

**LAND REFORMS AND LAND DISTRIBUTION
IN WEST BENGAL**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "LAND REFORMS AND LAND DISTRIBUTION IN WEST BENGAL" submitted by Mr. Monirul Islam in fulfilment of six credits out of the total requirement of twenty four credits for the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil.) of this University is a bonafide work, to the best of our knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for their consideration.


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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

India inherited from the British, a feudal agrarian structure which was marked on the one hand by the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a class who played no positive role in production and on the other, divorced from ownership of land the vast mass of the peasant who were the actual cultivators. Land-holdings both under the zamindari and ryotwari tenure were characterised by a high degree of concentration of land at the upper levels. The adverse effect of landlordism on agricultural land was most pronounced in the state of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar. The 'National Commission on Agriculture'¹ estimated that 1.5 per cent of all zamindars in U.P. held 58 per cent of the total land. Eight hundred and four of the biggest landowners of the state held 25 per cent of the total land. In West Bengal many zamindari estates were, in course of time, divided among sub-proprietors or tenure holders, nonetheless, a high degree of concentration of land in the hands of the bigger landowning class continued to exist. The same can be said of Bihar. Land rent continued to persist at a higher level under British rule as the rental

1. National Commission on Agriculture, Part XV, New Delhi, 1976, p.8.

demands of the zamindars increased arbitrarily. No attempt was made to regulate or fix rents until about the end of nineteenth century. The lands revenue rates as a rule were higher under ryotwari than zamindari tenure and weighed heavily on smaller holdings. The ryotwari tenant and share-cropper remained by and large unprotected. According to an estimate², leased-in area constituted nearly 35 per cent of the total operated area in 1950-51, most of the lease were unwritten and the tenants did not have legal security of tenure. The rents varied from 50 per cent to 70 per cent of gross produce. Besides rent, many illegal levies imposed on tenants and share-croppers reinforced their conditions of servitude. There was labour rent or 'begari' which was hallmark of semi-feudal domination. In short, the pre-independence agrarian structure was feudal as well as exploitative. The land reforms had a very limited scope and content and it did not touch the privileges or status of zamindars and other intermediaries. British land reforms gave hardly any protection to the tillers of the soil.

By the time India achieved Independence a strong public opinion had crystallised to the effect that semi-

2. Report of All India Agricultural Labour Inquiry, 1950-51, p.72.

feudal landlordism was the main hurdle in the way of the agricultural development in the country. In this regard a series of attempts have been made to improve agrarian structure by abolishing intermediaries, conferring ownership rights on tenants, reduce the inequality in the distribution of ownership through imposition of ceiling on land and the redistribution of surplus land among the landless or semi-landless workers. In fifties almost all the states in India, the land reform measures were enacted but the achievements were not found adequate to reduce inequality in distribution of land.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS:

Agriculture is the principal source of livelihood for a majority of the people in the largely rural state of West Bengal. Nearly 52 per cent of the total population in the state is directly dependent on agriculture for its livelihood. The state presents diversified agronomic niche for different crops from hilly north to deltaic south. The northern parts are largely hilly and mountainous providing suitable conditions for plantation agriculture. Southern districts are fertile alluvial plains and have very high density of population.

Agriculture in the state was fairly commercialised as the area in Calcutta hinterland was devoted to indigo

INDIA

LOCATION OF THE STATE

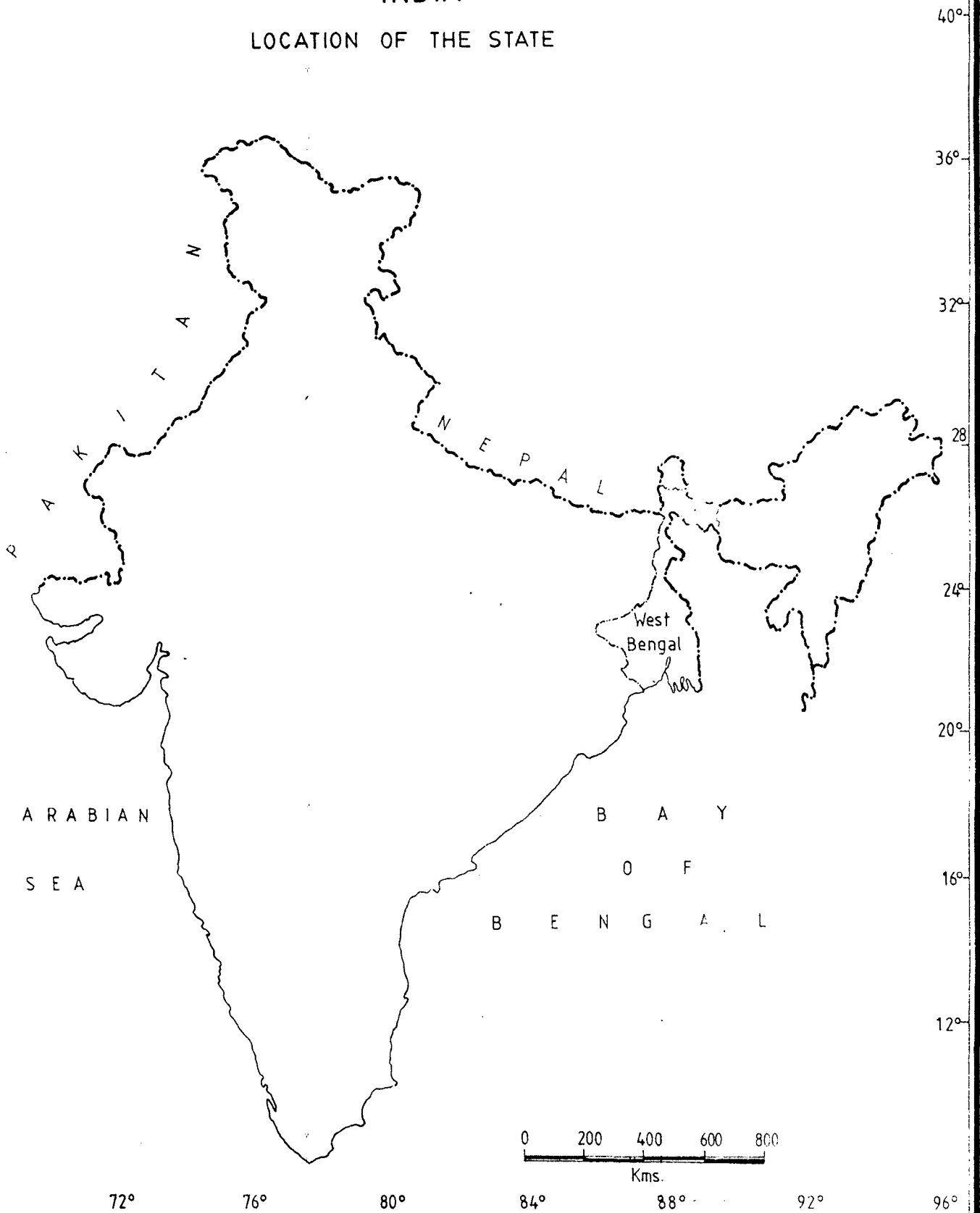


Fig 1

and then to jute cultivation. Partition of India in 1947 particularly affected the agricultural development of the state when most of the jute growing area went to erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while jute processing remained concentrated in and around Calcutta. Natural calamities like flood, drought etc. over time have also adversely affected agricultural development of the state. Distribution of rainfall is uneven over the years and erratic between the years.³ Most of the rainfall is concentrated from June to September causing floods. West Bengal has witnessed drought also during the period 1952-53 to 1974-75. In 14 of these 23 years, the harvest was either affected by droughts or floods.

Irrigation facilities are not sufficient. The perennial sources of irrigation has covered very little part of the state. Most of the irrigation is done through the public canal system with very little coverage. An extension of assured irrigation in the state, would allow intensive farming and more regular yields. The most important cereal of the state is rice, accounting for more than 70 per cent of the total cropped area. But per hectare yield is not as high as in some of the other states which introduced rice cultivation recently.

3. Agricultural Census of West Bengal, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, 1980-81, p.2.

Table 1.1 : Work Participation Rate (West Bengal)

	Population ('000)			Main Workers			% of workers to total population		
	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981
Male	18599.1	23435.9	28560.9	10040.2	11444.1	13959.0	53.98	48.83	48.97
Female	16327.1	20876.0	26019.7	1540.0	924.8	1550.6	9.43	4.43	5.97
Total	34926.2	44312.0	54580.6	11580.2	12368.9	15509.6	33.16	27.91	28.47

Source: Census of India 1961, 1971 and 1981.

The state is second only to Kerala in population density⁴ which is 619 persons per square kilometre. Total population of the state has grown by 56.2 per cent during 1961 to 1981. The participation rate declined from 33.2 per cent in 1961 to 28.5 per cent in 1981. In farming sector the number of cultivators increased by 6.6 per cent in between 1961 to 1981 while agriculture labourers increased by more than double. The share of cultivators in all main workers declined from 1961 to 1981 while share of farm labourers rose significantly. It indicates that population pressure on land increased heavily over the two decades.

Number of operational holdings and its area increased in the state from 1970-71 to 1980-81 but the proportion of number of holding grew more rapidly than operated area. As a result acreage per operational unit declined from 1.20 ha. in 1970-71 to 0.95 ha. in 1980-81. Number of holdings as well as area increased in marginal and small size group while medium and large size operational holding and its area declined.

Land distribution between the size classes is quite uneven. Inter-class concentration is more in medium and

4. Census of India, Part II-A, 1980-81.

large size group while it is very low for marginal and small size group. The inequality in the distribution of land remained unchanged and it continues to persist. The marginal and small farmers owned a very small proportion of area while the large farmer owned high proportion of area as compared to their share in total holdings.

During 1970-71 to 1980-81, the number of tenants (share-croppers) increased very sharply while leased-in area increased slowly. Share-cropping is by far the predominant form of tenancy; about 92 per cent of the total leased-in area is under share-cropping.⁵ The degree of fragmentation of holdings is quite high; a 5-acre holding may be scattered in 7 to 8 parcels. (The land reforms legislation, aimed at curbing the landlordism, to promote peasantisation of the economy. It also aimed to improve the condition of the rural poor through such measures as a reduction in landlessness, an expansion of employment opportunities, and increase in rural wage rates. However, the concrete achievements through land reforms measures have been found inadequate.

The above description is intended to provide a brief outline of the salient features of the rural economy of

5. Agricultural Census of West Bengal, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal, 1980-81, p.20.

West Bengal. Over the past twenty years, there was a significant rise in both the incidence of marginal farming and land inequality in rural West Bengal. There was a consequent rise in the degree of fragmentation of holdings.

OBJECTIVES:

The present study proposes to review the various Land Reforms Measures in West Bengal and to examine the pattern of land distribution and changes in different aspects of agrarian structure in the state at three points of time, namely 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81. This study also attempts to study the structural change in the agrarian society by analysing the information available from different rounds of National Sample Survey pertaining to the years 1953-54 (8th round), 1961-62 (17th round) and 1971-72 (26th round). The specific objectives of this study are:

- (i) To review the land reforms measures in West Bengal and its implementation;
- (ii) To analyse the land distribution in operational and ownership holding over the period of time by size groups;
- (iii) To examine the districtwise pattern of operated land holdings and its changes over the period by size group;

- (iv) To analyse districtwise distribution of average size of holding;
- (v) To examine the possible explanations for the pattern of concentration of operational and ownership holding;
- (vi) To evaluate the distribution of operational holdings in state by irrigation status and the changes in irrigated and unirrigated area over the selected points of time;
- (vii) To examine the distribution of operated area in the state by tenancy status over time.

DATA BASE:

The relevant data for this study have been collected from two sources, namely (1) Agricultural Census, and (2) National Sample Survey Report. The major portion of data has been obtained from Agricultural Census of West Bengal, where districtwise data of operational holdings and area are provided by different size groups. The following Agricultural Censuses were consulted for data:

- (i) Agricultural Census of West Bengal - 1970-71,
- (ii) Agricultural Census of West Bengal - 1976-77,
- (iii) Agricultural Census of West Bengal - 1980-81.

Another set of data has also been obtained from the 'National Sample Survey Report'. Some data on ownership

holdings and operational holding for 1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72 have been collected from N.S.S. reports. The N.S.S. reports also do not provide any district level data. The data given by N.S.S. reports and agricultural censuses are not comparable as one is based on sample survey while the other is based on revenue records. That is why N.S.S. figures are taken separately to examine the pattern of land distribution in the state.

The rounds and numbers of the N.S.S. report consulted are as follows:

- (i) 8th Round: N.S.S. Report nos.36 and 66,
- (ii) 17th Round: N.S.S. Report no.144,
- (iii) 26th Round: N.S.S. Report nos.215 (West Bengal).

Agricultural Census and N.S.S.

The Agricultural Census data are based on revenue record while the N.S.S. data are based on sample survey. The N.S.S. estimates do not take into account non-household land (land owned by Government, Co-operative societies, religious institutions etc.), but agricultural census estimates are inclusive of this land. The N.S.S. followed the enquiry method with household as the basic unit, while agricultural census was based on the concept of holding. The Agricultural Census figures include holding below

0.002 hectare when N.S.S. do not include it. Thus, there are certain limitations in both the Agricultural Census data and the N.S.S. data.

METHODOLOGY:

The following statistical techniques have been used in this present study:

- (i) Percentage share of holdings and area in different size groups have been computed from the total holdings and area of the state;
- (ii) The percentage changes in holdings and area from 1970-71 to 1976-77 have been worked out by taking the difference between 1970-71 and 1976-77.

$$\text{Percentage growth} = \frac{P_1 - P_0}{P_0} \times 100$$

By the same processes, the percentage growth of holdings and area over 1976-77 to 1980-81 has been worked out. Same methodology has also been followed to compute the districtwise percentage growth of holdings and area over 1970-71 to 1980-81.

- (iii) To work out the average size of holding we have divided the actual figure of area by number of holdings:

$$\text{Average size of holdings} = \frac{\text{Area}}{\text{No. of holding}}$$

(iv) As the main emphasis in this study is to bring out the pattern of concentration of operational and ownership holdings, the inequality in area in relation to holding is brought out through Gini's coefficient technique. Gini-coefficient is defined in the following way:

$$G.C. = \frac{x_i.y_{i+1} - x_{i+1}.y_i}{100 \times 100}$$

where

x_i = The cumulative percentage of number of holdings in the i th class

y_i = the cumulative percentages of the area in the i th class.

Gini-coefficient is useful for comparison of overall inequality cross-sectionally and temporally.

Some adjustment has been done in the original size classes given in Agricultural Census and N.S.S. The size classes are categorised into five broad size groups⁶ i.e. marginal, small, semi-medium, medium and large.

6. S.S. Tyagi and H. Laxminarayan, Changes in Agrarian Structure in India, Agricole Publishing Academy, New Delhi, 1982, p.35.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The post-independence period marks a turning point in the history of agricultural development in India. The national government gave high priority to land reforms and the regeneration of agriculture through building of irrigational infrastructure. Land reforms legislations were enacted by all the state governments during the fifties with the aim of abolishing landlordism, removing the inequality in distribution of land through imposition of ceilings, protection of tenants and consolidation of land holdings.

Land reforms legislations have been enacted in almost all the states of India, although there are differences in their implementation. Different scholars have looked at the government sponsored measures with different angles, owing to diverse expectations and in terms of implications. H.D. Malvia's⁷ study explained enactment of Acquisition of Land Act. He also explained the land reform measures taken in different states.

Bhowani Sen's⁸ study presented brief account of India's agrarian relations in the post-independence

7. H.D. Malvia, Land Reforms in India, Economic and Political Research Department, All India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1954.

8. Bhowani Sen, Land System and Land Reforms in India, People's Publishing House Ltd., Delhi, 1955.

period. To analyse the present land system in India, the author considered the land relations in ancient Mughal, and British periods. He also reviewed the land reforms measures in different states and their land relations.

G. Kotovsky⁹ has set himself the task of the analysing the agrarian reforms, its implementation and the socio-economic consequences of laws which have introduced to change the system of land ownership and cultivation. Dandekar¹⁰, Dantwala¹¹ and S.M. Shah¹² have indicated the trends of the land reforms measures and have identified the unexplored areas. Land reforms have been studied by the scholars mainly in terms of achievement of physical targets, at the level of promises and performances, in terms of their economic consequences on redistribution of land. P.C. Joshi¹³ interpreted the evaluation of land reforms

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9. G. Kotovsky, Agrarian Reforms in India, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1962.
 10. V.M. Dandekar, Planning Commission Seminar on Land Reforms, New Delhi, 1966.
 11. M.L. Dantwala, Land Tenure, Wisconsin University Press, 1956.
 12. S.M. Shah, Rural Development Planning and Land Reform, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, 1977.
 13. P.C. Joshi, Land Reforms in India - Trends and Perspectives, Institute of Economic Growth Publication, New Delhi, 1975.

and its impacts on social and economic changes. Relations between the land owner and the tenant farmers and the agricultural labourers have been studied by the scholar. Another study of change in social relations between land-owner and the tenants has been done by Baljit Singh¹⁴ and Andre Beteille¹⁵. The main argument of Singh is that land reforms have led to factionalism and quarrels among the owners and tenant castes in the villages. However, Andre Beteille's approach is neither institutional nor attributional. He examined the impact of land reforms on social inequality and stratification. It is more of a descriptive account of social structure of agrarian relations. A.M. Khusro¹⁶, in his study explained the role of socio-economic factors in the implementation and formulation of land legislation. The author has suggested that implementation of the tenancy legislation is the function of the degree of the consciousness among the tenants.

The government at the centre and the states tried to associate social scientist with the evaluation of

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14. Baljit Singh, Next Step in Village India - A study of Land Reforms and Group Dynamic, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1961.
 15. Andre Beteille, A Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, OUP, New Delhi, 1974.
 16. A.M. Khusro, Economic and Social Effects of Jagirdari Abolition and Land Reforms in Hyderabad, Osmania University Press, Hyderabad, 1958.

land reform and their implementation. The Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission entrusted eminent scholars in different Universities and Research Institutes with this task of scientific evaluation by offering financial assistance for this purpose. This programme of research sponsored by the government of resulted in a spurt of land reforms studies.

Important among these land reforms studies are: Basu and Bhattacharya's¹⁷ A Study on Implementation of Land Reforms in West Bengal (1963), G. Parthasarathy and B. Prasad Rao's¹⁸ Implementation of Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh (1966), K.S. Sonachalam's¹⁹ Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu (1970), and M.C. Dutta's²⁰ Land Problems and Land Reforms in Assam (1968). All these authors have carefully examined the various land reforms measure taken since independence and their implementation in different states.

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17. S.K. Basu and Bhattacharya, Land Reforms in West Bengal, Oxford Book Company, Calcutta, 1963.
 18. G. Parthasarathy and Rao, Implementation of Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh, Scientific Book Company, Calcutta, 1966.
 19. K.S. Sonachalam, Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu, Oxford Press, New Delhi, 1970.
 20. M.C. Dutta, Land Problems and Land Reforms in Assam, S. Chand and Sons Publication, New Delhi, 1968.

G. Parthasarathy's study evaluated the impacts of land reform measures on social and economic changes in Andhra Pradesh. N.C. Dutta's study traced out different drawbacks of the implementation of ceilings on agricultural land. Z.A. Ahmad's²¹ study among others raised argument against the big landlords lobby which has obstructed the proper implementation of Ceiling Act. His study also criticised the government for delaying the proper implementation of land reform measures. The political importance of land reform induced a number of research and surveys in different institutions. In this way a number of valuable studies on land reforms were contributed by prominent social scientists without getting any financial help from any official agency. The contribution of these studies were undertaken for an understanding of the Indian agrarian structure in the context of wider social structure and the process of social change. Among these contributions on the land question it is appropriate to mention the name of Abdul Aziz and K.N. Raj.

Abdul Aziz's²² study traced out the explanations for failure of the land reform measures in India. He suggested

21. Z.A. Ahmad, Ceilings on Agricultural Land, Communist Party of India Publications, New Delhi, 1972.

22. Abdul Aziz, Political Economy of Land Reforms, Ashis Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980.

that government bureaucracy, landed interests, tenants and landless labourers have played their self-interest roles through caste and class 'alignments' to frustrate formulation and implementation of radical land reforms. K.N. Raj²³ suggested that inequality in distribution of ownership land is still persisting in all the states of India very marginal changes have taken place in distribution of owned area. However, land reforms were half-hearted with regard to the imposition of ceilings and the security of tenure and a very large number of tenants were evicted all over India in the name of self-cultivation.

Research and studies on land reforms have been completed by distinguished scholars from outside India. Among them Inayatullah²⁴ and Ladejinsky²⁵ have made significant contribution in agrarian study. Inayatullah's study proposes to understand socio-political and economic processes involved in the initiation, formulation and

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23. K.N. Raj, "Ownership and Distribution of Land", Indian Economic Review, vol.V, April, 1970.
24. Inayatullah, Land Reforms - Some Asian Experience, An APDAC Publication, Kuala-Lumpur, 1960.
25. W. Ladejinsky, A Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package District, Govt. of India.

implementation of land reform policies to improve and increase governmental capacity to handle associated problems. To review the progress in agrarian reforms, some Asian experiences are taken into account in the study. W. Ladejinsky reviewed the impacts of land reform measures on tenancy status. His study also shows the large scale eviction of tenants all over India after implementation of land reform measures.

The sincere attempt has been made by some prominent scholars to review the agrarian relations in British India. Among them Karuna Mukherjee's²⁶ Land Reforms in India and M.N. Gupta's²⁷ Land System of Bengal, are considered to have offered explanation of agrarian relations in British India.

Some authors have reviewed the general progress of land reforms measures in India. Among them Kripa Shankar²⁸, S.K. Agarwal²⁹, P.T. George³⁰ and B.S.

26. Karuna Mukherjee, Land Reforms in India, H. Chatterjee and Co. Ltd., Calcutta, 1949.

27. M.N. Gupta, Land System of Bengal, Calcutta University Press, 1940.

28. Kripa Shankar, Concealed Tenancy and Implication for Equity and Economic Growth, Concept Publishing, New Delhi, 1980.

29. S.K. Agarwal, Economics of Land Consolidation in India, S. Chand and Co. (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1971.

30. P.T. George, Ceiling on Landholding, NIRD, Hyderabad, 1981.

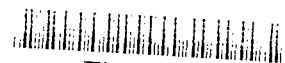
Sidhu³¹ have made significant contributions to explain the general framework and evaluate the results of land reform measures in different states of India. Kripa Shankar's study examined the phenomenon of concealed tenancy as it has emerged out in different states, in the context of the dynamics of new agricultural technology and explained the response of lessees and lessors in the new situation, while S.K. Agarwal's study considered the different problems and loopholes of land reform measures.

The contributions on land reforms, worth-mentioning are of Theodor Bergman³² and Ajit K. Ghosh.³³ Theodor Bergman's study traced out the general framework of agrarian reforms policy in India. The author also summarised the various land reforms legislation and its implementation and turned to an analysis of progress in four states i.e. Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West

In his findings, author mentioned that Kerala and West Bengal were most successful in the implementation of land reforms programme; Karnataka has made some headway

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31. B.S. Sidhu, Land Reforms, Welfare and Economic Growth, Vora & Co. Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1976.
 32. Bergman Theodor, Agrarian Reforms in India, Agricole Publishing Academy, New Delhi, 1984.
 33. Ajit K. Ghosh, Agrarian Reforms in Contemporary Developing Countries, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1984.

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while in Andhra Pradesh the results seem meagre. Ajit K. Ghosh's study referred to the process of agrarian reform in contemporary developing countries. It included seven detailed case studies - one each on Ethiopia, Peru, Chile, Nicaragua, Iran, Kerala and West Bengal. The case studies focussed on selected aspects of the reform processes - their origins, basic characteristics, problems of implementation and immediate consequences. In case of Kerala and West Bengal, author suggested that land reform programmes have been implemented there on a fairly large scale and the concentration of land increased in marginal and small farm size over time.

Planning Commission³⁴ also took initiative to review the implementation of land reforms measures. The chapter on "Land Reforms" of the first, second, third and fourth five year plans and two reports on "Progress of Land Reforms" (1963) and "Implementation of Land Reform" (1966) providing both information and analysis were the other important contributions of agrarian study by the Planning Commission.

After independence the central and state government began to play their roles in the field of land reforms. Some outstanding experts and administrators also played

34. Planning Commission Report on Implementation of Land Reforms, Govt. of India.

an important role in promoting research on the related questions. One of the important names is of Ameer Raja³⁵ who was responsible for drafting the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee Report (1948). In 1949 the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee³⁶ released its report which provided the basic characteristics of land reforms measures. The very first chapter of this report included a discussion on the main problems of right in land and future pattern of the agrarian economy of the country and land management. The rest of the chapters of this report included the problems of agricultural indebtedness, agricultural improvements and rural welfare. 'Report of the National Commission on Agriculture'³⁷ presented the salient features of 'Land Reforms Legislation' and its implementation in different states of India. A good attempt had been made by Harpal Singh³⁸, A.S. Sirohi³⁹, G.P. Sharma⁴⁰, H. Laxminarayana⁴¹

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35. Ameer Raja, U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee Reports, 1948.
36. Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committees, All India Congress Committee Publication, New Delhi, 1949.
37. Report of the National Commission on Agriculture, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1976.
38. Harpal Singh, "Structural Change, in the size Distribution of Holdings - A Macro view", IJAE, July-Sept. 1978.
39. A.S. Sirohi, "Inter-State Disparities in the Structural Distribution of Land Holdings in Rural India", IJAE, July-Sept. 1976.
40. G.P. Sharma, Some Aspects of Changes in Agrarian Structure, Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1977.
41. H. Laxminarayana and S.S. Tyagi, Changes in Agrarian Structure in India, APA Publishing, New Delhi, 1982.

and S.K. Sanyal⁴² to review the agrarian changes in India and as well as its regional variations. They looked into the inter-state variations in the inequalities in ownership holdings and also of the operational holdings. They also studied variations in the leasing-in/leasing-out aspects of ownership holdings by size classes. In addition Laxminarayana and S.S. Tyagi reviewed the types of tenancy and the status of the tenants in India.

Many authors have analysed 'Bargadar's Act' and its implementation to change the economic development of Bargadars and the agricultural production in West Bengal. They also highlighted the policies of the "Left Front Government" in relation to promoting the interests of the 'Bargadars'. Some important contributions have been made by scholars like Nripen Bandyopadhy⁴³, Ratan Ghosh⁴⁴, Ashok Rudra⁴⁵, Sunil Sengupta⁴⁶ and Kalyan Dutta⁴⁷.

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42. S.K. Sanyal, "Trends in Some Characteristics of Land Holdings - An Analysis for few States", Sarvekshana, July, 1977.
43. Nripen Bandyopadhy⁴³, "Operation Barga and Land Reform, Perspective in West Bengal", E.P.W., vol.16, April, June, 1981.
44. Ratan Ghosh, "Agrarian Programme of Left Front Government", EPW, April-June, 1981.
45. Ashok Rudra, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward", EPW, vol.16, April-June, 1981.
46. Sunil Sengupta, "West Bengal Land Reforms and Agrarian Scene", EPW, April-June, 1981.
47. Kalyan Dutta, "Operation Barga - Gains and Constraints", EPW, vol.16, April-June, 1981.

Nripen Bandyopadhyaya presented a brief outline of the historical perspective of land reforms in West Bengal and traced out the progress of land reforms in the state. Kalyan Dutta and Ratan Ghosh studied about the programme of the distribution of vested and various employment generation schemes of Left Front Government in rural Bengal. Similarly Sunil Sengupta and Ashok Rudra's study expressed the problems facing Left Front Government in the field of agrarian programme. Ashok Rudra criticised the enforcement of ceiling laws of West Bengal Government.

There are some studies of peasantry and peasant movements, some are monographic in nature, but as a whole they highlight the process of change in the structure and mode of production in Indian agriculture and tenancy relations. A reference may be made to some of the studies done by K.C. Alexander⁴⁸ and T.K. Basu.⁴⁹

STUDY AREA AND ITS GEOGRAPHICAL PERSONALITY:

The state of West Bengal, located in the Eastern India, is bounded by the state of Sikkim in the north. It has international boundary with 'Bangladesh' in the

48. K.C. Alaxender, Agrarian Tensions in Thanjavur, NICD, Hyderabad, 1975.

49. T.K. Basu, Bengal Peasant From Time to Time, Asian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1963.

WEST BENGAL ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

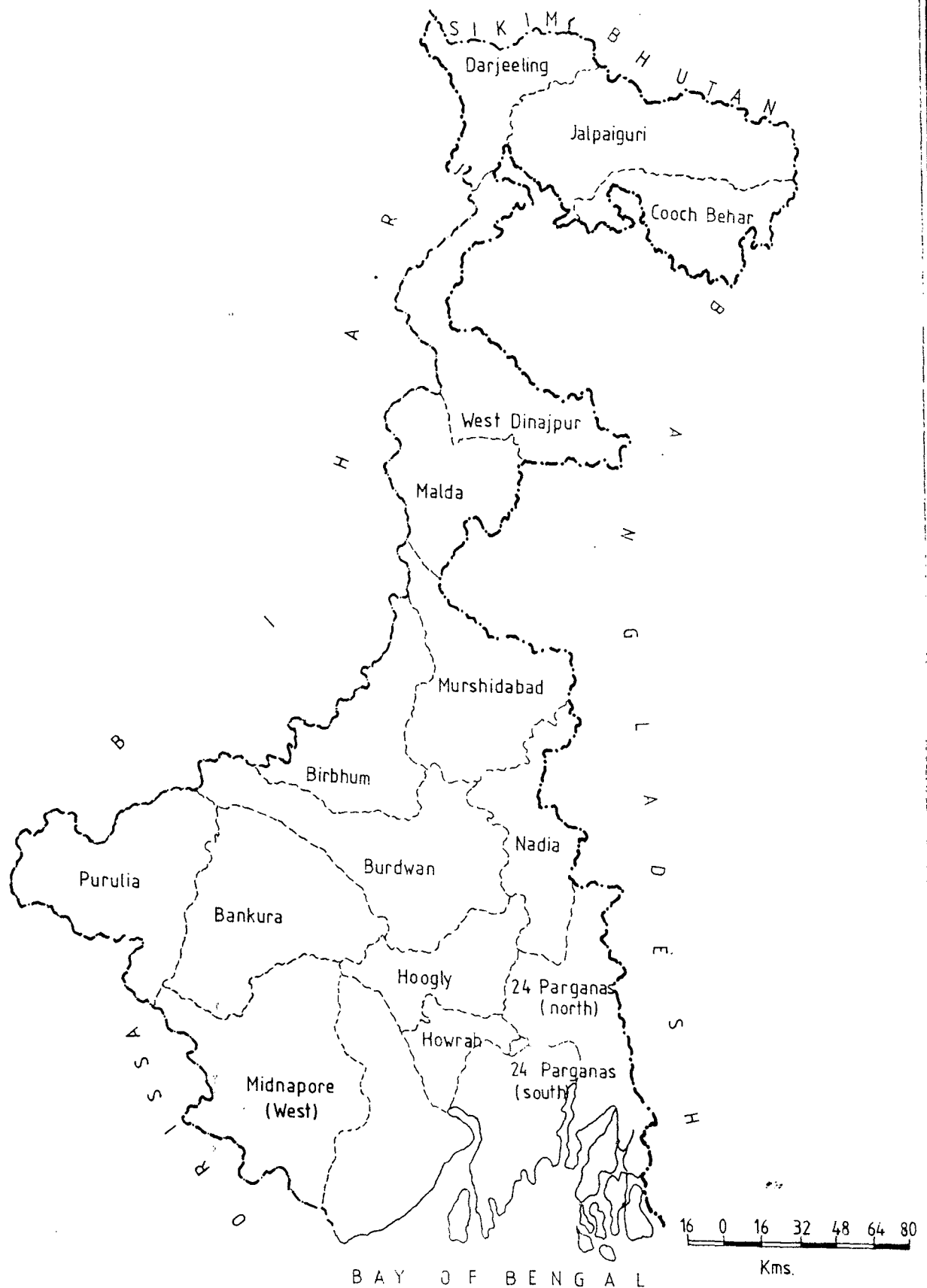


Fig. 2

east, while Bay of Bengal forms a physical boundary in the south and Bihar bounds it in the west. The strategic importance of this State also arises from the fact that the narrow neck which connects its northern most region with the main body of West Bengal provides the only corridor between the North-East Zone comprising Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh.⁵⁰ West Bengal spreads over an area of 87,853 square kilometres and accommodates 54,580,647 persons (1981). Administratively, it is organised in 17 districts.

The Geological Structure:

Approximately to the east of longitude 87°E, the great Indian shield disappears below a blanket of gangetic alluvium. The exposed part of the Archaean Shield, which borders this extensive alluviated plain, is marked by a number of Gondwana basins along the Damodar river valley, in the form of a few exposures of early tertiary age near Dungarpur and Baripada, and the late Mesozoic volcanics of the Rajmahal Hills. The alluvium covered plains of West Bengal are bordered to the north-east by an Archaean massif of the Shillong plateau, which is apparently the north-eastern continuation of the peninsular, Shield

50. West Bengal - An Analytical Study, Oxford and I.B.H. Publications Co., Calcutta, 1971, p.3.

through a relatively shallow sub-surface ridge in the area of the so-called Garo-Rajmahal gap. The folded belt of cretaceous and tertiary rocks in the Naga-Lushai Hill mark the eastern limit of the Bengal basin.

In the western fringe of the West Bengal basin, the Archaean Shield has been traced below a thin veneer of alluvium, upto a zone passing through the Midnapore, West Galsi and Jangipur areas. The buried basement ridges in the western fringe basin presumably kept the basin of Gondwana sedimentation isolated from the main Bengal basin through most of the tertiary times.⁵¹

Presence of the Durgapur beds possibly estuarine counterpart of the some shallow marine, Middle Miocene formations in the West Bengal subsurface near Raniganj, and the foraminiferal Baripada bed near Baripada, suggest extensive marine transgression, across the basement ridges in the late tertiary. In the south western areas, the marine invasion continued, at least locally, even during the Plio-Pleistocene.

Flanking the row of basin margins of buried ridges, is a zone of an echelon faults. Some of the down to

51. West Bengal - A publication of the Geographical Institute, Presidency College, Calcutta, 1970, p.95.

the basin, normal faults occurring in the subsurface of Midnapore, Galsi, Bolpur and Jangipur areas, show traces of being modified to fault through erosion. Some of them bear testimony of having developed with sedimentation. East of this marginal fault-zone lies the stable shelf of West Bengal, with a dip to the south-east.

Geologically, North Bengal Himalayas can be subdivided into three zones⁵², namely (i) an outer belt of Siwalik frontal range, (ii) a medium narrow of Damuda range and (iii) an inner belt of allocthonous metamorphiles of the of the Buxas, Dalinga and Darjeelings.

The Damudas of the Darjeeling foot hills are generally believed to be regionally overturned. Presence of so-called Talchir boulder bed at Tirdharia, occurring in the upper most structural level of the Damudas and under the older Dalings was taken as important evidence. The Daling series is a Schistose group; it grades through a transition zone into the dominantly gnessic Darjeeling series. Carbonaceous materials are present in both the units, but these are more common in the Darjeeling gneisses. The Buxa series intervene between them and tertiaries. It comprises

52. M.S. Krishnan, Geology of India and Burma, CBS, Delhi, 1982, pp.137-46.

WEST BENGAL RELIEF AND DRAINAGE

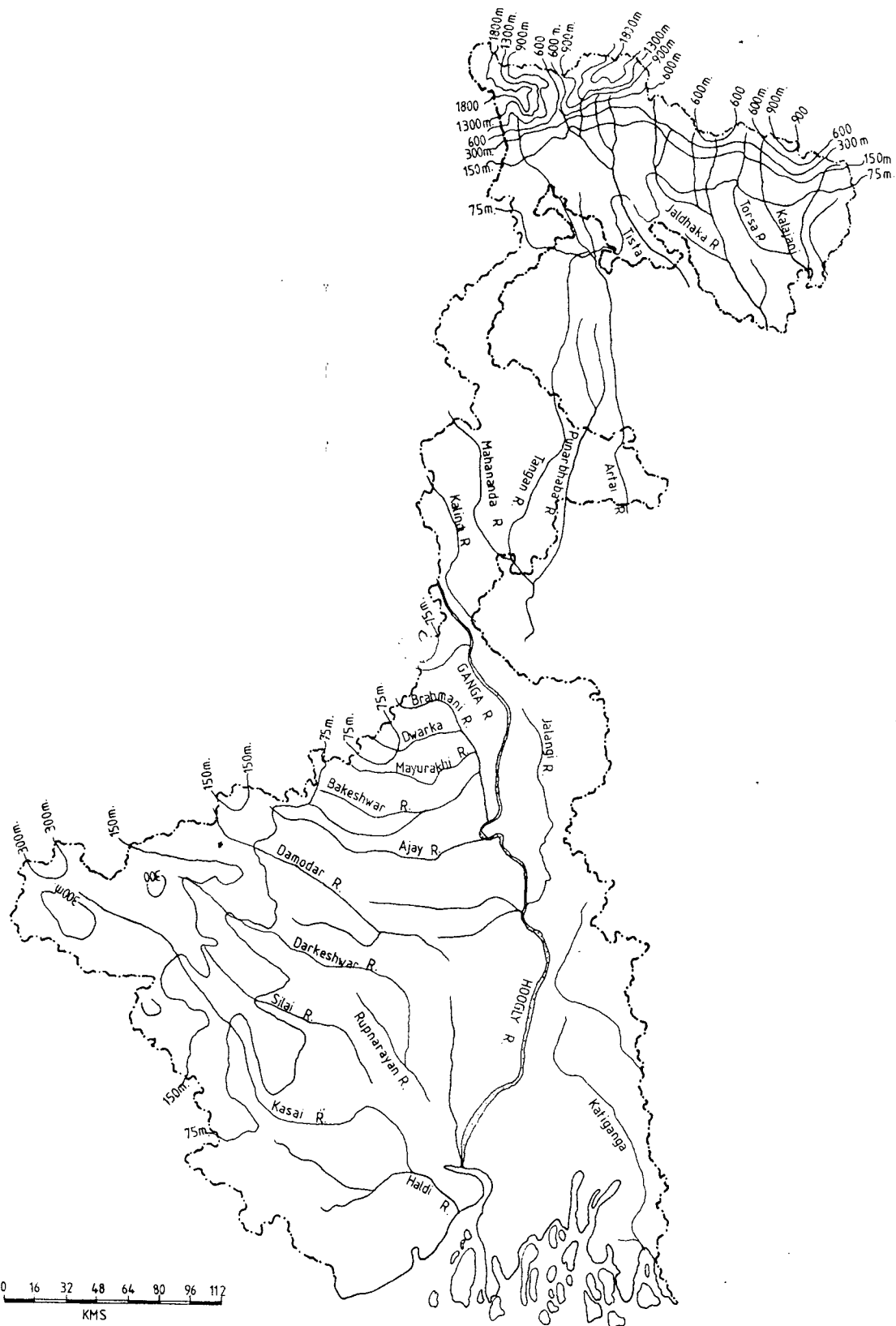


Fig 3

dolomite, orthoquartzites, slates, phyllites and schist. Slates and phyllites, associated with orthoquartzites are variegated in red and green colour.

Relief and Physiographic Divisions:

West Bengal can be divided into the following physiographic regions:

- (i) Young mountainous region of the North,
- (ii) Upland of the Western Plateau Fringe,
- (iii) The Duars and the plains of the North,
- (iv) The Mahananda corridor,
- (v) The Malda plain,
- (vi) Alluvial plains and Delta of Gangetic system,
- (vii) Sunderbans,
- (viii) Kanthi Coastal strip.

(i) Young Mountainous region of the North:

The ranges of hills and valleys formed in the Middle and Outer Himalayas in Darjeeling District constitute this region. It represents the hill country, having a very rugged topography. This region is cut into two portions by the deep gorge of river 'Tista' which is only two to four hundred metres above sea level, while the steep sides of the valley have attained the height of two to three thousand metres. The gorge runs north-

south. To its west are the hills of Darjeeling which rise to 2,600 metres while to the east 'Durbin Dara' near Kalimpong rises to 1,800 metres. Here, a few other small tributaries of Tista have cut deep incisions into the mountains. In the east the hills rise to above 3,000 metres and from Tiger Hills a spur descends northwards to the junction of Tista and Rangit.⁵³ To the south it runs through Dow Hills above Kurseong to the Siliguri plains. Throughout their whole length these spurs present steep flanks, which descend to the Tista gorge.

From Tiger Hill another spur runs westwards through Ghoom to Sukiapokhri and Simanabasti on the Nepal border. This is called Ghoom ridge. North of Simanabasti, the spur ascends steeply to Tangu, which is over 3,000 metres high. From here the spur continues northwards as Singalila Range, which rises to about 4,000 metres at two points, Sandokpu and Singalila peak, which stands at the trijunction of Darjeeling district, Sikkim and Nepal. The range runs further north between Nepal and Sikkim and ascends further to snow cover peaks, culminating in Kanchanjanga, at the trijunction of Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet. It is the third

53. S.C. Bose, Geography of West Bengal, NBTI, New Delhi, 1968, p. 23.

highest peak of the world as it records a height of 8,586 metres from the sea level. The Kanchanjanga group of snow covered peaks is called 'Kumbhakarna Himali'. The slope of Dow Hill spur, climbs over Ghoom ridge, and slowly descends to Darjeeling town. There is deep gorge between Darjeeling spur, the Ghoom ridge and Singalila range, over shadowing it from the west.

(ii) Uplands of the Western Plateau Fringe:

This region of West Bengal includes the western borders of the district of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Midnapore and slightly more rugged triangular piece of upland, consisting of the Purulia district. The highest part of the Purulia upland lies in the western portion between the valleys of Subarnarekha and Kansabati or Kasai. It is an elongated hilly area about 20 kilometres in length and 10 kilometres in width. Its sides, at some places, rise steeply to two to three hundred metres. Its highest point is "Gorgaburu", 677 metres high. Incidentally, it is the highest point in the plateau fringe. The whole of this hill is known as "Ajodhya Pahar". The "Panchet Hill" stands in this plateau fringe as a lone forest covered hill, with a flat-tish top, attaining a height of 643 metres. Its sides present bold vertical scarps on all sides, about 500 metres high. It seems that both Ajodhya and Panchet Hills are detached remnants of the Hazaribagh plateau, further west in Bihar.

The rest of the Purulia upland is about 200 to 1,000 metres high and gradually slopes towards the southeast. A few isolated hills rise here and there, which are generally 250 to 300 metres high, and present only local eminences. The southern corner of the Purulia triangle is called "Barabhum" and it mainly consists of a broken hilly area, which extends south-east-wards into Midnapore. The height gradually drops to below 100 metres. Towards the east the Purulia uplands extends into Bankura district. Here 'Susunia Hill', though 400 metres high, looks quite rugged, because it is the last hill of the plateau fringe. A low rocky upland spreads around it along the northern border, along which flows river Damodar in a broad and braided course.

The physical setting of Birbhum in this plateau is somewhat different than that in Bankura and Purulia, as the rocks in this area are not crystalline, but Gondwana sediments consisting of sand-stones, shales and coal.

(iii) The Duars and the Plains of the North:

This region occupies the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and the southern half of Darjeeling. This region slope downwards from the foothills and slowly flattens towards the south. Their upper parts are often called "Duars". The swift flowing Himalayan rivers bring down enormous eroded materials in the form of boulders,

pebbles, sands and even a little clay. On the plains, they suddenly lose their load capacity, and drop the load. The slopes are built up of this porous materials.

(iv) The Mahananda Corridor:

This name has been given to the narrow strip of land which connects the northern portion of West Bengal with the Malda plain. In this part the main river is Mahananda, which rises from the lower slopes of the Himalayan in the Darjeeling district and flows along the eastern edge of the corridor. A feature of this region is the slightly raised banks of old, leached alluvial soil through which numerous small streams rise and flow towards the plain.

(v) The Malda Plain:

This is triangle shaped region and drained by a number of rivers from north to south. Highly meandering courses of the rivers have enriched alluvial deposits on this region. The southern boundary of this region is the broad braided, bed, of the Ganga plain. The general elevation of this region is not more than 200 metres from the sea level.

(vi) Alluvial Plains and Deltas of Gangetic System:

This physiographic region of the state, comprises of the alluvial plains and delta of the Gangetic system. The land is flat and can be classified mainly on the basis of

drainage characteristics. The southern part consists of Gangetic plains and the Moribund delta. This latter area includes Nadia district. Old distributary streams are checked with silt and the rivers themselves flow on old levees with hardly enough water to inundate the countryside, during the monsoon season. The swampy area at the back lying between the natural levees is poorly drained. In the mature delta, which covers the northern half of 24 Parganas, the rivers have enough vigour to overflow and deposit some silt, although their increasing salinity is an indication of their gradual deterioration. The southern half of 24 Parganas is occupied by an active delta system reaching 90 to 130 kilometres inland from the head of the Bay of Bengal.

(vii) The Sundarbans:

Further south the plains extended into the complex pattern of tidal creeks, mud flats, and newly formed islands. If we draw a straight line from the southern tip of 'Sagar Island', situated east of the mouth of Hooghly to a point seventy kilometres north of the sea on the Bangladesh border, we get a triangular region with one of its sides as this straight line, the other as the sea coast and the third as the Bangladesh border. This triangle gives the extent of Sunderbans today. Of course,

it spreads further east into Bangladesh. The tidal creeks of the region are getting less and less of fresh water from the land. Silt, usually, deposits where low tides coming up along two channels meet. In this way the channels are disconnected. The building up of new land is slow, as the supply of silt is limited from the land. However, the channels near the sea are very broad. The broadest is the estuary of river Hoogly, with a width of 20 km west of the southern edge of "Sagar Island". Malta is another wide estuary through which bores ascends upto port canning, through Vidyadhari. It is 15 km broad at its mouth.

(viii) Kanthi Coastal Strip:

The topography of this strip of land is related to the sea. The coast-line is more or less a smooth convex curve; broken only by the mouth of small streams. Though there are salt marshes here and there. It is a long stretch of firm sandy beach.

Drainage System:

Bengal is known as the land of rivers. It is an intricate network of rivers with numerous tributaries and distributaries in the whole of the lowland between the Bhagirathi-Hoogly on one side and Meghna-Brahmaputra on the other. The whole drainage system of Bengal can be categorised into two groups on the basis of the

regional distribution of rivers and their tributaries, namely (i) Western rivers and (ii) North Bengal rivers.

(i) Western rivers:

The river Bhagirathi flows towards south and it is joined by a number of tributaries on the right bank, they are Pagla, Bansloi, Brahmani, Dwarka, Murrakhi and Ajoy. These right bank tributaries take off from the eastern slope of Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana hills. All these rivers are rainfed and Ajoy is most important among them. The river Ajoy comes out from Chotanagpur plateau and flows towards east and joins Bhagirathi near 'Katwa'. Floods in the Ajoy rise very rapidly during the monsoon season.⁵⁴ The other western tributary of Bhagirathi-Hoogly system is the Damodar which joins the tidal basin of the Rupnarayan instead of Hoogly. The flood waters of the river Darkeswar, Silai and Kasai also join this tribal basin. Several dams have been constructed on the river Damodar by the Damodar Valley Corporation. The Kansabati river originates from the PuFulia triangle and extends towards east and enriched the flows of Haldi river.

(ii) North Bengal rivers:

A number of streams, such as the Mahananda, the Tista, the Torsa etc. descend from the Himalayas and rush to their

54. Census Atlas of West Bengal, Series 22, Part IX (1971), p.5.

main streams almost parallel to each other. The Mahananda is a rainfed river receiving almost no snowmelt water from the Himalaya. It drains almost in the whole of North Bengal, passing through numerous marshy pockets before it joins the Ganga on the left bank.

The Tista, a prolific Himalayan stream joining the Padma, till 1787 suddenly drifted eastward to join Brahmaputra. The overfloodings in Duar and Braind tract are the result of the sudden break in the slope at junction of the foot hills and the plains as also in its counterpart to the east and west.

Climate:

The climate of West Bengal is tropical, hot and humid, monsoon type, except in the northern mountains, where the altitude becomes the controlling factor. The climate of West Bengal can best be described under four seasons recognised by the Indian Meteorological Department. The four seasons are:

(i) The Hot Weather Season:

The hot weather season in West Bengal extends between March and June. Summer is preceded by the somewhat insignificant spring season. Temperature may shoot up during day to above 38°C. The heat increases day by day, and usually the highest temperatures of the year are recorded

in the first or second week of April. 40°C is often reached during the day, and temperature comes down in night. There is very important consequence of the rise in temperature. It is the creation of conventional storms called "Norwesters" as they usually come from the north-west. In Bengal this storm is called "Kolbaisakhi" the deadly wind of the Baisakh. During the monsoon completely different types of climate exists. In the northern mountainous region where the temperature ranges between 6°C to 10°C .

(ii) Advance of the Monsoon:

By the 15th June, the whole of the West Bengal is under the influence of Bay of Bengal current. Heavy rains start all over the state. The onset of monsoon may be extremely vigorous, if a depression forms at the head of the bay at this time. Sometimes an early depression may cause rain even before the usual date of on-set. The characteristics of the monsoon rain have been called pulsatory. This is due to the pattern of depressions.

The average rainfall in the state is about 175 cm. in the years of which 125 cms falls in the four rainy months, i.e. June to September. But there is a lot of variations from place to place. The heaviest rainfall occurs in the northern mountains, where the average

annual recorded is over 400 cm. Throughout the northern link districts, annual average rainfall is more than 300 cm. The Mahananda Corridor, Sundarbans and Kanthi Coastal Strip receive about 200 cm. Annual rainfall recorded in Midnapore, Howrah, Hoogly, Nadia and Northern half of 24 Pargana varies between 140 and 160 cm. The plateau fringe receives less than 140 cm. Bankura and Purulia are the driest districts having an annual rainfall of 118 cm.

(iii) The Season of Retreating Monsoon:

In the early part of October the weather in West Bengal witnesses a change. The monsoon starts retreating from the northern India in the last week of September. And by middle of October it leaves West Bengal. The night soon becomes cool as the heat during the day fades out fast through the clear night sky. There is lot of dew in the morning, which is caused by the sudden drop of temperature, when there is high relative humidity in the atmosphere. Morning fogs are also frequent.

(iv) Cold weather Season:

The cold season begins in West Bengal by the middle of November and this cold is very mild. The daily mean temperature is not more than 25°C. The minimum temperature at night is always above 15°C. The winds are light and variable.

Natural Vegetation:

Forests exist in three distinct areas of the State. These are⁵⁵ (i) forest of the North which include the mountainous temperate forest and the tropical forests of the Duars, (ii) the deciduous forest of the plateau fringe and the mangrove forest of Sundarbans.

(i) Mountainous Temperate Forests:

The mountainous forests are related to altitude and aspect. Below 1,000 metres there are tropical evergreen forest. Between 1,000 and 1,500 metres, sub-tropical forests occur which have Terminalia, Cedrela, Michelia and various laurels dominant plants. Bamboo is abundantly found in this belt. Temperate forests are found from 1,500 to 3,000 metres. They contain some varieties of oaks and conifers. Mangolia campbellii and large rhododendrons are also found in this belt. Above 3,000 metres, silverfir, is very common.

(ii) Tropical Mixed Evergreen Forest of the Foot Hills:

Most dense forest of the state grow in this zone. Much of these forests is moist deciduous and sal is most common and valuable tree. Other common trees are champa, and chilauni khoir, gamar and toon. Evergreen laurels and

55. S.C. Bose, Geography of West Bengal, NBTI, New Delhi, 1968, p.53.

other moisture loving plants are found mixed with the deciduous forests. Here the low level tea gardens have taken heavy toll of the forest. Among the shrubs found in this region, the *Rauwolfia serpentina* is most important for its medical properties. The tropical corridor forest along the Tista valley goes beyond the West Bengal border into Sikkim. The forest is very dense like other tropical rain forest and there is much undergrowth of shrubs and bushes.

Deciduous forest of the Plateau Fringe:

Sals are found in this group of forest. The other trees are dominantly palash and mahua. Fruits and seeds of these trees are used for producing food and oil. Bamboos and some kind of tall grasses including sobai grass also grow at places in this area.

Mangrove vegetations of Sundarbans:

The mangrove vegetations are very common in this area, as the root system of mangrove plants are very large to allow them to stand in the deep mud. In many cases as in Keya or Kewra, the roots branch out from above the ground and provide silts to the plant, so that it does not fall easily. A very common scene in the Sundarbans is a forest of spikes jutting out the muddy ground. They are actually pneumatophores or breathing roots shooting

out of the mud and joined to the root system underground. The most common salt-loving tree which is found here is Sundri. Other trees are goran, gewa and dhundal. A dwarf variety of palm called "nipa palm" grws widely along the edge of the salt water.

Coastal Vegetations:

Among the coastal vegetations Keya, Kewra bushes are mostly important. Other trees like bamboo, coconuts and date-palm grow here and there. Now the coastal land scope is dominated by casuarina plantations which spread along the coast.

Soils:

The soils of the State of West Bengal are divided into five types:⁵⁶ (i) Laterites, (ii) Red Earths, (iii) Terai soils, (iv) Alluvial soils and (v) the Coastal soils.

(i) Laterite soils:

The lateritic soils are found in the undulating well-drained tract along the Chotanagpur highlands, covering the western part of the State. The formation of laterite soil takes place under typical monsoonal conditions. The wet season followed by the dry season leads

56. West Bengal - An Analytical Study, Oxford and IBH Publication Co., Calcutta, 1971, p.4.

to the leaching away of the siliceous matter of the rocks and as a consequence laterite soils are formed. The soils are acidic in nature and there is deficiency of organic matter.

(ii) Red Earths:

The transported laterites deposited on the eastern flanks of the lateritic stretch are known as the Red earths. These are found in the eastern margins of the Rarh plain and the Barind tract of Malda and West Dinajpur districts. The soils are of reddish colour due to a wide diffusion of iron in ancient crystalline and metamorphic rocks. The physical properties of these soils vary from region to region.

(iii) Tarai Soils:

The unassorted materials deposited at the foot of the Darjeeling Himalaya are responsible for typical Tarai soils in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. The deficiency of plant food and organic matter and acidity are common characteristics of Tarai soils.

(iv) Alluvial Soils:

Alluvial soils are very important for agriculture. The narrow alluvial strip along the lateritic and red soils in parts of the districts of Murshidabad, Bankura, Burdwan, Hoogly and Midnapore are different from the Ganga alluvial which covers parts of North Bengal plain and

whole of the remaining West Bengal deltas excluding the coastal strips in 24 Parganas and Midnapore. The Ganga alluvium is rich in plant nutrients and organic matter but poor in phosphorous.

(v) The Coastal Soils:

The coastal soils are the outcome of the interaction of rivers and tides and have developed in the districts of 24 Parganas and Midnapore. The soils are saline and alkaline and contain deposits rich in Ca, Mg and half decomposed organic matter.

CHAPTER II

LAND REFORMS IN INDIA -
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

India has diverse tenurial systems throughout its large extent. These systems have emerged historically from the local and regional traditional legal systems. There were three types of land tenure in British India - the 'zamindari', the 'ryotwari' and the 'mahalwari'. There were two types of zamindari system, namely (i) Permanent settlement and (ii) Temporary settlement. Permanent zamindari settlement existed in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Banaras and North Madras; and the Temporary settlement covered the greater parts of Uttar Pradesh. The jaqirdari system (a variety of temporary zamindari settlement) prevailed in Punjab, PEPSU and in Rajasthan.

Under the permanent settlement, the share of the revenue from the state was fixed in perpetuity and the zamindars became the proprietor of the lands. Under the ryotwari system¹, there was the direct link between the state and the ryots. This system was introduced in the greater parts of Madras and Bombay.

1. Report of the National Commission on Agriculture, vol.XV, New Delhi, 1976, p.5.

The principle of Mahalwari or joint village system was first adopted in Agra and Oudh and later extended to the Punjab. Under this tenure, the settlement was made with the entire village and the peasants had to pay revenue on the basis of the size of their respective holdings. The revenue was assessed for the village as a whole. Each cultivating household, thus, had to contribute his share of the total demand.

In order to understand the present land system in India, it is necessary to get least a rough idea of the land system existing before British came to India.

LAND SYSTEM DURING ANCIENT TIME:

The Aryans, who migrated to India, were a pastoral people. They became 'agriculturists' when they settled down in the fertile plains on the banks of Ganges and its tributaries. At the time to which the Institutes of Manu relate, keeping of herds of cattle and carrying on of trade were considered more commendable than agriculture. But the value of product from agriculture had come to be well-realised and a share of the produce from land formed one of the sources of the king's revenues. This share was "an eighth, sixth or twelfth part of the grain according to the labour necessary to cultivate the land."² The other sources of the king's

2. Manu, Chapter VII, p.139.

revenue were a fifteenth part from cattle, gems, gold and silver added each year to the capital stock and sixth part of the income of trees, flowers, honey, clarified butter, medical substances and liquids. There were also duties on trade.

It has been a subject of controversy whether a tribe or family or group of families who settled in a village would enjoy common ownership rights over the lands of village or not? But no outline of this land system was provided by Manu. This confusion may be ascribed to the fact that community ownership was prevalent in some of the frontier tracts in the Punjab. There are passages in Manu which indicated that king was the owner of the soil and revenues were collected from the cultivators and in return he would protect them against aggression.

Early land system in other parts of India was different from the Aryan system in Central and Western regions. The Dravidian races in Southern India had introduced system of 'Khunts' or allotments by which a portion of the lands in a village went to the headman, a portion to the priest and a portion as the royal farm (majhas). The practice of taking a grain share from the majha lands grew up later. On the western coast of Malabar and Canara and in the dry regions of Southern Punjab

there were no divisions by units as villages and in some parts there was no tax or revenue from the cultivated land.

The Kol tribes who occupied the vast area of Vindhya hills and hills of Chotanagpur, lived mainly by hunting and collecting forest produce. They generally practised shifting cultivation. In Orissa, the primitive tribes had, and have still, the same peculiarities as the Kolharians, while the Uraons had a land system very much like that of the Dravidians further south, though modified later by the Aryan influence.

An elaborate description of the tenurial system in Maurya period had been provided by Kautilya. 'Arthashastra' maintains that king was the owner of the land. King had the power to reclaim any types of land. When the king had, thus, prepared the lands for cultivation (kritakshetra), they would be settled with tenant who would hold for life only. The land was forested and not suitable for cultivation, but cleared and cultivated by individuals, would not be taken away from them, and presumably would be allowed to be held on by their successors so long as they paid the revenue. A prescriptive right by 20 years possession was also recognised. If in any cases land was not cultivated by the tenants, it might be taken away from him and given to others or cultivated by servants or by

traders. The traditional royal share was one-sixth of the produce of the cultivated lands, but in the irrigated areas, the share was one-fifth to one-third. There were "Crown Lands" which might be cultivated by hired labour or by slaves or convicts or by persons paying one-half of the produce (ardha-sitika). Certain quantities of arable lands were conferred tax free on religious men (ritwik acharyya, purohita, srotriya), physicians (chikitsaka) etc. and for officers as superintendents (adhyaksha), accountants (sankhyaka), revenue supervisors (sthanika) etc. Certain villages in Maurya kingdom were exempted wholly or partly from land tax as the men were to serve as soldiers (pariharaka).

Very little information is available about the land system of Harshavardhana (606-647 A.D.) kingdom. Chinese traveller Huen Tsang referred that agriculture was well advanced in the territory of king Harsha. The tenants, paid one-sixth of the produce as rent. There were three-fold land system in the Chola kingdom of South India. They were namely Samudayam (common property), palabhoga (permanent property), and ekabhogam. Under the Samudayam tenure, the land was cultivated either by the whole body of the village or separated by each member of the village, but the entire produce in both cases was

shared by the members of the community according to their respective share. Under the palabhaga tenure all the cultivated lands were distributed permanently to all the members of the community. The individual members were responsible to pay revenue to the king. The ekabhogam system differed from the other two systems. It is defined as a plot of land granted to a single Brahman for his sole enjoyment and having on it his house and the houses of dependents and tenants.

At the same time, a different type of land systems developed in Bengal during the reign of 'Ballal Sena'. The territory was divided into five grand divisions called "Bhuktis". These were Banga, Barendra, Bagri, Ragh and Mithila, and each was subdivided into "mandalikas" called also 'bishayas' or landed properties. The tenants paid one-sixth of their gross produce to the king and this system was known as "raja-praja sambandha".

Land System During the Sultanate Period:

The state had little or no direct relation with the peasantry so far as the rents collection was concerned during the Sultanate period. There were a host of hereditary land-holders who went by various names such as rajas, chaudhuries, sikdars, chakladars etc.³ The

3. Elliot, History of India, vol.3 as quoted in M.S. Randhawa, A History of Agriculture in India, vol.II, ICAR, New Delhi, 1982, p.170.

'Sovereign Ruler' fixed certain sums to be paid annually by the top most holder; and where the lands were comprised of the 'Khalsa' area, these sums were to be paid into the royal treasury, and where there were 'jaigir', they were appropriated by the 'jagirdar'. The amounts from the 'Khalsa' lands, formed the land revenue of the State, and judging from the nature of the administration it is not surprising that they have sometimes been called "tributes" or "taxes" and the like.

Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316 A.D.) made a 'jarib' or measurement of the land and decided to fix revenue on that basis. He gave orders that all the 'khalsa' villages of the country should pay the tribute in kind. Ghias-Uddin Tughlak (1321-1325 A.D.), decided that the land revenue of the country should be settled upon just principles with reference to the produce. The officers of the exchequer were asked not to assess more than one in ten, or one in eleven upon the 'ikta's', and other lands, either by guess or computation, whether on the reports of informers or the statements of valuers. During the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq (1325-51), the arbitrary increase of revenue from the cultivators was found. Revenues were not fixed for any province and it depended upon the provincial officers. The peasant economy was not well-developed. Of the produce of land, a large share went to the state

in the form of the land tax. Of the remainder, a customary share was fixed for various classes of domestic and other labourers. A certain portion went to the share of the priest and the temple. The peasant and his family kept the rest for their own use.

"Sher Shah" was famous among the pathan emperors for his revenue policy. Under Sher Shah, state demand was fixed at one-third of the expected produce. It was payable in cash or kind. When there was a drought or other natural calamity, advances were made to the cultivators to relieve them from the distress. The assessment was revised every year, and besides the rent, the tenant was to pay an extra charge for the cost of this annual measurement, called "jarib-ana". The collection was entrusted to officers called "muquddim", but the tenants had to pay for the costs and extra charge called 'mahasul'. The muquddim's cost was half the pargana, consisted of one 'Aumil', one 'Sikdar', one "Treasurer", one "Karkun" to write accounts in Hindi and another to write in persian.

Land System during the Mughal Period:

The land tax was the main source of revenue in Mughal India and the land was operated on a fixed rent basis. The king was in supreme power and below the king were actual tillers of the soils or the owner of 'khudkasht' land who

were called 'Khudkasht royat'. Such royat enjoyed permanent and heritable occupancy right.

'Akbar' is famous among the Mughal kings for his administrative reforms and revenue policy. The objectives of Akbar's revenue systems were⁴ - firstly to obtain a correct measurement of the land; secondly, to ascertain the amount of the produce of each bigha of land, and to fix the proportion of that amount that the cultivator should pay to the government; thirdly, to settle an equivalent for the proportion fixed in money.

The land was divided into three classes, according to its fertility, the amount of each type of product that a bigha of each class would yield was ascertained and the average of three classes was assumed as the produce of a bigha, and one-third of that produce formed the government demand. The land, which was cultivated every year, was called 'polaj'. The revenue for this type of land was paid to the government in every harvest. For land which required fallowing, rent was levied only when under cultivation and it was called 'parathi'. For the 'chhakkar' land, which had been out of cultivation for three years two-fifths of the produce for the first year was paid as

4. Randhawa, A History of Agriculture in India, vol.II, ICAR, New Delhi, 1982, p.203.

rent but it went on increasing till the fifth year, when it paid the full demand. Land which had been out of cultivation for more than five years was called 'banjar'. It enjoyed still more favourable terms for the first four years. The polaj and parathi lands were classified again into three categories - good, medium and poor. Then the annual average for each category of land was worked out. One-third of the annual average was fixed at the state demand for revenue. Besides these systems described above, there were two other revenue systems, 'galla baksh' (crop-sharing) and 'nasq' (village assessment).

The characteristic feature of the land system during Mughal period was that the king became the supreme owner of the entire domain. The intermediary class mainly consisted of chieftains who collected and transmitted the land revenue and taxes to the king. A number of zamindars and jagirdars came into existence as a result of generous gifts offered by the king. The multiplication of land titles originated mainly from these grants or assignments of revenue. However, the system never provided landed right to such persons.

According to Baden Powell, there were two types of grants of Revenue. The first grants were called 'inam' or 'muafi' grants. It was a common practice among the

rulers to grant 'Inams' to temples, warriors, priest and service artisans. The other types of grants were known as 'jagir' land, the revenue of which was assigned to certain state officers and military commanders. The assignments were for life and no revenue could be taken than was specified in the grant.

But with the political weakness of the Mughal king, the provincial rulers became the financial administrators. In many cases the zamindars, acted as an intermediary between the king and the Khudkasht rayat. The emergence of intermediary appears to be closely related with the right of collecting land revenue. Although the revenue system in many provinces were determined with the local land tenure.

Dr. Radhakamal Mukherjee pointed out that the revenue farmers in Bengal proved themselves a powerful body and called them as the independent zamindars (Baro Bhuiya) or the proprietors of the land. In the same way, the 'talukdari' right had developed in former Agra and Oudh. The talukdars of Oudh later asserted themselves as the proprietors of the lands. In southern India, the system did not spread much. The variety of revenue farming rights developed in the western part of India. They were generally known as 'jagirdars', 'inamdars' and in Gujarat as talukdars etc.

The land tenure was almost different in Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and in certain parts of Uttar Pradesh. The joint village bodies having proprietary rights in land continued. But some powerful chieftains claimed overlordship rights and declared their personal proprietary right. These peoples were named as 'Lambardars', 'malguzars' and 'talukdars'. The 'polygars' of North Madras, also declared themselves as the independent chiefs.

The origin of zamindari tenure in Bihar was quite similar to West Bengal. Baden Powell pointed out that the zamindars of Bihar, were descendents from the high caste and dominated in the rural localities.

It is to be noted that the system that had developed under the Mughal emperors had the following characteristics: Firstly, land belonged to the peasant, in the sense, that he enjoyed hereditary occupancy right if he was resident of the village. Even his rent could not be increased by the zamindar beyond the customary level. Secondly, land could neither be purchased nor sold. Generally, the peasant was not evicted for the failure to cultivate, land was not to be resumed as the 'Khalsa' land of the zamindars, but another peasant had to be invested with its occupancy right. In short, land never passed out of the hands of the peasantry.

Thirdly, the zamindars whose tributes to the ruler were fixed were themselves petty rulers and had to fulfil the traditional duties of a ruler for the betterment of agricultural operations.

LAND SYSTEM DURING BRITISH PERIOD:

The British did little in the beginning to interfere with the existing land system. They faced a peculiar situation of forged titles and pretended grants back by the fact of present possession, and it so happened that a 'jagirdar' or a 'grantee', 'malguzars' etc.; easily usurped the right to the land as well as the privilege of land revenue.⁵ The East India Company's rule recognised all the grants before 1765 A.D. in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa as valid. A century before the British rule the zamindars had developed themselves as landlords and the position became hereditary in course of time. But it was during the British rule that in Bengal the private right in land was first granted to the zamindars by permanent settlement, 1793. The proprietary right was to give full security to the zamindars. Under the permanent settlement of 1793, the state promised that the amount of land revenue would be fixed for ever and that it would not make any further demand

5. G. Ojha, Land Problems and Land Reforms, Sultan Chand and Sons, New Delhi, p.32.

in consequence of any improvement on the estates of the zamindars. Each zamindar, under this settlement was fully entitled to bring the vast area of waste land under the plough by his own tenants so that in course of time he became its owner. Such appropriated areas were called "Khamar-nijot" or "sir land". The land purchase and mortgaging-in of fresh land went on increasing the size of personal estates. Unpaid rent or arrears of rent was followed by seizing of the land by the landlord who claimed proprietary right on it. Apart from this each zamindar got some land exempted from revenue for his private subsistence which was known as 'nankar'. There was a marked difference between the old 'jagirdari' system and the zamindari system of the British rule. While the former system implied certain conditions of service without giving proprietary right, the zamindari system, on the other hand, made those conditions obsolete and on the other provided the ownership right to the zamindars.

By the middle of the 19th century three major land revenue systems were introduced in British India: (i) Zamindari, (ii) Rayotwari, and (iii) Mahalwari.

(i) Zamindari Land Tenure System:

The Zamindari land system prevailed in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, U.P., Oudh and in northern part of Madras. In the

very early stage of the zamindari system (in British India), the zamindars were considered as the intermediary between the government and the cultivators. The zamindars were responsible to pay the collected revenue from the cultivators to government, in return they would get certain privileges from the government. However, zamindars were not having any right of property in the soils.

After Dewani in 1765, Company's financial requirements for meeting the expenditure of territorial administration began to increase. The new zamindars were created and the revenue demands of Company became unlimited. The zamindars were permitted to bring the vast area of land under the plough by their own tenants. The revenue rates were increased enormously. Customary rents were abolished and freedom given to the zamindars to collect whatever they possibly could as rent.

Under that situation the actual cultivators were deprived from their all traditional rights including the right of security of tenure.

Lord Cornwallis introduced the permanent settlement in 1793 to restore some order in the prevailing chaos and to save the internal market for British goods. Under this settlement the zamindars became the proprietors of the lands and rate of revenue demands fixed permanently, but no fixation of customary rates was done.

Certain principles governed the permanent settlement, although all the principles were not implemented properly to protect the rayots.

The first principle stated that some persons had to play the role of intermediaries between the state and rayots for collecting the revenue from the cultivators, and these persons were zamindars.

Secondly, the zamindars were recognised as the proprietor of the lands. The absolute right in the soil was given to them.

Thirdly, the revenue was fixed perpetually. The zamindars was to pay to the state 90 per cent of the assets (rentals) which meant that he could keep one-tenth of the revenue.

Fourthly, the amount of the revenue was fixed in different manner for the different taluks and parganas.

Fifthly, it was decided that if the zamindars were unable to pay the revenue by the fixed date, the estates were to be sold out for the non-payment.

The most serious defect in the permanent settlement was that it failed to define and protect the rights of the rayots, who lost their proprietary rights in the land, and their existence depended on the mercy of the zamindars.

Rayotwari Land System:

The rayotwari settlement was introduced by Thomas Munroe, in the newly conquered territories of Madras in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Later the rayotwari system covered Bombay, Berar, East Punjab and portions of Assam and Coorg.

Under the rayotwari settlement, the rayot was directly under the state. Land revenue was assessed on each holding separately held by rayot. He was recognised as proprietor, he could sublet, mortgage or transfer it by gift or sale. It must be noted that the peasant under the zamindari system did not get these rights, these rights belonged only to the tenure holders, i.e., the zamindars and other intermediaries, when permanent settlement was introduced. But subsequent reforms had given these rights to a section of the tenants called occupancy ryots.

Rayotwari settlement was a temporary one. The period of settlement varied between 20 to 40 years. It was 20 years in Madhya Pradesh, 20 years in Bombay, Madras and U.P. and 40 years in the Punjab. The myth of "peasant proprietorship" under rayotwari system was blown up by the growth of different categories of tenants subjected to feudal extortion. There were four categories of tenants, namely, protected, occupancy, ordinary and the share-cropper.

The occupancy tenants were, in theory, proprietors, but the land owning chiefs, the "thakores" had restricted the rights accompanying the concept of proprietorship. For example, when an occupancy tenant transfers his property, either by sale or gift, he has to pay "nazrana" to the "thakore". Nazrana was also paid at the time of inheritance. It resembled "salami" of the zamindari areas. The other categories of tenants were actually tenants-at-will. They had to pay 50 per cent of the gross produce as rent to the landowner. The preponderance of tenants-at-will in the Punjab exposed the hypocrisy of peasant-proprietorship. The rent, the tenants-at-will had to pay, varied between one-fourth to one-half of the gross produce. The cash rent would vary between Rs.40 to Rs.200 per acre.

Mahalwari Land System:

The third type of land system in British India was known as 'Mahalwari' system which was initially introduced in the United Provinces by Regulation VII of 1822 and by Regulation IX of 1833. In Mahalwari settlement, an areal unit or mahal was responsible for the payment of revenue to the state.

Ghatwali Land System:

In tribal and interior areas of the British India, some other tenures developed, the prominent among them

was the ghatwali tenure. It was mainly the result of grants given to the chiefs to realize revenue in hill or frontier tracts with the condition to maintain a police or military force to prevent border raids and to maintain peace. One of the peculiar features of the 'ghatwali' system was that grant was made to all the grades of the militia maintained by the chiefs. However, the chief or the headman received the lion's share and every man of the rank and file received individual free holdings of land.

Above all, the early land system of British India had three phases:

(i) The first phase related to the increasing intervention of the East India Company in the matter of administration of the various small states with a view to acquiring political possession which in itself resulted in a large-scale unsettlement of small territories which the Company finally took over.

(ii) The second phase related to actual take-over. During this period, especially in Bengal, state of anarchy was prevailing.

(iii) In the final phase, the Company tried to build up its own machinery for the collection of revenue which was both in spirit and in content ruinous to the peasantry.

Landholdings, both under the zamindari and ryotwari tenures, were characterised by a high degree of concentration of land at the upper levels. For example, in U.P. only 1.5 per cent zamindars held 58% of the total land in the state. In West Bengal, many big zamindari estates were in course of time divided among sub-proprietors; nonetheless a high degree of concentration of land in the larger land owning class continued to exist. In the ryotwari areas, the concentration of ownership holding consisted of social elites.

Thus, the structure of the agrarian society evolved under British rule, remained powerfully dominated by big feudal and semi-feudal landowning interests over large parts of the country. The inequality in distribution of land prevailed in rural agrarian society. Large proportion of land was concentrated in the hands of big zamindars.

The demand for radical land reforms invoking the principles of "land to the tiller" had been raised in India for the first time during thirties of the present century. In 1939 'National Planning Committee on Land Policy' expressed itself against the large landlords having the right to appropriate and manage lands above the size of economic holdings that cannot be directly cultivated by their families without importing hired labourers or without subletting.

Due to feudal and semi-feudal exploitation, the peasant struggles started before India became independent in almost all parts of India. 'Tebhaga' peasant struggle in Bengal and Telangana peasant armed struggle of Andhra Pradesh were among such historical struggles.

The main concern of the land reforms programme in the first decade after independence was the question of abolition of the so-called intermediaries. The Congress Agrarian Committee was set up in December 1949 and recommended the following steps:

(i) Immediate abolition of all forms of feudal exploitation of the peasantry, with a moderate compensation;

(ii) To set up small and medium farms by allotting land to the tenants, share cropped and agricultural labourers in opposition to the establishment of landlord type capitalist farms;

(iii) There should be no exploitation;

(iv) There should be maximum efficiency of production;

(v) The scheme of agrarian reform should be made practicable.

The conception of 'Land Reforms' in the mind of the Congress authorities was precisely summed up in a resolution on 'Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms' adopted by the Conference of Chief Ministers of States and Presidents

of Pradesh Congress Committees, held in April 1950 at New Delhi. The conception of land reforms, taken up by the Indian government were in four spheres namely:

(i) Abolition of intermediaries between the state and the cultivators;

(ii) Tenancy reforms and the reconstruction of land system (i.e. regulations of fair rents, provision of security of tenure to the tenants, and a right to purchase (for the tenants);

(iii) Fixation of ceilings on holdings and distribution of surplus land among the landless;

(iv) Reorganization of agriculture through consolidation of holdings and prevention of their further fragmentation.

LAND REFORM MEASURES IN WEST BENGAL

West Bengal is one of the leading states in regard to several aspects of land reforms. Just as it was the first area to come under permanent settlement, so also it is the first state in which a detailed and carefully considered proposal for abolition of intermediaries was made by the Flood Commission in 1940. But the enactment of legislation i.e. the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act 1953 was considerably delayed (Act I of 1954). By that time legislation had already been enacted in most

of the states. It has, however, to be noted that West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 is a comprehensive measure providing not only for abolition of intermediaries but also for a ceiling on existing holdings at 25 acres.

By an amendment of 1955, the ceiling was extended to rayots and under-rayots also, who were deemed to be intermediaries for the purpose. In addition, provision was also made for tenancy reform so that a person holding land from a rayot or under-rayot* came into direct contact with the state without making any extra payment for the abolition of intermediary rights between him and the State. In West Bengal, on the other hand, intermediaries were allowed to retain lands of various categories (such as waste lands) other than lands given to the tenants.

The West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act⁶ 1953 applies to the entire state of West Bengal except Calcutta Corporation. Afterwards, a series of amendments were made to develop the tenancy status and to safeguarding the interest of the sharecroppers. To avoid the illegal transfer of holdings, several amendments were brought about over the period of time.

* Under rayots are those who lease in land from a rayot. (Bhowani Sen, Indian Land System and Land Reforms, p.76.)

6. Implementation of Land Reforms, Planning Commission, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1966.

EVALUATION OF LAND REFORMS IN
WEST BENGAL:

The failure of 'Temporary Settlement' with zamindars in Bengal led to the permanent settlement of 1793. It was considered as the best settlement with zamindars as their proprietorship of land was recognised. The revenue was fixed perpetually, and the rayots lost their proprietary rights in the lands. The existence of the rayots would depend on the mercy of the zamindars only. The first act, which sought to counter this development, was the Act X of 1859, recognizing the concept of occupancy rights of the real cultivators. In 1885, another Bengal tenancy rent act was enacted by the administration. The Act conferred occupancy rights on those rayots and under-rayots who had been in possession of any land for twelve consecutive years; but this Act of 1885 conferred no rights on 'bargadars' of share-croppers. No strong peasant movement could be organised against this act, except the "Pabna Peasant Movement".

After the first World War, the peasant movement gained new momentum and was closely connected with the national awakening. The first movement was the jute boycott campaign in February 1921. Then followed a movement, not to pay tax for irrigation water from the Damodar canal. In 1923, the provincial government planned to amend the law of 1885 and

to confer occupancy rights on the share-croppers, who hitherto were tenants-at-will. But no strong movement of share-croppers supported the official move; and opposition from upper strata forced government to withdraw the amendment. In thirties, the peasant movement formulated the demand to abolish the zamindari system, and organised local movements of not paying any rents to zamindars. In August 1938, the amendment of Bengal Tenancy Act was passed, which helped to change the awareness of the tenants about their land rights and titles. At the same time, the 'Kisan Sabha' played very vital role to organise the share-croppers (bargadars) in a large group, but their insecurity of tenure and heavy dependence on the jotedars (zamindars), weakened the organization. In 1939, the Bengal Revenue Commission estimated that more than 20 per cent of the acreage was cultivated under the share-cropping system. In the same year, the peasant movement demanded a rise, in the share-croppers share from 50 to 66 per cent and this became the forerunner of the Tebhaga movement of 1946.⁷ In September 1946, the Bengal Kisan Sabha demanded two-thirds of the crops for the share-croppers and this demand was based on the recommendation of the Land Revenue Commission of 1940. The share-croppers, simply, took

7. Sunil Sen, Agrarian Struggle in Bengal - 1946-47, PPH, New Delhi, p.39.

entire crops to their own barns instead of carrying it to the landowners. Even the young villagers were armed themselves with lathi and demonstrated through the villages. Tebhaga movement spread to almost all villages of Bengal.

After independence, the new administration in 1950 passed the West Bengal 'Bargadars Act', where provision was made for safeguarding the rights of bargadars and for the determination of the share produced by them. By the provision of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act, 1953, all ryots and under-ryots, came in direct relation with the state.

The basic features of agrarian relations between 1793 and 1953 among others, were the following:

- (i) Growth of intermediate interests;
- (ii) A process of transfer of estates from traditional rural-based landlord classes to urban based new moneyed classes;
- (iii) An increasing loss of occupancy rights and the growth bargadars and agricultural labourers.

This is the background for land reform after independence. The Congress Government initiated the Land Reform Programmes in West Bengal by passing the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953, though the lack of political will and big landlords lobby hindered the implementation

of land reforms programme. The Left Front Government after 1977 did make serious attempts in this direction. The major agrarian programme of the Left Government in West Bengal can be summarised as under:⁸

- (1) Recording of share-croppers (bargadars) with a view to preventing their unlawful eviction and securing their rights concerning cultivation;
- (2) Acquisition of estates and implementation of a ceiling on landholding and distribution of land, thus acquired, to the landless and small farmers;
- (3) Detection of additional excess land and its vesting in the state through a quasi-judicial machinery, supported by rural workers organizations and village councils;
- (4) Provision of special credit facilities for the poorer section of the cultivators;
- (5) Food for work and similar programmes for development of the rural infrastructure primarily for allottees of land and marginal farmers to give employment and income in periods of distress and to prevent retransfer of land to affluent farmers;

8. D. Bandhyopadhyay, Land Reforms in West Bengal, Govt. of West Bengal, 1980-81, pp.3-4.

- (6) Implementation of a minimum wage rate for casual agricultural labour and programmes designed to boost employment;
- (7) Allotment of homestead sites to all landless agricultural workers, share-croppers, artisans and fishermen occupying other persons' land upto 0.08 acre;
- (8) Provision of small-scale irrigation to allottees of surplus land with heavy state subsidy and bank financing to improve their economic position by high value multiple cropping;
- (9) Abolition of old revenue system and establishment of new revenue system with a progressive rate;
- (10) Restoration of land alienated by poor and marginal farmers through distress sale, provided purchaser is not a poor peasant (with less than 1 acre);
- (11) Provision of the old-age allowance for the old poor peasants and widowed female.

LAND REFORM LEGISLATIONS IN WEST BENGAL:

The first step in new land legislation was made with the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953. The main stipulations of the law as amended upto May 5, 1980 are

as follows:⁹

- (1) "The state government may from time to time by notification declare, that with effect from that date all estates and the rights of every intermediary in each such estate situated in any district... shall vest in state free from all incumbrances;"
- (2) Before February 15, 1955 intermediaries may apply on their own to the government to take over their estates;
- (3) After such notification the rights of the rayots to cultivate their land and their duties shall be unchanged, only that the state replaces the intermediary;
- (4) The intermediary retains the land of the homestead, land with building owned by him, non-agricultural land, altogether upto a ceiling of 20 acres, according to his choice, agricultural land by his choice upto a ceiling of 25 acres. For the tea-estates of Darjeeling district, an intermediary can retain all self-cultivated land in his possession including those adjacent forest tract, necessary for the tea garden.

9. Land Reforms in West Bengal - A Statistical Report (V), Govt. of West Bengal, 1981.

The special provision for the Darjeeling hill-tracts expired on 31 December 1977, as far as land other than tea garden is concerned;

- (5) For religious and charitable institutions, co-operative societies and companies, the ceiling of self-cultivated land is the multiplication of the individual ceilings with the number of members;
- (6) Arrears of land revenue, taxes, etc., of the intermediary due to the state shall be recovered, by deducting from the compensation. All arrears due to him shall equally be recovered;
- (7) The collector shall take charge of the estates and interests of the intermediaries, he shall pay an annual and interim payment, starting latest 18 months after the estate has vested in the State. When compensation has been assessed, no more interim payment is permitted;
- (8) The tea gardens were included in the Act of 1953, but exempted by the amendment of 1954 Act which stipulated that the intermediary holding tea-garden land has to obtain a lease from the state of West Bengal for 30 years, to be renewed for further terms of 30 years each. There is a provision that if the intermediary cannot reside on the land, he may

appoint a manager or agent. The intermediary cannot extend the tea-estates without getting any written permission by the district controller.

West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955, aimed at the fixation of a ceiling, distribution of vested land and consolidation of the rights of bargadars and the determination of the share of the crops for them. The basic provisions of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 are as follows:

- (1) All the rayots came into direct contact with the State, with permanent, heritable and transferable rights which are non-resumable by the original land owners;
- (2) Land holdings of the cultivation belonging to a scheduled tribe cannot be transferred;
- (3) It is said that a bargadar will not be allowed to cultivate more than 1.0 hectare of land, including all lands he owns;
- (4) The Ceiling on landholding¹⁰ are respectively as under:
 - (i) For a single adult person (unmarried),
2.5 hectares (6.2 acres) of irrigated or
3.5 hectares (8.6 acres) of unirrigated

10. Legislative Department, Govt. of West Bengal, 1980-81.

- agricultural land;
- (ii) For a family of upto 5 members; 5 hectares (12.4 acres) of irrigated or 7 hectares (17.3 acres) of unirrigated agricultural land;
- (iii) For a family of more than 5 members an additional 0.5 hectare (1.2 acres) of irrigated or 0.7 hectare (1.7 acres) of unirrigated land for each additional member subject to a maximum of 7 hectares (17.3 acres) of irrigated or 9.8 hectares (24.3 acres) of unirrigated agricultural land;
- (5) The compensation to be paid to an intermediary will be a multiple of his net income and will be on a graded scale. The gradation fixed by the Act 1953 as latter changed by the select committee and accepted by the 'State Assembly'. The balance of compensation is paid in negotiable and transferable bonds at 3 per cent annual interest in 20 equal instalments;

Table 2.1 : Scheme of Compensation Payable to Landowner whose Land has been acquired under the Provision of the Ceiling Act

<u>Net Income</u>	<u>Amount of Compensation payable</u>
For the first Rs.500 or less	20 times
For the next Rs.500	18 times

contd...

contd...

For the next Rs.1,000	17 times
For the next Rs.2,000	12 times
For the next Rs.10,000	10 times
For the next Rs.15,000	6 times
For the next Rs.17,000	3 times
For the next Rs.80,000	3 times
For the balance	2 times

- (6) A share-cropper and his landlord are by law, supposed to share the produce in the proportion of 50:50 in a case where plough, cattle, seeds and manure necessary for cultivation are supplied by the landlord and the proportion of 75:25 in all other cases;
- (7) In case of revenue for holding, cultivators shall pay the same amount as the rent paid before the new law was enforced. Land Revenue exempted for the holdings of below 1.619 hectares irrigated or 2.428 hectares unirrigated land;
- (8) Consolidation of holdings can be undertaken by the state with the consent of two-thirds of the owners effected;
- (9) Vested land in the state shall be distributed to such a local person who is not owning more than 1 acre of land. Even the distributed land cannot be transferred or sold.

Certain amendments regarding bargadars have been done in 1966, 1970, 1971 and 1978, where the bargadar share is raised to 75 per cent if he bears all expenses and the landlord can evict the bargadar for bonafide personal cultivation. The definition of personal cultivation as given under the Section 2(8) of West Bengal Land Reforms Act is as follows:¹¹

- (i) Cultivation by his (Landowner) own labours;
- (ii) by the labour of any member of his family;
- (iii) by the servants or labours on wage payable in cash or in kind (not being as a share of the produce) or both;
- (iv) A landowner can evict the bargadar, if the lion's share of his income comes from the agriculture.

West Bengal restoration of alienated land act came into force on 5th May, 1973¹² where there was a provision for restoring land titles to cultivators, who in distress had sold their land. If a person who held not more than 2 hectares of land transferred a part or whole of it by

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- 11. An Evaluation of Land Reforms in West Bengal, Board of Revenue, Govt. of West Bengal, 1981, p.7.
 - 12. Report of the National Commission on Agriculture, vol.XV, New Delhi, 1976, p.133.

Table 2.2 : Districtwise Progress of Land Distribution in West Bengal (upto 31.12.1980) (in lakh acre)

Districts/ State	Total vested Land	Vested Land hit by Injun- ction	Land Availa- ble for Distri- bution	Land dis- tributed
1. 24 Parganas	1.24	0.38	0.86	0.54
2. Howrah	0.06	0.02	0.04	0.02
3. Nadia	0.23	0.10	0.18	0.23
4. Murshidabad	0.53	0.06	0.43	0.12
5. Burdwan	0.78	0.22	0.55	0.35
6. Birbhum	0.38	0.10	0.28	0.20
7. Bankura	0.57	0.08	0.49	0.39
8. Midnapore	2.81	0.35	2.46	1.63
9. Hoogly	0.17	0.05	0.31	0.08
10. Malda	0.81	0.08	0.72	0.49
11. Purulia	0.89	0.12	0.76	0.36
12. W. Dinajpur	1.49	0.14	1.34	0.82
13. Cooch Behar	0.59	0.03	0.55	0.47
14. Jalpaiguri	1.17	0.05	1.12	0.86
15. Darjeeling	0.36	0.01	0.34	0.18
West Bengal	12.12	1.79	10.32	6.73

Source: Land Reforms in West Bengal, Statistical Report (V), Govt. of West Bengal, 1981.

sale after 1967, being in distress or in need of money for the maintenance of himself, his family or for meeting the cost of cultivation, or if such transfer was made after 1967, with an agreement, written or oral, for reconveyance of the land transferred to the transferor, he could make an application within a prescribed period for restoration of such land.

IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND REFORM:

In a very simplifying way it might be said that the land reform was implemented in two broad targets. In the very first target of land-reform, the provision was made for the vesting of excess land above ceiling and its distribution. In the second target of land-reform, the emphasis was laid on the transfer occupancy-rights to the share-croppers. In 1978 a combined statistical group was formed with Board of Revenue and the Department of Land Utilization and Reforms and Revenue to estimate the brief account of the achievements in the land-reform. The latest data refer to 31 December 1980, when in fact most of the land acquisition and the Land Reforms acts are concerned (Table 2.2).

The total agricultural land vested in the state under the Estate Acquisition Act and Land Reforms Act has been estimated as 12.12 lakh acres while only 6.73 lakh acres were distributed to 1.1 million of beneficiaries.

Table 2.3 : Number of Bargadars and Beneficiaries who received vested Agricultural Land upto 31 Dec. 1980 (West Bengal) (in thousands)

Districts/ State	No. of Bargadars recorded	No. of Benefici- aries	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe
1. 24 Parganas	1310.42	120.157	46.285	16.603
2. Howrah	30.743	13.3	2.860	0.081
3. Nadia	38.691	37.827	12.082	3.085
4. Murshidabad	48.248	61.259	12.859	3.675
5. Burdwan	79.825	87.411	38.217	17.293
6. Birbhum	60.449	42.928	21.953	9.458
7. Bankura	77.599	63.978	33.850	13.275
8. Midnapore	231.698	335.333	96.518	76.858
9. Hoogly	66.329	29.536	12.652	4.605
10. Purulia	N.A.	38.861	11.907	12.028
11. Malda	60.325	82.726	23.545	15.664
12. West Dinajpur	84.955	129.778	45.489	36.196
13. Cooch Behar	54.797	62.439	43.630	0.573
14. Jalpaiguri	45.404	68.7	33.584	17.026
15. Darjeeling	9.820	19.9	7.585	6.275
West Bengal	1001.986	1194.0	443.016	232.695

Source: Land Reforms in West Bengal Statistical Report (V), Govt. of West Bengal.

The proportion of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe beneficiaries are 37.09 per cent (443016) and 19.48 per cent (232695) respectively; in relation to the total beneficiaries of the state. The state as a whole, where the total number of bargadars are recorded as 1001986. Of the land vested in the state, almost 179000 acres were under injunction and not available for distribution. As an average each beneficiary received 0.56 acre of agricultural land. Upto 31 December 1980, the quantum of vested lands were 2.81 lakh acres in Midnapore, 1.49 lakh acres in West Dinajpur, 1.24 lakh acres in 24 Parganas and 1.17 lakh acres in Jalpaiguri district respectively. The four first named districts also recorded the largest numbers of beneficiaries (Table 2.3).

Sites for almost 83,000 homesteads were acquired for agricultural labourers, artisans and fishermen since the enactment of the law in 1975 upto June 1981. Of the beneficiaries, 52,800 belonged to the scheduled castes and tribes.

The minimum daily wage for an adult worker has been fixed at Rs.810. The government has undertaken certain schemes to develop rural infrastructure which have helped to generate additional employment. Three types of programmes are being implemented: rural works programme, food for work programme and composite rural restoration programme. Those employed under these schemes receive payments

Table 2.4 : Proportion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Beneficiaries to the total Beneficiaries of Districts (December 1980)
(West Bengal)

Districts/ State	% of S.C.	% of S.T.
1. 24 Parganas	38.51	13.81
2. Howrah	21.50	0.61
3. Nadia	31.93	8.15
4. Murshidabad	20.99	5.99
5. Burdwan	43.72	19.78
6. Birbhum	51.13	22.03
7. Bankura	52.90	20.74
8. Midnapore	28.78	22.91
9. Hoogly	42.83	15.59
10. Purulia	30.63	30.95
11. Malda	28.46	18.93
12. West Dinajpur	35.04	27.88
13. Cooch Behar	69.87	0.91
14. Jalpaiguri	48.89	24.78
15. Darjeeling	37.98	31.42
West Bengal	37.08	19.47

Source: Land Reforms in West Bengal,
Statistical Report (v), Govt.
of West Bengal.

partly in cash and partly in food grains. It is estimated that about 21.84 million man days of employment were generated through these schemes in 1977-78. The corresponding figures for 1978-79 and 1979-80 were 53.34 and 54.05 million man days respectively.

Table 2.5: Availability of Resources for Rural Employment¹³
Schemes (cash in million rupees, wheat in tonnes)

Programme	Resource	Amount		
		1977-78	1978-79	1979-80
(1) Rural Works Programme	Cash	87.72	102.12	98.40
	Wheat	36226	55928	95712
(2) Food for Work Programme	Cash	10.20	37.04	39.49
	Wheat	25721	49072	30388
(3) Composite rural restoration programme	Cash	-	285.15	25.01
	Wheat	-	43997	18566

An old-age insurance scheme for agricultural labourers and cultivators above 60 years was introduced; men and women with no other income receive 60 rupees per month. Upto December 1981, about 28,000 old aged (above 60 years) agricultural labourers and cultivators received the monthly allowance. After a year which then was provided to 14,000 more people. For this old-age insurance scheme (Bardhyako

13. Land Reforms in West Bengal, Statistical Report (V), 1981.

Bhata) West Bengal government spent 30 million rupees.

LIMITATION OF LAND REFORM MEASURES:

The land reforms legislation aims to curb the landlordism. It aims to improve the lot of the rural poor and reduction in landless; an expansion of employment opportunities, and an increase in rural wage rate. It aims to free the small cultivators from the clutches of usurious moneylenders through creation of special credit facilities. The another target of land reforms legislation is to reform the tenancy status. But the concrete achievements through land reform legislations have been found inadequate in some cases.

The inequality in distribution of agricultural land is still existing in the state.¹⁴ The large agricultural land has been transferred by land owners to the near relatives as "benami" to avoid the ceiling laws on agricultural land. Even land beyond the ceiling is still held by the big landowners and the former intermediaries. With regard to share-croppers, laws have long existed forbidding arbitrary eviction as well as stipulating the manner in which the produce of share cropped land is to be shared by share-croppers and landowners. The bargadar

14. Ajit K. Ghosh, Agrarian Reforms in Contemporary Developing Countries, St. Martin Press, New York, 1983, p.116.

will retain 50 per cent of the produce, if the landowner provides plough, cattle, manure and seeds; otherwise he will retain 75 per cent. These laws however have not been seriously applied until recently.

Similarly, arbitrary eviction of share-croppers is continuing in the state by the name of self-cultivation of the landowners. The professional money lenders are still persisting in the rural society of the state.¹⁵ They are providing consumption loans to marginal and poor farmers and charge an extraordinarily high rate of interest. As a consequence, many indebted cultivators are forced to hand over their entire surplus (above basic subsistence requirements) to the money-lenders in payment of interest.

Upto December 1980, only 55 per cent of the vested land has been distributed among 1.1 million of beneficiaries. On average each beneficiary received only 0.56 of an acre.

The West Bengal Land Reform Act of 1955 in fact included a programme for consolidation of holdings through a process of redistribution, but the present government has made no attempt as yet to implement this. Fragmentation of holdings are most obvious in West Bengal. In many cases, a 5 acre farm scattered in 8 or 9 plots.

15. T.K. Ghosh, Operation Barga and Land Reform, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1986, p.56.

CHAPTER III

LAND CONCENTRATION IN WEST BENGAL

West Bengal is one of those few states in the country where land reform programmes have been implemented on a fairly large-scale. In fact, one of the most crucial programmes of the land reform programmes have enacted in most parts of the country, viz. land acquisition above the stipulated ceilings and its distribution had a relatively large success in the state. Earlier the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act 1953 abolishing intermediary interests in land, had a relatively smooth passage in its implementation. As far as the programme of distribution of land is concerned, 673452.63 acres of surplus agricultural land were distributed in West Bengal till December 1980 which was more than 32 per cent of the total distributed land in the country and which is around 5 per cent of the total operated area of the state. Agricultural land vested in the state upto that period amounted 1,211,000 acres which was nearly 8 per cent of the operated area of the state. Number of beneficiaries was nearly 1.2 million and on an average, each beneficiary received about 0.56 of an acre. This type of distribution

1. Sunil Sengupta, "West Bengal Land Reforms and Agrarian Scene", EPW, 1981, pp. 4-69.

Table 3.1 : Distribution of Operational Holdings and Area by Size Group, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (in ha.)	Operational Holdings			Operated Area		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0 (Marginal)	2528485 (59.91)	3502125 (66.49)	4096001 (69.62)	5889722 (21.52)	1417531 (27.15)	1619657 (29.14)
1.0 - 2.0 (Small)	941753 (22.31)	1082534 (20.55)	1148936 (19.53)	1301643 (25.71)	1489887 (28.53)	1733512 (31.20)
2.0 - 4.0 (Semi-Medium)	558023 (13.21)	545717 (10.36)	519445 (8.82)	1464919 (28.94)	1414345 (27.08)	1403246 (25.25)
4.0 - 10.0 (Medium)	184456 (4.36)	134368 (2.52)	111859 (1.58)	973576 (19.23)	691774 (13.24)	594883 (10.70)
10.0 + (Large)	3610 (0.07)	1920 (0.02)	1408 (0.02)	231771 (4.54)	207429 (3.94)	203484 (3.64)
West Bengal	4216327 (100)	5266664 (100)	5877649 (100)	5061631 (100)	5220966 (100)	5554782 (100)

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

of land has its positive impact on the agrarian structure of the state.

Temporal Pattern of Operational Holdings and Area

In 1970-71, the marginal size class of the state represented 59.91 per cent of holding with 21.52 per cent of operated area while in 1980-81, 69.62 per cent marginal holding occupied 29.14 per cent of the operated area. In case of small farm size, 22.31 per cent of holding recorded 25.71 per cent of the total operated area in 1970-71 while 19.53 per cent of small holding had 31.20 per cent operated area of the state in 1980-81. It is evident that proportion of operated area in small farm size increased more significantly than the proportion of holding during 1970-71 to 1980-81. In fact, the shifting of holdings and area took place from medium and semi-medium size class to marginal and small size class over time (Table 3.1). The position did not change materially in large size group after the passage of Estate Acquisition Act, 1953 with its clauses on land ceiling. The large class of the state occupied less than 1 per cent of holdings in both 1970-71 and 1980-81 when the percentage share of operated area declined from 4.54 per cent in 1970-71 to 3.64 per cent in 1980-81. It is apparent that even after the ceiling act, there are very little changes in the operated area of the large

WEST BENGAL

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATED AREA IN
THE DISTRICTS OF THE TOTAL OPERATED AREA
IN THE STATE (1970-71)

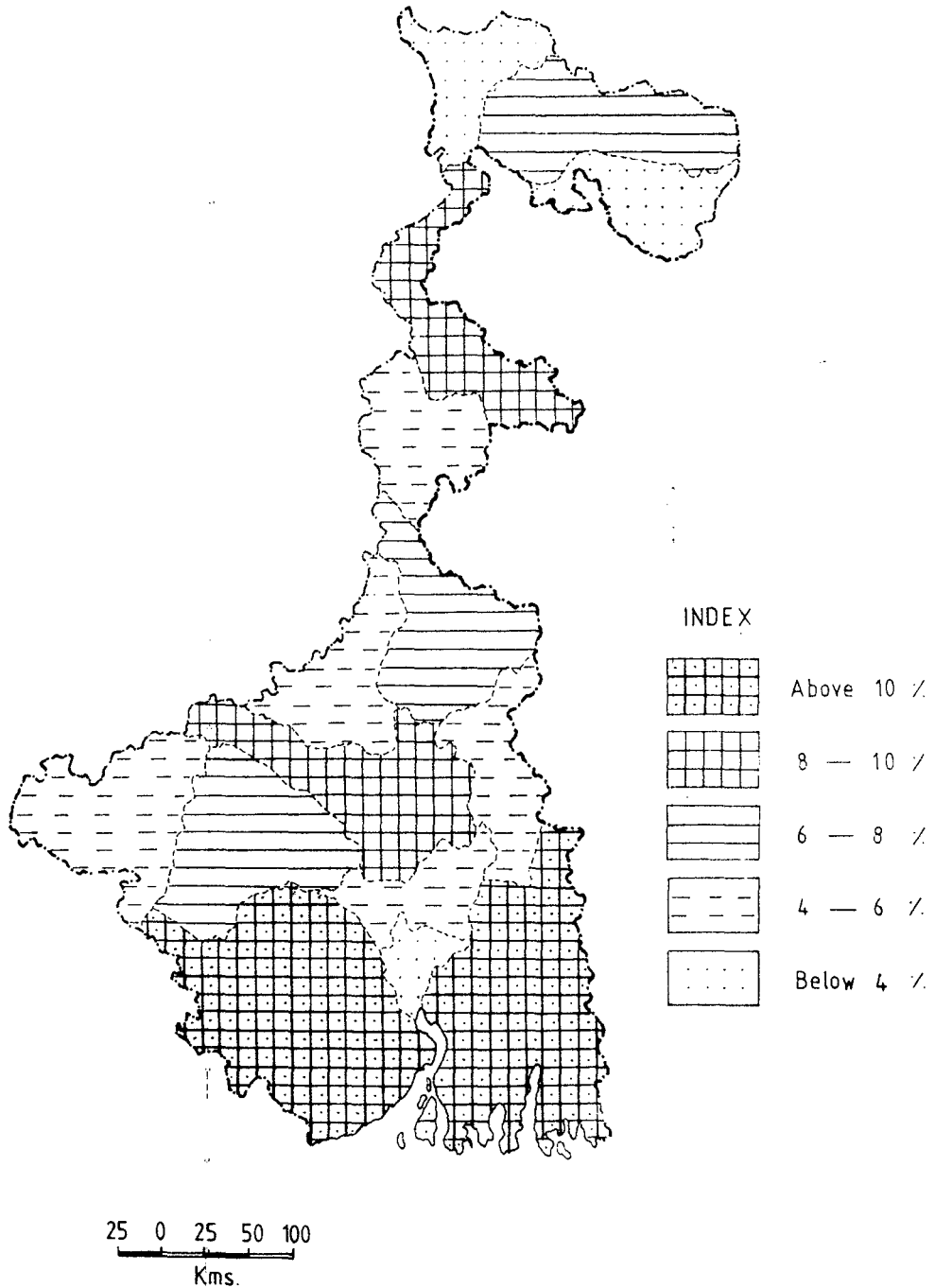


Fig. 4

WEST BENGAL

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATED AREA IN THE
DISTRICTS OF THE TOTAL OPERATED AREA IN
THE STATE (1980-81)

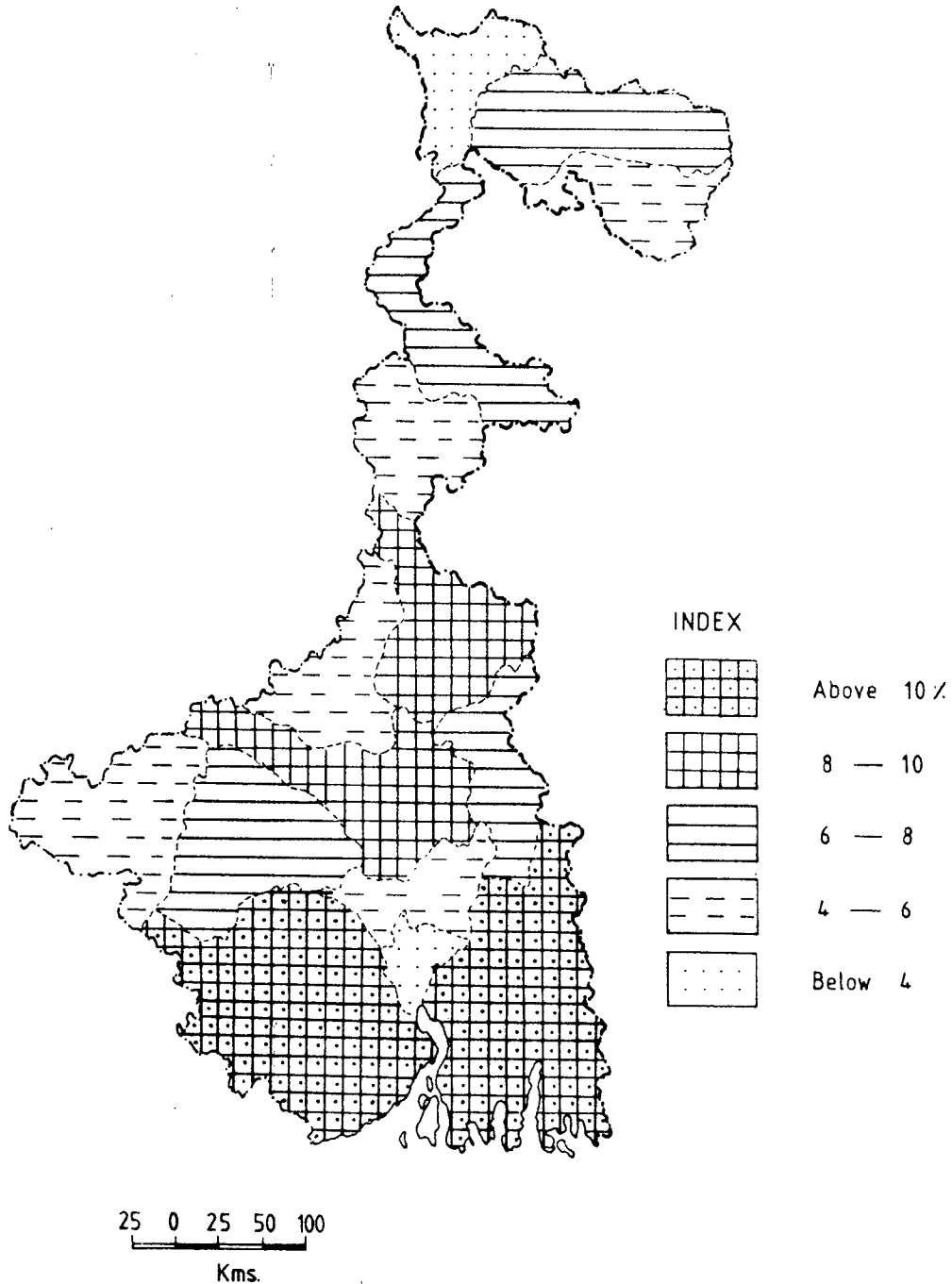


Fig 5

size class. This may be, because of the various exemptions which were given under the ceiling act. There is also the possibility of the limitation of the data which cannot always measure the exact position.

The shifting of operational-holdings and area was more significant from medium and semi-medium farm size to marginal farm size. In case of medium size class, the percentage share of holdings of the total were 4.36 and 1.58 per cent respectively along with 19.23 and 10.70 per cent of operated area during 1970-71 and 1980-81. But the overall situation did not signify any quantitative change in relation to land reform measures so far as the structural set up of the operational holding was concerned in the state.

Temporal and District-wise Pattern of Operational Holdings and Area

The analysis of the concentration pattern of operational holding will remain incomplete if the district-wise positions are not taken into account. In fact, district-wise analysis² will be more suitable to review the impact of land reforms measures in the state in relation to redistribution of operated area. The district-wise

2. G.C. Ojha, Land Problems and Land Reforms, Sultan Chand and Sons, New Delhi, p.174.

Table 3.2 : Districtwise Pattern of Operational Holdings and Area by Size Group - 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Name of Districts	Below 1.0						1.0 - 2.0					
	1970-71		1976-77		1980-81		1970-71		1976-77		1980-81	
	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.
Darjeeling	38.45	6.65	47.81	9.15	54.09	11.45	27.72	12.94	27.93	15.07	27.01	17.22
Cooch Behar	56.47	23.51	57.62	25.58	60.85	26.15	26.60	31.67	26.09	31.38	25.27	34.47
Jalpaiguri	37.94	9.44	52.56	14.17	62.12	17.57	33.18	18.81	27.45	18.70	24.03	20.77
Malda	59.24	19.95	70.73	29.58	71.68	29.59	20.37	22.80	17.18	26.44	18.07	31.92
W. Dinajpur	43.31	12.85	53.88	18.84	61.95	22.62	25.90	21.79	24.33	26.38	21.17	27.14
Nadia	53.80	18.27	63.79	26.32	67.69	30.6	24.0	25.46	21.57	28.91	21.19	34.28
Murshidabad	63.76	24.33	67.28	28.90	70.57	32.28	20.23	26.38	20.58	30.85	20.23	35.54
Howrah	86.92	55.3	87.92	57.54	89.06	57.84	9.92	26.34	9.29	26.42	8.54	27.68
Burdwan	51.43	17.22	54.78	20.51	55.44	20.29	24.94	24.60	26.02	30.22	26.65	32.59
Birbhum	49.56	14.89	53.49	18.72	56.37	21.65	24.24	23.15	26.15	29.59	26.04	32.85
Bankura	50.01	17.24	60.00	24.88	60.55	23.95	27.25	27.37	24.72	31.95	25.18	35.80
24 Parganas	68.2	27.92	74.68	36.71	79.42	39.33	18.91	27.50	16.65	29.45	14.08	30.32
Hoogly	68.55	30.43	73.64	37.63	76.95	39.82	19.97	30.26	18.06	32.36	16.45	34.48
Midnapore	65.32	28.55	72.93	34.15	75.76	35.92	21.90	30.03	17.63	29.91	16.17	31.16
Purulia	55.06	21.60	60.89	24.98	61.59	25.89	25.57	26.49	24.30	30.34	24.39	35.46
West Bengal	59.91	21.52	66.49	27.15	69.62	29.14	22.31	25.71	20.55	28.53	19.53	31.20

Note: OH = Operational Holding; AO = Operated Area.

contd....

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

Table 3.2....contd...

Name of Districts	2.0 - 4.0						4.0 - 10.0					
	1970-71		1976-77		1980-81		1970-71		1976-77		1980-81	
	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.
Darjeeling	23.2	20.33	16.22	16.45	13.91	16.92	9.96	18.04	7.41	15.75	4.60	11.09
Cooch Behar	13.62	30.54	13.12	29.47	11.82	29.8	3.25	14.05	3.11	13.38	2.00	9.48
Jalpaiguri	23.48	24.32	15.99	20.45	11.36	19.15	5.23	10.62	3.84	9.79	2.33	7.20
Malda	14.41	30.91	9.41	27.82	8.16	25.33	5.85	25.21	2.57	15.32	1.98	12.34
W. Dinajpur	20.73	31.79	16.40	33.39	13.29	32.92	9.80	32.06	5.30	21.15	3.52	17.09
Nadia	16.50	33.29	11.53	29.14	9.00	23.64	5.59	22.11	3.01	15.01	2.06	11.43
Murshidabad	12.18	30.38	9.81	27.59	7.75	24.02	3.74	18.28	2.27	12.46	1.37	7.96
Howrah	2.64	13.44	2.54	13.74	2.19	12.56	0.47	4.77	0.20	2.25	0.16	1.89
Burdwan	17.96	34.73	15.43	33.40	14.46	32.10	6.03	22.53	3.64	15.00	3.35	14.21
Birbhum	18.82	33.92	16.13	33.69	14.47	31.64	7.13	25.82	4.14	17.38	3.03	13.33
Bankura	16.72	31.66	12.28	29.65	11.69	27.66	5.89	22.75	2.62	13.10	2.51	12.18
24 Parganas	9.85	27.70	7.08	23.54	5.49	22.20	2.97	16.34	1.48	9.85	0.98	7.85
Hoogly	9.24	26.73	7.44	24.31	5.89	21.01	2.17	12.18	0.81	5.28	0.64	4.54
Midnapore	9.89	25.86	7.64	24.73	6.65	23.00	2.76	14.68	1.68	10.77	1.39	9.55
Purulia	13.94	27.6	11.14	26.48	10.69	28.05	5.11	21.58	3.56	17.61	3.25	9.93
West Bengal	13.21	28.94	10.36	27.08	8.82	25.25	4.36	19.23	2.52	13.24	1.88	10.70

contd...

Table 3.2....contd...

Name of Districts	10.0 Above						All Size Classes					
	1970-71		1976-77		1980-81		1970-71		1976-77		1980-81	
	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.	O.H.	A.O.
Darjeeling	0.61	41.98	0.56	43.51	0.33	43.55	100	100	100	100	100	100
Cooch Behar	0.01	0.17	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.03	100	100	100	100	100	100
Jalpaiguri	0.19	36.81	0.10	36.82	0.08	35.23	100	100	100	100	100	100
Malda	0.08	1.05	0.05	0.76	0.04	0.75	100	100	100	100	100	100
W. Dinajpur	0.19	1.44	0.01	0.17	0.01	0.15	100	100	100	100	100	100
Nadia	0.06	0.82	0.04	0.56	0.00	0.00	100	100	100	100	100	100
Murshidabad	0.02	0.59	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.14	100	100	100	100	100	100
Howrah	0.00	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100	100	100	100	100	100
Burdwan	0.09	0.87	0.06	0.78	0.05	0.74	100	100	100	100	100	100
Birbhum	0.18	2.14	0.04	0.55	0.02	0.46	100	100	100	100	100	100
Bankura	0.09	0.92	0.02	0.35	0.02	0.32	100	100	100	100	100	100
24 Parganas	0.03	0.41	0.01	0.32	0.00	0.26	100	100	100	100	100	100
Hoogly	0.01	0.35	0.00	0.37	0.00	0.08	100	100	100	100	100	100
Midnapore	0.04	0.79	0.01	0.37	0.01	0.35	100	100	100	100	100	100
Purulia	0.26	2.65	0.05	0.53	0.04	0.62	100	100	100	100	100	100
West Bengal	0.07	4.54	0.02	3.94	0.01	3.64	100	100	100	100	100	100

distribution of operational holdings and area as presented in Table 3.2 shows some lop-sided picture with heavy concentration of holdings and little concentration of area in the two low size groups. However, the concentration of operated area increased in marginal and small size class during 1970-71 to 1980-81. In few districts, there is decline in the proportion of small holdings but operated area increased over time. In case of Darjeeling district, the percentage share of operated area in large size group increased from 1970-71 to 1980-81, while share of holdings reduced significantly over the same point of time. In 1970-71, the large farm-size in Darjeeling district, 0.61 per cent of holding occupied 41.98 per cent operated area of the district while 0.33 per cent of holding recorded 43.35 per cent of operated in 1980-81. In Jalpaiguri district, the percentage share of holding in large size class was 0.18 per cent along with 36.81 per cent of the operated area of the district in 1970-71 while in 1980-81, 0.08 per cent of holding occupied 35.23 per cent of operated area. Such an existence of large holdings in these two districts are because of the presence of tea-estates which were entirely exempted from the ceiling laws of the state. One can find that proportion of area under this category has gone up even though there was share decrease in the proportion of holdings. This may

be because of the concealing of land in the already large tea-estates.

The remaining districts of the state show a pattern of decline in proportion of operational holdings as well as area in large medium, and semi-medium size classes over time. These changes in the upper size classes cannot be explained in terms of enactment of ceiling laws. These changes may partly be due to the subdivision of operational holdings with successive generations. The shifting of holdings and area from large, or medium size class to marginal and small size class may also be possible due to division of household land to avoid certain provision of land ceiling legislations.³ But the increase in the share of holdings and area in the lower size category, may be ascribed to the distribution of surplus land to the landless and the marginal farmers.

Let us review the pattern of the concentration in different size classes of the districts. A comparison of the distribution of holding and area by size groups as presented in the table 3.2 shows that percentage share of holdings and area decreased in semi-medium, medium and large size groups from 1970-71 to 1980-81, suggesting a shift of holdings and area in the lower size groups. It is more prominent in the southern districts of the state. Howrah district had the highest percentage share of holdings and area in marginal size class of its total

3. S.K. Sanyal, "Trends in Some Characteristics of Land Holdings", Sarvekshana, July, 1977.

holdings and area. In this district, in 1970-71 about 86.92 per cent of holdings in the size group of below 1 hectare occupied 55.3 per cent of the operated area while 89.0 per cent of holdings occupied 57.84 per cent of operated area in 1980-81. It shows that concentration of operational holdings as well as area is highest in the marginal size class of Howrah district. This type of pattern of concentration in marginal size group is closely followed by Hoogly district. In southern districts, i.e. 24 Parganas and Midnapore, the concentration of operated area in marginal size class is also found higher. In case of 24 Parganas district, 68.2 per cent holdings in the size below 1 hectare accounted for 27.92 per cent of area in 1970-71 while 79.42 per cent of holdings had 39.35 per cent operated area in 1980-81. In Midnapore district 63.32 per cent of holdings in size group of below 1 hectare recorded 28.35 per cent operated area in 1970-71 while 75.76 per cent of holdings had 35.92 per cent of operated area in 1980-81.

On the whole, the position of operated area in marginal and small size class of various districts changed significantly during 1970-71 to 1980-81. The redistribution of operated area took place in favour of marginal and small farm size from medium and large farm size from medium and large farm size except in Darjeeling

and Jalpaiguri districts where concentration of operated area has increased in the large size category.

Percentage Changes in Holdings
and Operated Area

The districtwise distribution of operational holdings and area does not provide an idea about the magnitude of changes in the holdings and area of different size classes. The related data about the changes of holdings and area during 1970-71 to 1980-81 has been presented in tables 3.3 and 3.4. We have already analysed in the table 3.2 that a high proportion of operated area of the state has accounted for very little proportion of holdings. The concentration of land to a certain extent has been broken in the wake of land reform measures. The table 3.4 emphasized that both the holdings and area increased in the size class of below 1 hectare in 1980-81 over 1970-71. The marginal size class of the state the holdings and area changed by 61.99 per cent and 48.63 per cent respectively from 1970-71 to 1980-81, while in small size group, the proportion of holdings and area increased by 21.99 and 33.19 per cent respectively.

Rest of the size classes of the state, i.e. semi-medium, medium and large where negative changes in holdings and area were noticed during 1970-71 to 1980-81. It is, thus, quite evident that redistribution of land has taken

Table 3.3 : District-wise Percentage Changes in Operational Holdings and Area, 1970-71 to 1976-77 & 1976-77 to 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Districts/ State	% Change in Opera- tional Holdings		% Change in Opera- ted Area	
	1970-71- 1976-77	1976-77- 1980-81	1970-71- 1976-77	1976-77- 1980-81
Darjeeling	11.83	11.26	-3.07	-1.56
Jalpaiguri	20.39	25.28	0.09	4.68
Cooch Behar	22.31	26.97	20.45	12.64
West Dinajpur	32.60	15.46	2.55	-4.46
Malda	54.65	5.72	11.82	5.31
Murshidabad	24.90	21.00	7.68	19.25
Nadia	31.02	27.05	2.45	20.14
24 Parganas	16.55	30.43	-5.47	11.73
Howrah	7.78	4.83	-2.16	7.08
Hoogly	15.71	18.66	-1.75	15.70
Burdwan	24.35	4.28	7.31	7.09
Birbhum	27.26	0.99	5.39	-0.14
Bankura	32.30	.63	1.79	6.95
Purulia	29.59	-4.87	12.04	0.85
Midnapore	25.49	2.29	0.97	-0.48
West Bengal	24.91	11.60	3.41	6.39

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

place in favour of marginal and small farm size over time. It is also true that vested surplus land distributed to landless and marginal farmers and consequently the proportion of marginal holdings and area increased significantly in between 1970-71 to 1980-81.

The percentage decline of holdings and area in medium and large farm size, has most probably been due to the imposition of ceiling on land holding. Of course, negative percentage changes in holdings and area of the medium and large size class during 1970-71 to 1980-81 could not show the actual position in respect of change in concentration of land because it is possible that many of the households resorted to partition simply to evade the ceiling laws. The district-wise percentage variations of holdings and area in different size groups in 1980-81 over 1970-71, will provide more clear picture about the agrarian set up of the state. In case of marginal and small size classes, the concentration of operated area and holdings increased more significantly from 1970-71 to 1980-81. In Jalpaiguri district the changes of operational holdings and area were 146.92 per cent and 95.01 per cent respectively in the size group of below 1 hectare during 1970-71 and 1980-81. Nadia district recorded the percentage changes, in holdings and area in marginal size class, of 106.18 and 109.47 respectively over the same period. In districts like

Table 3.4 : District-wise Pattern of Percentage Changes in Operational Holdings and Area by Size Group, during 1970-71 to 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Districts/ State	Below 1.0		1.0 - 2.0		2.0 - 4.0		4.0 - 10.0		10+	
	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.
Darjeeling	74.03	63.52	20.52	26.59	-25.81	-20.82	-42.67	-41.36	-31.51	-1.34
Cooch Behar	67.38	50.92	47.56	47.71	34.79	32.38	-4.08	-8.39	-93.10	-74.32
Jalpaiguri	146.92	95.01	9.28	15.67	-26.95	-17.31	-32.41	-28.75	13.49	0.29
Malda	97.88	74.62	45.05	64.82	-7.35	-3.49	-44.27	-42.29	-15.02	-15.29
W. Dinajpur	119.01	72.47	25.15	22.01	-1.80	1.47	-44.81	-47.73	-91.88	-89.26
Nadia	109.47	106.18	47.04	67.70	-9.08	-12.56	-38.46	-36.30	-100.00	-100.00
Murshidabad	67.31	70.42	51.14	73.09	-3.81	1.61	-44.27	-43.98	-62.76	-67.49
Howrah	15.77	9.57	-2.68	10.10	-6.39	-2.09	-59.61	-58.32	-100.00	-100.00
Burdwan	39.78	35.41	41.36	52.25	4.46	6.26	-27.77	-27.43	-23.13	-2.82
Birbhum	46.18	52.95	38.06	49.34	-1.17	-1.82	-45.05	-45.66	-80.91	-76.73
Bankura	61.21	51.26	23.01	42.44	-6.84	-4.83	-43.09	-41.61	-68.46	-62.34
Hoogly	54.16	48.76	13.12	29.52	-12.44	-10.61	-59.08	-57.43	-73.80	-73.53
Purulia	37.88	26.67	17.55	41.45	-5.45	7.37	-21.90	-51.35	-79.89	-75.50
Midnapore	48.79	26.35	-5.28	4.22	-13.68	-10.68	-35.54	-34.62	-55.34	-56.31
24 Parganas	77.02	48.72	13.19	16.41	-15.18	-15.38	-49.94	-49.27	-59.30	-39.89
West Bengal	61.99	48.63	21.99	33.19	-6.91	-4.20	-39.35	-38.89	-60.99	-12.20

Note: OH = Operational Holdings; OA = Operated Area.

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

Malda and West Dinajpur, the changes in holdings in the size class of below 1 hectare were 97.80 and 119.01 per cent from 1970-71 to 1980-81 while changes in operated area were recorded as 74.62 and 72.42 per cent respectively. Howrah district recorded 18.77 per cent change in marginal holdings in 1980-81 over 1970-71 where operated area changed by 9.57 per cent.

In small size class, Murshidabad district had highest percentage change in holdings (51.14%) and area (73.09%) and this pattern of changes was closely followed by Cooch Behar, Nadia and Malda districts. The medium and large size classes of these districts witnessed the negative changes in both holdings and area.

The change in the distribution pattern of operated land in small size group showed some marginal improvement. The percentage variations of operated area in the size group below 1 hectare was more apparent over time. But in case of large, medium and semi-medium categories there was overall decline in the proportion of holdings and as well as in area. In this regard, Ratan Ghosh⁴ referred that large proportion of operated area in West Bengal

4. Ratan Ghosh, "Effect of Agricultural Legislation on Land Distribution in West Bengal", IJAE, vol.16, 1976, p.43.

readjusted by medium and large farm size to marginal and small farm as to evade ceiling (i) by creation of subordinate tenancies in favour of near relative and "benamdars", (ii) by distribution of lands among the near relatives etc. in advance by way of family settlement; by partition of land among father and sons by invoking the privileges of 'Mitakshara' law of inheritance. As the combined results of these, the holdings and area decreased in medium and large size group reduced over time.

Temporal Pattern of Average
Size of Holdings

Under the influence of both population growth and land distribution, the average size of holding in West Bengal is also gradually declining over time. The size of holding has been decreasing not only because of heavy pressure of population⁵ on land due to slow growth of the non-agricultural sector and land redistribution measures undertaken by State government, but also due to subdivision of joint holdings and benami transfer of land by the large land owners for evasion of ceiling laws. Whatever be the reasons, the decline in size of holding

5. T. Haque, Agrarian Reforms and Institutional Changes in India, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1986, p. 150.

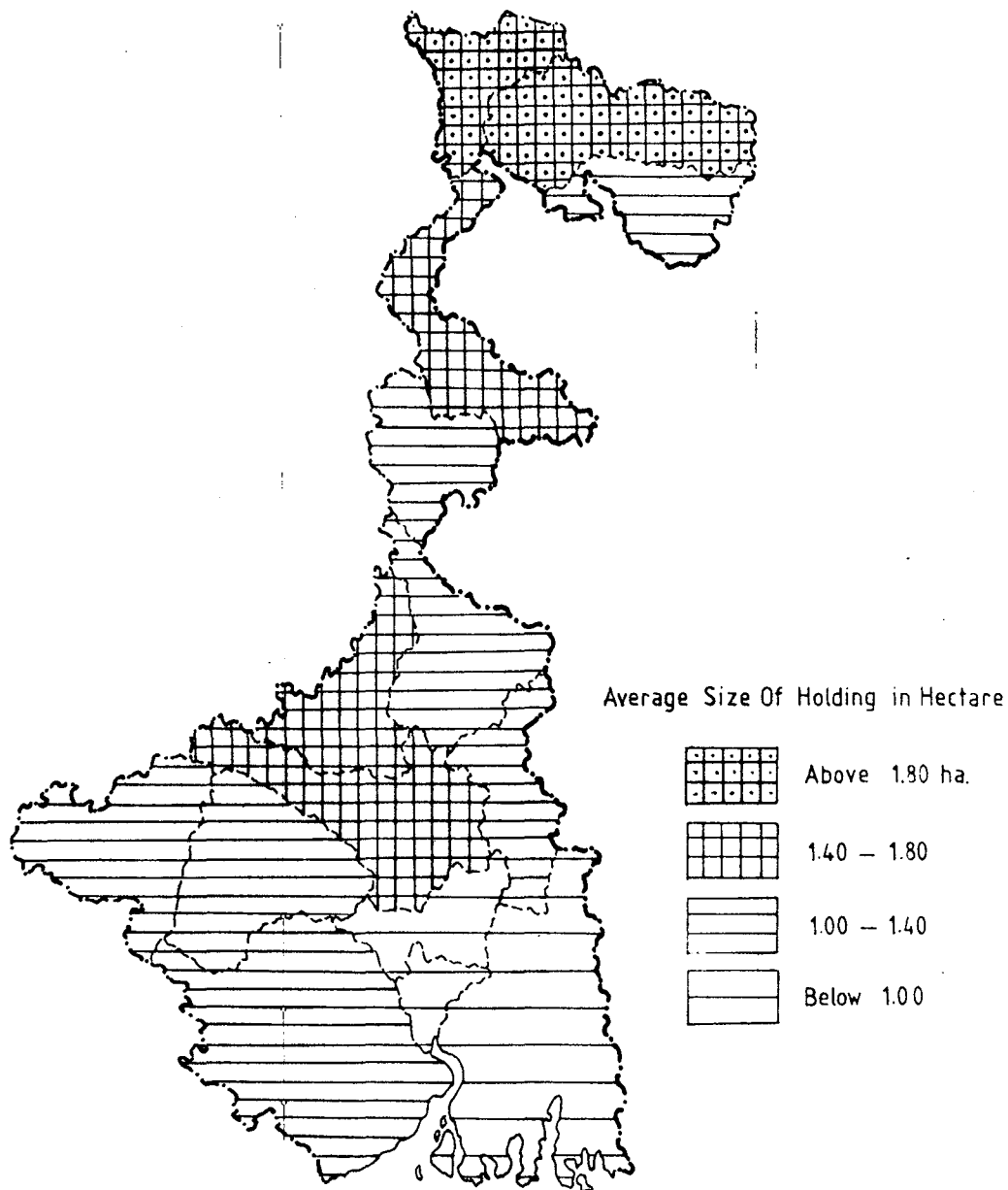
Table 3.5 : Pattern of Average Size of Operational Holding by Size Groups, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (in ha.)	1980-81	1976-77	1970-71
Below 1.0	0.40	0.40	0.43
1.0 - 2.0	1.51	1.38	1.38
2.0 - 4.0	2.70	2.59	2.63
4.0 - 10.0	5.32	5.15	5.28
10.0 & Above	144.52	108.03	64.20
All Sizes	0.95	0.99	1.20

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

WEST BENGAL

DISTRICTWISE PATTERN OF AVERAGE SIZE OF HOLDING (1970-71)



25 0 25 50 100
Kms.

Fig. 6

WEST BENGAL

DISTRICTWISE PATTERN OF AVERAGE SIZE OF HOLDING (1980-81)

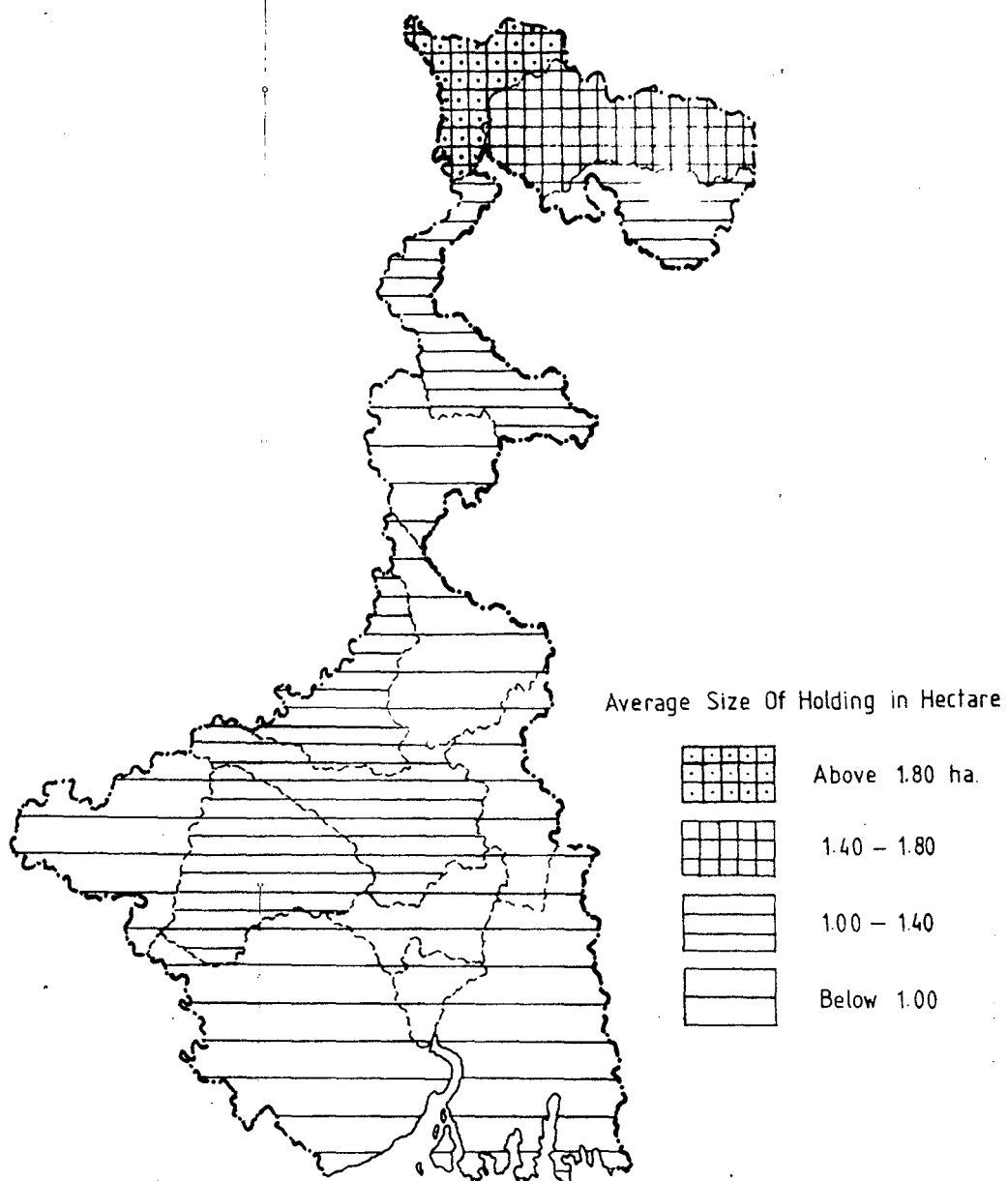


Fig 7

is a matter of concern for the policy maker's view-point in as much as the modernization of agriculture depends on optimum size of holdings. If necessary, this trend has to be curbed by prohibiting further subdivision of joint holdings and encouraging co-operative farming, although in the long-run there would be no alternative to curbing the growth of population and undertaking a programme of rapid industrialization.

At the state level the average size of operational holdings were reduced from 1970-71 to 1980-81. In 1970-71 the average size of holding in the state was 1.20 hectares (Table 3.5) which was much less than the all India average of 2.71 hectare. In 1980-81, the size of operational holding is less than even one hectare. Table 3.5 represents a dismal picture of the size of holding within the state. No significant improvement in respect of average size of holding was noticed in any size class of the state during 1970-71 to 1980-81 except the large size group where size of holding was 64.20 hectares in 1970-71 while it rose to 144.52 hectares in 1980-81.

Table 3.6 represents the district-wise pattern of the size of holding for the year of 1970-71 and 1980-81. It appears from this table that size of holding in all the districts declined in the years 1980-81 over 1970-71.

Table 3.6 : Districtwise Pattern of Average Size of Operational Holding, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81

Name of Districts	(In ha.)		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Darjeeling	3.04	2.65	2.34
Cooch Behar	1.15	1.13	1.00
Jalpaiguri	2.25	1.99	1.66
Malda	1.23	0.78	0.89
W. Dinajpur	1.66	1.28	1.06
Nadia	1.31	1.02	0.97
Murshidabad	1.05	0.91	0.89
Howrah	0.50	0.45	0.46
Burdwan	1.39	1.20	1.23
Birbhum	1.50	1.24	1.22
Bankura	1.38	1.06	1.13
Hoogly	0.90	0.76	0.75
24 Parganas	0.94	0.76	0.65
Midnapore	1.00	0.80	0.78
Purulia	1.28	1.18	0.9
West Bengal	1.20	0.99	0.94

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

The decline of the average size of holding is more sharp among the districts in the plains of the state. This reduction most probably⁶ is due to excessive increase of population on the operated area in this region. The higher average size of holdings is found in the northern districts, i.e. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri only. It is mainly due to the existence of a large number of tea-estates. As has already explained these estates were exempted from the ceiling laws; so people tried to conceal the surplus land with them by enlarging these tea-estates may be on official records only. In the Darjeeling district the average size of operational holding was 3.04 hectares in 1970-71 and it declined to 2.34 hectares in 1980-81. Similarly in case of Jalpaiguri district, the average size of holding was 2.25 hectares in 1970-71 and 1.66 hectares in 1980-81.

Level of Concentration of Operational Holdings.

We have tried to measure the overall inequality in distribution of operated area with the help of Gini's Coefficient. With all its limitations it is the widely used measure to compare the skewness in different distribution. Table 3.7 presents the overall inequality in

6. Agricultural Census of West Bengal, 1980-81, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal, p.23.

Table 3.7 : Pattern of Concentration of Operational Holdings, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

(Gini's Coefficient)

Name of Districts	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Darjeeling	0.66844	0.69060	0.69022
Cooch Behar	0.44213	0.42721	0.43980
Jalpaiguri	0.58761	0.63336	0.64908
Malda	0.51907	0.53005	0.52960
W. Dinajpur	0.47124	0.47427	0.50869
Nadia	0.48354	0.48481	0.47190
Murshidabad	0.50832	0.49176	0.48787
Howrah	0.45944	0.44955	0.45651
Burdwan	0.47293	0.45722	0.46457
Birbhum	0.49026	0.46885	0.45286
Bankura	0.46317	0.45910	0.46685
24 Parganas	0.51583	0.49222	0.48879
Hoogly	0.48835	0.46492	0.47150
Midnapore	0.47786	0.49489	0.50819
Purulia	0.46899	0.47533	0.44743
West Bengal	0.51542	0.50619	0.51451

WEST BENGAL

DISTRICTWISE PATTERN OF INEQUALITY IN DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS (1970 - 71)

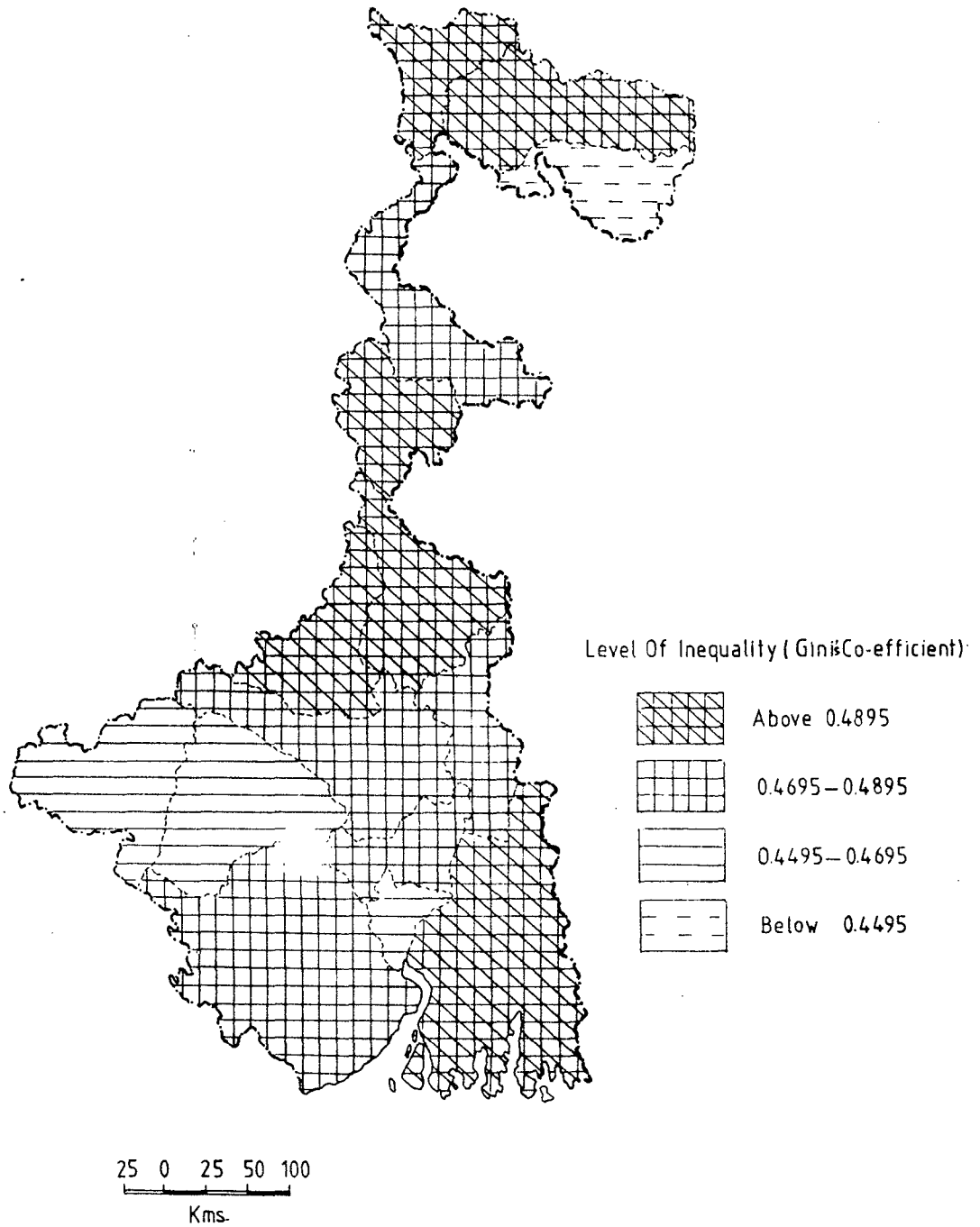


Fig. 8

WEST BENGAL

DISTRICTWISE PATTERN OF INEQUALITY IN DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS

(1980-81)

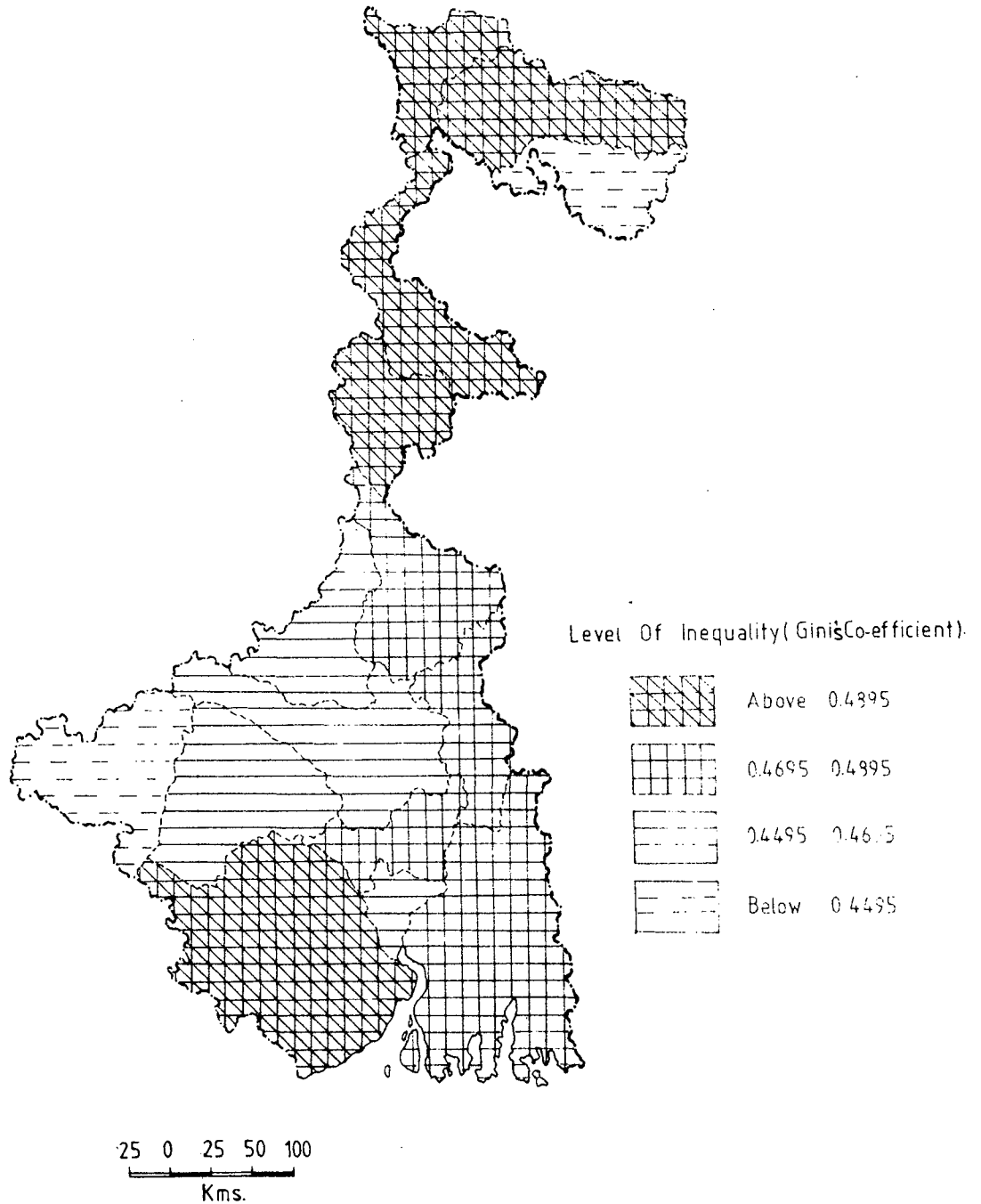


Fig 9

the distribution of operational holdings in the state and its various districts. At the state level one finds that the inequality in operated area has not changed during 1970-71 to 1980-81. The value of Gini's Coefficient was almost same in both the years. It may be stated that various land reforms measures did not have much effect on the distribution of operated area in the state during the reference period. The concentration ratio in the state was 0.51542 in 1970-71 and 0.51451 a decade later in 1980-81.

District-wise pattern of concentration in operated area has remained unchanged over the period i.e. 1970-71 to 1980-81. Darjeeling district recorded the highest concentration in operated area among the districts for both the years 1970-71 and 1980-81. This was closely followed by Jalpaiguri district where the concentration ratio was 0.58761 in 1970-71 and 0.64908 in 1980-81. In West Dinajpur and Midnapore the concentration ratio showed a slightly upward trend. Only in some districts like Murshidabad, Birbhum and 24 Parganas the inequality in distribution of operated area has reduced marginally during 1970-71 to 1980-81. Rest of the districts of the state, did not show any change in the Gini's Coefficient over time. The inequality in distribution of operated area increased in both the districts of Darjeeling and

Jalpaiguri over the period, most probably because of the tea estates which were exempted from the ceiling laws. As a consequence the inequality in operated area is still higher in these two hilly districts.

Pattern of Operational Holdings
by Irrigation Status

The percentage figures of irrigated area shows that the share of irrigated has increased in the marginal and small size groups from 1970-71 to 1980-81. On the contrary the shifting of irrigated area took place from medium and large size groups to other size groups over this period. Table 3.8 represented that in 1970-71, more than 59 per cent of marginal holdings of the state occupied 20.76 per cent irrigated area of the state while in 1980-81, 69.68 per cent of holdings recorded 26.94 per cent of irrigated area. In case of small size group, 22.33 per cent of holdings recorded 26.31 per cent of irrigated area in 1970-71 whereas 19.54 per cent of small holdings had 33.74 per cent irrigated area in 1980-81.

It appears that proportion of irrigated area increased in marginal and small size classes with the increase of operated area over the period; 1970-71 to 1980-81. If we look back to the pattern of unirrigated area in different size classes of the state, it will also be obvious that

Table 3.8 : Distribution of Operational Holdings
by Irrigation Status, 1970-71, 1976-
77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (ha.)	Holdings			Unirrigated Area			Irrigated Area		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0	2528485 (59.96)	3502125 (66.49)	4096001 (69.68)	605308 (24.09)	765694 (31.04)	812839 (33.35)	172402 (20.76)	264506 (25.23)	361047 (26.94)
1.0 - 2.0	941753 (22.33)	1082534 (20.55)	1148936 (19.54)	657765 (26.18)	738594 (29.94)	718659 (29.49)	218533 (26.31)	318292 (30.36)	452040 (33.74)
2.0 - 4.0	558023 (13.23)	545717 (10.36)	519445 (8.83)	691697 (27.70)	641923 (26.02)	531823 (21.82)	265355 (31.95)	323671 (30.38)	365522 (27.28)
4.0 - 10.0	184456 (4.37)	134368 (2.55)	111859 (1.90)	441523 (17.57)	314483 (12.74)	204465 (8.39)	165104 (19.88)	139987 (13.35)	156172 (11.65)
10.0 +	3610 (0.08)	1920 (0.03)	1408 (0.03)	111662 (4.44)	5901 (0.23)	169169 (6.94)	8902 (1.07)	1688 (0.16)	4930 (0.36)
All Sizes	4216327 (100)	5266664 (100)	5877649 (100)	512455 (100)	2466595 (100)	2436955 (100)	830296 (100)	1048144 (100)	1339711 (100)

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue
and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt.
of West Bengal.

percentage share of unirrigated area increased in marginal size class during the reference period 1970-71 to 1980-81. While share of unirrigated area decreased in semi-medium, medium and large size group over the same point of time. It should be noted that the proportion of unirrigated area increased in marginal and small size classes along with the increase of total operated area.

Pattern of Operated Area
by Tenancy Status

Table 3.9 shows the pattern of distribution of operated area by tenancy status. It is observed that the share of wholly owned and self-operated area increased in the state in relation to total operated area in 1980-81 over 1970-71, and at the same time partly owned and self-operated area declined. The share of wholly leased-in area has remained unchanged in between 1970-71 and 1980-81. The percentage share of owned area increased in the state over the period of time, it is possibly due to the vested (Khash) surplus land distributed to landless and the marginal farmers, and as a results the proportion of owned area increased to the total operated area in the state. If we see the percentage figures of partly owned area, it decreased over time. It may be possible that marginal farmers purchased some sorts of less fertile land from the large of medium farm size and ultimately

Table 3.9: Distribution of Operated Area by Tenancy Status, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (in ha.)	Wholly Owned and Self- Operated Area			Partly Owned and Self- Operated Area			Wholly Lease in Area			Otherwise Operated		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0	21.47	27.90	28.76	20.12	26.24	31.00	37.08	38.59	35.73	Nil	58.49	37.08
1.0 - 2.0	24.39	28.60	29.80	32.73	37.39	40.88	36.42	40.84	42.81		25.05	31.00
2.0 - 4.0	28.62	28.58	25.68	31.71	26.56	22.93	21.87	17.58	19.24		12.91	19.24
4.0 - 10.0	20.18	14.57	11.57	15.02	8.96	5.02	4.02	2.05	1.63		3.40	7.08
10.0 & above	5.32	0.32	4.15	0.39	0.83	0.15	0.59	0.83	0.58		0.13	3.00
All sizes	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00		100.00	100.00

Category	State		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
1. Wholly owned and self-operated area	4292648 (84.57)	4395011 (87.02)	4829791 (86.93)
2. Partly owned and self-operated area	691998 (13.65)	538950 (10.67)	626406 (11.27)
3. Wholly leased-in area	76985 (1.51)	40367 (0.79)	60370 (1.08)
4. Otherwise Operated area	-	58176 (1.15)	38015 (0.68)
Total	5061631 (100.00)	5632506 (100.00)	5554582 (100.00)

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

it increased the owned area in marginal farm.⁶

It will be more appropriate to see the distribution of operated area by tenancy status in different size classes of the state, in order to examine the effects of land reforms measures on tenancy status. In the marginal size class, the percentage share of owned area was 21.47 per cent in 1970-71 and 28.76 per cent in 1980-81 of the owned area of the state. In case of small size group the share of owned area was 24.39 per cent in 1970-71 and 29.80 per cent in 1980-81. At the same, the share of owned area reduced in semi-medium, medium and large size class of the state (table 3.9). It is noted that shifting of owned area has taken place from medium and large size class to marginal and small farm size groups from 1970-71 to 1980-81. Share of partly owned area also found increase in marginal and small size group from 1970-71 to 1980-81. Marginal size class occupied 20.12 per cent of partly owned area in 1970-71, in relation to total partly owned area while it increased to 31.00 per cent in 1980-81. This pattern was closely followed by small size group of the state. In other size classes,

6. Agricultural Census of West Bengal, 1980-81;
Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture,
Govt. of West Bengal, p.18.

i.e. semi-medium, medium and large size the percentage share of partly owned area decreased over time. It is clear that marginal and small farmers leasing-in land from the medium and large farm size groups and as a matter of fact the proportion of operated area increased in the size group up to 2 hectares during the reference period i.e. 1970-71 to 1980-81.

It is also observed from the table 3.9 that leased-in area increased in the size class upto 2 hectares when in other size classes proportion of leased-in area decreased from the period 1970-71 to 1980-81.

**DISTRIBUTION OF LEASED-IN AREA
UNDER DIFFERENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS:**

The types of tenancy vary greatly over regions, owing mainly to the differences in the historical tradition, cropping patterns and the level and nature of agricultural production technology. In the state of West Bengal crop sharing has been the most dominant form of tenancy both before and after independence. It appeared from the table 3.10 that percentage of leased-in holdings to total holdings in the state was 2.12 per cent in 1970-71 when leased-in area in relation to total operated area was 1.52 per cent. In 1980-81, the percentage of leasing-in holdings to total holding was 1.87 per cent while leased-in area to total operated was 1.08 per cent. It

Table 3.10: Distribution of Lease-in Area
under Terms of leasing

Size Class (in ha.)	Fixed Money			Fixed Produce			Fixed Share of Produce		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0	5204 (4.72)	3419 (3.62)	2381 (1.83)	2399 (2.17)	1619 (1.71)	6197 (4.76)	67980 (61.69)	84657 (89.80)	119046 (91.51)
1.0 - 2.0	2738 (1.85)	1621 (1.41)	851 (0.53)	2948 (1.99)	3244 (2.83)	10380 (6.53)	111719 (75.58)	106584 (93.52)	146071 (91.89)
2.0 - 4.0	1566 (1.35)	1152 (1.64)	2246 (2.92)	2526 (2.19)	1794 (2.55)	5741 (7.48)	90547 (78.61)	65482 (93.24)	67782 (88.32)
4.0 - 10.0	635 (1.62)	747 (4.53)	450 (3.94)	1501 (3.84)	300 (1.81)	881 (7.72)	26058 (66.73)	14624 (88.69)	9940 (87.11)
10.0 +	37 (2.62)	1463 (40.55)	10 (1.54)	28 (1.98)	-	-	377 (26.77)	135 (3.74)	559 (86.13)
All Sizes	10180 (2.46)	8402 (2.81)	5938 (1.57)	9402 (2.27)	6957 (2.32)	23199 (6.13)	296681 (71.70)	271783 (90.93)	343398 (90.86)

Source: Agricultural Census, Board
of Revenue and Directorate
of Agriculture, Govt. of
West Bengal.

contd...

Table 3.10.contd...

Size Class (in ha.)	Other Term			Total		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0	34605 (31.40)	4567 (4.84)	2459 (1.89)	110188 (100.00)	94262 (100.00)	130083 (100.00)
1.0 - 2.0	30372 (20.54)	2524 (2.20)	1654 (1.04)	147777 (100.00)	114273 (100.00)	158956 (100.00)
2.0 - 4.0	20531 (17.82)	1792 (2.55)	971 (1.26)	115170 (100.00)	70220 (100.00)	76740 (100.00)
4.0 - 10.0	10849 (27.78)	816 (4.94)	139 (1.21)	39043 (100.00)	16487 (100.00)	11410 (100.00)
10.0 +	966 (68.60)	2009 (55.69)	80 (12.32)	1408 (100.00)	3607 (100.00)	649 (100.00)
All Sizes	97323 (23.52)	11708 (3.91)	5303 (1.40)	413586 (100.00)	298849 (100.00)	377838 (100.00)

contd...

Table 3.1Q contd...

Distribution of Holding Leasing-in
and Area Leased-in

Size Class (in ha.)	% of holding Leasing Land			% of Area leased-in to total operated area		
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81
Below 1.0	2.37	0.98	1.26	0.48	1.09	1.33
1.0 - 2.0	2.29	1.27	1.61	2.15	1.10	1.49
2.0 - 4.0	0.01	0.58	0.82	1.14	0.50	0.82
4.0 - 10.0	8.00	0.12	0.16	0.31	0.11	0.16
10.0 +	0.00	1.25	1.34	0.00	0.16	0.17
All Sizes	2.12	0.98	1.27	1.52	0.77	1.08

is noted that proportion of leased-in area in relation to total operated area did not increase in the state in between 1970-71 to 1980-81.

It is evident from the table 3.10 that proportion of leased-in area is more dominated in marginal and small farm size. In case of medium and large size class, where the proportion of leased-in area in relation to operated is quite negligible in both 1970-71 and 1980-81 (Table 3.10).

In most of the cases, the marginal and small farms prefer to lease-in land from the large farms under the share-cropping terms. This is more appropriate in West Bengal also, where more than 90 per cent leased-in area is under share-cropping. The medium and large size class in West Bengal leased-in land under the fixed money and share-cropping tenancy. In this regard S.K. Sanyal⁷ referred that medium and large farms prefer to lease-in most fertile land so that it will be economically profitable. Some cases large farms have the tendency to lease-out land to large and medium farms because there is relatively less risk of default of payment of rent. Small farmers lease-out land to large farmers as non-viability of small and marginal holdings and their lack of access to institutional credit and relative factor to undertake personal

7. S.K. Sanyal, "Trends in some characteristics of Landholdings", Sarvekshana, July, 1977.

cultivation of land and instead try for alternative sources of livelihood either in the farm or non-farm sectors. Furthermore, small and marginal farmers also lease-out land under pressures of poverty and indebtedness.

DISTRIBUTION OF WHOLLY LEASED-IN AREA BY TERMS OF LEASE:

Share-cropping is the most popular tenancy system in West Bengal. More than 90 per cent leased-in area of the state is under share-cropping tenancy. Fixed money and fixed produce tenancy, popularly, existed in large and medium size class. Under the share-cropping tenancy, a tenant retains 50 per cent of the produce, if the land owner provides plough, cattle, manure and seeds; otherwise he retains 75 per cent. This share-cropping tenancy is locally known as 'Bhag Chash' in most of the districts of the state.

It will be more appropriate, to understand the pattern of leased-in area in various size classes of the state, if we consider the terms and conditions of leasing-in. Table 3.10 reflects the popularity of share-cropping tenancy which has increased in all the size classes of the state in 1980-81 over 1970-71. In West Bengal, the proportion of the leased-in area under the terms of (share-cropping) fixed share of produce was 71.70

per cent while it was 90.86 per cent in 1980-81 (table 3.10). Share-cropping tenancy is more prevalent in marginal and small farm size whereas fixed money tenancy is dominated by the large size farms in the state. As is evident from the table 3.10 popularity of fixed money tenancy is declining gradually in the state.

In 1970-71, the leased-in area under the terms of fixed money was 4.72 per cent in size class below 1 hectare as compared to 1.83 per cent of the total leased-in area in 1980-81. Leased-in area, under the terms of fixed share produce was 61.69 per cent in 1970-71 and 91.51 per cent in 1980-81 for the same size class. The small size group, where the popularity of leasing under fixed share of produce increased in between 1970-71 to 1980-81. Very recently the popularity of leasing under share-cropping tenancy has also been found to increase in medium and large size class.

**PATTERN OF HOUSEHOLD OWNERSHIP
HOLDING AND AREA: (N.S.S. Data)**

In 1953-54, the proportion of holdings in marginal category was 45.67 per cent with only 4.30 per cent of owned area while the share of holdings in large size group was 6.74 per cent with 39.90 per cent of owned area (Table 3.11). During 1971-72, the percentage share

Table 3.11 : Distribution of Ownership Holdings and Area, 1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72 (Rural Sector)

Size Class (in ha.)	Ownership Holdings					
	No. of Holdings (000)			Area Owned (000 hectares)		
	1953-54	1961-62	1971-72	1953-54	1961-62	1971-72
0.02 - 1.00	1551 (45.67)	1896 (44.12)	2587 (51.79)	176 (4.30)	187 (4.10)	264 (6.82)
1.01 - 2.02	711 (20.93)	890 (20.71)	1168 (23.38)	475 (11.60)	611 (13.42)	791 (20.44)
2.03 - 4.04	539 (15.87)	826 (19.22)	700 (14.01)	761 (18.59)	1182 (25.97)	994 (25.69)
4.05 - 10.12	366 (10.77)	482 (11.21)	404 (8.08)	1044 (25.51)	1311 (28.80)	1072 (27.71)
10.12 +	229 (6.74)	203 (4.72)	134 (2.68)	1636 (39.98)	1260 (27.68)	747 (19.31)
West Bengal	3396 (100.0)	4297 (100.0)	4995 (100.0)	4092 (100.0)	4551 (100.0)	3868 (100.0)

Source: NSS, 8th Round, Report No.66,
NSS, 16th Round, Report No.144,
NSS, 26th Round, Report No.215 (W.B.).

of holding in semi-medium and medium size group found decrease while the percentage share of owned area increased. It is observed that shifting of holdings as well as owned area took place in favour of marginal and small size group from large size group during the period 1953-54 to 1971-72.

In 1971-72 about 51.79 per cent of marginal holding accounted for only 6.82 per cent of owned area in the state while at the same time 2.68 per cent of large holding occupied more than 19 per cent owned area. Most surprising thing is that no shifting of owned area has taken place from medium size class to other size class over the period 1953-54 to 1971-72 although this size class has come under ceiling laws.

CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP HOLDINGS AND AREA:

Now we review the impact of land reform measures in connection with the changes in ownership holdings and area in different size groups over time. In between 1953-54 and 1961-62, the proportion of ownership holdings of the state increased by 26.53 per cent while area increased by 11.21 per cent. During 1961-62 to 1971-72, the ownership holding increased by 16.24 per cent and area decreased by 15.00 per cent (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12: Percentage Changes in Ownership Holdings, Area and Pattern of Average size of Holding (1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72)

Size class (in ha.)	% Change				Average Size		
	1953-54 to 1961-62		1961-62 to 1971-72		1953-54	1961-62	1971-72
	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.			
0.02 - 1.00	22.24	6.25	36.44	41.77	0.11	0.09	0.10
1.01 - 2.02	25.17	28.63	31.23	29.45	0.66	0.68	0.67
2.03 - 4.04	53.24	55.32	-15.25	-15.90	1.41	1.43	1.42
4.05 - 10.12	31.69	25.57	-16.18	-18.23	2.85	2.71	2.65
10.13 +	-11.35	-22.98	-33.99	-40.71	7.14	6.20	5.57
Total	26.53	11.21	16.24	-15.00	1.20	1.05	0.77

Note: O.H. - Ownership Holdings
O.A. - Owned Area

Now we see that how far 'Ceiling Act' contributed to change the pattern of holdings and area in marginal, medium and large size class. During the reference period 1953-54 to 1961-62 the proportion of holdings in marginal size class increased by 22.24 per cent and the area increased by 6.25 per cent; at the same time this proportion for the size class 4.05 to 10.12 hectares increased by 25.57 per cent while the proportion of holding in this farm size increased by 31.69 per cent. In fact, in the size class 10.13 hectares and above where the holding and area decreased by 11.35 and 27.98 per cent respectively over 1961-62 to 1971-72.

In between 1961-62 to 1971-72 the proportion of holdings and area for semi-medium, medium and large size group decreased significantly and the opposite was true for marginal and small farm size. This gradual declining of holding and area in large and medium size class is partly due to the subdivision of holdings over time or land reform.

PATTERN OF AVERAGE SIZE OF OWNERSHIP HOLDING:

The average size of ownership holding declined in all the size classes of the state from 1953-54 to 1971-72. The average size of marginal holding had declined from 0.11 hectare in 1953-54 to 0.10 hectare in 1971-72. There was

also decline in the average size of holding among the large farms. The pattern of average size of holding was more or less same in semi-medium and medium size class. In fact, there was a continuous decline (Table 3.12) in the average size of ownership holding at all levels which could be attributed to increase in population leading to sub-division and fragmentation of ownership holdings with successive generations and may also be partly due to division of household land to avoid certain provision of land ceiling legislation.

**PATTERN OF OPERATIONAL
HOLDINGS AND AREA:**

The situation regarding operational holding is not very different from that of ownership holding. Table 3.13 represented that the distribution of operational holdings also has been greatly uneven among different size groups of farm, although the degree of skewness here is relatively less as compared to the ownership holdings. In 1953-54, the number and area of operational holdings in the size group upto 2 hectares constituted 64.51 per cent and 14.29 per cent of the total respectively. While the large farm size above 10 hectares recorded 5.26 per cent of holding with 31.38 per cent of area of the total holdings and area of the state.

Table 3.13 : Distribution of Operational Holdings and Area 1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72 (Rural Sector) (West Bengal)

Size Class (in ha.)	Operational Holdings					
	No. of Holdings (000)			Area Operated (000 Hectares)		
	1953-54	1961-62	1971-72	1953-54	1961-62	1971-72
0.02 - 1.00	1984 (47.69)	2291 (46.62)	1096 (28.66)	180 (3.90)	116 (2.30)	186 (4.34)
1.01 - 2.02	700 (16.82)	833 (16.95)	1241 (32.46)	479 (10.39)	582 (11.58)	876 (20.45)
2.03 - 4.04	738 (17.74)	964 (19.61)	872 (22.80)	1060 (23.00)	1405 (27.97)	1239 (28.92)
4.05 - 10.12	519 (12.47)	604 (12.31)	495 (12.94)	1443 (31.31)	1624 (32.33)	1330 (31.05)
10.13 +	219 (4.26)	221 (4.49)	116 (3.03)	1446 (31.38)	1296 (25.80)	652 (15.22)
West Bengal	4160 (100.0)	4914 (100.0)	3823 (100.0)	4608 (100.0)	5023 (100.0)	4283 (100.0)

Source: NSS, 8th Round, Report No.66,
NSS, 16th Round, Report No.144,
NSS, 26th Round, Report No.215 (W.B.).

In case of 1971-72, about 61.12 per cent of operational holding in the size class up to 2 hectares occupied 24.74 per cent of operated area while at the same time large size group above 10 hectares occupied 3.03 per cent of holdings along with 15.22 per cent of operated area of the state. Thus the situation in respect of concentration of operational holding can be said to have changed significantly over time.

**CHANGES IN OPERATIONAL
HOLDING AND AREA:**

It already noticed from the Table 3.14 that percentage share of operated area increased in the marginal and small size group over time. The shifting of operated area taken place in favour of low size groups from higher size group. During 1961-62 to 1971-72, the operated area increased more significantly in the size class up to hectare. Opposite was true in medium and large size class. These changes can be explained in terms of Ceiling Act which was 25 acres for agricultural land and may be partly due to the distribution of surplus land to marginal farmers or it may be possible of the subdivision of holdings and area over time.

Unfortunately, under the influence of both population growth and land redistribution, the average size of operational holding in West Bengal is gradually declining

Table 3.14: Percentage Changes in Operational Holdings, Area and Pattern of Average size of Holding (1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72

Size class (in ha.)	% Change				Average Size		
	1953-54 to 1961-62		1961-62 to 1971-72		1953-54	1961-62	1971-72
	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.			
0.02 - 1.00	15.47	-35.55	-52.16	60.34	0.09	0.05	0.16
1.01 - 2.02	19.00	21.50	48.97	50.51	0.68	0.69	0.70
2.03 - 4.04	30.62	32.54	-9.54	-11.81	1.43	1.45	1.42
4.05 - 10.12	16.57	12.68	-18.18	-18.10	2.78	2.68	2.68
10.13 +	0.91	-10.37	-47.51	-49.69	6.50	5.86	5.62
Total	18.12	9.00	-22.20	-14.73	1.10	1.02	1.12

Note: O.H. - Operational Holdings
O.A. - Operated Area

over time. According to the data given in Table 3.14^{3.14} the average size of operational holding in the state was 1.10 hectares in 1953-54 and 1.12 hectares in 1971-72. In all size classes, the average size of operational holding declined from 1953-54 to 1971-72 except marginal and small size class.

PATTERN OF CONCENTRATION OF OWNERSHIP AND OPERATIONAL AREA:

We have tried to measure the concentration of owned as well as the operated land in the state with the help of Gini's Coefficient. The overall inequality in distribution of owned area remained unchanged in the period of 1953-54 to 1971-72 (Table 3.15). The concentration ratio of ownership holdings were 0.6512 in 1953-54, 0.6102 in 1961-62 and 0.6112 in 1971-72 respectively. It is observed that there is not much improvement in the situation as inequality still existed in ownership holding the state; although various land reform measures have been enacted after fifties to reduce the existing inequality in distribution of land.

On the contrary if we read the concentration ratio of operational holding, we find that overall inequality in operated area has declined in the state between 1953-54 to 1971-72. In 1953-54, the value of Gini's Coefficient was 0.5601 while it came down as 0.4819 in 1971-

72. It appeared that redistribution of operated area from large and medium class to marginal and small size class resulted in the decline of inequality in operated area.

Table 3.15: Pattern of Concentration of Ownership and Operational Holdings, 1953-54, 1961-62 and 1971-72 (West Bengal)

Gini's Coefficient					
Ownership Holdings			Operational Holdings		
1953-54	1961-62	1971-72	1953-54	1961-62	1971-72
0.5601	0.4621	0.4819	0.6512	0.6102	0.6112

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

LAND REFORMS IN INDIA -
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Indian agrarian relations were distorted by British rule of more than a century and at the time of independence, a large part of agrarian system in India was characterised by feudal and semi-feudal production relations. The ownership rights were concentrated in the hands of the landlords. The actual cultivators had either no right or had very limited rights in land as tenants. The security of tenure depended on the mercy of landlords. The adverse effect of landlordism on agricultural land was most pronounced in West Bengal. The arbitrary increase in the rent realised from the tenants was most important characteristic of landlordism. The tenants were even asked to provide free labour (begar) to landlords. Therefore, the pre-independence agrarian structure was exploitative in nature.

Land System during Ancient period:

The present tenurial system in India evolved through the complex politico-social and economic processes. In the ancient period, land was the property of the king. King's share was eighth, sixth or twelfth part of the grain, according to the labour necessary to cultivate the land. Some authors also referred that land was the common

property of the village communities, though cultivation was not done on communal basis. But there is no mention in 'Manu' about this common ownership of land. In south, the land system among the Dravidian races was quite different, where the land of a village was divided into two categories, (a) 'khunts' and (b) 'Majhas'. In khunts system, a portion of land went to the headman, and a portion to the priest while in Majhas system, a portion of land was as royal farm. In Gupta period, king was the supreme owner of the land. The traditional royal share was one-sixth of the produce of the cultivated lands. There was crown land generally cultivated by hired labour or slaves.

In Harshavardhana's kingdom, the tenant paid one-sixth of the produce as rent. There were three-fold land tenure system in 'Chola' kingdom of south India. These were samudayam (common property), palabhaga (permanent property) and ekabhagam. At the same time a different type of land tenurial system developed in Bengal during the reign of 'Ballal Sena'. The territory was divided into five grand divisions known as 'Bhuktis'. The tenants paid one-sixth of their gross produce to the king and this system was known as "raja-praja sambandha".

Land System during Sultanate Period:

During Sultanate period, the state had little or no direct relation with the peasantry so far as the rent collection was concerned. There were two major categories of land known as 'Khalsa' and jagir land. The amount from the 'khalsa' lands, formed the land revenue of the state. In Sher Shah kingdom, the state demand was fixed at one-third of the expected produce payable in cash or kind.

Land System during Mughal Period:

Land tax was the main source of revenue in Mughal India. The king was the supreme owner of the land, but the land was actually operated by tenants or the "khud-kasht-rayat". In the regime of Akbar, the land was divided into three categories according to its fertility, namely 'polaj', 'parathi' and 'banjar'. The quantity of produce from each type of land i.e. a bigha of each category would yield was ascertained; the average of the three categories of land was assumed as the produce of a bigha, and one-third of that produce formed the government demand. Besides, there were two other revenue systems, namely gallabaks and nasq (village assessment). The gallabaks prevailed in Kabul, Sindh and Kashmir while nasq was introduced in suba Bengal.

Land System during the British Period:

There were three types of land tenures in British India - the zamindari, the ryotwari and the mahalwari. Zamindari systems prevailed under: (i) permanent settlement and (ii) temporary settlement. Permanent settlement existed in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Banaras, and North Madras; and the temporary settlement covered the greater parts of Uttar Pradesh. The jagirdari system (variety of temporary zamindari settlement) prevailed in PEPSU and Rajasthan.

Under the permanent settlement, the share of the revenue from the state was fixed in perpetuity; and the zamindars became the proprietors of the lands. The ryotwari system was introduced by 'Thomas Munroe' in the greater parts of Madras. Under the ryotwari system, there was the direct link between the state and the ryots and the ryot was protected from any sort of illegal eviction as long as he paid the fixed rent to the state.

A third type of land tenure called the 'mahalwari' system was initially introduced in Agra and Oudh and later extended to the Punjab. Under this tenure, the settlement was made with the entire village and the peasants residing there contributed, on the basis of their respective holdings, to the total revenue demand for the village. There were also other varieties of tenure arrangements

of minor importance like the malguzari and maktedari tenures in Central Provinces.

LAND REFORMS IN WEST BENGAL:

Under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 the following tenancy reforms were adopted in the state:

- (a) Abolition of all intermediaries;
- (b) The rayots holding became free from the intermediaries, and came in direct contact with the state;
- (c) The under rayots holding from the rayots, were up graded and came in direct contact with the state;
- (d) Imposition of ceiling on agricultural lands at 25 acres;
- (e) There was no ceiling for religious or charitable institutions of public nature;
- (f) Payment of compensation to the ex-intermediaries.

The abolition of the intermediary interests did not, however, bring the large body of share-croppers into direct contact with the states, because they were not treated as tenants. Their rights and obligations were confined in the West Bengal Bargadars Act, 1950.

The West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955, provided for:

- (a) Management of estates acquired;
- (b) Fixation of ceiling on retained land on family basis and vesting of ceiling surplus land to the state;
- (c) Distribution of surplus land to the landless people or near landless;
- (d) Elaborate provision for the rights and obligations of share-droppers;
- (e) Restrictions of alienation of land by scheduled tribes;
- (f) Recording of the share-croppers (bargadars) with a view to preventing their unlawful eviction and securing their rights concerning cultivation of the land;
- (g) Regulation of crop share payable to the landowner.

The West Bengal Land Holding Revenue Act, 1979 came into force with effect from 14.4.81 and under this Act land revenue has been relationalised. A momentous change has been introduced in the land reforms sphere in this State through the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (Amendment) 1981. With this amendment, all classes of land, agriculture, non-agriculture, tank, tank-fishery, fishery, orchards, bazar, ferries, land in tea garden mills and factories etc. have been brought under a common ceiling.

With regard to overall progress of different Land reform measures, West Bengal is one of the few states in the country where the land reform programmes have been implemented on a fairly large scale. The West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act abolished all sorts of intermediaries. Total area of agricultural land taken into possession by the government through the application of Estates Acquisition Act and the Ceiling Laws upto December 1980 was 1,211,617 acres which accounts for 8 per cent of the operated area of the state. Of this, however, 179,207 acres (14.78%) could not be released owing to court injunctions and about 1,032,410 acres (85.17%) which constituted approximately 6.8 per cent of net sown area, was available for distribution. Upto December, 1980, an area of about 673,453 acres, constituting approximately 4.8 per cent of net sown area, was actually distributed to 1,194,176 beneficiaries, among them 37.09 per cent are scheduled caste, and 19.94 per cent scheduled tribes. The size of a parcel given to a single beneficiary was not fixed, but did not generally exceed one hectare. On an average each beneficiary received about 0.56 acre.

With a view to create conditions for an enforcement of the existing laws, the government launched a campaign (called Barga Operation) for recording share-croppers and for regulating share-cropping system. This programme has so far been fairly successful. Upto December, 1980, 1,001,986

share-croppers had been officially recorded.

As stated earlier, the main objective of the study is to examine the pattern of land concentration in West Bengal over time. The various findings of the study have been summarised below.

As regards the pattern of operational holdings and area, it has been found that the proportion of marginal and small holdings and area increased in the state in 1980-81 over 1970-71. In 1970-71, 59.91 per cent of marginal holdings occupied 21.52 per cent operated area of the state while 69.62 per cent marginal holdings occupied 29.14 per cent of operated area in 1980-81. The shift of operational holdings and area from semi-medium and medium farm size to marginal and small farm size is found more pronounced over time. The proportion of holdings in medium size class of the state declined from 4.36 per cent in 1970-71 to 1.58 per cent in 1980-81 when the proportion of operated area decreased from 19.23 per cent in 1970-71 to 10.70 per cent in 1980-81.

The decrease of the proportion of holdings and area in semi-medium, medium and large size classes was recorded in most of the districts of the state except Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts where the large farm size continued to exist. The concentration of operated area increased in the marginal and small size classes in

various districts of the state over time. The increase in number of holdings and area in marginal size group may be due to the effects of land reform measures where vested surplus land has been distributed to marginal farmers and landless labour or partly may be due to the subdivision of holding in the medium and large size class with the successive generations. The increase in operated area in the large farm of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts, may also be ascribed to the exemption granted to tea-estates from the ceiling laws.

The average size of holding has decreased during 1980-81 from 1970-71 in all the size classes of the state except the large farms where average holding increased more sharply over the time. The average size of holding in the state decreased from 1.20 hectares in 1970-71 to 0.95 hectare in 1980-81. In the district level analysis, it has been found that the average size of holding has decreased in all the districts over time. It is observed that the lower size of holding dominate in the plain districts of the state. According to Agricultural Census (1970-71, 1980-81), the largest average size of holding has been found in Darjeeling district while the lowest by Howrah district. However, the positions of average size of holding decreased in all the districts over time,

not only because of population pressure on agricultural land but also due to subdivision of joint holdings and 'benami' transfer of land by the large land owners for evasion of ceiling.

Looking at disparities in operated area in relation to holdings. The results show very limited change. The existing inequality in operated land, even after land reform measures, are quite apparent. Among the various districts, the problems are more acute. In the State as a whole, the concentration ratios in operated area are found to be 0.51542 in 1970-71 and 0.51451 in 1980-81 respectively. It is observed that the overall inequality in distribution of operated area in the state has almost remained unchanged even after the series of land reform measures. In case of Jalpaiguri, West Dinajpur and Midnapore districts where concentration ratio showed slightly upward trend. Of course, there are certain districts like Murshidabad, Birbhum, Hoogly, 24 Parganas etc., where the overall inequality in operated area has decreased during 1970-71 to 1980-81.

Regarding the distribution of irrigated and unirrigated area, it has been observed that there has been an increase in the proportion of marginal and small size group over time. In case of semi-medium, medium and large farm, the percentage share in both irrigated and

unirrigated areas has decreased during 1980-81 from 1970-71. In fact, the proportion of irrigated area in higher size groups has decreased over time along with the shifting of operated area to the lower size class.

It is evident that proportion of wholly owned and self-operated area increased in the state in 1980-81 over 1970-71, while partly owned and self-operated area has decreased. In case of marginal and small farms, the share of owned area has increased more significantly over time. Similarly increase in lease-in area in the lower size group is also more apparent during 1980-81 over 1970-71. The increase of owned area in the lower size group (upto 2 hectares) can be ascribed to the distribution of surplus vested land to the landless and marginal farmers.

The proportion of leased-in area under the terms of share-cropping has increased in the state from 1970-71 to 1980-81. It has also been found that the share-cropping tenancy is more popular in marginal and small classes. In marginal farm, the proportion of leased in area under the terms of share produce increased from 61.69 per cent in 1970-71 to 91.51 per cent in 1980-81. The similar trends have also been observed in small farm. It is interesting to note that leased-in area under the terms of fixed money tenancy is more pronounced in the higher farms.

The analysis has been done with the help of N.S.S. data, presented also the same characteristics of the agrarian structure in West Bengal. The concentration of ownership and operated area increased in the marginal and small farm over time. The pattern of average size of ownership holding has observed decrease over time when it was almost constant in case of operational household. Regarding the overall inequality in distribution of ownership area there has been almost no change over time. This is more clear that the existing inequality in the ownership of land, even after land-reform measures, is quite apparent. Of course, the results show that inequality in operational area has decreased from 1953-54 to 1971-72.

From the analysis made in chapter three the following characteristics of the agrarian structure in West Bengal has emerged out quite prominently.

- (1) The proportion of marginal and small holdings has increased along with area over time;
- (2) The inequality in the distribution of land almost remained unchanged and it continues to persist;
- (3) The average size of holding has declined over time;
- (4) The share of irrigated area has increased in the lower size class while it has declined in higher farm size;

- (5) Leased-in area increased in marginal and small farms rather than in medium and large farms;
- (6) Popularity of leasing under the terms of share of produce has increased in all size classes of the state over time.

The land reforms legislation aimed to curb landlordism and to reform the tenancy status. It aimed to reduce the inequality in distribution of land. However, the concrete achievement through land reform measures have been found inadequate to some extent. Of course, agrarian reform is still on-going process in West Bengal. It is too early to determine factually long-term impact of various land reforms programme on rural poverty, tenancy and inequality in distribution of land. It is very difficult to evaluate the achievements of Land Reforms Programme within the short-term programme. Therefore, we cannot attempt a definite assessment at this point. Government has done some sincere attempt to plug the loopholes in the Act and to protect the tenants from the illegal eviction by the land owners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix-1 : Districtwise Distribution of Operational Holdings and Area, 1970-71, 1976-77 and 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Name of Districts	1970-71		1976-77		1980-81	
	No. of Holdings	Area Operated	No. of Holdings	Area Operated	No. of Holdings	Area Operated
Darjeeling	52310 (1.24)	160318 (3.17)	58500 (1.10)	155385 (2.97)	65091 (1.10)	152953 (2.75)
Cooch Behar	166952 (3.96)	192649 (3.81)	204200 (3.85)	232056 (4.44)	259293 (4.40)	261389 (4.74)
Jalpaiguri	135742 (3.22)	326079 (6.44)	163427 (3.08)	326373 (6.25)	304752 (3.48)	341659 (6.19)
Malda	204833 (4.86)	253130 (4.99)	316778 (6.01)	283065 (5.42)	334922 (5.70)	298126 (5.38)
W. Dinajpur	248484 (5.89)	413781 (8.17)	329510 (6.22)	424350 (8.12)	380483 (6.47)	405394 (7.29)
Nadia	209896 (4.98)	275989 (5.49)	275018 (5.22)	282775 (5.41)	349435 (5.94)	339743 (6.11)
Murshidabad	330539 (7.84)	349719 (6.91)	412859 (7.83)	376610 (7.21)	499593 (8.49)	449162 (8.08)
Howrah	183056 (4.34)	92096 (1.82)	197301 (3.74)	90099 (1.72)	206836 (3.51)	96487 (1.73)
Burdwan	293735 (6.97)	409804 (8.10)	365268 (6.93)	439786 (8.42)	380929 (6.47)	470974 (8.47)
Birbhum	186628 (4.43)	280215 (5.54)	237513 (4.50)	295335 (6.65)	239867 (4.07)	294905 (5.30)
Bankura	253264 (6.01)	350856 (6.93)	335076 (6.36)	357164 (6.84)	337212 (5.73)	381994 (6.87)
Hoogly	228374 (5.42)	207024 (4.09)	264268 (5.01)	203397 (3.89)	313586 (5.33)	235331 (4.23)
Purulia	213185 (5.05)	273330 (5.40)	276270 (5.24)	306250 (5.86)	262806 (4.46)	308836 (5.55)
Midnapore	810558 (19.22)	814122 (16.09)	1017194 (19.31)	822091 (15.74)	1040503 (17.68)	818099 (14.71)
24 Parganas	698771 (16.57)	662519 (13.09)	814482 (15.46)	626227 (11.99)	1062341 (18.05)	699730 (12.59)
West Bengal	4216327 (100.0)	5061631 (100.0)	5266664 (100.0)	5220966 (100.0)	5877649 (100.0)	5554782 (100.0)

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal

Appendix-2 : Percentage Changes in Operational Holdings and Area during 1970-71 to 1976-77 & 1976-77 to 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (in ha.)	<u>1970-71 to 1976-77</u>		<u>1976-77 to 1980-81</u>	
	O.H.	O.A.	O.H.	O.A.
Below 1.0	38.50	30.08	16.95	14.25
1.0 - 2.0	14.94	14.46	6.13	16.35
2.0 - 4.0	-2.20	-3.45	-4.81	-0.78
4.0 - 10.0	-27.15	-28.94	-16.74	-14.00
10.0 & Above	-46.81	-10.15	-26.66	-1.90
All Class	24.91	3.14	11.60	6.39

Note: OH - Operational Holdings;
AO - Operated Area

Source: Agricultural Census, Board
of Revenue and Directorate of
Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

Appendix-3 : Pattern of Changes in Irrigated and Unirrigated Area in the State by Size Groups during 1970-71 to 1976-77 and 1976-77 to 1980-81 (West Bengal)

Size Class (ha.)	% Change in Unirrigated Area		% Change in Irrigated Area	
	1970-71- 1976-77	1976-77- 1980-81	1970-71- 1976-77	1976-77- 1980-81
Below 1.0	26.49	6.15	53.42	36.49
1.0 - 2.0	12.28	-2.69	45.64	42.02
2.0 - 4.0	-0.77	-17.15	21.97	12.93
4.0 - 10.0	-28.77	-34.98	-15.21	11.56
10 +	-94.71	2766.78	-81.03	192.66
All Classes	-1.82	-1.20	26.23	27.81

Source: Agricultural Census, Board of Revenue and Directorate of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal.

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