting of land in future was strictly forbidden. However, cultivation under the share-cropping was not to be treated as subletting but as equivalent to cultivation through wage labour.

3) All khas cultivable lands of all persons (including land cultivating through bargodars) in excess of 100 bighas (33.3) acres) per family or 10 bighas per member of the family, whichever was larger, plus the area of homestead land upto a maximum of 10 bighas, were to be acquired by the government. This ceiling would be relaxable in cases of tea, coffee, sugarcane and rubber plantations, carsia leaves, gardens, orchards and large scale farming by the use of power driven mechanical appliances and large scale dairy farming. The excess khas land thus acquired would be settled with bonafide cultivators holding less than 3 acres of land.

4) The rent receiving interests of estates belonging to religious institutions (waqful lillah and waqful aulad in case of Muslims and 'debottor' in case of Hindus) were not be exempted from the State acquisition. In case of religious property meant for private

(i.e., waqful amlad) welfare, the ceiling on khas land would be 375 bighas whereas for those devoted entirely to public welfare (i.e., waqful lillah) no ceiling would apply.

5) For acquisition of the rent receiving interests compensation was payable on a graduated scale ranging from 10 times the net annual income in case of persons with net incomes of Taka 500 or less per annum to two times the net annual income in case of persons with net income of taka one lakh or more. In case of public religious property, the compensation would be perpetual annuity equal to the amount of annual income. But in case of 'private' religious property compensation would be at the same rate as that for secular property.

6) For acquisition of khas lands, compensation was payable at the rate of 5 times the net annual profit from the land. Again, in case of public religious property, the compensation would be a perpetual annuity equal to the net annual income. For 'private' religious property, compensation rates would follow those for secular property.

7) Maximum rent would not exceed 1/10th of the annual gross produce of the land.

8) After state acquisition no one except a bonafide cultivator holding less than 100 bighas of land for himself and his family would be permitted to purchase or otherwise acquire new land.

In 1954, general elections, the Muslim League suffered defeat to the United Front consisting of Krishik Shramik Party and the Awami League. The United Front promised in its election manifesto, non-payment of compensation to the zamindars and rent receivers, free distribution of land among landless and legislation ensuring the bargadars two-third share of the produce and more secure tenancy.⁹

Due to internal dissensions the government could not run and for most part of 1955 the East Pakistan Assembly was kept suspended by the Central Government. Although the bill regarding sharecroppers was introduced in the Assembly in 1957 by UF government, it could not become an Act due to dissolution of Assembly and subsequent Martial Law proclamation in 1958 all over Pakistan.

In 1961, the ceiling on land was raised to 375 bighas and wherever feasible the land resumed by government

9. Siddiqui, K., n.6. P. 71.

was restored to the original owners. On the basis of Mahmud Committee report the Act was further amended and certain restrictions were imposed on the transferability of holdings to prevent fragmentation of the land. Due to the stiff opposition from the people, these restrictions were withdrawn in 1964. In the same year the exemption of the ceiling (now 375 bighas) was extended to cooperatives, provided the ownership of the land was transferred unconditionally to the society by the individual members.¹⁰

(D) Land Reform Legislations: Post Liberation Period:

In 1970 general elections were held in Pakistan. The Awami League had won majority of the seats. The Martial Law government at the centre was unwilling to hand over power to the Awami League. This situation led to the intensification of movement for autonomy, subsequently there was heavy military crackdown on the East Bengal people. After 25th March 1971, the movement was irrevocably transformed from demand for autonomy into a heroic struggle for national freedom. on December 16, 1971, a new State called the Sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh had emerged on the world map.

10. Abdullah, A., Id. S., pp. 81-82.

In the post liberation period, the Awami League government came out with a number of relief measures to the peasantry. Two immediate steps were taken by the government. Firstly, the government commuted all arrear dues and exempted land revenue for households owning 25 bighas and less of agricultural land. Secondly, the government scaled down the ceiling on agricultural land from 375 bighas to 100 bighas per family.

On 26th December 1971 Bangladesh government had issued handout which disclosed that exemption of land revenue for households owning 25 bighas and less of agricultural land and incorporated in the Bangladesh State Acquisition and Tenancy (Third Amendment) Order (vide Presidential Order 96 of 1972). But the holders of such lands were to pay development tax, relief tax, education cess and other local rates.¹¹

It has been estimated that 99 per cent of the agricultural families have holdings not exceeding 25 bighas and area under them was 80 per cent of the total agricultural land. This implied that virtually all of the agricultural families were expected to benefit out of this measure. As a result of this measure the

11. Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Progress 1972 (Dacca, 1972).

government will incur annual revenue loss to the tune of Taka 68 million.¹²

On 20th February 1972 the Bangladesh government announced, Bangladesh Land Holding (Limitation) Order 1972 (vide P.O. 98 of 1972) which imposed a ceiling limit of 100 bighas of land per family on agricultural land.¹³ This land reform measure is more progressive in character compared to the 1950 EBSATA. Firstly, this order also imposed 100 bighas ceiling limit on secular lands as laid down, initially in the 1950 Act, although in 1961, the ceiling limit had been raised upto 375 bighas. Secondly, in 1972 order a more realistic definition of family was included whereas in 1950 Act, a loose definition was given, which provided opportunity for ceiling evasion. Thirdly, this order provides free distribution of land in blocks among landless and near landless (i.e., holding upto 1.5 acres) whereas in 1950 Act there was a provision for distribution of government land at full market price among households with upto 3.00 acres of land. Finally, the order provided for nationalisation of 'char' lands for the purposes of redistribution among land poor classes whereas in the 1960 Act, riparian land

12. Mulherji I.N., 'Agrarian Reforms in Bangladesh' Asian Survey, P.455.

13. Ibid., P.456

owners had certain proprietary rights over these lands and wherever no such rights existed these lands were under unauthorised occupation of the rural rich.

Initially the main provisions of the order were as follows:¹⁴ 1) Imposition of a ceiling of 100 bighas per family on agricultural land. Families with land in excess of 100 bighas were to surrender the excess within 60 days after August 15, 1972. All transfers of land made by any member of the family after December 16, 1971 would be ignored; the land actually transferred would not be forfeited, but an equivalent quantity of land out of the lands actually held by any member of the family would be forfeited in lieu thereof.

2) The definition of a 'family' included 'such a person, his wife, son, unmarried daughter, son's wife, son's son and son's unmarried daughter'.

3) Ceiling provisions would not apply to cases where the land was exclusively dedicated to religious and charitable purposes with out any reservation of any pecuniary benefit to an individual. The government could relax the limitation in case of (a) cooperatives (b) cultivation of tea, rubber and coffee, (c) industrial concerns for the production of raw materials.

14. Siddiqui, K., A. 6, PP. 93-99

4) In redistribution of khas land salami would not be taken, which meant annual loss to the government of income by Taka 49.0 million. The distribution would be according to the priority among landless and near landless (i.e., owning less than 1.5 acres) agricultural families. The amount of land given to a family would be such that total land held did not exceed 1.5 acres.

5) 'Char' lands would now vest in the government for settlement among the poorer classes of agriculturists in accordance with governments' policy and provision of the law.

6) Any transaction, on the application of the debtor to the sub-divisional magistrate, would be treated as a complete usufructuary mortgage for a period for a period not exceeding seven years with the provision for restoration of the land to the debtor before the expiry of the said term of refund of the money in proportion to the unexpired period of the term.

Several amendments took place subsequently to the Bangladesh Land Holding (Limitation) Order (vide P.O. 98, 1972) which shows that government had come under the influence of landlords and jotedars. Two major loopholes were created with these amendments, to escape from the

ceiling limit: (a) the strict definition of the family for the purposes of applying the new ceiling was diluted, (b) the time limit for submission of statements in respect of land beyond the ceiling and the date for which the new ceiling was to become operative were extended several times.¹⁵

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act (fourth amendment) Order 1972 (vide P.O. 135 of 1972) added an additional clause to the original definition of a family which read 'that an adult and married son who has been living in a separate mess independently of his parents continuously since five years before the 16th day of December 1971 and his wife, son and unmarried daughter shall be deemed to constitute a separate family'.¹⁶

The above definition of a family was further relaxed vide P O 154 of 1972 under which the revenue officer could accept the son's claim to be the head of a separate family while his father was alive, if he found on verification, that the son was an adult and married with independent means of livelihood since before 20th February 1972.

15. Mukherjee I.N., Id., pp. 456-57.

16. Ibid., P. 457

The time limit for submission of statements was first extended to January 31, 1973 and then to March 31, 1973 (vide P.O. 138 and P.O. 154 of 1972 respectively). Originally legislation had sought to give retrospective effect to the day of liberation i.e., December 16, 1971. The amendments made the date for the announcement of a ceiling on land holdings (February 20, 1972) the starting point for the application of the land ceiling provision.

(C) The Post Mujib Period:

During the post Mujib period, there has been no legislation regarding either land reforms or protecting the share croppers. There has been continuous emphasis on rural development and cooperativisation of agriculture. In order to increase the agricultural production, the present government has started movements like Swanirvar with the objective of attaining self reliance. Swanirvar programmes are those, which seek to promote development in rural areas through supply of inputs such as water, fertiliser and improved seeds. Self help projects, have been enunciated as an approach to rural development in Bangladesh.¹⁷ These projects are intended to use people's labour to expand irrigation, drainage and

17. Ahmad Q.K., 'Social Transformation in Bangladesh, Realities Constraints, Vision and Strategy (Mimeo) (Dacca, 1979)

18. Ahmad Q.K., Rural Development in Bangladesh, Some Reflections on the Current Scenario (Mimeo) (Dacca, 1980).

other facilities for increasing agricultural production. All these developmental projects are launched without at the same time bringing any change in the existing production relations in agriculture. The benefits emanating from these projects, thus, may not only fail to reach to the landless and poor peasantry, but may as well exacerbate the existing imbalances.

Critical Appraisal of Land Reform
Legislations and Their Implementation

(A) Pre Liberation Period:

Zamindari system was abolished in EBSATA, but not without compensation. The compensation, including three per cent interest on deferred payment, was assessed at about Taka 400 million. Ultimately this burden had to be borne by the peasantry in the form of land revenue payment.¹⁹ A large number of rent receivers, caste Hindus, migrated to India after 1947, which implies transfer of real resources out of the country. There is no evidence to show that the compensation that did not go beyond the frontiers was productively invested either in agriculture or elsewhere. The Muslim League was interested in safeguarding Jotedari interests by altogether dropping pre bargadari provision from the bill

19. Kamal Siddiqui, n.6, P.62.

and suggesting a ceiling which affected zamindars, not Jotedars. All kinds of delaying tactics were adopted by pro zamindari lobby during legislation process, such that took two and a half years to become Act. This delay in enactment obviously helped zamindars.

Before the EBSATA, the legal rent demand of the zamindars from the peasants was Taka 84.20 million. Since 1958, until its exemption of 25 bighas of landowner in 1972, the government was collecting from the peasantry Taka 185 million per year.²⁰ The enhancement in the rent was done in accordance with the Act. Thus, it increased the rent burden on the peasantry rather than mitigating the burden. Besides this, the government was collecting enhanced cesses for education, local government relief and development etc. Defaulters were ruthlessly dealt with. The EBSATA provided that a holding would be liable to be sold in auction in case of default. This burden on peasantry was resulting in increasing indebtedness.²¹

To acquire 443 estates with a total rent roll of Taka 47,427,207 the government had taken six years. Only in 1964 all estates including religious, finally vested

20. Zaman H.A., 'The Case for Further Land Reforms' South Asian Review, (London, January 1975) P. 102.

21. Chandra N.K., 'Agrarian Classes In East Pakistan' Frontier, (Calcutta, 1972).

in the government. Thus there was inordinate delay in implementation. Acquisition of khas lands also met the same fate. This delay gave ample scope for landlords to escape from the ceiling limit. Several exemptions in the Act also provided scope for escape from the ceiling limit.

According to one estimate, the number of families having land over and above 375 bighas was 499 (529 according to Hossain Report) and the total amount of land available through acquisitions was 1,63,741 acres. This constituted only one per cent of the 19.2 million acres of cropped area in 1947-48.²²

The Act laid down simply that preference was to be given to bonafide cultivating families with less than three acres. However the detailed criteria underwent frequent changes and these changes bred corruption and delay in settlement operations. It has to be noted that the landless agricultural labourers were never given priority in providing khas land.²³ The land was not distributed freely. "Salami" was collected from the applicants. There was no clear cut stipulation of the "salami" and its mode of payment.²⁴

22. Abdullah, A., N. 8, P.82.

23. Ibid., PP. 55-56

24. Ibid., P. 58.

(B) Post Liberation Period:

Initially the Awami League government had shown interest in the peasant's problems with a view to providing relief to them. It brought out two important measures in favour of the peasantry. Firstly, commutation of arrear dues and exemption of land revenue upto 25 bighas. Secondly, it had set a ceiling on agricultural land at 100 bighas. Moreover the government had shown its enthusiasm to reduce further ceiling limit on agricultural land in future.²⁵ All these measures show the government's seriousness towards the problems of the agricultural sector. However a number of points need to be noted in this regard.

Commutation of arrear rents did not constitute a special privilege for the peasantry. The nine months of war had caused unprecedented damage to the country's economy and the rural areas were affected more than the urban areas. In Bangladesh about 99 per cent of the agricultural households had holdings less than 25 bighas. This meant that relief through exemption of rents for families with less than 25 bighas reached almost the entire peasantry and not just the lower stratum among them. An attempt to bring out agricultural taxation in 1973 was withdrawn under the pressure of jotedars.

24. Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Progress Ahead Policies and Measures, (Dacca, 1972) P. 19.

Thus in the absence of this taxation, the real beneficiaries of rent abolition below 25 bighas holdings were the top strata in the rural society. Although rents below 25 bighas holdings was abolished, various rates and cesses remained and in 1976 all these were consolidated into a single item termed "Land Development Tax."

The ceiling limit which the Awami League government had imposed was not a new step in that direction. In the early partition period the Muslim League government also initially put 100 bighas ceilings limit on land. Of course, it was raised subsequently in 1961, to 375 bighas by Martial Law administration. It has to be noted that, in view of 2.6 acres of average holdings in 1960, this ceiling limit was a radical step. And about loopholes there were many in this legislation to escape from the ceiling limit. Although, initially the definition of family was on sound basis, later it was diluted and gave scope for ceiling evasion. In mid 1973, the total amount of khas land was 720,468 acres of which 415,612 acres were fit for settlement and 47,612 acres were fit for settlement on reclamation.²⁶

26. Abdullah, A, et al., 'Agrarian Structure and IRDP' Bangladesh Development Studies, (Dacca, 1976) P.85.

The yearwise distribution of khas land since 1973 was as follows:

Table 4.1
Yearwise Distribution of Khas Land

Year	Land settled (in acres)
1973	900
1974	122,845
1975	14,802
1976	3,369
Total	141,410

Source: Kamal Siddiqui, Political Economy of Land Reforms In Bangladesh (Nimeo, Dacca, 1978), P. 106.

Thus only about 25 per cent of the land fit for settlement had been distributed upto 1976. In any case, as it was stated in the Act, giving priority to the landless peasants was not strictly adhered to and the lands were settled with undesirable classes. If at all the landless received land, they could not take possession since these lands were being illegally occupied by large landowners in collusion with administration.²⁷

27. Siddiqui, K., ibid., P. 107.

Bangladesh is a rivarine country where diluvian and the reclamation of land on a large scale is an annual phenomenon. According to the 1972 legislation in settling such land preference was to be given to a family which had been affected by diluvian and provided that the total area of land by the family was less than 25 bighas. In 1974, the legislation was amended, so that now they could be provided with land upto 100 bighas. The data is not available about the settlement of 'char' lands after 1972.²⁸

(C) Implementing Machinery:

1) Administration:- During 1950s the administrative set up of land administration was facing lack of subordinate revenue staff at district collectorate. The problem of this nature was more acute at lower levels. Moreover the available staff including officials were overburdened with the land revenue administration. The District Magistrate and the sub-Divisional Officers were highly involved with law and order and coordination duties. Thus the implementation of land reforms was not given priority. And in general, the competence and training required for implementation of land reforms were lacking and essential facilities such as maps

and upto date land records were not provided to the implementing machinery. Following Mahmud Committee report, certain improvements were made but these were inadequate. The involvement of peasant associations were not accepted.²⁹

In the post liberation period the old revenue organisation with certain peripheral modifications, continued to handle the work of land reforms. In such a situation initially there was 'administrative devolution' involving implementing machinery with Peasant Associations at lower level for efficient implementation of land reform measures. But later in 1975 such arrangement was withdrawn and the implementing responsibility was again put back in the hands of revenue administration.³⁰

ii) Peasant Struggles:- Bengal is having great heritage of peasant revolts, since British days. They fought both British colonials and zamindars. The famous 'Tobhaga' movement launched against zamindars on the issue of produce sharing had occurred before partition.

29. Ibid., pp. 73-79.

30. Ibid., p. 107.

After partition, 'Krishak Samity' the peasant front of the National Awami Party raised many peasant demands. These demands were confined mainly to the speedy implementation of the EBSATA and redistribution of government land among landless poor and dropping of proceedings for realisation of arrear loans. In 1962, when the Martial Law was withdrawn, the Krishak Samity was to organise a number of agitations projecting peasant problems. Only in 1969 the slogan of 'land to the tiller' was effectively raised. Owing to organisational weakness and vacillating leadership, the Samity could not be able to fulfil its demand. After the liberation, Naxalbari Movement in West Bengal influenced the Bangladesh peasantry. It was confined to a few pockets. Although it could mobilise the peasants in some pockets, the movement took place not on peasants' immediate demands but was directed to capturing state power.

To sum up, the peasant movement in Bangladesh could not become strong. The implication of all this for land reforms was that neither in the formulation nor in their implementation, peasants could assert themselves and extract a better deal. Thus the weak peasant movement was also one of the reasons of ineffective implementation of land reforms.³¹

31. Siddiqui, K., 'The Political Economy of Land Reforms in Bangladesh', Journal of Social Sciences, (Dacca, 1980) pp. 29-30.

Nature of Power Structure

The Muslim League in Pakistan represented the top most strata of the urban and rural propertied classes. The classes which could not be accommodated by the Muslim League, mainly from East Pakistan, in the share of the 'opportunities' generated by the state machinery were represented by the Awami League and Krishak Shramik Party. In 1954, the United Front consisting of the Awami League and Krishak Shramik Party defeated Muslim League in East Pakistan. In 1957 the Awami League was split and the left wingers in it formed the National Awami Party. At the national level no party was in a position to fulfil the gap created by the Muslim League. At this juncture in 1958 the Military took over the administration and declared Martial Law administration. And they openly supported the rural rich by raising the land ceiling to 375 bighas. After liberation the Awami League became the ruling party till mid 1975. The Awami League was based traditionally on a coalition of urban and rural rich.³²

32. Ibid., PP.26-27.

Table 4.2Land Holdings of the Members of the Parliament

Size Acre	1970	%	1973	%
Less than 1	22	0.83	3	1.26
1 - 3	23	10.08	26	10.97
3 - 6.4	41	17.98	30	12.65
6.5 - 10.4	38	16.66	32	13.50
10.5 - 15.4	29	12.71	25	10.54
15.5 - 25.4	34	14.91	49	20.67
25.5 - 40.0	38	16.66	48	20.25
Above 40 Acres	33	10.08	24	10.12
Total	228	100	237	100

Source: Jahangir, B.K., Differentiation, Polarisation and Concentration in Rural Bangladesh, (Dacca, 1979) P. 147.

Above table indicates the rural background of the Parliament members of 1970 and 1973. It reveals that 75 per cent of the members own more than 6.5 acres of land. It also reveals an increasingly rural rich becoming Members of Parliament. Thus the ideology of land reforms, and the formal power structure are all geared to the dominant interests of the rural sector. The formal power structure legitimise their hegemony over rural areas. Thus in the ultimate analysis the rural power structure largely explains the slow and tardy implementation of land reform measures in post liberation Bangladesh.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

If the concept of 'land reform' necessarily implies 'land to the tiller', that has not been accomplished in Bangladesh. It does not stand as a practical proposition in the near future, given the nature of the existing power structure.

Land reform is a multi-dimensional change involving the socio-economic and political spheres. It affects not only the propertied class but the overwhelming majority of the rural people as a whole. In a socio-economic set up built on the inviolability of the private property relations, the agrarian question involves conflict of interests. In a society in which the landlord class still constitutes a predominantly powerful component, not only the implementation, but even the initiation of radical agrarian reforms may not be possible. The land reform policies, proclaimed by successive governments in Bangladesh, with a view to its feasibility within the limitations of the rural set up, the implementation of even such policies becomes difficult because of the power and influence wielded by the landlord class.

The agrarian relations evolved in Bangladesh as a result of the British land policies led to the emergence of Zamindari system, which in turn created innumerable intermediaries. The increasing pressure of population on agriculture on the one hand, and the restricted

land ownership pattern on the other, gave rise to the bewildering variety of land tenures ranging between bargadars to superior tenants.

At the dawn of independence from British colonialism, present Bangladesh was part of the Pakistan state. Although the British colonialists, left the country, the colonial period was not ended in Bangladesh until 1971. The British colonialists' place was occupied by Pakistan and the country was turned as a source of raw material and market for finished goods. Initially there was enthusiasm to abolish the obnoxious Permanent Settlement and the Muslim League government brought out a legislation called East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act. The major provisions of this bill was abolition of the intermediary rent receiving interest and fixing the land ceiling at 100 bighas.

The progressive character of this bill was the abolition of 157 year old intermediaries (Zamindars) and fixing the land ceiling at 100 bighas. But the same enthusiasm was not reflected in its implementation as was shown in legislating it. For final abolition of all intermediaries it took not less than a decade. Another notable thing was that three years after the Martial law administration, in 1961, the ceiling limit was raised to 375 bighas and wherever feasible the land resumed by

the government was restored to the original owners. Secondly the land confiscated by the government from excess holders was not distributed freely salami was collected from the farmers. The land settled per year during Pakistan period was very low in comparison with land available for settlement. Thus the land reform policies were not only diluted, but also it was not implemented properly during Pakistan regime. The only major change that took place in Bangladesh agriculture was the abolition of Zamindari system. This was accomplished with ease not because of legislation alone, but because most of the landlords were Hindus who left the country at the time of partition.

The attainment of independence from Pakistan, and the instalment of Awami League government gave fillip to land reforms again. Immediately after independence, the Awami League government brought out a number of legislations to give relief to the peasantry. Firstly it commuted all arrears of land revenue and exempted land revenue for households owning less than 25 bighas of agricultural land. Secondly it scaled down of the agricultural land ceiling from 375 bighas to 100 bighas. This legislation, unlike the previous one, included the provision of free distribution of land among the landless poor.

But immediately the legislation brought out by Awami League underwent several amendments. The time limit given to the landlords for filling the ceiling returns had been extended time and again. The definition of family was also diluted and thereby opened the provisions for landlords to evade the ceiling limit. Further the land obtained from ceiling imposition was only 15 per cent of what should have been obtained and its quality was also extremely poor. Between 1973 and 1975, only 2 per cent of the total cultivated land was actually distributed. Even when the landless received land, they could not take possession since these were under illegal occupation of large landowners in collusion with implementing machiner.

In the post Mujib era, Bangladesh witnessed several rural development programmes, the notable being canal digging with laudible objective of attaining self reliance (Swamirvar). No attempt has been made to alter the land ownership pattern through the mechanism of land reforms. This attempt at fostering cooperative capitalism without altering the basic structure cannot but lead to further polarisation among the peasantry.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the provisions of land ceiling legislation in Bangladesh does not

indicate any radical shift from the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950. It will be noted that so far no legislation has been introduced in regulating the right of bargadars.

In the entire process of land reform from initiation to completion - the government plays a decisive role. Unless the government takes drastic action in implementing the more radical land reforms, the situation in Bangladesh is not going to be altered. A further reduction of land ceiling is possible in Bangladesh and hunger for land of the peasantry can be solved by putting ceiling limit at a lower level, say, 10 acres. True, even this will not solve the land problem in Bangladesh as many peasants would continue to remain landless. Yet, by curbing the power of the dominant landlords, this could help in a more equitable dispersal of agricultural inputs to the peasants. Thus more radical land reforms with genuine implementing machinery can solve the problem of disparities in Bangladesh agriculture and thereby facilitate the attainment of self-sufficiency in foodgrains production to which the present government is committed. Given the existing power base of the ruling elite in Bangladesh it is doubtful whether such a measure would be forthcoming.

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