

**SOME ASPECTS OF AGRARIAN  
CHANGE IN NORTH BENGAL**  
**A CASE STUDY OF TWO VILLAGES FROM NAXALBARI**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
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**RAJIB NANDI**

**CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

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I hereby affirm that the research for this dissertation entitled "Some Aspects of Agrarian Change in North Bengal: A Case Study of Two Villages from Naxalbari" being submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy, was carried out entirely by me at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

*Rajib Nandi*

Rajib Nandi

Certified that this dissertation is the bonafied work of Rajib Nandi. This has not been considered for the award of any other degree by any other University.

S. N. Rao  
G N Rao  
Fellow

*Raman Mahadevan*  
Raman Mahadevan  
Associate Fellow

Supervisors

*Chandan Mukherjee*

Chandan Mukherjee  
Director  
Centre for Development Studies  
Trivandrum

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Trivandrum

Rajib Nandi

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## INTRODUCTION

### *1. The Land Question*

"To the propagator of 'elite politics' land question is a 'dead horse' but in 'peoples politics' land question has a special position" (Chatterjee, 1984). Land represents livelihood, economic security, status and power in village India. Since agrarian relations play a crucial role in shaping the entire matrix of social relations it may be perceived as a basic social causes. Agrarian relations are aspects of economy, polity and society. This also explains the scholarly attention that has been bestowed on this theme.

Changes in agrarian relations may take place at two levels: reforms and/or revolution. Reforms imply changes brought about through the intervention of the state. The process is a slow one. Revolution implies direct action by people, bringing forth fairly rapid changes. This in turn involves gradual but steady process of politicisation. Interestingly Terai region in North Bengal, presents a case of both revolution and reforms. In the late 1960's the region witnessed a militant uprising of the landless workers and poor peasants, which was described as India's "spring thunder". Further in the late 1970's the Government of West Bengal attempt institutional intervention through a package of Tenancy reforms called 'Operation Barga'. It would be interesting to examine the change in agrarian relation that occurred in the wake of peasant uprising and tenancy reforms with a study on the relation between the political movement and the state intervention i.e., how the uprising articulated into reforms.

## *2. The Naxalbari Peasant Uprising*

In the 'Terai' region, where Naxalbari is situated, there are as many as 45 tea estates employing about 50,000 workers. The brown podzolic soil in Terai is conducive to the growth of tea plantation but it renders general agricultural productivity low. The land problem in these tracts presents an even more complicated picture. First, the Terai region was never permanently settled with the zamindars under the British Raj. It was marked as 'non-regulated area', that is regular tenancy laws of the British Indian Government were not enforced in this area. Two different acts were in vogue - the Act of 1859 and the Act of 1879. According to these Acts the Bengal Government had leased out the land to its 'subjects' for specific periods. These subjects were known as 'jotedars'. There were 860 small and big jotedars in the region before the land Acquisition Act of 1954.

Under the existing system in the Terai region, a jotedar could employ 'adhiars' and evict them as well as at his will, from their lands. A new situation arose following enactment of the Estate Acquisition act and the Land reform act in 1954 and 1955 respectively. The jotedars took full advantage of the absence of land records indulged in the malafide transfer of holdings in excess of ceiling. This was followed by large scale evictions of the peasants and sharecroppers, who failed to secure any protection from the administration. On the other hand the high rate of population growth put an extremely heavy pressure on the limited capacity of the total cultivable land in the Terai region. Thus the regressive land tenure system in this region has been a source of extra misery for the appallingly poor peasantry. Consequently

years of accumulated tension, bitterness sparked off feuds. The peasant leaders led oppressed peasantry into land occupation and crop seizures in Naxalbari area.

The strategic position of Naxalbari coupled with the prevailing agrarian problems which had been carefully and systematically capitalised by the Maoist ideologies in the CPI(M) in that area, helped the peasants to launch a violent agitation, largely modelled on the Human Peasant Uprising in China in the spring of 1927. Though there have been agrarian problems in other areas of West Bengal, no less than those of Naxalbari, the situation in Naxalbari was complicated by a host of socio-economic factors specific to the area. To this must be added the strategic location of the tract, which made the situation all the more volatile and hence conducive for a violent uprising.

### *3. Review of Literature*

The existing literature on the evolution of agrarian relations in Bengal primarily focuses on the conditions in areas which came under the Permanent Settlement Act, 1793. North Bengal which was a non-regulated area, failed to receive adequate scholarly attention. The few studies which are available have mainly dealt with the ideological and organizational aspects of peasant revolts in the region, without paying sufficient attention to the socio-economic conditions which led the peasants to adopt a radical path for solving their economic problems (Franda, 1971; Mohon Ram, 1971; Sengupta, 1972; Johri, 1972; Dasgupta, 1974).

Among notable exceptions to the general genre of studies are the works of Roy (1975) and Jawaid (1979). While like those works cited above, Roy is mainly concerned with the organisational aspects of the politicisation of the peasants and the landless, he makes an attempt to go behind the veil of the party to trace the causes behind the peasant uprising. Among the main causes he identifies shortage of cultivable land, inequality in land distribution and irregular tenancy systems. However, these items are not elaborate upon, and several crucial themes such as the success of this uprising in solving the problems of the poor peasants and the responses of the government after the Naxalbari peasant uprising.

Some of the issues mentioned above are subjected to analysis by Jawaid (1979). In particular the impact which the Naxalite movement had upon the initiation of a whole set of new public policies devised by the most profound impact upon the Congress Government by forcing it to design far more radical and effective socio-economic policies to deal with poverty, hunger and inequality on an all India basis.

A very interesting change in North Bengal is the sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers. The agricultural economy of North Bengal was 'adhiar-based' in the past. But the 1971 Census revealed a sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers and its percentage in West Bengal's rural work force. This was most striking in some North Bengal districts. When the state as a whole recorded a little over 80 per cent increase in agricultural labourers in contrast in four out of five districts of North

Bengal, it rose by more than 155 per cent. Only one research paper has so far discussed this problem (Bandopadhyay, 1977). The author identified a process of depeasantisation behind the sharp increase of agricultural labour force in this region.

A substantial body of literature is available on the agrarian scenario of West Bengal since 1977. However, most of the studies have restricted themselves to the analysis of macro data: Among the few scholars who have ventured to go down to the village level to collect detailed empirical data are Rudra (1983), Chattopadhyay et al (1983, 1984), Chadha and Bhowmik (1992) and Harris (1992).

The study by Chadha and Bhowmik (1992) on the present agrarian situation in West Bengal has tried to capture the picture of grassroot realities from a field survey in Midnapore district of West Bengal. The authors argued on the basis of the empirical evidences, that, the situation has now altered. Now the tenants enjoy some degree of collective and organised strength, often backed by the peasant organisations. In the new circumstances under the Left Front regime, the relationship between the lessors and lessees has been regularised. They intended to know to what extent the terms and conditions of tenancy contracts and tenurial relations differ between the unrecorded tenants and the recorded tenants with their hypothesis that the recorded tenants start enjoying the benefits of the collective and organised strength, the old tenancy relations which characterised exploitation of the tenants start breaking up.

The major findings of the above study are the effective crop sharing rights by the organised tenants, the low incidence of crop sharing by the land lords and the dominance of tenants in production decisions. But they also found a large section of unregistered tenants.

The authors argued that an important aspect of changing tenurial relations of West Bengal in recent years is restrictions of transactions between the lessors and the lessees, which is confined only in the land-lease market. This has pushed the phenomenon of market interlocking (particularly between land-lease-credit) to a position of insignificance (Chadha and Bhowmik, 1992).

In the Terai area of Darjeeling district significant changes in tenurial contracts occurred as a result of land reform legislation in 1955 and its implementation; the expansion of domestic market for agricultural products; the peasant revolt in 1967 and the Operation Barga movement since 1978 (Chattopadhyay and Ghosh, 1983).

Regarding the land tenure structure at the present times, it can be said from the study that the lessors do not give much evidence of entrepreneurship or innovativeness. Sharecropping has become the principal form of tenancy during recent times. Proportion of land less tenants has gone up and proportion of absentee landlords has increased. Customary traditional tenurial arrangements have become less prevalent. An interlinkage exists between tenancy and credit conditions. Credit market is dominated by the landlords and not by the non-landlord money lenders. The data do not entirely support



semifeudal production relations. And lastly there is no evidence of extra-economic coercion (Chattopadhyay and Ghosh, 1983).

Though the study mentions about a significant change in tenancy relations it lacks a comparative analysis between the past and present situation. He did not go through the conditions of the adhiars (sharecroppers) from pre Naxalbari era, when the adhiars used to render leisure time service to the landlords, to the present time. It is also not very clear from the study that the reduction in the number of share-crop variants, which is reported only in three different forms, is due to a large section of the tenants being able to exercise their tenurial rights in recent years. Nor can it be authenticated from the study if the pattern of crop-sharing for different crops has responded to differences in the levels of technology available for individual crops.

One of the two recent studies, based on field work in the Birbhum district of West Bengal says, "It seems that in practice the state government has been instrumental in achieving something of a breakthrough in agricultural production but more by means of a focus on the expansion of the productive forces". It also says, "the agrarian reform policies pursued by this government have brought about any really significant change in the agrarian structure (Harris, 1993). But the other study reaches the opposite conclusion, where the author finds the evidence of the displacement of relations of personal interlocking (Lieten, 1992).

After the implementation of 'Operation Barga' in West Bengal a number of scholars studied the success and failure of the agrarian

policy of the state government, or some times the policy itself (Rudra, 1981; Dutta, 1981; Khasnobis, 1981 and 1994; Dasgupta, 1984). The policy faced a major criticism from Khasnobis (1981) where he argued that through this measure 'the rent earning authority of the non-cultivators, condemned by the bourgeois democratic revolution, get a communist sanction', and, as a consequence, 'this reduces an erstwhile revolutionary programme to an ordinary reformist one'. Khasnobis's latest study, based on a survey of twenty six villages from different districts of West Bengal, brings out the picture of changing tenurial conditions. He argued that the reforms do not seem to have changed the existing mode of production in a radical way. Though the interlinkage between tenancy and credit does not seem to operate in the countryside, but, with the sources of institutional credit drying up, the informal credit agencies are fast making a come-back in rural West Bengal. A new type of interlinkage involving the merchants and tenants is developing in the countryside.

Several recent studies, including one by Rudra jointly with Bardhan (1983), confirm that sharecropping in West Bengal is a declining phenomenon. According to Dasgupta though sharecropping is declining the demise of this system is by no means imminent (Dasgupta, 1984).

A study, extremely critical of the Left Front Government's agrarian policies, argues that rather than struggling to improve the position of the agricultural proletariat, the communists have instead "...tried to control the labour movement within multi class alliance dominated by rural elite interests". Further it argues

that the registration of share croppers was probably skewed towards the sympathisers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and big sharecropper-landlords; and that the rate of sharecropper eviction may well now exceed the recording of sharecropping rights (Mallick, 1992).

#### *4. Context of the Proposed Study*

The distribution of agricultural land in Naxalbari in the 1950s was highly skewed. The land grab movement in the mid fifties and late sixties was largely an attempt to seek a political solution to this problem. What changes in the agrarian structure did this bring forth? Further, in the late 1970s, the state attempted an institutional intervention through tenancy reforms named 'Operation Barga'. The proposed study of agrarian structure in Naxalbari is thus sought to be situated in the broader context of political movement and state intervention.

#### *5. Statement of the Problem and Objectives*

The proposed study seeks to examine two sets of relations: First, the relations between the political movement and state intervention on the one hand and the land holding structure on the other. Second, the disempowerment of the small peasantry as seen in the downward movement from cultivators to landless labourers and its possible situational relations.

The empirical relevance of this problem, needs to be analysed within the frame work of interlinkages. Relations defining attributes such as terms and conditions of contract, credit relations and the like, are important. At a conceptual level, the

agrarian class categories, marked by antagonistic and \ or non-antagonistic contradictions, is the context within which the concrete empirical attributes find their relevance. A field survey was carried out with a view to unravel the present agrarian structure and its implications on credit and product market: (a) the incidence and types of tenancy; (b) the lessors and the lessees and their respective socio-economic backgrounds; (c) and finally the nature of land, credit and product market in this region and their possible interconnections.

Further, the nature of transformation brought about by land reforms since 1977 also receives attention in the present study. How far various institutional reforms have been responsible in bringing about any noticeable change in agrarian structure? The scenario in terms of social overheads and agricultural facilities in the new tenancy reform called Operation Barga will receive close attention.

#### *6. Data and Method*

The available census and other secondary data from government and non-government sources are supplemented by the first hand survey data of the villages. Two villages were selected from "Naxalbari peasant movement area" on the basis of information from secondary sources, regarding the involvement of the peasants of those villages in the movement in late 1960s.

The socio-economic parameters which were taken into account in selecting the villages were; location of the villages (distance of the villages from its nearest pukka road or high road and railway station), caste and community composition, sources and intensity of

irrigation. The basic purpose for this choice is to understand two dissimilar types of villages in the same region.

Thirty households were chosen at random from each village and a schedule was canvassed among the head of those households. The schedule was framed to primarily gather details of the prevailing agrarian structure and to capture the inter-generational mobility and also the changes that had occurred, during the last fifteen years in the wake of land reforms.

Consistent with the dychronic approach of the study, the aged persons of the village engaged in agriculture, and those who were directly or indirectly involved with the peasant movement of the late 1960s were also interviewed. Additional information was collected from the contemporary peasant leaders of the village and the village officials.

The villages ultimately chosen were Subholbhita from Kharibari police station area and Sevdela from Naxalbari Police station area. The villages were studied between August 1994 and November 1994. This was the lean agricultural season, and enabled us to meet the villagers in relative idleness.

I have relied on multidisciplinary tools for collecting primary information and the data analyses. For the field work, anthropological way of interviewing people was adopted: at times questions were asked outside the questionnaire. Thus the field survey contain both quantitative and qualitative information.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Agrarian History and Peasant Resistance in Terai*

#### *1.1 Introduction*

Darjeeling, the northern most district of West Bengal, occupies only 3.68 per cent of the total area of the state. It has 591 villages (of which 55 are uninhabited). This is the lowest figure of all the districts of West Bengal. Geographically the district can be divided into two broad divisions, the hills and the plains. The entire hilly region of the district now comes under "Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council", an autonomous administrative body under the state Government. The council covers the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. The foot-hills of Darjeeling Himalayas, which coming under the Siliguri subdivision and covering 837.4 sq. kilometres, is known as 'Terai'. The 'Terai' is the tract lying at the foot of the hills, which is bounded on the north by the mountains, on the south by the Purnea district of Bihar state, on the east by Jalpaiguri and on the west by the state of Nepal. It has a length from north to south of 18 miles, and a breadth from east to west of 16 miles, excluding the area covered by forest, it contains a total area of 230 square miles.

#### *1.2 Agro-Climatic Conditions in Darjeeling*

Geographically, 'Terai' is a sort of medium country, being composed neither of the alluvium of the plains, nor of the rocks of the hills, but for the most part of alternating beds of sand, gravel and boulders brought from the mountains. Sand absorbs surface water very fast, which is not suitable for growing crops. But intra zonal variations in soil are a characteristic feature of

Table:1.1  
Some Typical Profiles of Terai Soil

Depth(in inches)	0-7	17-21
Colour of soil layer	Grey	Grey brown
Coarse sand	24.0%	23.5%
Fine sand	55.1%	58.1%
Silt	10.5%	10.4%
Clay	9.4%	7.3%
Air-dry moisture	1.0%	0.7%
Depth of water table(in feet)	3-12	

Terai. It is not for quite good soil to be found even high up on the hills. Good manuring is necessary on reddish soil for growing good crops. The black soil can grow dry crops like maize, marua etc. and is known as 'kalomati'. Black soil is rich in humus content. The entire terai is covered by dense forests, tea estates big or small- tea estates and is criss-crossed by several streams, interspersed with patches of cultivable lands.

The average rainfall in the district is 136.41 inches in a year with 114 rainy days on the average. Apart from copius precipitation, abundant water flows through Siliguri subdivision are good sources of natural irrigation. The district in general is well-drained. Parts of Siliguri subdivision are flooded by the hill-born rivers during the rainy season. A few drainage schemes like Sukdela and Kawakhari have sofar been executed.

Table:1.2  
Rainfall in Darjeeling District:1986 to 1989  
(In millimetres)

Normal	....	...	...	3212.0
1986	....	...	...	3043.0
1987	....	...	...	3110.0
1988	....	...	...	2550.0
1989	....	...	...	3509.0

Source: Economic Survey of West Bengal, (Various issues).

The entire Darjeeling district, and some parts of Terai, are not suitable for tube well irrigation due to the presence of small stones and boulders inside the earth. The only source of water in Terai is natural and artificial canals and dug-wells. The facilities for tank irrigation are not available in this region. Most of these canals do not carry water through out the year. According to data published by the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics (1974 and 1982) net irrigated area under Government canals in the whole district increased to 4.7 thousand hectares in 1979-80 from one thousand hectares in 1960-61. Where total irrigated area declined over the years. State Water Investigation Directorate's data shows that in 1988, there were only 4 deep tube wells in the whole district. There are 814 shallow tube wells and 303 dug-wells in 1980-81, 813 hectares of area of Darjeeling district were under Government canals. This was only 0.08% of total area under government canals in the state. The area under government canals further declined to 846 hectares i.e. 0.05 per cent in 1991-92.

**Table:1.3**  
**Area Irrigated in Darjeeling District through Various Means:**  
**1960-61 to 1966-67** (in acres)

Year	Govt. canals	Pvt. canals	Tanks & wells	Other sources	Total
1960-61	2500	5000	nil	49000	56000
1961-62	2600	5300	nil	49200	57100
1962-63	2300	5100	nil	49100	56500

Source: Agricultural Economist, Government of West Bengal.

The hilly part of Darjeeling district is not suitable for cultivation, except maize, marua, cardamom and tea. But the tract



of Terai has been used mainly for paddy cultivation for last hundred year or so.

Table: 1.4  
Land Utilization in Terai (Siliguri Sub-division)  
1977-78 to 1978-79  
(in thousand hectares)

	1977-78	1978-79
Total area (according to DLR, WB)	83.91	83.91
Area under forest	22.60	22.60
Area not available for cultivation		
(a) Land put to non-agricultural uses	7.72	8.96
(b) Barren and uncultivable waste	0.03	0.02
Pasture and other grazing land	N.A.	N.A.
Misc. tree crops & graves	0.75	1.43
Cultivable waste	2.98	3.93
Other fallow land and other than current fallow	0.19	0.36
Current fallow	1.47	0.46
Net cropped area	48.17	46.15

Source: Government of West Bengal, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, (1982).

Table:1.5  
Main Crops Grown in the Plains  
(Based on the settlement records of 1925)

	Cropped area (in acre)	Percentage to total cropped area
Rice	49523	79.0
Jowar(millet)	186	0.3
Maize	497	0.7
Mustard	2292	3.6
Sugar cane	282	0.4
Jute	3690	5.9
Dyes	247	0.4
Tobacco	542	1.0
Garden Produce	801	1.3
Fruit	265	0.4
Potatoes	313	0.5
Miscellaneous Food	620	1.0
Miscellaneous Non-food	3843	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>63101</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Dash (1947).

**Table:1.6**  
**Acreage under Major and Subsidiary Crops in Darjeeling District:**  
**1963-64 to 1966-67**

(in acres)

Name of the crop	1962-63	1963-64	1964-65	1965-66	1966-67
Rice	80.1 (45.82)	86.8 (48.93)	88.9 (47.77)	90.2 (46.52)	92.6 (47.37)
Wheat	1.3 (00.74)	1.3 (00.73)	1.1 (00.59)	1.1 (00.57)	0.8 (00.41)
Pulses	1.9 (01.09)	1.2 (00.68)	1.4 (00.75)	3.8 (01.96)	4.0 (02.05)
Potato	6.6 (03.78)	7.4 (04.17)	10.2 (05.48)	10.5 (05.42)	10.3 (05.27)
Sugar Cane	0.2 (00.11)	0.1 (00.06)	0.2 (00.11)	0.1 (00.05)	0.5 (00.26)
Maize	66.6 (38.10)	66.6 (37.54)	66.6 (35.79)	65.5 (33.79)	65.5 (33.50)
Oil seeds	2.4 (01.37)	1.2 (00.68)	3.0 (01.61)	3.3 (01.70)	3.3 (01.69)
Jute	9.4 (05.38)	5.8 (03.27)	7.2 (03.87)	10.7 (05.52)	9.0 (04.60)
Barley	0.2 (00.11)	0.2 (00.11)	0.2 (00.11)	0.2 (00.10)	0.2 (00.10)
Veg. & Fruits	6.1 (03.49)	6.8 (03.83)	7.3 (03.92)	8.5 (04.38)	9.3 (04.76)
<b>Total</b>	<b>174.8</b> <b>(100.00)</b>	<b>177.4</b> <b>(100.00)</b>	<b>186.1</b> <b>(100.00)</b>	<b>193.9</b> <b>(100.00)</b>	<b>195.5</b> <b>(100.00)</b>

Source: District Agricultural Officer, Darjeeling.  
Agricultural Economist, (Government of West Bengal).

**Table:1.7**  
**Area, Yield and Production of Irrigated Crops in Darjeeling**  
**District in 1966-67 (in thousand acres)**

Crop	Area	Yield/acre	Production (In 1000 tons)
Aman Rice	85.7	12.78	40.3
Aus Rice	6.9	9.11	2.3
Potato	10.3	45.36	17.2
Sugar cane	0.5	493.55	9.1
Maize	65.5	11.00	26.5
Wheat	0.8	12.00	0.4
Pulses	4.0	6.44	1.0
Oilseeds	3.3	4.67	0.6
Jute	9.0	3.41*	30.7**

\* Yield per acre (in bales) 1 bale= 4.85 maunds

\*\* Production (in 1000 bales of 400 lbs. each)

Source: Agricultural Economist, Government of West Bengal.

## 1.2 Tea Plantation of Darjeeling

Tea cultivation started in the district from the 1880s. In the subsequent years it developed in a rapid scale when it was observed by the British planters that the region, both hills and the plains are very much suitable for china bush.

**Table:1.8**  
The Development of Tea Industry between 1885 and 1940

Year	No. of gardens	Area under Tea (in acres)	Out turn (in lbs.)
1885	175	38499	9090500
1895	186	48692	11714500
1905	148	50618	12447500
1910	148	51281	14137500
1915	148	54024	20303500
1920	148	59356	15850500
1925	148	59356	18732500
1930	148	59356	20870500
1935	148	59356	21026000
1940	142	63059	23721500

Source: Bengal district Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947 (p.228)

**Table:1.9**  
Extent of Tea Cultivation in Darjeeling in 1965

	Area of the tea estates (in hectares)	Area under tea cultivation (in hectares)	No of estates	
			with factories	without factories
Darjeeling Dist.	62937.00	27990.71	119	8
Siliguri sub-div.	20332.17	9131.52	42	2

Source: Tea Board, Tea Directory, Calcutta, 1966.

The tea enterprises created a big demand for plantation labour in the district. "By the end of 1866, i.e. , only ten years after the establishment of the industry on a commercial basis, there were no less than 39 gardens with 10,000 acres under cultivation " which, by 1874, rose to 113 spread over 18,888 acres (O'Malley, 1907: 74).

From around 1856, immigration of plantation labour attracted by the opening of tea gardens has been a major factor in the population increase of the district. In 1869, when a rough census of the then district was taken, it was found to contain over 22,000 inhabitants. By 1901 tea-garden labourers and their dependents accounted for more than two thirds of the total population of the district. Though in 1971, the proportion workers employed in plantations, forestry, mining quarrying, hunting and orchards, etc. constituted only about 27 percent of the total working people in the district due to the massive influx of immigrated population in agricultural and other activities. In the three hill subdivisions in 1971 they formed 31.52 percent of the total working population.

Table:1.10  
Tea Industry's Impact on Population Growth: Darjeeling District 1861 - 1966

Year	No of tea estates	Total area in hectares under tea	Approx. yield in Kgs.	Avg yield in kgs. per hec.	Total No. of all kinds of workers	Total work force	Percentage of col.6 to col.7
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1861	22	1317	19323	15	2534	N.A.	-
1871	56	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	8000	*94712	8.45
1881	155	11489	2340719	204	N.A.	155179	-
1891	177	18462	4948997	268	N.A.	155207	-
1901	170	20948	6139720	293	40451	155135	26.06
1911	156	20853	6464079	310	39561	151604	26.09
1921	168	23897	6387117	267	48710	174167	27.97
1931	169	24777	9297204	375	63665	129070	43.33
1941	136	25585	11256182	440	69699	133306	52.28
1951	138	25345	13282995	524	69590	137541	50.60
1961	145	27709	18050271	651	59844	266105	22.49
1966	144	28121	17398000	619	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Note: \* = data are from 1872, N.A.= Not available. The figures are approximate.

Source: De et al. (1980)

Any emphasis on the tea industry as the most potent factor for growth of population in the district should not minimize the role played by general agriculture, which also encouraged large-scale

immigration to the newly reclaimed lands, as would be apparent from the following facts relating to Kalimpong subdivision. In 1865, it had a population of only 3530 persons. The number increased to 12,683 in 1881 and to 41511 by 1901, the larger part of this population was composed of incoming agriculturists. With the growth of settlements of plantation workers and agriculturists (who were getting cash remuneration and good crops including Cardamom, a good cash crop), and of relatively well off white collar workers, the prospects of trade and commerce grew, which again, attracted more immigrants.

Table:1.11  
Percentage of Agriculturists to Total Workers  
in Darjeeling District: 1901-71

Year	Total no of all types of agrl. workers	Total no. of workers	Percentage of agrl. workers to total Workers
1901	56029	155207	36.10
1931	30175	129070	23.38
1961	107510	266105	40.40
1971	111837	282442	39.59

Source: De et al. (1980)

Immigration (for various reasons) has been the largest single factor in the growth of population of the district. But emigration from the district has always been relatively negligible. Moreover such emigrants, more often than not, have left the district only temporarily.

Table:1.12  
Immigration and Emigration in Darjeeling District: 1891-1961

Year	Actual Popn.	Immigration	(3) as %age of (2)	Emigration Popn.	Natural
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1891	223314	119670	53.6	962	104606
1901	249117	113588	45.6	802	136331
1911	265550	111269	41.9	6000	160281
1921	282748	101807	36.0	6000	186941
1931	319635	100700	31.5	3455	222390
1941	376369	95750	25.4	4120	284739
1951	445260	100311	22.5	6900	351849
1961	624640	169250	27.1	N.A.	45539

Source: De et al. (1980)

Table:1.13  
Places of Origin of Immigrants into Darjeeling District: 1901-61

Year	From Nepal Bhutan, Sikkim & Tibet	From Bengal districts	From other Indian States	From other countries outside India*
1901	80303	8725 (undivided Bengal)	34549	814
1961	47270	13720 (West Bengal)	61226	47034

\* Including refugees from Pakistan and Tibet.

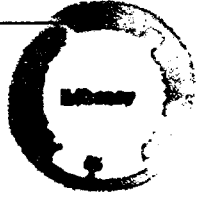
Source: De et al. (1980).

Dash gave elaborate information on the wage pattern of different categories of the tea plantation labour. He noted that the basic rates for the haziri system of wage payment prevailing then were 31 paise for men, 25 paise for women and 19 paise for children in the hills, while the corresponding rates in the Terai were 25 paise, 19 paise and 9 paise respectively (Dash, 1947: 119). "These basic rates", he said, "have been prevalent for a long time and are really task rates.

Table:1.14  
Tea Plantation Wages of Terai in 1959 and 1967-8  
(Figures in Rupées)

	Male		Female		Child	
	Field	Factory	Field	Factory	Field	Factory
Gardens of 500 acres and above						
Aug. 1959						
Basic wage	1.24	1.24	1.12	1.12	0.68	0.68
Dearness Allowance	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.32	0.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>1.72</b>	<b>1.72</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>
<hr/>						
	Male		Female		Child	
<hr/>						
1967-8						
Basic wage	2.07		1.90		1.13	
Dearness Allowance	0.56		0.56		0.28	

Source: De et al. (1980)



### 1.3 Agrarian History of Darjeeling

An accidental involvement of the British Indian Government in the affairs of neighbouring Himalayan states in the nineteenth century created the present district of Darjeeling. In 1817, the East India company struggled with Nepal on behalf of the Raja of Sikkim and restored to him the whole of the country between the Mechi and Tista rivers under the treaty of Titatiya in 1817.

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Later, the Terai and the hill territory was annexed by the British from Sikkim for the non friendly approach of the 'dewan' of Sikkim. The entire region was managed by a Superintendent, who from 8th May 1850 onwards was called the Deputy commissioner. The change was welcomed by the inhabitants who had to pay only small fixed sums into the treasury in Darjeeling. Whereas earlier they had to meet uncertain and fluctuating demands in kind and calls for personal service made on them by the Raja and Dewan (O'Malley, 1907).

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After the annexation, first it was decided by the Government that the southern part of the tract should be placed under the collector of Purnea, and the northern part attached to Darjeeling. But following the strong resentment by the people of the southern Terai to the transfer to Purnea, Government decided instead in the same year to attach the whole tract to Darjeeling. The land revenue was settled for three years in this region (Dash, 1947: 227).

The district was formerly a non-regulated district, that is to say, act and regulations did not come into force unless they were especially extended to it. Moreover Darjeeling had no representative in the legislative council constituted under the government of India Act, 1919. It was extended and declared a backward tract. The administration of the district was not subject to vote of the legislature. Any Act passed by the legislature which extended to the whole of Bengal automatically applied to the Darjeeling district (De et al., 1980).

The portion of Terai that was transferred to Darjeeling district had 544 jotedars or persons with whom the settlement was made.<sup>1</sup> Although they renewed their 'jotes' from year to year, they

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Permanently settled areas, in these two districts the British entered into agreements 'directly with the original reclaimer of the soil'. The original reclaimer, called 'jotedar', was a person who holds in severalty, joint or in common, a piece of land for which he pays revenue directly to the government through his agents, the tehsildars...his tenement is called a 'jote'... the jote constitutes the kernel of the revenue system (Hunter, 1974, X: 181-82). The jote was a holding, i.e. a cultivating unit, and not just a tenure. In Darjeeling, some jotedars were 'pleaders and men of business, who... purchase the holding as speculation or investment. Some were poor ryots. The average size of a jote was little under 150 acres, and where the land had passed into the hands of the money lenders, the ordinary jotedar was generally a substantial farmer representing the original reclaimer of the soil and held it at an easy rent (O'Malley, 1907: 147-8).



virtually held them on a hereditary basis which could not be changed. Under this settlement, the choudhuries<sup>2</sup> were allowed to take more than 10 percent of the collections as their remuneration, and rent free grants for 5 years were made to them to encourage reclamation of forest lands. In 1853 the cultivated portion of the terai was resettled exclusively with jotedars for 10 years. There were at that time 595 jotedars fetching the Government an annual revenue of Rs. 30,330. In a resettlement in 1867, 808 jotes with an area of 1,15,137 acres were settled at an annual revenue of Rs. 35,041. Another settlement for 10 years took place in 1879 when the total annual revenue was fixed at Rs. 79,518. In the 1897 settlement, which was valid for 20 years, the overall revenue was stepped up to Rs. 97,610 with cesses amounting to Rs. 22,079 and a one-anna cess of Rs. 6102, the latter being abolished during the 1924 settlement. In 1897 there were 834 jotes exclusive of hats. In the next settlement of 1919-25 the area settled was 1,14,132.23 acres (178.3 sq. miles) at an annual revenue of Rs. 1,79,168. According to Dash (1947), in 1925 there were 860 jotes and 22 hats which were not resettled thereafter. These areas and revenues did not include tea grants which were held at varying rates on 30 years leases. The average rate at which they held at the time of the 1919-25 settlement was 6 annas per acre but as these grants became due for renewal, the revenue was reassessed at the enhanced rate of Rs. 2 per acre with no legal restriction on further enhancement to

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<sup>2</sup> In the Terai region extending over the Himalayan Foot Hills, the revenue collector before the British were Bengali officers known as 'choudhuries', who were not only the chief land holders and jotedars in their areas but also 'exercised civil and criminal powers'. By 1964 the institution of Choudhuries was abolished. (Powell, 1972, I: 500).

Rs. 3 per acre making the rate equivalent to that charged for the best agricultural lands (De et al.,1980: 396).

The Settlement Report of the Darjeeling Terai (1919-25) mentioned that the jotes were originally let out for cultivation by the lessees themselves or by their tenants. But at a later stage, since the first decade of present century, Marwaris, Pleaders, merchants, speculators and others made their appearance and bought up many of the jotes. The number of jotes and grants also increased along with the existing ones, for reclamation of waste lands and conversion of service grants etc. into ordinary agricultural jotes. Land grabbing by speculators became rampant and this was accelerated by the settlement of land under the old Waste Land Rules for tea cultivation. The original settlers of the soil were gradually pushed out by the rich and influential immigrants who were mere receivers of rent and the tenants under them were the actual tillers of the soil. There were several layers of middlemen rent receivers between the jotedar and the actual cultivator. There included thikadar, dar-thikadars, daradar-thikadars, nimdaradar-thikadars and so on down to the fifth or sixth layer upto the actual cultivator. Jotedars having cultivable lands in their direct possession often employed 'adhiars'<sup>3</sup> to cultivate them (Mitra, 1927: 10).

In the settlement operations an elaborate classification of lands has been drawn up in which the differences between the various

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<sup>3</sup> The word 'adhi' means half. The local term for the sharecropper in the region is 'adhiar' who is supposed to get a share of 50 percent of total crop produced by that piece of land which he cultivates.

categories of tenure holders has been spell out. Sub-tenants are not recognised by Government in 'Khas- Mahal'<sup>4</sup> areas where any kind of transfer of land by the holders is illegal. There is also a restriction on transfer of lands held by members of scheduled Tribes and others. In spite of this restriction, such transfer had taken place in many cases and these have been separately recorded. Similarly there is a considerable number of sub-tenants in the Khas mahal areas inspite of the prohibition against sub-letting. The cases of small sub-tenants-adhiars, pakhurias and kuthdars have also been separately registered. There are also cases where tenants have encroached into adjacent, unsettled khas mahal lands. Where it was possible to locate and identify the encroachments, they were segregated and kept in the Deputy Commissioner's 'Khatian'. The names of the encroachers were also noted there. Where this was not possible, the tenancy was made liable to enhancement of rent for the encroached portion (De et al., 1980: 400).

Before independence, in the Terai region there was a growth of the intermediary interests in land. Consequently, at a later stage, in post independence period, the Government decided to recognise only one class of under-ryots under the jotedars. The Settlement Report of the Darjeeling Terai (1917-25), however, traced many classes of under - ryots that have actually come to exist. Another curious system which developed in course of time in this area was that many thikadars came to hold their lands under the superior ryots through an arrangement called mukh-thika or oral arrangement. Such under-

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<sup>4</sup>. Khas Mahal areas: The areas which are not yet recorded in the government documents. Sub-letting of these lands was prohibited.

ryots had no way of proving evidence to the effect that they had cultivated land under a jotedars. Hence their eviction was fairly common, since there was no means of legal redress. Moreover, since the jotedars did not in most cases keep any record of share-croppers working in their lands, there was no way of finding out which plots of land has been cultivated by them and over what period of time.

The minimum wages of agricultural labourers in Darjeeling district were fixed by the State Government for the first time in December 1953 under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The daily rates prescribed for those engaged in agriculture other than certain specified operations are given below:

	Siliguri Sub-division	Darjeeling, Kerseong & Kalimpong
Male	1.75	1.50
Female	1.50	1.37
Child	1.00	0.87

Those employed in the specified agricultural operations, namely ploughing, harvesting and retting of jute in Siliguri sub-division and ploughing and spading in the Darjeeling (sadar), Kalimpong and Kerseong sub-divisions are entitled to daily wages according to the following schedule:

	Siliguri Sub-division	Darjeeling, Kerseong & Kalimpong
Male	2.00	2.00
Female	1.75	1.87

A male adult labourer employed on long term basis, if allowed free accommodation and two principal meals a day, is supposed to receive a minimum wage of Rs. 25.00 a month. Otherwise, he is to be paid for actual days of employment at the prescribed daily rates.

The average daily earnings of various categories of agricultural labourers during the period from 1955-6 to 1965-6 are given in the following table which will show that there has been no appreciable rise in the wage rates; in fact, a slight fall is indicated in some cases.

Table:1.15  
Difference of Average Wage Rate of Agricultural Labourers, 1955-6 and 1965-6

Year	Normal daily working hours	Field labourers (per day)			Other agricultural labourers (per day)			Herdsmen (Per animal per month)		
		M	F	Child	M	F	Child	M	F	Child
1955-6	8	1.94	1.66	1.19	2.55	1.93	2.22	1.94	1.84	1.06
1965-6	8	2.45	1.95	1.45	2.24	1.83	1.33	1.93	1.50	1.00

In 1967-68, average daily wages in the hills were Rs. 3 for a man, Rs. 2 for a woman and Rs. 1.50 for a child, besides light tiffin, during the peak of the cultivating season, while the off-season wages fall by about 0.50 paisa daily. In the plains, the daily wage of a man varied between Rs. 2.50 and Rs. 3.00 without food and between Rs. 1.50 and Rs. 2.00 with food, depending on whether the season is peak or dull. Women and children received, on an average, 0.50 paisa and between Re. 1.00 respectively less than their male counterparts. Such of the workers as one employed on contract basis for 2 to 3 months, especially during the peak

season, are known as mashora in the plains. Their monthly wage varied from Rs. 15 to Rs. 30 besides meals, depending upon age, experience etc. Attached workers, known as chakar in the plains, were also required to do household duties. Their annual wage varied from Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 besides meals and clothings, depending upon age and experience. Under the Rural Manpower Programme introduced in the district in 1963, the daily wage paid to a worker varied between Rs. 1.50 and Rs. 2.00.

**Table:1.16**  
**Wage Rate of Male Agricultural Labourers in Different Districts of North Bengal**  
(In Rs.)

	70-71 +	71-72 +	72-73 +	73-74 +	76-77 *	79-80 *	81-82 *	82-83 *
Darjeeling	3.25	5.37	4.79	4.69	5.90	7.25	8.37	7.71
Jalpaiguri	-	-	4.10	4.25	5.20	6.95	7.62	8.32
Coochbehar	3.13	3.15	3.47	3.75	5.05	6.25	7.18	7.83
Malda	-	-	-	-	4.50	4.35	5.37	6.17
W.Dinajpur	3.13	3.68	3.37	3.81	4.70	4.95	5.45	6.28

Source: + Ghatak (1978), \* Government of West Bengal, Department of Agriculture, Socio-economic Evaluation Branch, (1989).

#### *1.4 Peasant Uprising*

The economic problems of this area have been to a great extent accentuated by the increase of population, a large proportion of which was made up of migrants. This probably affected the employment potential of the tea gardens in the Terai. In the tea gardens it was common practice to let the labourers cultivate, on a share-cropping basis, such portion of the garden land as were not used for producing tea. But as some tea gardens habitually retrenched labourers each year, the latter automatically lost the right of residence within the garden and with it the right of share-cropping as well.

This jotedari system of the nineteenth century steadily crystallized into a jotedari-adhiari system by the twentieth century. The position of adhiars, in the landlord tenant configuration, was precarious. The group of these adhiars did not own any means of production and had to engage in adhiari cultivation. Over a period of time the adhiari system became a necessary and inevitable complement of the jotedari system, presumably because the jotedars in general were not peasant proprietors given to tilling their own land. Hence the gulf between owners and tillers widened to the advantage of the owners (Mukherjee, 1978: 33).

The high percentage of adhiars was one of the unique feature of this region<sup>5</sup>. Out of a total area of 228.82 sq. miles which came under the revisional settlement operations in siliguri subdivision, a substantial portion is covered by forests and tea gardens, the rest, as already indicated, being Khas Mahal estates. Before the Estate Acquisition act came into force, there were 860 jotedars in this area whose holdings varied considerably as did their economic importance (Table: 1.17).

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<sup>5</sup> One principal feature of terai is the high percentage of sharecroppers. Among those owning 5 acres or less, the percentage of sharecroppers in Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari Police Station areas are 60.1, 65.0 and 50.1 per cents respectively (Mukherjee, 1978: 30).

Table:1.17  
Number of Tenants and Size of their Holding in Siliguri  
Sub-division (1967)

Size of holding of the tenants	No of Tenants	Col. (2) as percentage of total No. of tenants
(1)	(2)	(3)
Up to 1 acre	3874	29.2
1 to 3 acres	3120	23.6
3 to 5 acres	2215	16.8
5 to 10 acres	2135	16.1
10 to 15 acres	818	6.2
15 to 25 acres	786	6.0
Above 25 acres	281	2.1
	13229	100.0

Source: Records of the Directorate of Land Records and Survey, West Bengal, 1967.

The irregular tenancy system of the region and the excessive exploitation by the jotedars, were the main sources of misery for a large number of adhiars in the region. The fifty percent share which was supposed to be their legal entitlement, would often be subjected to deduction on different grounds regarding from paddy loan to the expenses towards the construction of jotedars' granary. Consequent upon such extractions the actual net share of the adhiar was minimal and well bellow the subsistence requirements. By about the fourth decade of this century, the agrarian system of exploitation had sufficiently crystallized all over Bengal to evoke the first major peasant revolt against the iniquitous relations of production.

Between September 1946 and May 1947 the peasants in many parts of Bengal rose in protest against the prevailing produce rent in sharecropping. The peasants responded to the call by the BPKS (Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha) for a revolt against the extortionate fixed rate of 50 percent rent of the produce



(excluding charges for agricultural inputs, implements and other charges which were further deducted from the 50 percent). The demands which the BPKS had formulated were not merely confined to crop sharing but touched upon wider issues involving basic rights of the peasants. These were: (1) two-thirds share of the standing crop to the sharecropper; (2) tenancy rights of the sharecropper on the land he tills; (3) interest on paddy loans should not exceed 12.5 percent; (4) no other demands should be made by the landowner on the sharecropper as deductions from produced rent; (5) no payment of produce rent will be made without receipts; (6) cultivable fallow land must be put to cultivation and (7) the harvest will be packed in the share-croppers' threshing floor and not on the landowners' (Omar, 1963: 151). The peasants of North Bengal were one of the pioneers of this movement.

The Tebhaga movement which was suspended in 1947, till short of fulfilling all the demands of the adhiars. Naturally, bitter feuds accumulated for years and created acute tensions. This was followed by large scale evictions of the peasants and sharecroppers, who did not get any protection from the law of the land or the administration. Moreover the land distribution was highly skewed in Terai (Table:1.18).

On the other hand as a result of large scale eviction of the adhiars, together with the inflow of immigrants from East Bengal and the pressure of surplus labourers from the tea estates had the cumulative effect of causing a sharp increase of agricultural labour force in the region. This is clearly reflected in the

Table:1.18  
Distribution of Agricultural Land in Terai Darjeeling [1967]

Land Owner	No. of owners	Percentage	Total Land	Percentage
Up to 1 acre	3976	29.00	1409	1.60
1 - 2 acre	2102	15.30	2905	3.20
2 - 3 acre	1065	7.80	3139	3.50
3 - 4 acre	1124	8.20	3714	4.10
4 - 5 acre	1105	8.00	5071	5.60
5 - 10 acre	2144	15.60	15094	16.70
10 - 15 acre	1124	8.20	14275	15.80
15 - 20 acre	442	3.20	6652	7.40
20 - 25 acre	360	2.60	7671	8.50
25 + acre	285	2.10	30266	33.60
<b>Total</b>	<b>13727</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>90195</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Department of Land and Land Revenue, Government of West Bengal.

Table:1.19  
Changes in the Distribution of Rural Workers in the Three Police Station Areas under Siliguri Subdivision

Year	Total Rural Work Force	Cultivators	(3) as % of (2)	Agricultural Labourers	(5) as % of (2)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Naxalbari</b>					
1961	17339	6501	37.49	789	4.55
1971	18519	5692	30.74	3148	17.00
1981	26902	6699	24.90	4817	17.90
<b>Kharibari</b>					
1961	11678	7909	67.73	634	5.43
1971	14466	6477	44.77	2474	17.10
1981	16643	8009	48.12	4944	29.71
<b>Phansidewa</b>					
1961	24288	13149	54.14	1474	6.07
1971	23912	12081	50.52	3185	13.32
1981	26811	12592	34.20	8887	24.14
<b>Total</b>					
1961	53305	27559	51.70	2897	5.43
1971	56897	24250	42.62	8807	15.48
1981	80356	27300	33.97	18648	23.21

Source: District Census Handbook, Darjeeling: 1961, 1971, 1981.

pronounced decline overtime in the percentage of cultivators to total workers (Table: 1.19).

The acute land hunger compelled with the regressive agrarian structure, acted as a catalyst in spawning peasant agitations. The radicals led the peasant followers into land occupation and crop seizures against land lords in Naxalbari. Gradually this peasant unrest took the shape of a mass movement in the entire region, and came to be popularly characterised as the Naxalbari movement. The slogans of Tebhaga movement and its front organizations - the Krishak Sabha (Peasant Association) and Krishak Samiti (Peasant Committee) - were the programmatic and organizational instruments harnessed by activists like Panchanan Sarkar, Kanu Sanyal and others in mobilising the exploited peasants. Some of the slogans used initially indicate the continuity of conditions and of the influence of traditions of Tebhaga are: (1) abolition of zamindari system; (2) land to the tiller; (3) tenant eviction will not be tolerated; (4) 25 per cent interest for borrowed paddy; and (5) continue cultivation without surrender to the jotedar.

The contract with the jotedars on the basis of sharecropping did not imply any security since there was no guarantee that the 'jotedar' would employ the same sharecropper also for the next season the position of adhiar was essentially vulnerable. This lack of security and extreme uncertainty forced them to raise their protest beyond 'certain limits' (Jawaid, 1979).

The high rate of population growth put an extremely heavy pressure on the limited capacity of the total cultivable land in Terai

region (See Tables 1.10 and 3.2). In addition the owners of the tea gardens had retained under their possession vast stretches of land. Under the provision of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1954, the tea planters were required to use their land for the purpose of tea plantation only. However they used to keep major portion of their land as fallow which further intensified the short supply of agricultural land (Roy, 1975).

According to the Siliguri subdivision land settlement reports, the total amount of 'vested' land of the area in 1967, just prior to the outbreak of the peasant struggle, was about 19,089 acres, of which 10,875 acres had been handed over to the Defence ministry for strategic defence needs (Roy, 1975).

The proportions of cultivators possessing less than five acres were extremely high in Naxalbari and Phansidewa.

**Table:1.20**  
**Proportions of Cultivators Possessing Less than 5 acres of Land**

Police stations	percentage of the total cultivators
Naxalbari	68.3
Phansidewa	59.6
Kharibari	43.7

Source: Darjeeling, District Census Handbook, 1961: 184-185.  
[Quoted in Roy, 1975]

Most of these small holdings, as high as 50 percent and even more than that, are held through agencies both in Naxalbari and Phansidewa.

Table:1.21  
Types of Holdings and Percentage of Total Holdings of each Thana  
(Less than 5 acres)

Police Station	Owner Cultivator	Adhiar	Cultivator and Adhiar
Naxalbari	33.2	60.1	6.7
Phansidewa	27.1	65.0	7.5
Kharibari	38.8	50.1	11.2

Source: Same as in Table 1.20

The region already had some experience of protest and movement right from the tebhaga agitation. Even after the tebhaga movement, the peasants' voice against the jotedars were not stopped completely. Kanu Sanyal, one of the main architects of Naxalbari movement, observes that 1951-54 was the organizational stage, when 'the peasantry of Naxalbari, advanced through clashes to get them organised'. The period 1953 to 1957 was one of worker-peasant alliance and a 'united class of the workers and peasants'. Between 1955 and 1962, they responded to the call by the West Bengal Kisan Sabha 'to regain possession of 'benami' land. The movement took its final shape in 1967. Soon after the assumption of office by United Front Government the class-based agrarian uprising broke out in the northern part of the state. It began in March 1967 the deeds and documents of jotedars were burnt, their bullocks and implements seized and their land redistributed among the landless peasants. On 25 May several peasants rebels were killed in an incident of Police firing, and on 10 June the first jotedar was assassinated. The revolt was led by local peasant committees of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Chinese leader Mao Zedong hailed the Naxalbari uprising as 'peal of spring thunder' of the Indian revolution. The peasant uprising of Naxalbari was

crushed within a year, the movement was reactivated by radical students in urban centres.

More importantly, the Naxalbari uprising, limited though it was in its geographical spread, had a disproportionate impact on political psyches in India and helped stir a section of the ruling groups out of a sense of complacency.

### *1.5 Concluding Remarks*

The agrarian history of Darjeeling is not only complex but one with a different trajectory pattern in relation to the rest of West Bengal. This had much to do with its agro-economic resource base, as well as its ethnic composition. The development of tea plantation also further sharpened this difference. Before tea plantations launched in this tract, the hilly region was inhabited by various Nepali and Tibetan castes and tribes. Mech, Dhimal, Koch and some other Nepali castes were the main residents of the foot hills. With the colonisation of the entire tract by the British, people from surrounding regions and even from far away places started immigrating here in search of their livelihood. The flourishing tea plantation which was directly controlled by the British put the agriculture in a miserable conditions without any proper infrastructure. People attached to agriculture were rather neglected by the government. The entire production organisation of cultivation was in the hands of the jotedars, who were not only the owners of the lands but the local authority of all political and economic powers. The fate of the poor peasants and the land less sharecroppers rested in the hands of the jotedars. In the mid 1940s, the peasants first raised their voice against the inhuman

attitude of the jotedars. The massive peasant movement of the late sixties in Terai was a continuation of the earlier movement. Agro-climatic conditions of the plains of this district are not so unfavourable for agriculture.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Land Reforms in West Bengal*

#### *2.1 Introduction*

Land reform has been an old refrain in development studies. Given the unequal distribution of land in countries where a majority of the population - especially the poor - are concentrated in agriculture, land reform appears to be the obvious policy response to the uneven distribution of gains from development in the agricultural sector and an essential condition for achieving broad-based rural development. Scholars and practitioners of development have made their case for land reform not merely on grounds of social justice, but also on grounds of efficiency - the comparatively higher productivity of small farms-as well. It is not surprising therefore that in almost all developing countries there have been some efforts at land reform. The nature of reform has varied depending on political structures and the relative strength of reformist political currents. The record of implementation of land reform, however, has been poor in most countries. Scholars have generally attributed the failure of land reform to the political power of landed classes: their ability to frustrate meaningful land reform laws during their implementation.

#### *2.2 The Debate on Land Reform*

In 1970, the UN had proposed 'structural reform' as more appropriate term in the place of land reform. Kuhn (1976) argues that from a historical view point, agrarian reform is a political change. But from the Economic point of view, it is rather one of the urgent problems of our time.



Agrarian reform is here defined as all measures, that redistribute property and/or the disposal and utilization of land radically in favour of the ultimate agricultural producers and as a consequence distribute land-rent. Though there are slight differences between the terms and their definitions, hereafter "agrarian reform" and "land reform" will be used interchangeably.

The most essential factors forcing a radical change of agrarian structure, identified by Bergman (1984) are:

(a) Population density and growth, (b) Agricultural inputs and technical progress, (c) Soil Productivity, (d) Human Productivity, (e) Societal role of the farming sector, (f) Changing functions of the land due to new social demands on land, (g) Development phase of society and offer of alternative employment, (h) Changes of the social system, (i) Changes in the value systems of the holders of land-titles.

These factors do not all work in the same direction. The technical, economic, socio-political determinants and the social groups or classes can be perceived as nectars of different direction in a parallelogram of forces. Thus the political economist Boserup (1965) views population growth as a factor for intensified land utilization and to a certain degree for improved land productivity.

Tenancy Reform is one of the most delicate and difficult tasks of any land reforms programme anywhere in the world. Tenancy is the creation of the land owner primarily for his own convenience, and hence may increase the productivity. Depending upon the demand and

supply position of land, the production relation between the land owner and the tenant varies. In most of the Third World countries, there is acute land hunger, which is further accentuated every year by a rising population pressure. The non-monetised and primitive production relations between the land owner and the tenant often tend to make the tenant an informal or oral tenant, particularly in the poorer countries. Since a formal tenant has a place in the record-of-rights and is often provided protection under the law, it is easier for the land owner in a buyer's market to resort to informal and oral tenancies. Share-cropping has been one such institution whose existence is evident through the long corridors of history. Adam Smith, the father of economics, was the first to have noted the economic significance of share-croppers, but the institution is indeed as old as the history of human civilisation.

### *2.3 Programmes and Policies*

Land reform is a long standing issue in Indian agriculture. The long colonial rule made many experiments in land. The peasants also reacted from time to time. The effects of all these continued to have their impact even after independence. And no government of whatever ideological predisposition can afford to wish away the historical conditioning of land question.

Hare Krishna Konar, the eminent peasant leader and Minister for Land Reforms in the United Front in the late sixties and early seventies, has analysed the crisis in the colonial and post-colonial economy as follows:

As a result of foreign exploitation and exploitation by the landlords and money lenders during the British regime, many peasants had lost their land which became concentrated in the hands of jotedars and money lenders (or) became financially weak. Consequently the peasants lost their vitality and the land its fertility. Those who would cultivate land remained devoid of their power, means and initiative (Konar, 1977:14).

Land reforms have become a major political issue throughout the developing countries of the world today. The insecurity and the lack of status of the actual tiller cannot but have a disastrous effect on the whole system. It is not surprising that agrarian unrest has been at the root of all social and political upheavals in history<sup>1</sup>. The tenurial status is not simply an indicator of agricultural income; it is also a matter of human dignity for the freedom to exercise their will to put the land to the best use.

The primary purpose of economic growth in the context of land reforms is to ensure the improvement of the condition - economic and social - of the majority of the population who are actual tillers of the soil and producers of agricultural products. The form of land tenure has a direct bearing on the distribution, accumulation and improvement of a nation's wealth particularly in a country like India where agriculture is the basis of national

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<sup>1</sup>e.g., Kathleen Gough 'Indian Peasant Uprising' in A.R. Desai (ed.) Peasant Struggles in India, pp.87-126.

The struggle will continue in some form or the other until the entire agricultural land is distributed on egalitarian lines either by nationalising the entire land of the country or by bringing down the ceiling on holding - I mean the operational holding and not ownership holding. Equal distribution of agricultural land will directly effect a wider participation in and equitable sharing of the benefits of the development process.

economy. The people's sentiment for land, therefore, should always be uppermost in the minds of the policy-makers. A clear understanding of the role and function of land tenure in economic affairs will help in integrating land reforms with overall plan for development.

Land reforms may be viewed as a purposeful re-planning of land tenure system with the authority of the government. Usually the idea of land reforms is confined in outlook to some political or technical issues as if it is independent of overall economic and even of land-use planning. The land-use planning and land reforms need to be brought together.

Between the land planners and the intended beneficiaries, and unknown to both, there is great gulf of ignorance and suspicion. Continuous exploration of the impact of various policies on land-use and land reforms, therefore, remains imperative.

Some people feel that it is dangerous for any society to allow unregulated private property rights in lands. They generally make out a case for enlargement of present social control for making it more effective. By any standard, controlling the rights attached to landed property in the interest of general welfare is a complex and difficult task.

In India, different state governments experimented with the land reforms, to do a social justice for the actual cultivators. The objectives of land reforms in India are: (a) abolition of intermediaries; (b) tenancy reforms to ensure security of tenure;

and (c) imposition of ceiling on land-holdings and distribution of surplus land among the landless agricultural labours and poor cultivators.

The abolition of intermediaries has been legally accomplished. The existence of the various grades of idle partners down from Zamindars to small rentiers who did not take any part in agricultural development and who were assured of their unearned income was an obstacle to the progress in rural India<sup>2</sup>. This problem was done away with a single stroke of legislation in West Bengal. But the problem of the insecurity of tenancy has now come into focus and is being appreciated as a far more formidable one; and the other important component of land reform, that is, the ceiling on land-holding has always been caught in the whirlwind of serious controversy thrown up by different influential interest groups.

In West Bengal land-ceiling was fixed by the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953. This ceiling was on the basis of individual holdings. The State Government of West Bengal considered the problem in the light of the opinions referred to the Land Revenue Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud in 1938<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama, pp.1306-11. (pelican, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> "The Report of Land Revenue Commission Bengal on the 21st March 1940, under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Floud which was set up in 1938 recorded its opinion in the report by a majority that the zamindari system was no longer suited to the conditions of the present times and it recommended that the interests of all classes of rent-receivers should be acquired on reasonable terms so that actual cultivators might become tenants holding directly under the Government." Sarkar, B. (1989):p.40.

Bengal Administrative Enquiry Committee, set up in 1945<sup>4</sup>, under the Chairmanship of Sir Archibald Rewland and decided to bring forward the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Bill with the four-fold objects namely: (a) to eliminate the interest of all zamindars and other intermediaries by acquisition on payment of compensation; (b) to permit the intermediaries to retain possession of their khas (i.e. not settled with tenants) land up to certain limits and to treat them as tenants holding directly under the State; (c) to acquire the interest of zamindars and other intermediaries in mine; (d) to provide for certain other necessary and incidental matters.

The legislation on the statute book in West Bengal when the United Front Government came to power in 1967, was the West Bengal Land Reform Act of 1955, which had many loopholes. Several amendments which were inserted were ratified after the fall of the second United Front Government by a further amendment of West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1972. The provisions of the Act had come in the form of an Ordinance in 1971. The new legislation of the early seventies sought to enforce the ceiling on the basis of the family of five members: 12.36 acres (5 Hec.) of irrigated land and 17.36 acres of unirrigated land. For each additional member 1.24 and acres of irrigated land and 1.73 acres of unirrigated land could be retained with an absolute ceiling of 17.30 acres of irrigated land and 22.22 acres of unirrigated land. For the benefit of landless and poor families from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe

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<sup>4</sup> "The Bengal Administrative Enquiry Committee, set up in 1945, under the Chairmanship of sir Archibald Rewland which examined the question mainly from the administrative point of view expressed its opinion that the present system of land tenure was outmoded and was an obstacle to the maximum utilisation of the land and water resources of the country" (ibid: p.40).

communities were taken up to distribute plots of Government's lands, varying in size from 0.33 acres (1 bigha) to 2 acres (6 bighas) (Government of West Bengal, 1989: 24-27).

#### *2.4 Process of Implementation*

Unlike some other states in India, West Bengal does not officially recognise any category of land-owners except the ryots or direct cultivators. The state does not have tenants on fixed or variable rent, nor does she recognise any leasing out of land. Here the bargadari is recognised not as sub-tenancy but as inseparable from the ryoti interests. Since the bargadar is generally permanently attached to the former. In West Bengal, the raiyats are broadly of two categories: (a) cultivating raiyat, i.e., the one who cultivates his own land either by his own labour or by family labour or with both; and (b) non-cultivating raiyat, i.e., one who holds land but does not cultivate either personally or by family labour but by hired labour only.

#### A Brief note on 'Operation Barga':

Operation Barga was a massive drive launched by the Government to register the names of the sharecroppers with the collaboration of the groups of existing beneficiaries as well as with the active assistance of the peasant organizations (Ghosh, 1981: A49-A55).

By Section 15A (amendment of 1972) the right of cultivation as a bargadar was made hereditary. The right of the owner of the land to nominate a different person as his bargadar would arise only in case where no lawful heir of the bargadar is in a position to cultivate the land personally. Section 16 of the Act stipulated

the share payable by the land owner to the bargadar in the following proportions: (a) 50:50, in case where plough, cattle, manure and seeds are supplied by the land owner; and (b) 75 :25 in all other cases. This section came into force in 1972, thus amending the earlier provision which stipulated a 60 : 40 share.

In order to protect the interest of the bargadars, the act has laid down that the land-owner will be entitled to terminate cultivation by a bargadar only in the following four cases: (a) when the bargadar fails to cultivate the land or uses it for non-agricultural purposes, (b) when the land is not cultivated by the bargadar personally, (c) where the bargadar fails to tender the share of the produce to the land-owner, and (d) where the land owner requires the land for bringing it under personal cultivation<sup>5</sup>.

A restriction has also been imposed on the bargadars. It has been laid down that a bargadar will not be entitled to cultivate more than 6 hectares of land (Ghosh, 1986: 30-33).

### ***2.5 Limitations of the Land Reform Programme***

The land reform programme in West Bengal, as many other things about Bengal has evoked mixed reactions being praised by some and criticized by others. The Left Front's agrarian reforms has received fulsome praise in the development literature. In support

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<sup>5</sup> Section 2(8) of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act defines: 'Personal cultivation' as cultivation by a person of his own land on his own account (a) by his own labour, or (b) by the labour of any member of his family, or (c) by servants or labourers on wages payable in cash or in kind (not being as a share of the produce), or both.]



of the general view of their success Dreze and Sen state "the change in the balance of power in the rural society of West Bengal in favour of the poorer sections of the population largely as a result of left-wing activist movements, has certainly resulted in a much greater participation of the poor in poverty alleviation programmes"<sup>6</sup>. Brass states that Communist parties have been "more serious about and more effective in implementing measures of agrarian reform such as land ceilings and land redistribution and programmes for the poor to provide them with employment opportunities and income producing assets"<sup>7</sup>. Manor's (1987: 44) claim that the panchayats are giving the lower classes more control over their destiny is endorsed by Brass (1990). Brass (1990: 120) argues that because there has been a "displacement of the dominant landed classes by smaller landholders, teachers, and social workers, it has been possible to use the village panchyats for the implementation of agrarian reforms. However Ross Mallick is inclined a more critical view. He quotes (1992:739) the following interview given by the West Bengal Panchayat secretary, in support of his position, "we found that same old class which has been exploiting the lower classes for centuries continued to dominate the panchayats. While some may have diversified their occupations and business interests, and there was the inevitable upward and downward mobility over generations, the only lower-class panchayat council members tended to be those nominated by the elite to fill the Scheduled caste quota...While the poorest sections were neglected, the dominant elite established their own interests with the acquiescence of the communist leadership and the support of the

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<sup>6</sup> Dreze and Sen (1989), p.107.

<sup>7</sup> Brass (1990), p.75.

local party membership...Without land redistribution or some other resource transfer that provides a less elite-dependent livelihood for the poor, decentralization cannot bring lower-class empowerment."

In a detailed study, Kohli has described the West Bengal reforms as impressive in their redistribution for the poorer classes<sup>8</sup>. Praising the Left front government programme Schneider (1988:107) also stated that the Government has carried out a genuine land reform, by distributing to the sharecroppers title deeds for the lands they were working. But, Mallick has serious reservations over the success of the bargadari registration programme. Citing from the two survey reports conducted by Bandopadhyaya (1983) and West Bengal Land Reform Office (1985) Mallick shows that even among the recorded bargadars the legally stipulated three-quarters crop share was often the exception furthermore it was found from the 1985 survey in Burdwan district that 11.22 per cent of the recorded bargadars had been thrown out of possession by one way or the other. On the strength of the evidence contained in these two reports, Mallick argued, "As the objectives of Operation Barga were (a) to prevent eviction through recorded tenancy and (b) to ensure the three-quarters crop share, it is clear that in both respects the programme has failed. If the programme achieved any thing at all, it may have consolidated the hold of the big sharecropper-landowners who leased in land from smaller landholders, who do not have the resources and political influence to prevent their land from being effectively lost to bigger recorded sharecropper-landowners."

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<sup>8</sup> Kohli (1987)

The Left Front land redistribution has also been proclaimed as a successful programme<sup>9</sup>, though in a publication of the department of Information and Cultural Affairs (1989:2-4), the government admits that only 200,000 acres of land has been vested over the 12 years of Communist rule, and claimed that previous United Front Government having already distributed land during 1967-69. It is a mark of the political distance the CPM has travelled from its early revolutionary phase of the 1960s that the state bureaucracy is now left to do everything and peasant movements are discouraged, even when legislation waiting for central government approval is delayed giving time for the 'unscrupulous' land owners 'to formulate strategy to evade the new ceiling provisions.'

Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) argue that, the failure of CPM's land reforms is not due to the influence of elite class interests but to the gradual disappearance of rural class differences though previously successful redistribution. "Its pattern of land holding has been confined to so narrow a range that polarization no longer seems possible. The 87 per cent of West Bengal's cultivators who hold less than 2 hectares (about 5 acres) control 87 percent of the cultivated land" (1987: 353). Mallick (1990) refuted this statement by referring a 1979 government publication and stated that these 87 percent cultivators are only controlling 56 percent of land; the remaining 13 percent control the other 44 percent of cultivable land. The National Sample Survey (1992: 742) indicates

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<sup>9</sup> The Left front ministries' record on land redistribution is indubitably impressive, particularly when compared with other states in India. Some 4.4 million acres were 'vested' (expropriated and held) in government nationwide. Of this West Bengal accounted for 1.2 million acres of which 800,000 acres have been redistributed to the landless [Election Manifesto of the Left Front, 1987] (Nossiter, 1988:140).

even "less equality, with the top 9.7 per cent of households owning over five acres having 47 per cent of the land and bottom 47 per cent owning 2.5 per cent of the land. Furthermore, 45 per cent of agriculturists are landless agricultural labourers. Thus the top 13 per cent own nearly half the cultivable land while nearly half the agricultural population owns nothing at all having to work instead as labourers. Between these two polarized groups there is a middle class of cultivators who, depending on their holding size, work for themselves and hire themselves out or hire others" .

The catalogue of failures in the policy of generating growth with a measure of equality is lengthy, 'Perhaps the only conspicuous result of policies after independence has been the strengthening the upper strata in the villages and a corresponding reduction in the position of sharecroppers and landless labourers in the lower strata or rural society' (Myrdal, 1972: 229). In short, the classes have not disappeared, but rather, elite classes have consolidated their position during 'Communist' rule thus derailing any further attempts by Left Front to initiate reform moves. Operation Barga was suspended because of a lack of deserving bargadars, but because the Left Front's influential sharecropper supporters had gained the necessary concession and further work would have threatened those supporters in possession of land. Ironically, at the time when the programme was called off, it was said that less than half the bargadars were recorded and only a minuscule proportion of the land redistributed. (Bergman, 1984: 152) In contrast to the land grab movements of the peasants, the record of Marxist governments of the 1960s vis a vis land

distribution was not particularly impressive<sup>10</sup>. A more strident criticism linking up this failure with the ideological and theoretical premises of the CPI(M) was provided by sections of radical intellectuals: 'This reduces an erstwhile revolutionary programme to an ordinary reformist one. Thus the political will] was conditioned and constrained by the will to serve the institutions of the class society where they run the government'(Khasnobis, 1981:A44-A45). Rudra (1981: A61) also questioned the political will and strategic understanding of the party.

### *2.6 Local Impact*

In the light of above debate, in this section we will try to see the success and failure of the Government's land reform programme and the change in the agrarian system of the region from the late sixties<sup>11</sup>.

Till 1967, when the United Front ministry came in power, 4.5 lakh acres of agricultural land and 2.3 lakh acres of non agricultural land were vested with the government under the Estate Acquisition

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<sup>10</sup> "During the brief United Front rule by the left-wing parties in 1967 and 1969-70, the village level committees of poor peasants and landless labourers helped to identify such benami land (that is land held illegally in excess of the permitted limit), took over 300,000 acres of such land and distributed it among the landless. While the legality of such action was disputable there was no denying the effectiveness of bringing about a change in the land relations in rural West Bengal. The beneficiaries of such populist land reform formed the hard core of the support which the Left Front received during the 1977 and 1982 elections".(Dasgupta,Biplab: 1982, p.13)

<sup>11</sup> "As an effect of the Naxalite movement the Government initiated a whole set of new public policies. Even the Congress government at the Centre was forced to design far more radical and effective socio-economic policies to deal with poverty, hunger and inequality on an all India basis" (Jawaid: 1979).

Act, and probably 10 lakh acres 'due to lapses on the part of the government during the vital years following the enactment of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act' had to be treated as lost (Bose, 1981: 2055; Konar, 1979: 5). The government had taken possession of most of the land, but probably it was only 'paper permission' as the then minister for Land Reforms, Konar (1979: 141), alleged: 'Actual physical possession of these lands , however, mostly remained with the ex-owners'. The amount of land which was effectively taken possession of and was distributed was much smaller: Probably only 150,000 acres had been distributed of which, according to the new U.F. minister for Land Reforms, "More than one-third had been given to ineligible persons, and jotedars' agents" (Konar, 1977: 29). In the two short periods of the United Front ministry around 5 lakh acres were vested with the state and during the latter ministry, lasting for thirteen months, about 3 lakh acres were distributed (Lieten, 1992: 134).

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has argued that in the period between the second United Front ministry and Left Front Government (1977), the distributed land was again re-alienated on a wide scale. The initiative after forming the government would accordingly be the land distribution and bargadar registration programme.

In Siliguri sub-division, the position is a little more complicated owing partly to the agrarian disturbances that took place in certain areas. It has been noted earlier that land was held in jotes in that sub-division (the jotedars having a theoretical ryoti status and rights) and that subletting grew in that part of the

district giving rise to a crop of under-tenants (De et al., 1980: 402) The number of tenants in the Siliguri sub-division officially recognised by the Land Reforms Committee operating their holdings according to various sizes.

After the agrarian disturbance broke out in the Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa Police stations of the Siliguri sub-division in May - July 1967, the Government set up Land Reforms Committees in all the thanas of the sub-division. According to the review of work carried out till September 30, 1967, a total of 465.27 acres of land was licensed, out of which a thana wise break-up is given below.

**Table:2.1**  
**Area Licensed Out and Settled**

Police Station	Area licensed out (in acres)	Number of Persons Benefitted	Area Settled (in acres)	Number of Persons Benefitted
Siliguri	43.12	35	142.10	138
Kharibari	123.66	89	361.82	256
Phansidewa	298.49	76	531.22	322
Naxalbari	NIL	NIL	4.18	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>465.27</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>1039.32</b>	<b>757</b>

Source: Records of the Directorate of Land Records and Survey, West Bengal.

The total land settled since the formation of the Committees up to 30 sept. 1967 was 1,076.32 acres of which the thana wise break-up has been given in Table 2.1.

In April 1968 a decision was taken by the State government that landless agricultural labourers, share-croppers and small ryots holding below 2 acres of land will be given land through out West

Bengal from the ceiling surplus illegal lands resumed by the government. This was naturally applicable to this area as well.

There was a common practice among the tea estates of North Bengal to hold excess land illegally. And very often they used to lease out these lands to the tenants. In the early seventies an Advisory Committee was setup to look into the matter. The Committee, recommended the take over of 2480.8 acres of land from the tea gardens but eventually only 1551.6 acres of land was resumed. The Committee also made a final plan on land use in four Police Station areas of Terai.



Table:2.2  
Resumption of Tea Garden Lands in Siliguri Sub-division  
(in acres)

Land recommendation for resumption by Advisory Committee (in acres)								
P.S.	No. of gar- dens	Total area of tea gardens	Tea	Agri	Non Agri	Forests	Unfit for culti	Total
Naxalbari	14	16677.0	15.7	34.8	10.5	1679.1	44.9	1784.8
Siliguri	12	10977.4	-	211.8	1.0	125.7	22.9	361.4
Kharibari	4	3232.4	-	191.0	8.3	-	-	199.3
Phansidewa	10	12758.6	-	19.2	35.1	-	-	135.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43645.4</b>	<b>15.7</b>	<b>456.6</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>1979.0</b>	<b>74.6</b>	<b>2480.8</b>

Land allowed for retention by Advisory Committee (In acres)						
	Tea	Agri- culture	Non Agri-	Forests	Unfit for cultivation	Total
Naxalbari	6057.0	2377.3	539.6	3112.6	1899.2	13985.7
Siliguri	4955.0	3443.0	635.8	697.2	885.2	10616.2
Kharibari	1482.3	1075.8	218.9	39.0	217.1	3033.1
Phansidewa	5862.2	3567.7	931.5	953.0	1309.3	12623.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>18356.5</b>	<b>10463.8</b>	<b>2325.8</b>	<b>4801.8</b>	<b>4310.8</b>	<b>40258.7</b>

Land Resumed under Government Order (in acres)					
	Agriculture	Non Agri- culture	Forests	Unfit for cultivation	Total
Naxalbari	44.9	-	1459.0	-	1503.9
Siliguri	-	4.3	-	-	4.3
Kharibari	-	8.3	-	-	8.3
Phansidewa	-	35.1	-	-	35.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>1559.0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1551.6</b>

Source: Records of the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal.

After the Left Front government came to power, they distributed 12889.26 hectares of land in the state. These lands were distributed among 9080 Scheduled Castes and 7247 scheduled tribes forming 42.3 and 33.7 percent of the total beneficiaries respectively. In North Bengal also, the government paid special attention to extend the benefits to the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes (see Tables 2.3 to 2.8).

**Table: 2.3**  
Distribution of Vested land for Agricultural Purpose  
to the landless small cultivators

Year as on 31st June	Area of vested land (in hectares)		No. of Beneficiaries				
	Free for Distribution	Distri- buted	S.C.	S.T.	Other caste	Others	Total
1979	8810.73	6860.57	3480	2712	1467	-	7659
1980	13511.23	6028.69	5600	4535	3697	2	13834

Source: Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics.

**Table:2.4**

Benefitted Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of North Bengal  
under Land Reform Programme of West Bengal Govt. 1985

District	Patta holders		Reg. Bargadars		Patta holders of H.S. land	
	S.C	S.T.	S.C.	S.T.	S.C.	S.T.
Coochbehar	61771	2274	44507	707	4973	81
Darjeeling	90971	9113	4139	3028	924	762
Jalpaiguri	44294	21433	25769	12841	3483	1801
Malda	30060	21481	19056	18993	3101	2730
W.Dinajpur	58792	45113	26534	28699	6547	3601
West Bengal	605543	318099	401617	162662	86721	40990

Source: Board of Revenue, West Bengal.

Table:2.5  
Area of Vested Agricultural Land Distributed, Number of  
beneficiaries and recorded Bargadars in Darjeeling  
(as on 30th June, 1992)

Area of Land Distributed (In Hec.)	No. of Beneficiaries			
	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total
11260.39	17360	10307	13853	41520

Recording of Bargadars (Dec. 1991)

Area under recorded Bargadars (In Hec.)	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total
7009.11	4150	3044	5699	12893

Source: Board of Revenue, West Bengal.

Table:2.6  
Distribution and Classification of land under Barga cultivation  
in Darjeeling and West Bengal as on 31st Dec. 1984.  
(In acres)

	Recorded Bargadars				Percentage of S.C. & S.T. Bargadars to total Bargadars	
	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total	S.C.	S.T.
Darjeeling	3881	2285	5849	12015	32.30	19.02
W. Bengal	389031	158701	763750	1311482	29.66	12.10

	Land under cultivation				Barga L H per Bargadar			
	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total
Darjeeling	5417.08	3940.88	8699.95	1857.91	1.40	1.72	1.49	1.50
West Bengal	324070.7	149725.5	532867.7	1006663.9	0.83	0.94	0.70	0.77

Source: Records of the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal.

**Table:2.7**  
**Distribution and Classification of Recorded Bargadars in**  
**West Bengal in comparison with Rural population,**  
**as on 31st December, 1984.**

Percentage of recorded Bargadar to Rural Population				
	S.C.	S.T.	Others	Total
Darjeeling	3.24	1.68	1.13	1.62
West Bengal	3.70	5.37	2.86	3.27

Source: Ghosh, 1986.

**Table:2.8**  
**Percentage of Land under Recorded Bargadars to Total Agricultural**  
**Land (excluding Vested Land) in West Bengal as on 31 st Dec. 1984.**  
(in acres)

	Total Agrl. Land	Land under Recorded	Percentage of of col (3) to col (1)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Darjeeling	103917	18058	17.4
West Bengal	11413358	1006665	8.8

Source: Ghosh, 1986.

The Agricultural Census (1985) published by the West Bengal government shows a better land concentration for the scheduled Tribes than the Scheduled castes. Among the large holdings (10 Hec. and above) 48.28 percent are S.T., who hold 47.68 percent of total large holdings. Where as the percentage S.C. in this category is 2.07 and 2.31 respectively. Among the marginal holdings (up to 1 Hec.) 23.06 percent are S.C. and 7.94 percent are S.T.

In the entire district, among the peasant classes, in terms of numbers the marginal and poor peasants dominated the scene, both

before and after the land reforms. Though the gross size categories give only a rough picture of the skewed distribution, they do suggest that the scope for land reform in the district was rather slim. According to the recent agricultural census, the holdings up to one hectare constitute 56.49 per cent of the total but only 21.57 percent of the area.

### *2.7 Concluding Remarks*

'Land Reforms' by the Left Front Government in West Bengal faced both admiration and criticism from many Indian and foreign authors. The policies of this reform programmes are criticised both by the left and the right wing scholars. The main focus of their argument is on the political will of the CPI(M) and other Left Front parties in implementing the land reform. A few of them also criticised the implementation of this policy in grass root level. According to them the benefits of this policy are enjoyed only by the supporters of the ruling parties. As far as the Terai region is concerned, it was a more sensible area in terms of peasant agitation, even after the Naxalbari movement. The S.C.s and S.T.s, who are the numerically dominant agricultural communities, were especially taken care of by the government. In some cases, as compared to other districts, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are indeed in a more favourable situation.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Caste and Peasantry in Terai*

#### *3.1 Introduction*

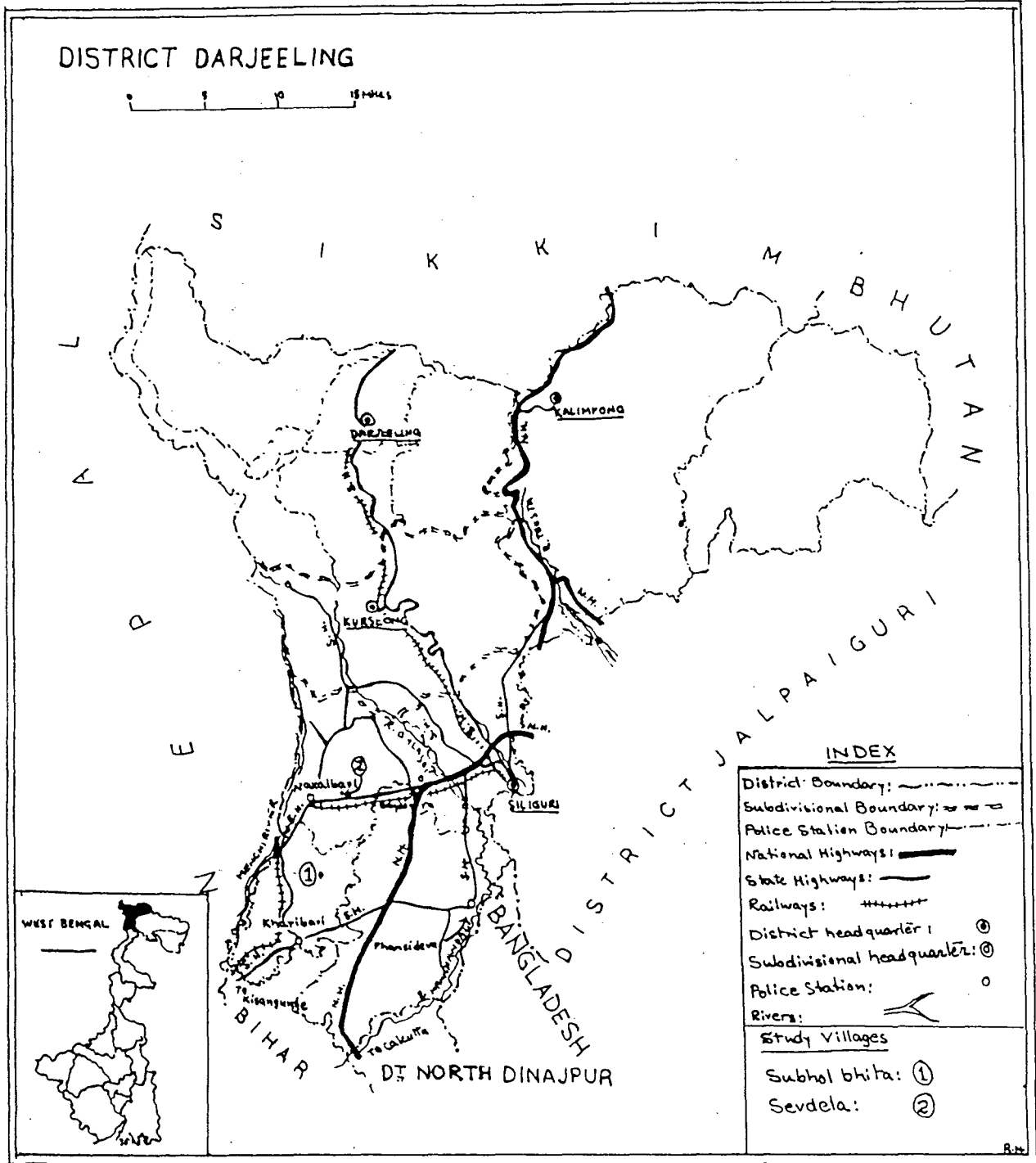
The peasantry in Terai is composed of numerous communities. They include 'Rajbanshis', a sanskritised Hindu lower caste community essentially an aboriginal tribe known as 'Koch'. Then there are the 'Madesias', originally immigrants from the Chotanagpur region of Bihar. They came to clear forests and provide labour force for the tea plantations. In next generation, part of the family members of this plantation labour force rendered surplus and were pushed into agriculture to become a large part of peasantry of this region. They are not a homogeneous social group and consist of different tribal groups like Oraon, Munda, Santhal and a few others. In addition to these groups, there is a significant presence of the 'Bengalies' who migrated into this region from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) from 1947 onwards. They are basically middle and lower caste Hindus.

In this chapter we will try to provide the broad contours of socio-economic structure and formation of peasantry in two survey villages in the light of the immigration and caste structure. We propose to make an attempt to examine the position of various classes in our study villages in relation to the agrarian production structure. Though we are not directly concerned with the large question of rural class formation yet we discuss class with reference to the land distribution pattern. What follows is an analysis of the mobility of peasantry in terms of land holding pattern and tenureship during the last fifteen years.

### *3.2 The History of Settlement of the Sample Villages*

The villages (mouza), which were chosen for study, are Subolbhita and Sevdela. The field survey was conducted between September and November of 1994. Though both the villages were from the Naxalbari peasant movement belt, as indicated earlier, in terms of socio-economic parameters the villages differ from each other. The difference in the micro level agrarian scenarios between the two villages has been influenced by the varying settlement pattern and social structure of the villages.

Subolbhita, the first village under our study is a middle size village in this region (see table:3.1). The village is thirty five kilometres away from Siliguri. It is located in Kharibari Block and comes under the jurisdiction of Kharibari Police station (see Map No.2). The village is one and a half kilometres away from the nearest pukka road, where only one bus plies daily between Siliguri and Kharibari. The village is situated between Naxalbari and Kharibari. Batasi the nearest 'hat' from Subolbhita, is approximately five kilometres, which is not connected by any pukka road from the village. A small stream divides the village into two sets of hamlets, viz. Nazir Jote and Subolbhita. Nazir Jote is comparatively an older part of the village. An influential man from the Rajbanshi community who had first settled in the village, during the second half of the 19th century acquired the right of jotedarship over the village. He is also said to have converted forest and waste lands into cultivable land. As he was from West Dinajpur region of the undivided Bengal, within a few years many Rajbanshis from that region began to settle down in the village. Most of these immigrants had some kinship ties with the jotedar.

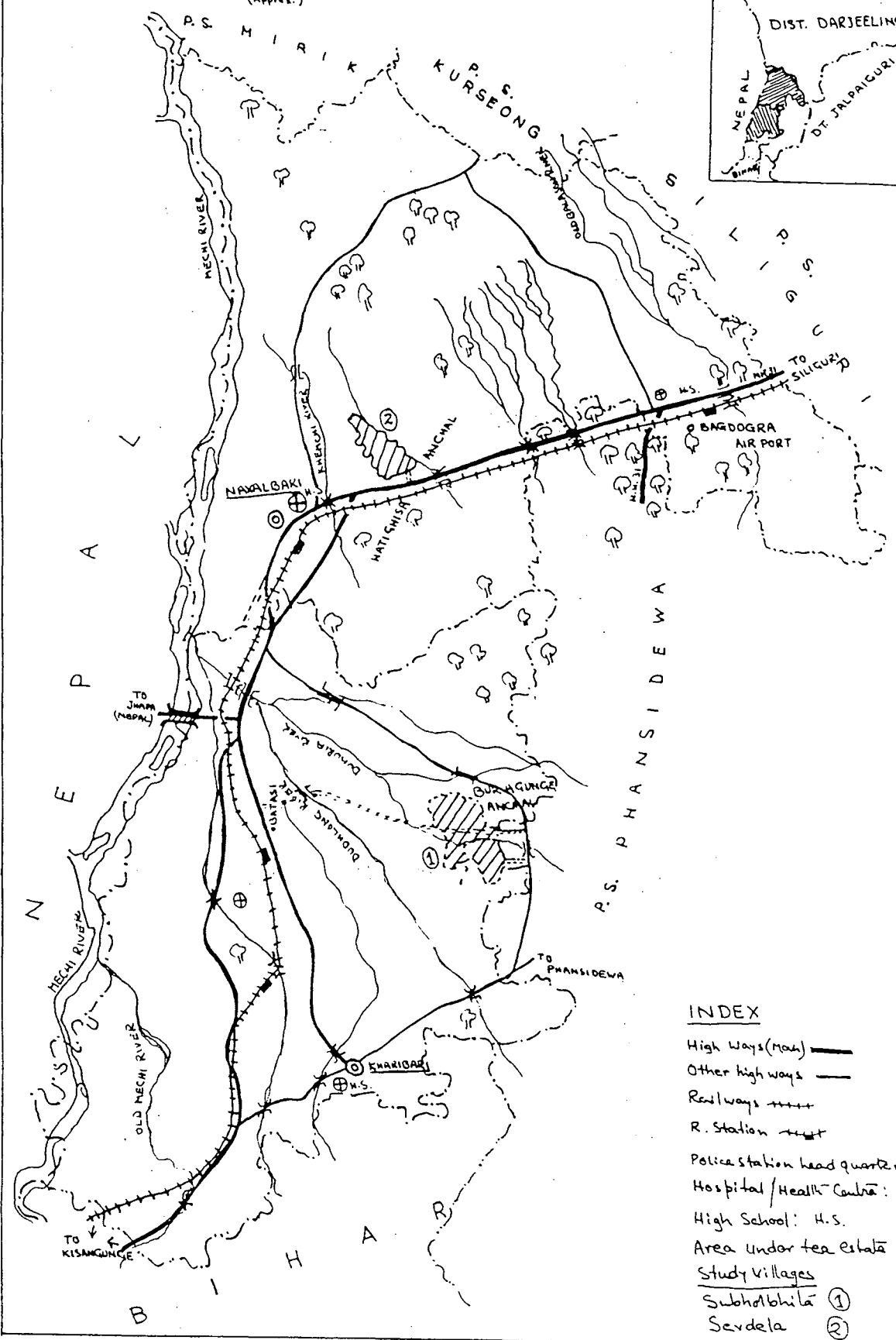
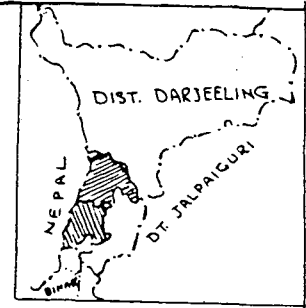




MAP NO. 2

POLICE STATION NAXALBARI AND KHARIBARI

0 2 miles (Approx.)



INDEX

- High Ways (Main) ———
- Other high ways ———
- Railways + + + +
- R. Station + + +
- Police station head quarter: ⊙
- Hospital / Health Centre: ⊕
- High School: H.S.
- Area under tea estate ⊕
- Study Villages
- Subohbhila ①
- Serdela ②

Eventually, the leasing out of the land started among the kin members. Initially he started with a ten years leasing contract but after the completion of the contract, the adhiar used to get the land on a permanent lease basis as per the jotedar's wish, called 'thika pattan'. During the late sixties most of the village land was held by the jotedar, Sree Nagendranath Roychowdhury and his family. Though the cultivation was mainly based on sharecropping, the immigration from East Bengal started changing the agrarian scenario. A few upper caste Bengalis who had settled in the village during the sixties started buying land from the poor Rajbanshis and Nepalis. They also subsequently leased out to other immigrant Bengalis mainly from the lower castes. The situation changed significantly since the outbreak of the Naxalbari uprising. Buragunge Anchal, where this village is situated, was one of the main centres of the Naxalbari movement. The involvement of the Rajbanshis in the movement was comparatively marginal and especially so in relation to the madesias. In Nazir Jote, in particular, the number of active participants in the movement was said to be negligible. Despite this Nazir Jote has found a place in the history of Naxalite movement in West Bengal following the killing of the jotedar Sree Roychowdhury by the activists during that period when the entire Buragunge Anchal was declared as 'muktanchal'. After the death of Sree Roychowdhury, his family lost its interest in jotedarship and on various occasions they sold the lands to the adhiars. In such cases where they sold the land to other than the adhiars the latter were given compensation in terms of cash or land. In 1978 when the Left Front Government initiated the legislation aimed at uplifting the adhiars (Operation

Barga), there were very few bargadars to register their names in this village.

The other hamlet of the village, Subolbhita, is relatively new. The original inhabitants of this hamlet were the Nepales and the madesias until they were outnumbered following the huge wave of immigration during the seventies and early eighties, by the so called lower caste Bengalis from Bangladesh. Most of these immigrants eked their livelihood as wage labourers with the exception of a few who could purchase small plots of cultivable land. Under the Land Reform and Rural Development Scheme of the state Government a number of these people managed to secure homestead and cultivable land. Hence, a large number of people underwent a change in their status as from the agricultural labourer to owner-cultivator cum agricultural labourer.

**Table:3.1**  
**Key Information of Subolbhita and Sevdela**

	Subolbhita	Sevdela
Area	256.98 Hectares	180.09 Hectares
Irrigated area	Nil	141.64 Hectares
Non Irrigated area	181.3 Hectares	18.21 Hectares
Culturable Waste	19.83 Hectares	NIL
Area not available for cultivation	55.85 Hectares	20.24 Hectares
No. of Occupied Residential Households	145	132
No. of Households	145	134
Total Population	813	704
No. of males	427	373
No. of females	386	331
Sex-ratio	903.98	887.40
S.C. population	535 (65.81%)	10 (1.42%)
S.T. Population	66 (8.12%)	548 (77.84%)
No. of Literate persons	169	99
Total Main Workers	254	322
Cultivators	130 (51.18%)	215 (66.77%)
Agri. Labourer	99 (38.98%)	83 (25.78%)

Source: District Census Handbook:Darjeeling (1981)

Sevdela, the other sample village, (see table:3.1) comes under Naxalbari Block in Naxalbari Police station area (see Map no. 2). The village is about one kilometre from Siliguri-Naxalbari highway. Sevdela is nearly five kilometres from the main Naxalbari market and comes under Hatighisa Anchal, which was a noted place for the Naxalite activities during the late sixties. Naxalbari is the nearest 'hat' from this village and Bagdogra is the nearest town at a distance of nearly seven kilometres. The settlement pattern of Sevdela is in many respects different from the previous village in terms of its social composition. Rambulak Sharma, a man from the Bihari Yadav community, was the main landholder of this village. He was an absentee landlord staying in Satbhaia, three kilometres away from the village. Rambulak's adhiars were mostly from the Madesia community. The entire village is dominated by the tribals from Santhal, Oraon, Munda and Kisan. Most of the people who settled here, were part of the surplus labour stream retrenched from the nearby tea estates during the thirties. Later, a few of them purchased some patches of land to cultivate their own. In 1955, during the land grab movement, the activists were successful in capturing some 'benami' land from the jotedar. It was claimed that they distributed those lands among the landless peasants. It was said that during late sixties most of the peasants of this village were associated with the peasant uprising. Despite this, there is no clear cut evidence suggesting their success in capturing the land from the jotedar. In fact it seems that in most of the cases the adhiars secured the land from their 'giris' under the tenancy legislation programmes by the Left Front Government. However, the evidence of 'patta' distribution in this village is not as prominent as in Subolbhita.

The presence of Rajbanshis in this village is marginal. Only one Rajbanshi family has been residing in the village during the last thirty years. However, besides the Madesias, there is a significant sprinkling of people from the Muslim community. The Muslims of this village, like the tribals, were also originally from Ranchi area of Bihar. They came from the same region as 'Sardars' during the first half of this century. Later, they became unemployed and had settled down in the nearby villages. In the next section we will examine the aspects of migration in our study villages.

### *3.3 Role of Migration*

The decadal rate of population increase was quite higher in Kharibari and Phansidewa than that in the entire Darjeeling district between 1961 and 1971 (see Table: 3.2). This was clearly related to the unprecedented influx of immigrants from Bangladesh following the 1971 crisis in the latter region. In the following decade there was a further intensification of the influx possibly due to the disturbed conditions in Bangladesh. Our survey data (Table:3.3), with regard to immigration presents a different picture which is at variance with the census data. Our data suggests that Subolbhita experienced a wave of migration after 1971; whereas Sevdela, a predominantly tribal village, did not experience any significant pressure of migration from Bangladesh.

Table:3.2  
Population and Decadal Increase in Darjeeling District,  
Siliguri Subdivision and Two Sample Villages

	Population			Decadal increase '61-'71	Decadal increase '71-'81
	1961	1971	1981		
Darjeeling Dist.	624640	781777	1024269	25.16	31.02
Naxalbari	42193	50799	81175	20.40	59.80
Kharibari	25957	44723	51646	72.30	15.48
Siliguri	93125	134392	232610	44.31	73.08
Phansidewa	58573	71885	107464	22.73	49.49
Subalbhita	-	754	813	-	7.82
Sevdela	-	517	704	-	36.17

Source: District Census Hand-book, Darjeeling: 1971, 1981.

An analysis of the caste-wise migration in both the villages (Table 3.3), suggests that in the first village approximately 77% of lower caste Bengali households came to the village only after 1977. On the contrary, there is no evidence of migration of Rajbanshis into the village after 1966. The bulk of the immigrants after 1966 (43.33%) were from the Bengali community. Interestingly, in Sevdela, over 96% of the immigration occurred before 1966. Two non tribal households recorded in the sample households of Sevdela, immigrated some time between 1948 and 1966. Most of the households (40%) of this village immigrated before 1930 and all were from various tribal groups.

Table:3.3  
Households According to their Caste and Year of Migration

caste/ community	Year of migration				
	Before1930	1931-1947	1948-1966	1967-1977	After1977
<b>Village-1</b>					
Brahmin	-	-	1	-	-
Bengali upper caste	-	-	1	1	-
Bengali lower caste	-	-	1	2	10
Rajbanshi	2	3	4	-	-
Rai(Nepali)	-	1	2	-	-
Tribals	-	-	2	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>6.67</b>	<b>13.33</b>	<b>36.67</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>33.33</b>
<b>Village-2</b>					
Rajbanshi	-	-	1	-	-
Muslim	-	-	1	-	-
Tribals	12	3	7	5	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>30.00</b>	<b>16.67</b>	<b>3.33</b>

Source: Survey Data

After discussing the pattern of migration in the villages we will make a comparative analysis of the caste structure, and their educational attainment.

### 3.4 Caste, Community and Literacy

The first village in our study, Subolbhita is essentially dominated by the Rajbanshis, and other lower caste Bengali groups such as Mahisyas, Barujibi and Namosudras; most of the inhabitants of the

village belong either to Scheduled Castes or to the Other Backward Castes (OBC). The only Brahmin household of this village had migrated from Assam sometime during the late forties. The then head of the household was assigned some land by the jotedar in lieu of all religious services he performed for the village. This family is said to have lost its land during the Naxalite uprising and is reported to have fled Nepal. Hiren Sharma, the present head of a nuclear Brahmin family, returned to the village after 1977 and bought some land. Apart from the lone Brahmin family (Assamese), there are only two other households belonging to upper castes. Both the families are from Bengali Kayastha community. These two families are said to have come from East Bengal after the partition in 1947. All the other thirteen Bengali households belong either to middle or lower caste groups. Rajbanshis of this village consider themselves as the earliest settlers of the village though a few Nepali people of the village from 'Khamba' (Rai) caste dispute this<sup>1</sup>. The tribals of the village drawn largely from the 'Oraon' group were employed as 'adhiars' sometime between 1948 and 1966.

The second village, as indicated earlier, is essentially a 'Madesia' settlement. They constitute more than 93% of the households of the village accounting for 92% of total population. A few Muslim households also residing in the village consider themselves as part of the same 'biradari'. The Rajbanshis

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Khambus' are a caste living on the southern spurs of the Himalayas, whose home is the eastern portion of Nepal between the Sankos river of the Singalia range and Mechi river. They claim to be 'jamindars', one of the fighting tribes of Nepal and bear the kiranti title of 'Rai'. [O'Malley (1907):42]



constitute a mere 3.33% of the households in this village. (see the table:3.4)

**Table:3.4**  
**Caste-wise Distribution of Population**

Caste\ Community	No. of household	Percentage	No. of persons	Male	Female
<b>Village-1</b>					
Brahmin	1	3.33	4	3	1
Bengali upper caste	2	6.67	10	7	3
Bengali lower caste	13	43.33	74	38	36
Rajbanshi	9	30.00	56	29	27
Nepali(Rai)	3	10.00	17	9	8
Tribal	2	6.67	5	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Village-2</b>					
Rajbanshi	1	3.33	5	4	1
Muslim	1	3.33	10	5	5
Tribal	28	93.33	162	88	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>80</b>

Source: Survey Data

More than 43% households of the first village are nuclear by type (Table:3.5). This is a dominant feature not only among the Rajbanshis, but also in most of the Nepalese and tribal households of the village as well. Further, most of the non-Rajbanshi Bengali households belong to the extended and joint family type. In contrast in the second village as many as 50% households are either extended or joint, whereas only 27% households are recorded as nuclear households.

Table:3.5  
Distribution of Households According to the  
Caste/Community and Household Types

Caste/ Community	Household Types					
	Incom- plete	Inter- mediate	Nuclear	Extended	Joint	Extended cum Joint
Village-1						
Brahmin	-	-	1	-	-	-
Bengali upper caste	-	-	-	1	1	-
Bengali lower caste	-	-	2	4	5	2
Rajbanshi	-	-	6	2	1	-
Nepali(Rai)	-	-	2	-	1	-
Tribal	-	-	2	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
Village-2						
Rajbanshi	-	1	-	-	-	-
Muslim	-	-	-	-	1	-
Tribal	-	2	8	9	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>

Source: Survey data

The literacy rate of the second village is relatively lower (55.83%) as compared to the first village (72.19%). In the first village the literacy rate is quite high among the Brahmins, Rajbanshis, Nepalis and the tribals. Conversely, the literacy rate is comparatively low among all sections of the people in the second village. In so far as the male and female literacy rates are concerned, the latter in the second village is significantly lower than that in the first village.

**Table:3.6**  
**Literacy Rate According to Caste and Community**

Caste/ community (No. of Households)	No of Persons aged 7 & above 7	No of Lite- rate persons	No of Males aged 7 & above 7	No of Lite- rate Males	No of Females aged 7 & above 7	No. of Lite- rate Females
<b>Village-1</b>						
Brahmin (n=1) Upper caste	4	4 (100.0%)	3	3 (100.0%)	1	1 (100.0%)
Bengalies (n=2) Lower caste	8	5 (62.5%)	5	4 (80.00%)	3	1 (33.3%)
Bengalies (n=13)	67	39 (58.21)	35	27 (77.14%)	31	11 (35.48%)
Rajbanshi (n=9)	50	42 (84.00%)	26	24 (92.31%)	24	18 (64.29%)
Nepali(Rai) (n=3)	17	15 (88.24%)	9	8 (88.89%)	8	7 (87.5%)
Tribal (n=2)	5	4 (80.00%)	2	2 (100.00%)	3	2 (66.67%)
<b>Total (n=30)</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>109 (72.19%)</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>68 (85.00%)</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>41 (57.75%)</b>
<b>Village-2</b>						
Rajbanshi (n=1)	4	2 (50.00%)	3	2 (66.67%)	1	0 (0.00%)
Muslims (n=1)	10	4 (40.00%)	5	3 (60.00%)	5	1 (20.00%)
Tribals (n=28)	149	85 (57.05%)	82	60 (73.17%)	67	25 (37.31%)
<b>Total (n=30)</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>91 (55.83%)</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>65 (72.22%)</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>26 (35.62)</b>

Source: Survey data

At this juncture an analysis of the social classes with particular emphasis on the distribution of wealth becomes necessary.

### 3.5 Social Classes and Distribution of Assets

In this section we shall present a rough classification of the rural population of Subholbhita and Sevdela into socio-economic classes, concentrating mainly on the section deriving its main subsistence from agriculture (Note that even families in this sector sometimes have supplemental or main sources of income, from other jobs or service). The agricultural population may be classified into roughly five groups.

1. The landless: This group is relatively easy to identify and categorise. At present, it includes only those who primarily derive their livelihood from working in agriculture, either as day labourers, or as 'adhiars'. Occasionally, one even finds a landless family which happens to own a pair of bullocks working as share-croppers or agricultural labourers. According to our survey data collected from the local panchayat office, there is no evidence of landless household in subolbhita. On the other hand in sevdela, nine households are found as landless of whom five are sharecropping households. The remaining four are mere day labourers.

2. Marginal peasants: the second group consists of those who own very small amount of land (less than one acre), so small that the main source of their income is derived by labouring in other's fields on a daily basis.

In Subolbhita 11 households, from the 30 sample households, come under this category. Most of these households were basically landless even a few years back but secured some cultivable land

under the policy of redistribution of land by the State Government. These people came as refugees to the village from Bangladesh. The category of this marginal peasants is totally absent from the sample households of Sevdela.

3. Poor peasants: This category consists of those who hold land between 1 and 2.5 acres, small enough to compel them occasionally to resort to daily wage labour.

In Subholbhita some six households come under this category from a those thirty households we studied. On the other hand the number of households in this category in Sevdela is quite high with 14 households.

4. Self-sufficient peasants: This category consists of those who are self-sufficient, and are able to sustain themselves without any labour rendered to the fields of others. For small families, anything over two-and-a-half acres is enough to permit a modest degree of security. This is especially so if some of it is double-cropped. Even with respect to this category other factors such as whether or not a family adds to its holding by renting, or whether any of the family members have any non-agricultural income, and the extent to which the family aspires to a semblance of urban middle-class life are in the ultimate analyses of crucial importance. There are six and four such households under this category in Subolbhita and Sevdela respectively.

5. Middle Peasants: The cut-off point between the fourth and fifth group is five acres. We would like to classify those

possessing more than five acres of land as falling under this category. In the first village there are two households, who hold ten acres of land, which is the highest in our sample. In the second village only one household come under this category with 6.67 acres of land. Households with five acres or more acres of land are not only self-sufficient but additionally are also able to accumulate surplus stocks in anticipation of a lean year, and still have enough surplus grain to sell to obtain cash for going to buy consumer goods.

Looking at the agrarian situation in these two villages, it is clear that there are striking inequalities in the distribution of wealth (Table 3.7). On the basis of our survey data, in the first village, we find that 36.67 percent of the households are controlling more than 46 percent of total land. The situation in the second village appears relatively less skewed, where 46.67 percent of the poor peasant households control more than 50 percent of total cultivable land in the village. The overall situation is however somewhat more complex than the Table would seem to suggest. Thus a large amount of land is still controlled by the non residents of the village, who did not come under our sample.

Table:3.7  
Distribution of Land among Households

Size group (in acre)	Households (NO)	Percentage of area owned by this group	Avg. Size (in acre)
VILLAGE-1			
0	0	0.00	0.00
0.01-0.99	11	7.33	0.55
1.00-2.49	6	8.75	1.19
2.50-4.99	8	37.89	3.88
5.00 & +	5	46.03	7.53
All size	30	100.00	2.73
VILLAGE-2			
0	9	0.00	0.00
0.01-0.99	0	0.00	0.00
1.00-2.49	14	51.79	1.87
2.50-4.99	6	35.00	2.95
5.00 & +	1	13.21	6.67
All size	30	100.00	1.68

Source: Survey Data.

In the first village the distribution of land favours the upper caste people and early settlers. Both the upper caste (Kayastha) Bengali households possess more than five acres of land. While 22.22% of Rajbanshi households in the village hold five or more acres of land. In the second village more than 46% of tribal households hold land between 1 and 2.5 acres. 28.57 per cent of tribal households are landless in the village.

Table:3.8  
Distribution of Households According to their  
Size of Holding and Caste/Community

Caste/ community	Size-group (In acre)				
	0	0.01-0.99	1.00-2.49	2.50-4.99	5.00 & +
<b>Villagel</b>					
Brahmin(n=1)	-	-	1 (100.00)	-	-
Bengali upper caste(n=2)	-	-	-	-	2 (100.00)
Bengali lower caste(n=13)	-	7 (53.84)	3 (23.08)	3 (23.08)	-
Rajbanshi(n=9)	-	3 (33.33)	-	4 (44.44)	2 (22.22)
Nepali(Rai) (n=3)	-	1 (33.33)	1 (33.33)	-	1 (33.33)
Tribals (n=2)	-	-	1 (50.00)	1 (50.00)	-
<b>All(N=30)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11 (36.67)</b>	<b>6 (20.00)</b>	<b>8 (26.67)</b>	<b>5 (16.67)</b>
<b>Village-2</b>					
Rajbanshi(n=1)	-	-	1 (100.00)	-	-
Muslim(n=1)	1 (100.00)	-	-	-	-
Tribals(n=28)	8 (28.57)	-	13 (46.43)	6 (21.43)	1 (3.57)
<b>All(N=30)</b>	<b>9 (30.00)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14 (46.67)</b>	<b>6 (20.00)</b>	<b>1 (3.33)</b>

Source: Survey Data

Migration wise land concentration is also not so sharp in these two villages. In the first village the general trend shows that the households who immigrated before 1947 hold at least 2.5 acres of land. But in the second village even this trend is absent.



Table:3.9  
Distribution of Households According to  
Year of Migration and Land Holding

Year of Migration	Size of holding					Total
	0	0.01-0.99	1.00-2.49	2.50-4.99	5.00 & +	
Village-1						
Before1930	0	0	0	0	2	2
1930-1947	0	0	0	3	1	4
1948-1966	0	4	3	3	1	11
1967-1977	0	0	1	1	1	3
After1977	0	7	2	2	0	10
	0	11	6	9	5	30
Village-2						
Before1930	1	-	5	5	1	12
1930-1947	2	-	1	0	0	3
1948-1966	3	-	5	1	0	9
1967-1977	3	-	2	0	0	5
After1977	0	-	1	0	0	1
	9	-	14	6	1	30

Source: Survey Data

Per capita land holding in the villages shows a favourable picture for comparatively larger holders in both the villages. In the first village the average household size does not differ much, whereas in the second village this varies with the size-class. A comparison between the average per capita land holding among all the groups shows a better position for the first village.

Table:3.10  
Average Household Size and Per-capita Land of each Size-class

Size-class (in acre)	Average No. of members	Average No. of males	Average No. of females	Per-capita land
Village-1				
0	-	-	-	-
0.01-0.99	5.73	3.00	2.73	0.10
1.00-2.49	5.33	2.67	2.66	0.22
2.50-4.99	5.25	2.63	2.62	0.74
5.00 & +	5.80	3.60	2.20	1.30
All sizes	5.33	2.93	2.60	0.49
Village-2				
0	6.78	3.56	3.22	0.00
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	5.21	2.93	2.29	0.36
2.50-4.99	6.00	3.33	2.67	0.49
5.00 & +	7.00	4.00	3.00	0.95
All sizes	5.90	3.23	2.67	0.29

Source: Survey Data.

Table:3.11 shows the mode of cultivation according to the size-class of the operational holdings, which includes the leased-in land also. The table clearly shows the high percentage of mixed employment (based on both family and hired labour) among all the groups in both the villages. The only household who hires the entire labour from the market but operates less than one acre of land has actually got some other job, which is the primary one besides cultivation. In the first village all the households, who depend only on family labour, operate less than one acre of land.

**Table:3.11**  
**Modes of Cultivation of Size-class of Operational Holdings**

Size class of operational holdings (in acre)	No of household by			
	Exclusively Family Labour Based Cultivation	Exclusively Hired Labour Based Cultivation	Mixed typeed (Both family and labour)	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Village-1</b>				
0.01-0.99	4	1	4	9
1.00-2.49	0	0	5	5
2.50-4.99	0	0	6	6
5.00 & +	0	2	7	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b> (13.79)	<b>3</b> (10.35)	<b>22</b> (75.86)	<b>29</b>
<b>Village-1</b>				
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	1	0	14	15
2.50-4.99	0	0	10	10
5.00 & +	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b> (3.85)	<b>0</b>	<b>25</b> (96.15)	<b>26</b>

Source: Survey Data.

Table:3.12 shows that 83.33% of households have at least one pair of bullocks, in the first village. The percentage of landless households is higher in the second village and as a consequence only 70% of the total households have at least one pair of bullocks. In the first village 86.66% of households have at least one plough whereas the proportion is 80% for the second village.

Table:3.12.  
Distribution of Non-land Agricultural Assets among Households

Size-class of ownership holdings (in acre)	Bullocks			Plough		
	More than one pair	Only one pair	None	More than one one	Only one	None
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
VILLAGE-1						
0	-	-	-	-	-	-
0.01-0.99	0	7	4	0	8	3
1.00-2.49	0	5	1	0	5	1
2.50-4.99	2	6	0	2	6	0
5.00 & +	4	1	0	5	0	0
All	6	19	5	7	19	4
VILLAGE-2						
0	1	2	6	1	3	5
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	1	11	2	0	13	1
2.50-4.99	3	2	1	3	3	0
5.00 & +	1	0	0	1	0	0
All	6	15	9	5	19	6

Source: Survey Data

### 3.6 *Depeasantisation Discontinued*

By examining the data on land holding pattern over a relatively larger span of time we can clearly observe significant change in the land holding pattern which would suggest the need to accord importance to peasant movement of the late sixties and of the land reform programme of the Left Front Government as factors on inducing this change.

Table:3.13  
Control of Land by the Different Categories  
of Households: 1977-1994

Size Gr. (In acre)	1977		1985		1994	
	Percen- tage of House- holds	Percentage of of area controlled by this group	Percen- tage of House- holds	Percentage of of area controlled by this group	Percen- tage of House- holds	Percentage of of area controlled by this group
Village-1						
0	35.00	0.00	26.67	0.00	0.00	-
0.01-0.99	5.00	0.36	10.00	2.13	36.67	7.33
1.00-2.49	10.00	2.92	20.00	8.93	20.00	8.75
2.50-4.99	15.00	11.48	26.67	40.86	26.67	37.89
5.00 & +	35.00	85.24	16.66	48.08	16.67	46.03
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Village-2						
0	82.76	0.00	34.48	0.00	30.00	0.00
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	3.45	10.92	41.38	49.42	46.67	51.79
2.50-4.99	6.90	37.51	20.69	37.48	20.00	35.00
5.00 & +	6.90	51.57	3.45	13.10	3.33	13.21
		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Survey Data.

The above table (Table 3.13) suggests a certain degree of upward mobility in the first village. We find the status of the landless people had changed into that of marginal peasants, whereas the middle peasants moved down into the category of self-sufficient peasants. A similar tendency is also noticeable in the second village where the landless adhiars moved up to the categories of poor and self-sufficient peasants.

But as Sevdela was basically an adhiar based village, the landholding pattern was markedly different from the first one. Here much of the land was under the control of a non resident

jotedar. As a matter of fact, 83% of households were landless. Among these landless households 83.33 percent were adhiar households and 16.67 percent agricultural labourers. This situation began to change when the lessors of small holdings started selling off their land. This way adhiars were benefitted as they obtained land under the tenancy laws of Bengal. A few landless labourers of this village are still awaiting for the distribution of patta by the Government.

From Table 3.13 it appears that the process of depeasantation has discontinued over the period. In Subholbhita there was a pronounced increase in the numbers of landless between 1983/1984. This as indicated earlier appears to have been the outcome of a sudden spurt in the influx of Bangladesi refugees. Later, the distribution of patta may have had some effect in reducing the proportion of landless people. The degree of sharecropping fell rather more sharply here than in Sevdela. From the early seventies, the landlords began to either sell their land or drive out the adhiars from their land. The partitioning of joint property and cultivable land also began in the seventies. This was yet another new phenomenon among the agriculturist households. The occurrence of peasant movements bound them to start self cultivation by employing wage labourer leading to break-up of joint family property. Here the giri-adhiari<sup>2</sup> relationship was not so antagonistic, for both the adhiar and the giri belonged to the same community, i.e., Rajbanshi. And most of the time they were linked

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<sup>2</sup> The word 'giri' is a Rajbanshi word, to mean the lessor (landlord). This word has now become common for every community.

with some kinship ties. The Rajbanshi-Rajbanshi relationship made the land transfer process rather smooth.

The second village, Sevdela, was different in many respects from the first one in many respects. As mentioned earlier this is basically a tribal dominated village, where a substantial portion of the village land is under the control of some non-residents, and non-tribal communities like Biharis and Bengalis. The nature of relationship between the giri and adhiar was quite tended to be more impersonal, relatively more exploitative. The eviction of adhiars through debt-trap was a regular feature of the village until late sixties. Unlike, Subholbhita immigration was not a characteristic feature of this village. Hence this village did not experience any sudden spurt in number of agricultural labourers. But the kind of passiveness in sharecropping by the small even by the big holders was common in this village also. Here also the lessors started selling off their land to some landless adhiars.

The impact of these changes in the land holding pattern is discernable from the following tables (Tables 3.14 and 3.15). Table 3.14 reveals the inter-generation and intra-generation occupational mobility while the table 3.15 indicates the respondent's mobility during last 15 years. Table 3.14 clearly reveals that in Subolbhita the self-cultivating households increased from 16.67% to 30% percent over two generations. Whereas 23.33% sharecropping households withdraw from sharecropping in the course of a generation. Similarly 36.67% households have been engaged as fixed-rent tenants are new in the present generation. In the second village 67% households out of 70% of sharecropping

Table:3.14  
Intergenerational Mobility Pattern of Agrarian Households

Types of tenure of the respondent	Occupation of respondent's father								Total	Percentage
	Lessor	Lessor cum owner	Owner cultivator	Owner cum S.crop	S.Crop	S.Crop cum lab	Landless labour	Others		
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)		
<b>VILLAGE-1</b>										
Lessor	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.33
Lessor cum owner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.00
Owner cultivator	1	2	5	1	-	-	-	-	9	30.00
Owner cum tenant	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	1	7	23.33
Owner cum tenant cum labour	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	3	4	13.33
Owner cum labour	-	-	-	1	-	3	1	4	9	30.00
S. crop	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.00
S. crop cum labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.00
Landless labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
percentage	6.67	6.67	16.67	13.33	10.00	13.33	6.67	26.67	100.00	
<b>VILLAGE-2</b>										
Lessor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.00
Lessor cum owner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3.33
Owner cultivator	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	-	5	16.67
Owner cum tenant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.00
Owner cum tenant cum labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.00
Owner cum labour	-	-	-	1	9	4	-	1	15	50.00
S.Crop	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	5	16.67
S.Crop cum labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.00
Landless labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	13.67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.00</b>
percentage	0.00	3.33	0.00	6.67	56.67	13.33	10.00	10.00	100.00	

Note: In the above table, the word 'tenant' is used for fixed rent tenant only where the word 's.cropper' is used for 'adhiars'.  
Source: Survey Data.



households appear to have moved up as self-cultivating households. Among them 16.67% are pure owner-cultivator and the remaining 50% despite owning some cultivable land and work as agricultural wage labourer in times.

The following table (Table 3.15) provides a snapshot of the upward and downward mobility, in these villages, during the last fifteen years. It is seen that in both the villages there is a pronounced upward mobility from non land owning category to land owning category. In the second village with the exception of a few owner cultivators almost 50 per cent of the immobile respondents are sharecroppers and landless labourers.

Table: 3.15  
Change in Agrarian Category of the Respondents  
during the last 15 years

Mobility patterns	No.	Percentage
<b>Village-1</b>		
Upward mobility	16	53.33
Land owning category to Land owning category	4	13.33
Non landowning to Landowning category	12	40.00
Downward mobility	3	10.00
Landowning category to Landowning category	3	10.00
Immobile group (Landowning category)	10	33.33
Not clear	1	3.33
<b>Village-2</b>		
Upward mobility	14	46.67
Non landowning category to Landowning category	14	46.67
Downward mobility	1	3.33
Land owning category to landowning category	1	3.33
Immobile Group	15	50.00
Land owning category	6	20.00
Non land owning category	9	30.00

Source: Survey data.

### *3.7 Concluding Remarks*

Terai is not a homogenous region in all respects. The study villages Subolbhita and Sevdela, fifteen kilometres apart and situated in opposite directions of Naxalbari differ in many respects. Subolbhita can be termed as a Scheduled Caste village, whereas Sevdela is a Madesia village. From the very beginning the

Rajbanshis, started to concentrate in Buragunge Anchal, where the first village is located. On the other hand, Sevdela became a centre of Madesia settlement. Literacy rate is quite high in both the villages, though the proportion of persons who have completed eighth standard is very low. The proportion of nuclear family is higher in the first village as compared to the second village. There is no such tendency in these villages of domination by any particular community over the others. However, people from upper size class of holdings enjoy a favourable position in holding economic assets.

One common specificity of the villages, is the absence of big landholders. Still the skewness in the distribution of land is visible specially in the first village. Here much of the land is concentrated in the hands of middle peasants. The quantity of land in the hands of poor and self-sufficient peasants is quite high in Sevdela. Whereas in seventies land was concentrated in the hands of big and middle peasants with a very high percentage of landless people. This change in the landholding pattern has a direct impact on the production organisation in this region. This trend in the agrarian scenario needs to be analysed in the broad framework of peasant movement and land reform programmes.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Changing Agrarian Structure and Agrarian Markets*

#### *4.1 Introduction*

Sharecropping was a predominant production in Terai. But in the previous chapter, we have observed that the incidence of sharecropping has gone down with the process of discontinuation of depeasantisation. In the first section of this chapter, we will try to find the social and economic factors behind the demise of sharecropping, and the present form of tenancy market in this region. In the subsequent sections we will examine the aspects of the agrarian structure with reference to the labour, credit and output market. We will also examine the relative positions of each size-class and their access to the agrarian markets.

#### *4.2 Demise of Sharecropping*

The first significant change in both the villages, is the low incidence of land leasing (see table: 3.14). It is obvious that the series peasant movements in the post-independent period is one of the reasons behind this. And the second reason lies in the post-movement measures taken by the Government to stop such an agitation or to stop the exploitation of these cultivators by the landlords. But one more change which is not so noticeable at times is the breaking up of the property. The low incidence of sharecropping is certainly linked with the partitioning of the joint family.

The peasant uprising in late sixties, created a lot of tensions among the agrarian population of this region. Though the movement was crushed in its bud, it took quite a few years to normalise the

situation. Most importantly, the big landowners and the lessors became afraid to lose land. The fear of losing land worked as a catalyst to start self cultivation. They thought it risky to keep big landed property under a single family. A necessary outcome was the division of joint property through the break up of joint families<sup>1</sup>. Hence during the seventies the incidence of sharecropping has come down more rapidly in the first village, where the number of middle and big farmers were more than the second village. Again, in early seventies, the crop sharing pattern was made 75:25 in favour of the sharecroppers by an amendment of the tenancy Act of West Bengal. Later the operation Barga programme launched by the state Government, was an attempt to secure the tenancy of the sharecroppers. It is said that the lessors lost interest basically for two reasons, first the share of crop is not attractive for them and second there is a very less chance to get back the leased out land from the sharecropper in future. Gradually the incidence of sharecropping has stopped in this region.

It would however be somewhat far fetched to assume that the Naxalbari peasant movement paved away for a structural change in the agrarian system of the region. A critical analyses, on the basis of our field data would suggest instead some kind of repositioning of agrarian social structure, in the post movement phase. This cannot be termed as structural change. But associated changes, especially the changes in values and approaches due to the occurrence of peoples' movement makes way to change personal

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<sup>1</sup> There may be other reasons for the break up of joint families which is beyond the scope of the present study.

relations to some extent. A change in the personal relations, from traditional to formal or professional is needed as a major instrument for any kind of planned and institutional development. Thus the state government's drive for a radical land reform in the late seventies got an extra space in that region.

To see the change in agrarian relations we will first look at the hierarchy in the agrarian society and the class relations, the relation between the sharecropper, land owner and the labourer. In studying the relationship between the 'giri'(land owner) and the 'adhiar' (sharecropper), the first interesting point to note is the change in their attitudes towards each other. Earlier the relationship was very much personal but when the formal political organizations started to penetrate between them the relationship took a different shape which could be termed as professional. The role of peasant organisations both during and after the failure of movement cannot be discounted. It served as institutional framework and helped the Government to implement the new legislative measures.

Caste has been particularly important in the social institution in the context of agricultural production especially the control and use of land<sup>2</sup>. But it is also important to note that the role of caste in this part of Bengal is different from the South and East Bengal. Most of the big land holders or jotedars largely from Rajbanshi community or some Bihari intermediate castes (mainly trading or money lending caste). The Muslim and Madesia jotedars

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<sup>2</sup> André Béteille, "Closed and Open Social Stratification in India", European Journal of sociology, Vol.7, No. 2,1966, pp.224-246.

formed only a few exceptions. The adhiars on the other hand, were mainly either from Madesia or Rajbanshi community until the immigration started from Bangladesh. The relationship between the giri and adhiar when both of them from Rajbanshi community, tended to be personalised, with states of jajmani features. The horizontal ties served to cushion the coercive relationship between the giri and the adhiar. The incidence of eviction which was a common practice resorted to the jotedars, was infrequent in those cases where both the giri and adhiar were from Rajbanshi. According to Sri Karuna Roychowdhury, son of the ex-jotedar of Nazir jote, it was quite common for the adhiars to rid themselves free of their debt bondage, simply by presenting a particular local fish to the jotedar. This was endorsed by some ex-adhiars of the village as well. But Roychowdhury was unable to deny or counter the fact that the periodic shifting of adhiars from one plot to other by the jotedars, was essentially to prompt the adhiars from laying any claim or right over that particular piece of land after few years of cultivation. However Jetha Tudu and some other ex-adhiars of Sevdela took a different view. They repeatedly mentioned that the eviction of the adhiars by the jotedars, was a major problem especially after mid-fifties. According to them adhiars were being shifted from a particular land after every two/three years. The exercise of power by the jotedars was contingent upon their relative economic and social positions, in the village. All the ex-adhiars of sevdela alleged that though the word 'adhi' means half and the adhiars were customarily to secure half of the total crop produced, however invariably they never got more than one tenth of the actual amount. In the name of interest on loan provided by him and through other illegal cesses and

manipulations the jotedar often used to grab a good portion of adhiars' legitimate share.

#### 4.3 Present Form of Tenancy

The present pattern of sharecropping is, now different from the one exercised earlier. In fact sharecropping as conventionally understood has almost ceased to exist. The few that exist are mere continuation of old contracts. In Subolbhita fixed rent tenancy has replaced share tenancy to some extent (see table:4.1). The people engaged in this leasing out business are the owners of small holdings but essentially interested in other non-agricultural businesses and usually reside in neighbouring villages. In contrast in sevdela, the incidence of fixed rent tenancy is

Table:4.1  
Change of the size and Number of Leased-in Holdings  
from 1977 to 1994

Size of Leased in holdings (In acres)	Number of Holdings					
	Village-1			Village-2**		
	1977	1985	1994	1977	1985	1994
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	1	4	8	1	2	-
2.50-4.99	3	-	3	6	4	5
5.00& +	1	-	-	13	1	-
Total	5*	4	11#	20	7	5

Source: Survey Data. Note: (\* 2 out of five cases were share tenancy, # all fixed rent tenancy, \*\* all share tenancy).

virtually absent and is restored to only in a situation where the peasants need some cash. According to Mahiuddin Ansari, the local leader of CPI(M) led Krishak Sabha, these fixed rent leases are



usually contracted within the village only. In short land is leased out to the co-villagers only. The cases of fixed rent tenancies captured at Subholbhita, are between persons from two different villages. This is appear to be related to the involvement of some of the Bengali intermediate castes of this village and those of neighbouring villages in small business and the need to also at some time retain some of the cultivable land; leasing out through fixed rent system appears to have been a convenient response to this situation (Table: 4.2 and 4.3). A few sharecroppers, found in sevdela are mere continuation of old contracts running over the last two generations. Sri Pal a renowned business man from siliguri purchased a certain amount of land on excess of the ceiling level from the then jotedars which was in excess of the land ceiling during the late fifties. He employed a few adhiars to cultivate those lands. After his death, the land was divided among his successors, who are now continuing the old contracts without taking any interest in it. According to the adhiars, their giris come once in a year to take their share, which they sell on the spot to some dealers. All these contracts are registered under the law of W.B. Tenancy Act. In Subolbhita sharecropping began to decline soon after the peasant uprising. Here most of the giris were from Rajbanshi community who used to reside either within or the nearby villages. Immediately after the movement, they began to getting back their lands from the adhiars either by providing compensation either in land or in cash. All the existing tenants of subholbhita are only fixed-rent tenants.

Table: 4.2  
Distribution of Lessor Households According to Their Occupation

Occupation	Village-1		Village-2	
	Number of Households	Percentage of Households	Number of Households	Percentage of Households
Cultivation	1	10.00	0	0.00
Business	2	20.00	5	100.00
Service	7	70.00	0	0.00
Others	0	-	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Survey Data.

Table: 4.3  
Distribution of Lessor and Lessee households  
According to their Caste

Lessee caste	Lessor caste				
	Bengali Upper Caste	Bengali Intermediary and lower Caste	Rajbanshi	Nepali	Tribals
<b>Village-1</b>					
Ben. lower caste	-	4	-	3	1
Rajbanshi	-	-	-	1	2
Nepali	-	-	-	1	-
Tribals	-	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Village-2</b>					
Tribals	-	5	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Survey Data.

Crop sharing pattern has changed over the year in the village. According to Barga rule of Bengal, if the land owner refuses to

share any input cost, the share will be 75:25 in favour of the adhiar. The land owners do not bear any input cost.

We shall now look at some of the contractual terms other than those on crop and cost sharing. All the fixed-rent tenancies found in the survey are short term contracts. The duration is for nearly ten months. Tenancy arrangements which leave all decision making to the tenant, the land lord being interested only in the rent seems to be far from being typical, as may seen earlier. Earlier the land lord did confine himself to supervision of harvesting and quite frequently he used to participate in taking decisions, singly or jointly with the tenant, on matters of what crops to grow and what inputs to use. this phenomenon was more often observed among some advanced landlords. In the last twenty years with the declining tendency of sharecropping the lessors became aloof from the farming. They are not at all bothered, about the share they are getting or not at all interested to bear any kind of input cost. They lost interest in cultivation mainly due to the fact that they know that due to the barga registration the adhiars are getting 75% of the total product, naturally the latters are interested in increasing the output by any means. The sharecroppers are also no more dependent on their land lords, though the credit facility in the region is really under developed. On the whole it may be stated that, the entire agricultural sector is heavily dependent on the efforts of the middle, self-sufficient and marginal farmers.

#### *4.4 Incidence of Land Selling*

Before coming to the discussions of other agrarian markets we propose to see the occurrence of land sells in the villages. The incidence of land transfer has been quite high in the first village in last fifteen years. Twenty six percent of households sold a portion of their land during the period (see table: 4.4). And of these fifty percent cases it was sold to the tea estate owners. Most of these lands are non-irrigated land. Plagued by the problem of declining or uncertain output or some time to secure a job in the tea estate for one member of the family in that tea estate selling out their land to the tea estate owners. Some time the tea estate owners provoke the village people to sell the land to them. In some other cases land was transferred to those people who use it only for traditional agriculture. The incidence of land transfer in the second village is quite low. Only one case is recorded where the land was transferred owing to exigences of cash requirements.

Table:4.4  
Details of Land Sales in Subholbhita

	Purpose of selling land		
	To start a business	To get a job in tea estate	Other purpose
Up to 1 acre	1	3	3
More than 1 acre		1	

	Purpose of the buyer		
	Traditional agriculture	Commercial agriculture (except tea)	Tea plantation
Up to 1 acre	3	1	3
More than 1 acre			1

	The buyer resides in		
	same village	other village	Town
Up to 1 acre	1	3	3
More than 1 acre			1

Source: Survey Data.

#### 4.5 Labour Market

There is a bewildering variety of labour relations in agriculture not only between different regions of India but even within the same area. But one can see some patterns in these relations, which are in fact based on different combinations of a certain set of attributes such as the following:

(a) duration of contract: day, month, season, period of a particular operation, year, etc.; (b) basis of payment: hourly, daily, piece rate, product share etc.; (c) frequency of payment: day, month, year, several irregular instalments during the year, bonus during festivals, etc.; (d) medium of payment: cash, kind,

meals, snacks and their different combinations; (e) degree to which work obligations and hours of work are specified; (f) interlinkage with other contracts with the employer in credit or land relations, or in employment of other members of the labourer's family on the same employer's farm; (g) freedom to work for different employers: full freedom, total absence of such freedom, conditional or restricted freedom, etc, and so on.

It is necessary to take into account all these attributes or aspects of employer-employee relations to understand the nature and degree of attachment of labourers to employers. It is often assumed that long-term contracts with an employer necessarily implies a dependence-dominance relationship sharper than that characterising the relationship of other members of the rural poor vis-a vis the rural rich. However labourers on long term contract are not necessarily more dependent on their employers than those who may be called casual labourers or daily labourers. the degree of dependence is an aspect of the totality of the relationship into which a poor man enters with a rich man and is not determined by the duration of contract alone.

Again a common source of confusion exists between the concepts of duration of contract and the frequency of payment. The fact of a labour getting his payment daily does not necessarily mean that his duration of contract is a day. Labourers whose duration of contract might be the entire crop season but their wages are reckoned and paid on a daily basis like the casual labourers.

The right to work for more than one employer is also something not necessarily indicative of daily contract. It is true that most annual contracts require the labourer to work exclusively for his employer.

With respect to the involvement of households in the labour market, the households have been divided into three broad categories in terms of hiring-in and hiring-out labour, as may be seen from Table:4.5. This table shows the mode of cultivation according to the size-class of the operational holdings, where the leased-in land also has been taken into account. Table 4.5 clearly reveals the high percentage of self employment in agriculture among all the groups in both the villages. The only instance of household hiring the entire labour from the market but operates less than one acre of land is turned out to be one whose interests were primarily outside the realm of agriculture. In the first village all the households which rely only on family labour operate less than one acre of land.

Table:4.5  
Hiring in and hiring out of labour by households according to  
Size - class of operational holdings

Size class of operational holdings (in acre)	No of household by			
	No hiring in Only hiring out	Only hiring in No hiring out	Both hiring in and hiring out	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<b>Village-1</b>				
0.01-0.99	4	1	4	9
1.00-2.49	0	0	5	5
2.50-4.99	0	6	0	6
5.00 & +	0	9	0	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b> (13.79)	<b>16</b> (55.17)	<b>9</b> (31.03)	<b>29</b> (100.00)
<b>Village-2</b>				
0	4	0	0	4
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	0	1	14	15
2.50-4.99	0	9	1	10
5.00 & +	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b> (13.33)	<b>11</b> (36.67)	<b>15</b> (50.00)	<b>30</b> (100.00)

Source: survey Data.

One interesting observation in both of the villages was that the number of days the agricultural labourers devoted to agricultural pursuits is less than that in non-farm activities (see table: 4.6). Another noticeable trend was the slight wage differences across the two villages. In the first village it is Rs. twenty for the male workers and Rs. sixteen for the female workers, whereas in the second village it is Rs. twenty two and Rs. eighteen respectively. In the tea gardens the wage rates for males and females are higher viz rupees twenty five and twenty respectively. Lately there is a tendency especially in the first village to employ wage labour on a piece rate basis. The large land holders find this more



Table: 4.6  
Average Days of Employment of Wage Labourers, with and without Land

Size-Class Of Op.Holding	NO of Days Employed					
	Agricultural job		Non agri. job (except job in Tea estate)		In tea estate	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Village-1</b>						
0.01-0.99	80	18	100	0	60	45
1.00-2.49	60	15	50	0	40	15
2.50-4.99	40	0	30	0	15	0
	60	11	60	0	33	20
<b>Village-2</b>						
0	110	30	90	0	115	120
1.00-2.49	45	22	40	0	60	60
2.50-4.99	35	0	25	0	25	30
	63	17	52	0	67	70

Source: Survey Data.

Table: 4.7  
Average Days of Employment in Different Seasons

Size-class (in acres)	Days employed							
	Kharif Paddy		Rabi Paddy		Jute		Others	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Village-1</b>								
0.01-0.99	40	8	25	5	15	5	0	0
1.00-2.49	30	10	15	5	15	0	0	0
2.50-4.99	25	0	5	0	15	0	0	0
	32	6	15	3	15	2	0	0
<b>Village-2</b>								
0	50	15	40	10	0	0	20	5
1.00-2.49	25	10	15	7	0	0	5	5
2.50-4.99	20	0	15	0	0	0	0	0
	32	8	23	6	0	0	8	3

convenient. The non-Bengali labours, who migrate in the agricultural peak seasons from adjacent Bihar are employed on piece rate contract. However employing of immigrant labour is not common for the small peasants households.

Table: 4.8  
Employment of Labourers in Different Seasons and Different Crops

Size-class of Operational holdings (In acres)	Average No of days of labour employed by each Class									
	Kharif Paddy		Rabi Paddy		Jute		Others		All seasons	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Village-1										
0.01-0.99	10.63	0.88	5.25	0.88	2.50	0	0	0	18.38	1.75
1.00-2.49	22.00	4.4	14.00	3.4	3.8	0	0	0	39.8	7.8
2.50-4.99	34.14	7.86	22.29	5.71	8.71	0.43	0.43	0	65.57	14.0
5.00 & +	84.78	17.22	40.56	8.56	21.67	1.0	2.0	1.0	149.0	26.89
All size	37.89	7.59	20.52	4.64	9.17	0.36	0.61	0.25	68.19	12.61
Village-2										
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	30.6	6.73	20.0	5.07	0.67	0	1.73	0	53.0	11.8
2.50-4.99	40.0	9.90	32.0	9.60	4.00	0	3.7	0	79.7	19.5
5.00 & +	90.0	15.0	50.0	10.0	15.0	0	10.0	0	165.0	30.0
All Size	53.53	10.44	34.00	8.22	6.56	0	5.14	0	99.23	20.43

Source: Survey Data. (Annual Farm Labourers are not Included)

A sizeable section of labourers, as was to expected, reported themselves as being landless. However, as many as nine households, in the first village reported holding small bits of land, and hence they may be categorised as dwarf holdings. In the second village four households come under landless category. Interestingly we did not encounter a single instance where the labourer was attached for

a period of one year to a single employer. Thus the employer - labour relations considered in this section relate to those labourers who worked on a daily contract basis or piece rate contract basis and served simultaneously more than one employer during an year. They are indeed casual labourers.

Generally the terms and conditions of employment of casual labourers indicate that they are employed for a day or for different types of farm and non-farm work in almost all the seasons of an agricultural year. Since they are offered employment on an adhoc basis, they are free to choose any employer for this purpose. One might expect in such a situation that a casual labourer will serve a large number of employers during an agricultural year. Our data however do not corroborate this view.

The daily contract labourers of this region can be classified into three broad types in terms of their involvement with the number of landlords. There were two households who reported that they served less than five employers during the major part of the year. They have been termed as 'semi-attached' labourers. 'Semi' is here used in the sense that they were not attached fully to a single employer for the whole year, but also because presumably they were not in a position to seek job with a large number of employers or as purely attached labourers. As many as eight labourers broadly satisfied the concept of 'casual labourers'.

Table: 4.9  
Types of Labourers by No. of Employers served

Types of labourers	No. of labourers		
	Less than 1 acre	More than or equal to 1 acre	Total
Village-1			
Attached (one employer)	2 (100.00)	0	2 (100.00)
Semi attached (< 5 employers)	10 (66.66)	5 (33.33)	15 (100.00)
Casual (> 5 employers)	5 (62.50)	3 (37.50)	8 (100.00)
All Types	17 (68.00)	8 (32.00)	25 (100.00)
Village-2	Landless	More than or equal to 1 acre	Total
Attached (one employer)	2 (100.00)	0	2 (100.00)
Semi attached (< 5 employers)	5 (25.00)	15 (75.00)	20 (100.00)
Casual (> 5 employers)	3 (27.27)	8 (72.73)	11 (100.00)
All Types	10 (30.30)	23 (69.70)	33 (100.00)

Source: Survey Data.

There is a common notion that labourers in agriculture in different parts of West Bengal generally belong to a community or a social group distinct from that of their employers. Thus, distinct caste/community groups are more or less graded according to their economic position. For example, high and middle castes generally own a fair amount of cultivable land, whereas lower castes and tribal people generally belong to the wage earning or sharecropping occupations. Our North Bengal experience is, however, different from this. Our data show that the two classes - a class of land

owners (or employees) and the class of labourers (employee) are drawn from the same community in the region<sup>3</sup>.

Let us now examine the role of credit in labour contracts described above. We observed that only nine labour households out of thirteen (i.e. 69.23 percent) entered the credit market as receivers of consumption loan in the first village. And same number of labour households (47.37) got loans in the second village also. It is reported that with one exception none of other labour households received non consumption loan (i.e. loans for expenses on ceremonial purposes etc.) from any source. In the first village out of nine debtors, only one secured a loan from his employer (or land owners) and consequently works as attached labour under him. The corresponding figure for non-employer source (viz. money lenders etc.) is more. In the second village there was no instance of the land owner providing credit.

It was also observed that in the first village out of eight cases of loan, only one labourer mentioned that his employer is charging interest for the consumption loan which was supplied by him. The corresponding figure in the case of non-employer source is four out of seven. These observations clearly indicate that the indebtedness of the labourer to his employer is not a common feature in this region. Non employer money lenders are also not interested in entering into the usurious practices, particularly with the labourers.

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<sup>3</sup> It is not our demand that North Bengal is only region where both the employers and employees are drawn from same community. This kind of situation is found in quite a few other regions in India.

It is, however, quite often argued that as the labourers generally do not have any other surety except their labour power to offer against loans, they do not get loans even from their employers. But in order to ensure a steady supply of labour required by the employers, the labourers sometimes are offered wage advances against future commitment of labour where the labourer takes advances from his employer, he works at a wage, lower than market wage as adjustment towards repayment. The payment of interest thus takes the form of wage rent and in this way the employer indirectly enters into usurious practices with the labourers. Thus, the employer's need for a dependable and readily available source of labour supply and consideration of usurious income derived from labourers provide the major motivation for such types of labour contracts. Our data do not however corroborate this view fully.

In view of the backward nature of agriculture of this region and the greater dependence of family labour in the landowning families who have also no social prejudice against doing manual work in agriculture, the demand for hired labour for cultivation is slack. Therefore, the question of securing labour supply by providing wage advances to the labourers does not apply to any significant extent in this place. More over the relationship between the landowner and the daily contract labourer is not personalised enough in character. It is, therefore, not a safe proposition for the employers to provide credit to the labourers who are not able to provide surety; they are deprived of much needed credit. For these reasons, it can be said that the labour markets in this region is not interlocked with the non-institutional credit markets.

#### 4.6.1 *The Credit Market*

Before we consider the specific question of interlinkage of credit market with the other markets, we propose to briefly describe the general scenario with respect to the credit conditions of the households vis a vis different size classes. A recent report on Panchayats in West Bengal, captured a tendency of re-emergence of private money lending system<sup>4</sup>.

Our findings with respect to the credit contracts pertaining to the peasant households do not contradict this observation. It is true that there exists a high degree of credit requirements for the rural households for both agricultural and non agricultural purposes. Thus 22 out of 30 households in the first village and 18 out of 30 households had been involved in credit contracts. As the data indicate in the first village about 59 percent of the total indebted households had to rely on private agencies for their credit requirements. Where as in the second village for 78 percent of indebted households private agencies was the principal source of credit. The comparable figure for credit from institutional sources was relatively low with 41 and 22 per cent respectively in the two villages. The private lenders are thus playing a dominant

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<sup>4</sup> "With the co-operative credit structure in disarray and the scheme for institutional finance from commercial banks in a state of desuetude, the all important questions arises as to where poor farmers meet their credit requirements from. An academic of repute told us that for a decade and a half after the nationalisation of commercial banks, when the banking network spread far and deep into the countryside, money lenders did go underground. But from the early eighties onwards the number of defaulters to co-operative credit institutions as well as to commercial banks increased. The defaulting farmers thereafter lost access to credit sources. a number of micro-studies have brought out the reemergence of private money lending system from the mid-eighties onwards. Other attendant circumstances bear out this conclusion [Mukherji and Bandopadhyay 1992:33].

role in the rural credit market. There is not a single case where the household got credit from both the sources.

Only 9 households in the first village and 4 households in the second village received loans exclusively from institutional sources. Predictably, the landless and marginal peasants who have very little collateral to offer had been largely deprived of the institutional credit (Table:4.10. column7). The percentage of the receipts of institutional loans increases systematically as we move from the group of landless to the higher size class of peasant households. Since the institutional loans are being distributed according to the asset base of the creditors consequently the poor peasants are being deprived of this source.

Since there exists a high degree of credit requirements among all the peasant households and since the institutions are more inclined to serve the substantive peasants, it is only logical to infer that the poor peasants would depend more on the private lenders. Only one landless household, which got an institutional credit is a registered sharecropping household operating more than 4 acres of land. The rural market is now being dominated by the private money lenders.



Table: 4.10  
Description of sources of Credit for Various Classes  
of Agricultural Households

Size- Class of HH	Insti- tution only	Pri- vate only	Both and Pvt	No of HH who got credit	No of HH in this Group	(4) as %age of (5)	(1) as %age of (4)	(2) as %age of (4)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Village-1								
0	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
0.01-0.99	1	7	-	8	11	72.73	12.50	87.50
1.00-2.49	1	3	-	4	6	66.67	25.00	75.00
2.50-4.99	2	3	-	5	8	62.50	40.00	60.00
5.00 & +	5	0	-	5	5	100.00	100.00	0.00
	9	13	-	22	30	73.33	40.91	59.09
Village-2								
0	1	2	-	-	9	33.33	33.33	66.67
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	1	11	-	12	14	85.71	8.33	91.67
2.50-4.99	1	1	-	2	6	33.33	50.00	50.00
5.00 & +	1	0	-	-	1	100.00	100.00	0.00
	4	14	-	14	30	46.67	22.22	77.78

Source: Survey Data.

Table:4.11  
Indebtedness among the Households

Size-group (in acre)	INSTITUTIONAL							INFORMAL						
	AMOUNT				PURPOSE			AMOUNT				PURPOSE		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	A	C	S	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	A	C	S
Village-1														
0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	5	1	-	4	5	1
1.00-2.49	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	2	-	-	1	2	-
2.50-4.99	-	-	-	2	1	1	1	-	3	-	-	3	2	-
5.00 & +	-	-	-	5	4	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
All size	-	-	1	8	6	2	3	2	10	1	-	8	9	1
Village-2														
0	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	-
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	4	7	-	-	9	3	-
2.50-4.99	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-
5.00 & +	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
All size	-	-	-	4	4	-	-	4	10	-	-	10	4	-

Note: Amount; (1)=Less than Rs. 100, (2)=Rs. 100 to Rs. 500,  
(3)=Rs. 501 to Rs. 1000 (4)=More than Rs. 1000. Purpose:  
A=Agricultural Purpose, C=Consumption, S=Social Purpose.  
Source: Survey Data.

#### 4.6.2 The Role Private Money Lenders

In a pioneering work on the lender-creditor relation in a backward economy, Amit Bhaduri developed the hypothesis that there exists an interlinkage between tenancy and credit contract involving the landlord and the tenant and that the poor adoption of the yield-raising innovations by the landlord can be explained in terms of an

usurious rate of interest he charges on the consumption loan advanced to the tenants [Bhaduri 1973]. Probably this was the situation in this region in the mid-sixties. But after the breaking up of big holdings and with the end of jotedars' reign, the scenario has changed dramatically. The first point to mention here is the lessors are neither interested nor capable to evict the lessees. And all the fixed rent lessors are also basically holders of very small piece of land and mostly engaged in some other nonagricultural jobs. The landlords thus did not play any significant role in the private credit market on the region surveyed by us.

A kind of interlinkage, however, does exist between credit and output. But before we take up that issue, we should describe the dominant forces in the informal credit market. The informal credit market is dominated by the merchant cum lenders, petty traders and a category that could be termed as 'friends and relatives' (Table:4.12). Let us consider the case of 'friends and relatives' first. The 'friends and relatives' account for 7 cases out of 13 cases (54 percent) of short-term credit in the first village. Though in the second village only 2 out of 14 private loans (14.29 percent) are provided by this category. 'Friends and relatives' often supply interest free loans to the peasants. Even when they charge interest, ordinarily the rate is much lower than that of the professional moneylenders.

The merchant cum lenders account for only 7.7 percent in private loans of the first village. But it is higher i.e. 12 out of 14 (85.71 percent) in the second village. The repayment is sought in

terms of money or crop. In both the villages the private money lenders are also wholesale dealers of agricultural products and do not reside in the village. In the case of the second village the lending business is virtually monopolised by ex-jotedar of the

Table:4.12  
Main Sources of Short Term Credit

LENDERS	SIZE-CLASS (in acre)					
	0	0.01-0.99	1.00-2.49	2.50-4.99	5.00& +	Total
Village-1						
Institution	0	0	0	0	0	0
Merchant cum lender	0	1	0	0	0	1
Big land holders	0	2	0	0	0	2
Petty traders	0	2	1	0	0	3
Friends & relatives	0	2	2	3	0	7
Total	0	7	3	3	0	13
Village-2						
Institution	0	-	0	0	0	0
Merchant cum lender	2	-	9	1	0	12
Big land holders	0	-	0	0	0	0
Petty traders	0	-	0	0	0	0
Friends & relatives	0	-	2	0	0	2
Total	2	-	11	1	0	14

Source:Survey Data.

village. Apart from being buyer of the agricultural products of this village, he is also a dealer of modern agricultural inputs (seed, fertilizer, pesticide). In addition to private money

lenders the small grocery-owners are also an important source for consumption loan in the first village. Their transactions with the peasants was mainly through the grocery items. While in some cases the transaction was in monetary terms. However there were also case in which the repayment was in kind.

The imputed rates of interest for such transactions have been presented in the following table. While examining the rates, one should note that the arrangement in which a specific amount of crop is repaid irrespective of price (Rudra, 1975) seems to be a matter of older days. The contract involves a rate of interest to be paid at the time of repayment, the crop equivalence of the interest is calculated at the prevalent market price of crop. The rates are of course very high.

The existence of a high rate of interest in the informal credit market may be explained in terms of the economics of monopoly. The unorganised market for rural credit operates in virtual isolation and the ruling level of interest rate in the organised market has little significance for the unorganised market. Its isolation depends on the fact that the borrowing small peasants have no access to credit in the organised market, and it is this isolated working of the unorganised market for private credit which allows the rate of interest to be fixed independently of its level in the organised market...The borrowing small peasant has access to one or two moneylenders who would conceivably lend him money. Similarly the lender also has a highly restricted domain of operation consisting of a few peasants whose economic and social conditions are intimately known to him. Neither the borrower nor

the lender satisfies the basic condition of 'anonymity' of an impersonal, organised market for credit (Bhaduri, 1984: 74-75).

The isolated character of unorganised market resulting from the borrowers' inaccessibility to the organised market for credit creates the situation of monopoly that explains the existence of a

Table:4.13  
Interest Rate of Private Credit

Monthly Interest rate (per cent)	Lenders				Total
	Friends and relatives	Prof. Money lenders	Petty Traders	Land-owner employer	
Villagee-1					
0	1	-	-	-	1
1 - 5	6	-	2	-	8
6 - 10	-	1	-	1	2
10 +	-	-	1	1	2
could not be ascertained	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	1	3	2	13
Villagee-2					
0	-	-	-	-	-
1 - 5	2	-	-	-	2
6 - 10	-	-	-	-	-
10 +	-	1	-	-	1
could not be ascertained		11	-	-	11
Total	2	12	-	-	14

Source: Survey Data.

of the lower rungs struggle for each input starting from land also for water. But in Terai people do not have to struggle much for water in the kharif season. The rain water fulfils their requirements. But for the rabi paddy, lack of adequate water in both the villages, deters peasants from going in extensive cultivation. The people from the upper stratum of agrarian hierarchy, however are in a better position in this respect. Land access to the canal or

**Table:4.15**  
**Operational Holding and Area Operated by Households**

Size Group of holdings (in acre)	Number of House holds	Kharif Paddy			Rabi Paddy		
		No of H.Hs	Area in acres	Avg op area	No of H.Hs	Area in acres	Avg op area
<b>Village-1</b>							
0	1	1	-	-	7	-	-
0.01-0.99	8	8	4.33	0.54	2	0.50	0.25
1.00-2.49	5	5	8.00	1.60	5	3.50	0.70
2.50-4.99	7	7	26.85	3.84	7	9.50	1.36
5.00 & +	9	9	59.67	6.63	9	18.33	2.04
<b>All sizes</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>98.85</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31.83</b>	<b>1.60</b>
<b>Village-2</b>							
0	4	4	-	-	4	-	-
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	15	15	26.49	1.77	15	17.50	1.17
2.50-4.99	10	10	33.51	3.35	10	20.50	2.05
5.00 & +	1	1	6.67	6.67	1	4.00	4.00
<b>All sizes</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>66.67</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>42.00</b>	<b>1.40</b>

Source: Survey Data.

high rate of interest. No neat model developed on the basis of 'lenders risk hypothesis' seems to be applicable in the unorganised credit market of the rural economy.

Table:4.14  
Modes of Repayment

Modes of Repayment	LENDERS				Total
	Land holders	Shop-keeper	Professional Money lender	Friends & Relatives	
Village-1					
Money to money	-	3	1	7	11
Money to crop	-	-	-	-	-
Money to service	2	-	-	-	2
Total	2	3	1	7	13
Village-2					
Money to money	-	-	1	2	3
Money to crop	-	-	11	-	11
Money to service	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	12	2	14

Source: Survey Data.

#### 4.7 The Output Market

The output market plays a significant role in influencing change in the agrarian structure. It influences the farmers to increase the production of crops. However output market is itself in turn influenced by other factor markets of the agrarian economy. Labour, manure and seed are some of the basic inputs in agriculture. And above all land is a important factor influencing output. The quality of land and its irrigational facilities could directly affect production. Equal access to the input markets is not easily ensured. In hierarchical agrarian structure the people



river water is usually controlled by the agriculturists from upper size-classes. In the first village lack of water prevent with holders of less than one acre of land from going for Rabi paddy. For the same reason even the households from upper strata are constrained from resorting to extensive Rabi paddy cultivation. With relatively better access to water the average cropped area under Rabi paddy, in the second village, is not insignificant.

Table 4.16 shows the cropping pattern the different size classes. Kharif paddy is the main crop for all size class in both the villages. As indicated earlier the relatively better endowed water sources in the second village the peasants were in a position to go for the Rabi crop of paddy. Owing to problems of marketing, the extent of jute cultivation has steadily declined and has now been more or less discontinued. Even with respect to the first village, it is the small land holders who had taken to jute cultivation. However, the gross area is said to be negligible. The cultivation of wheat has lately been gaining importance in both the villages, but it is mainly grown by the middle farmers. It is mainly those peasants who can avail some water appear to have taken to wheat production. The use of HYV variety is widely prevalent across size group of households. Still the proportion of HYV used in relation to local variety significantly lower in both the villages. For Rabi paddy, the use of HYV is negligible. In both the villages peasants prefer to cultivate a local variety called 'Nepali Kalam'.

Table:4.16  
Cropping Pattern of the Households

Size Group of operational holding (in acre)	No of households operated	total area of this gr. (in acre)	Total area covered by all crops (in acre)	Proportion of cropped area under					
				Kharif paddy	Rabi paddy	Jute	Wheat	Veg. & Potato	Others
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Village-1									
0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0.01-0.99	8	4.33	7.63	56.75	6.55	28.44	-	-	8.26
1.00-2.49	5	8.00	14.49	55.21	24.15	13.80	2.28	2.28	2.28
2.49-4.99	7	26.85	46.84	57.32	20.28	11.91	2.84	5.15	2.50
5.00 & +	9	60.67	111.75	54.29	16.85	9.03	13.87	3.57	2.39
All size	30	99.85	180.71	55.25	17.89	9.50	10.98	3.72	2.66
Village-2									
0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	15	26.82	50.35	52.61	34.76	2.48	7.23	2.28	0.64
2.49-4.99	10	33.84	66.57	50.29	30.77	3.11	8.76	3.84	3.23
5.00 & +	1	6.67	14.67	45.47	27.26	6.82	13.63	3.41	3.41
All size	30	67.33	131.65	50.64	31.90	8.72	3.28	3.20	2.26

Source: Survey Data.

Average yield of Kharif and Rabi paddy favours the landholders in the upper size classes in both the villages. The use of only local variety, is one of the reasons behind the low productivity of Rabi paddy. In contrast, in the second village the 'self-sufficient' peasants are in comparatively better position. This could perhaps be related to the greater use of HYV and the intra-regional variations in soil qualities in Terai.

**Table: 4.17**  
Use of HYV According to the Size class of Operational Holdings

Size-class	Operated area	Kharif Trad.	Kharif HYV	Kharif Total	Rabi Trad.	Rabi HYV	Rabi Total
<b>Village-1</b>							
0.01-0.99	4.33 [4.34]	3.65 (84.30)	0.66 (15.24)	4.33 (100.00)	0.50 (100.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.50 (100.00)
1.00-2.49	8.00 [8.01]	3.67 (45.88)	4.33 (54.13)	8.00 (100.00)	3.50 (100.00)	0.00 (0.00)	3.50 (100.00)
2.50-4.99	26.85 [26.89]	9.17 (34.17)	17.67 (65.83)	26.84 (100.00)	5.50 (57.89)	4.00 (42.11)	9.50 (100.00)
5.00 & +	60.67 [60.76]	21.67 (36.32)	38.00 (63.68)	59.67 (100.00)	12.33 (67.27)	6.00 (32.73)	18.33 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.85</b> [100.00]	<b>38.16</b> (38.61)	<b>60.66</b> (61.37)	<b>98.84</b> (100.00)	<b>21.83</b> (68.58)	<b>10.00</b> (31.42)	<b>31.83</b> (100.00)
<b>Village-2</b>							
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	26.82 [39.83]	9.00 (33.96)	17.50 (66.04)	26.50 (100.00)	17.50 (100.00)	0.00 (0.00)	17.50 (100.00)
2.50-4.99	33.84 [50.26]	9.83 (29.33)	23.68 (70.67)	33.51 (100.00)	20.50 (100.00)	0.00 (0.00)	20.50 (100.00)
5.00 & +	6.67 [9.91]	2.00 (29.99)	4.67 (70.01)	6.67 (100.00)	4.00 (100.00)	0.00 (0.00)	4.00 (100.00)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67.33</b> [100.00]	<b>20.83</b> (31.24)	<b>45.85</b> (68.76)	<b>66.68</b> (100.00)	<b>42.00</b> (100.00)	<b>0.00</b> (0.00)	<b>42.00</b> (100.00)

Note: Figures in [] and () parentheses are percentage of Total Operated area of the village and percentage of the total cropped area of that size-class for that season respectively.  
Source: Survey Data.

**Table:4.18**  
Average Yield of Different Size-Classes

Size-class (in acres)	Average yield: Village-1		Average yield: Village-2	
	Kharif paddy	Rabi paddy	Kharif paddy	Rabi paddy
<b>Village-1</b>				
0.01-0.99	625.87	550.00	-	-
1.00-2.49	693.75	607.14	762.57	674.34
2.5-4.99	761.64	615.79	810.21	736.59
5.00 & +	842.26	663.83	817.09	737.50
<b>All class</b>	<b>730.88</b>	<b>609.19</b>	<b>796.62</b>	<b>716.14</b>

Source: Survey Data.

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For the first village the nearest market is 'Batasi' at a distance of five kilometres from the village. But Naxalbari is a bigger market. From the second village the distance of Naxalbari is five kilometres. Bagdogra the nearest town is at a distance of ten kilometres from this village. The price of paddy differs between 'Batasi' and 'Naxalbari'. Though according to the peasants, the price difference between 'Naxalbari' and 'Bagdogra' is only marginal. The access to the market varies across size class. The people who can carry bulk of their products only can avail of the distant market. The tendency to carry crops jointly is not prevalent in the villages. In both the villages people carry the products by cycle-van. The use of bullock cart for transporting grains does not exist any more. The avail of the markets also linked with some other reasons, the frequency of selling products. The households which belong to the lower strata sell in small amounts and go even twice a week to sell products. The households from upper strata can sell their products in bulk and their frequency to go the market is comparatively less.

Table:4.19  
Distance of Product Market

Size-class of Operational holdings	No of H H	Distance of market			col(3)	col(4)	col(5)
		Only M1 5Km	Only M2 10Km	Both M1 & M2	as % of col (2)	as % of col (2)	as% of col (2)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
village-1							
0.01-0.99	8	6	0	2	75.00	0.00	25.00
1.00-2.49	5	2	0	3	40.00	0.00	60.00
2.50-4.99	7	1	0	6	14.29	0.00	85.71
5.00 & +	9	0	2	7	0.00	22.22	77.78
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31.03</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>62.07</b>
village-2							
0.01-0.99	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	15	14	-	1	93.33	-	6.67
2.50-4.99	10	7	-	3	70.00	-	30.00
5.00 & +	1	-	-	1	-	-	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>80.77</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>19.23</b>

Note: M1 denotes Market-1 and M2 denotes Market-2.  
Source: Survey Data.

Table:4.20.  
Frequency of Selling Products by Different Size Groups  
(In season time)

Frequency of Selling Products						
Size-class (in acres)	Not sold at all	Twice a week	Once a week	Twice a month	Once a month	Total
Village-1						
0.01-0.99	6	2	0	0	0	8
1.00-2.49	0	0	3	2	-	5
2.5-4.99	0	0	2	4	1	7
5.00 & +	0	0	0	7	2	9
<b>Total</b>	6	2	5	13	3	29
Village-2						
0.01-0.99	-	-	-	-	-	-
1.00-2.49	2	10	2	0	0	14
2.5-4.99	0	5	6	0	0	11
5.00 & +	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	2	15	9	0	0	26

Source: Survey Data.

#### ***4.8 The Selective Linking***

The role of credit in linking labour, tenancy, and output markets lead to a situation of interlocking of the three markets. The landowner leasing out land to the tenant further reinforces this linkage by providing him with credit. Similarly in this circumstances, he would like to reinforce the relationship by which the landowner not only is able to maintain an assured labour supply but can increase his profits through usury. Combined with other cultural elements of the structure a notion of a semi-feudal

structure with dominance and related system of production is derived.

To what extent does this explain the agrarian structure in the terai region of North Bengal. If one argues that the land owner combines in him both the roles of the lessor and the creditor, or employer and creditor and that these roles are broad enough to include not only his tenants and labourers as debtors but also other debtors, then, empirically, the interlinkage model stands validated. However, in the North Bengal Terai we find, from our analysis, that generally the landowner, when he happens to extend credit, does so only to his own tenants and refrains from extending credit even to his labourers. Thus while he is extending credit to selective individuals linked to him in the productive process, he is not an usurer. Hence, the interlinkage model does not satisfy the characteristics of the agrarian structure in this region. We are inclined to believe that it may be more appropriate to characterize this phenomenon as 'selective linking' of credit with labour and output. That the situation here seems to be different does not appear exceptional when we examine the historicity of the settlement pattern in a non-regulated area composed of distinct ethnic communities, and where inter-class transactions are often circumscribed within the same ethnic community.

#### *4.9 Concluding Remarks*

The historical specificity of a backward economy can of course be captured in terms of a market failure, in varying degrees, in the condition of labour asset and insurance for agricultural activities. However, the theoretical essence of market failure in

the backward economy is that capitalism is yet to develop in its full form so that the rate of technological progress remains low and, therefore, the differential rent component remains weak. However there may develop a transitory situation which can be noted as the metayer system, 'or sharecropping under which the farmer furnishes labour, his own or others', and also a portion of working capital such as, cattle and the produce is divided between tenant and landlord in definite proportion which varies from country to country' (Marx, 1962:783)<sup>1</sup>. This is a characteristic of a feudal society.

Capital in a semi-feudal society is determined by the possible earning from alternative uses of investable surplus. In a backward economy, instead of utilising it in a productive venture in agriculture, the investable surplus may be 'utilised alternatively as merchant and usury capital. So long as the enhanced rent is as high as his stationary rent plus earning from trade and usury, the landlord may opt for sharing the working capital in agriculture. If his earnings from agriculture fails to maintain this critical level he will be reluctant to share the working capital in agriculture. There could be some non-economic considerations in sharing the working capital even when the return is not attractive. The sociology of 'moral economy' may explain this behaviour (Scott, 1976). But then the landowner will definitely refuse to incur an investment if the required amount is so high that he cannot ignore the economics of investment.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl (1962): Capital, Vol.3, Foreign Language Press, Moscow).



## CHAPTER 5

### *Summary and Conclusions*

In Terai, irregular tenancy arrangements and acute land hunger gave birth to a series of peasant resistances since mid forties. The Tebhaga movement of 1946, the land grab movement of mid 1950s and later the Naxalbari movement of late 1960s were a few attempts by the poor peasants to solve the problems. Further, in the late 1970s, West Bengal Government attempted an institutional intervention by tenancy reforms throughout the state known as 'Operation Barga'. The present study is an attempt to examine the changes in the agrarian structure in the wake of the political movement of the late 1960s on the State intervention of the late 1970s.

A study of the evolving tenancy arrangement and land holding structure in this frontier region, in the broader context of the history of a large scale peasant mobilization and revolt, is one of the major concerns of this study. The empirical relevance of this problem has been analysed within the framework of interlinkage. In this context two levels of relations are considered as coordinates of the problem. At the concrete empirical level are the relations defining attributes such as terms and conditions of contract, credit relations and the like. At the most abstract level, the agrarian class categories, their relative positions in the agrarian hierarchy and their access to agrarian markets has been studied carefully. Since an agrarian conflict is the product of the agrarian structure which is conceived partly or fully within an interlinkage framework, two villages have been chosen from the

movement belt as a measure for assessing the empirical veracity of the interlinkage approach.

North Bengal as a whole, except the hilly part of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district, is treated as one zone despite intra-zonal variations in some respects. This is because of the fact that the districts which constitute this zone share some major characteristics both with regard to the techno-economic base as well as the institutional framework of agriculture. The region does not have any canal irrigation network. Pump irrigation in pockets accounts for a very small portion of irrigated area. Here agriculture is essentially rain fed. Rajbanshis were the main cultivating community in this region until a large influx of surplus tea plantation labourers in agriculture, especially in Terai and eastern part of Jalpaiguri district. Later, a part of Bengali refugees from East Bengal joined the Rajbanshis and Madesias. In a large part of North Bengal the cultivation used to carry on within an institutional frame work known as giri-adhiari system on the basis of 50:50 crop sharing. The cultivation used to be carried on within an institutional frame work known as giri-adhiari system. Initially the land-man ratio, in the area was favourable while land concentration was very high, large areas given to the jotedars, resulted in a specific character to North Bengal agriculture.

The northern districts of pre partition Bengal witnessed a wide spread sharecropper uprising known as Tebhaga in which, as the name implies, the principal demand was for a change in the share from half to two-thirds of produce in favour of the cultivators. The

socio-economic impact of partition was not only restricted to the land man ratio for the occurrence of a large influx of refugees from East Bengal. The East Bengal peasants who used to carry on much more intensive cultivation, were able to get hold of the land and also to change the cropping pattern and introduce a dynamism in the areas where they settled.

In North Bengal the incidences of the eviction of sharecroppers was significantly higher than any part of Central and South Bengal. Over and above the normal increase due to genuine resumption for 'self-cultivation' and de jure evictions, the fact that defacto sharecropping on inferior terms were enumerated residually as agricultural labourers caused a sudden and sharp increase in the number of agricultural labourers in the North Bengal districts, were previously the extent of adhiari kept the agricultural labour requirement at a low level.

Two decades after the Tebhaga movement, Terai witnessed another peasant revolt. Slogans and Programmes were similar to earlier one. The movement took its final shape in the spring of 1967 by seizing jotedars' crops and burning their (jotedars') land documents.

The incidences of peasant uprising in the late sixties were high in both the villages under our study. But for the differences in other socio-economic variables, the micro level impact of peasant movement and institutional reforms differ markedly in some respects between these two villages. Subholbhita is essentially a Scheduled Caste village whereas Sevdela is a Scheduled Tribe village. In the

first village where the giri-adhiari relationship exists only was between the members of the same community (Rajbanshi), experienced a shift from sharecropping to self cultivation soon after the agitation period. Before the government could launch the programme called Operation Barga, the incidence of sharecropping had already decreased. The settlement pattern of Sevdela is quite different from Subholbhita, the first village under our study. It was an adhiar based village where adhiars were basically from the Madesia community and the jotedar was from Bihari Yadav community. Hence in the second village the giri-adhiari relationship was between the Bihari and Madesia. Here most of the ex-adhiars benefitted from the Barga registration programme and got land under the Barga law of the state.

In both the villages as consequences of the peasant uprising of the late sixties, the jotedars lost interest in tenancy. In most of the cases they sold out their land to the adhiars or someone else. In Subholbhita, where the jotedar was from Rajbanshi community, the jotedar's family was fragmented and the whole landed property was divided among the families in early seventies after the peasant agitation. They compensated the adhiars by providing cash or land. The members of ex-jotedar's families have become owner cultivators, though now they take more interest in the jobs in Government and in other institutions. Hence they play little role in controlling the agrarian markets of the village.

The agrarian scenario of Sevdela differs significantly from Subholbhita. Here the jotedar was an absentee landlord from Bihari community. During the land grab movement of mid fifties he sold

out a substantial portion of land above the land ceiling to some Bengali businessmen of Siliguri town, who in turn leased out those lands to the Madesia adhiars. Later after the Naxalbari uprising, the jotedar again began to sell out his land, but this time to the adhiars or to those people who started self cultivation and compensated the adhiars in terms of cash or land. As a result of above practices, in both the villages the landless adhiars have become marginal or poor owner cultivators over the last twenty years or so.

The breaking up of joint families was a dominant feature in Subholbhita than in Sevdela. The giris other than the jotedar (basically big and middle land holders) of the village began to divide the joint landed property from mid seventies onward. The incidences of grabbing the land of the giris by the activists generated a fear among them of losing land. This fear induced them to start self cultivation which paved way for family partitioning. The interactions with the urban people, by the members of those size-class due to their migration in nearby urban centres for jobs from early seventies, possibly was another reason behind the breaking up of families. Due to the breaking up of families, the group of middle peasants shifted into self-sufficient peasants.

Again in late seventies, with the Operation Barga programme launched by the government, the rest of the adhiars of the second village either became registered bargadar or got some land due to the transfer of land by the landowner according to the Bargadar Act.

During the seventies and early eighties, Subolbhita experienced a big wave of immigration from Bangladesh. It had intensified the problem of rising share of agricultural labourers in the total rural workforce. Many of these landless people got homestead land and/or cultivable land under the patta distribution of the State Government. Sevdela being a tribal village did not experience any major pressure of immigration. The cases of patta distribution in Sevdela are negligible. The landless labourers of this village are still awaiting for their pattas of cultivable land.

Our study shows that in both the villages, sharecropping has given way to self cultivation. In the first village a few cases of fixed rent tenancy are recorded, wherein the lands leased out are not more than 2.5 acres. The lessors are basically petty traders. No case of sharecropping is recorded in the whole village, except a Brahmin household, who leases out land. All the cases of sharecropping, recorded in the second village, are the mere continuation of old contracts. The landowners are basically from business community of Siliguri town they have little interest in cultivation.

All the major agrarian markets in these two villages were found to be inadequately developed. Since the majority of the landholding communities are of small middle size category, there is a tendency to cultivate with family labour. Hence the demand for wage labour is rather slack. Moreover the agricultural labourers in both the villages, prefer to opt for non- agricultural jobs, especially in tea estates, where the wage is relatively higher than agricultural wages.

It was seen that institutional credit is out of reach for the poorer section of the rural society. As a result, the non-institutional credit with high interest rate, has come up to fulfil the demand of poor people with high interest rate. In the first village petty traders and friends and relatives were the major sources of such credits. In the second village a merchant cum whole sale dealer who is the ex-jotedar of the village was the main source of non-institutional credit. In many cases where the land owner provided credit, he does so in his role as a friend or relative rather than as an employer. Due to the inadequate development of institutional credit facility for the peasants from all size categories, a possible linkage between credit and output market was observed in the second village. Without getting the required credit from the institutions, the marginal and poor peasants rely on the private credit sources who charge high rate of interest. Here in most of the cases repayment takes place in terms of crops. On the other hand the main money lender is also a wholesale dealer of agricultural products and a bulk purchaser from this village.

Our study also reveals that the output market was inadequately developed. Only the people from the upper class have a better bargaining power in the market.

It is very clear from the study that, the markets are not interlinked except in a few cases. Rather it can be said that the entire agrarian economy in this region is running at a low equilibrium level, where the markets did not develop well for want of an inadequate infrastructure. The study high lights that in

changing and shaping the agro-economic condition, the role of both the technological and institutional factors, are important and interdependent. The development of one without changes in the other fails to bring about significant progress.

We noted in the course of our study, that the residual problems of the rural poor in this area are of conglomerate nature and not of distinct categories like the sharecroppers, small peasants or hired agricultural labourers. The categories are overlapping and interpenetrating. Sharecroppers have turned into owner cultivator cum fixed rent tenants. Agricultural labourers has transformed themselves into small landowning peasants through distribution of vested lands etc. And the exogenous changes like relationship among the various rural classes of people, have changed from informal to formal.

The study observed an upward movement among the rural poor during the last fifteen years. However one does not find a significant success either in terms of redistribution of vested land or recording of bargadari rights. They cannot be fully successful unless the productive forces, other than land, are harnessed for the benefit of all sections of rural population.



## GLOSSARY

Adhi:	Half or fifty per cent.
Adhiar:	Sharecroppers of North Bengal. He is supposed to get fifty per cent of the crop produced under his tenantship.
Adibasi:	Tribal. In terai the Rajbanshis refer the immigrated tribals by this name only.
Aman:	Late variety of paddy, harvested in winter.
Anchal:	Cluster of villages.
Aus:	An early variety of paddy, harvested during rains.
Barga:	Sharecropping cultivation.
Bargadar:	Sharecropper of west Bengal.
Barujibi:	A Bengali intermediary caste. cultivation of betel leaf is their traditional occupation.
Benami land:	Illegal holding.
Bhutia:	A hilly tribe of Tibetan origin in North Bengal.
Bigha:	Measure of Land. In terai one third of an acre.
Biradari:	Lineage.
Choudhury:	Bengali land revenue collector of North Bengal In pre British Period. They were not only the chief land holders and jotedars in their areas but also 'exercised civil and criminal powers'.
Dewan:	Person in charge of revenue account of a Princely State.
Giri:	Originally a Rajbanshi term for the lessor, who leasses out his land to the sharecroppers.
Gorkha:	A warrior caste of Nepal.
Gram:	Village.
Hat:	Weekly market. The place where people gather for the weekly market is called a hat.
Haziri:	Daily wage.

Jotedar:	In North Bengal, jotedar is a person who holds in severalty, joint or in common, a piece of land for which he pays revenue directly to the government. His tenement is called a jote. The jote constitutes the kernel of the revenue system. The jote is a holding, i.e. a cultivating unit, and not just a tenure. Most of the time the jotedar leases out his land to the sharecroppers.
Kalomati:	Black soil.
Kayastha:	Elite class of Bengal generally come next to Brahmins in caste hierarchy.
Khas land:	Land under direct ownership, demeshe land, surplus land.
Khas-Mahal:	The areas which are not yet recorded in government documents.
Khatian:	Paper document of ownership of a particular land.
Kisan <sup>1</sup> :	peasant.
Kisan <sup>2</sup> :	A tribal community of Chotanagpur region.
Koch:	A tribal community of North Bengal
Krishak:	Farmer / Peasant.
Lepcha:	A hilly tribe of Sikkim of Mongoloid origin.
Madesia:	A group of immigrated tribals of North Bengal and Assam who were brought by the tea estate owners for plantation works from Chotanagpur.
Mahisya:	A Bengali cultivating caste.
Marua:	A millet.
Mech:	An indigenous tribal community of North Bengal.
Mouza:	It is originally an Arabic word, literally means a revenue village. It refers to a habitation and its surrounding cultivable lands.
Mukh-thika:	Oral-contract without any paper document.
Muktanchal:	Free region.
Munda:	A tribal community of Chotanagpur.
Namosudra:	A lower caste of Bengal.
Oraon:	A tribal community of Chotanagpur.
Paharia:	Inhabitants of Hilly region.

Patta:	Document of land holding.
Pukka Road:	A metalled road or cobbled road.
Rai:	Warrior caste of Nepal.
Raja:	King.
Rajbanshi:	A scheduled caste community of North Bengal actually descended from Koch.
Ryot:	Peasant.
Sabha:	Committee.
Santhal:	A tribal community from Chotanagpur plateau.
Sardar:	A man who used to be employed by the tea estate owners of North Bengal and Assam to bring tribal labourers for plantation works from Chotanagpur of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.
Tebhaga:	Two thirds share.
Terai:	Foot of the Himalayas.
Thika:	Contract.
Thika-Pattan:	A process of permanent lease among the Rajbanshi jotedars and adhiars.
Yadav:	An intermediary caste of North and Eastern India.
Zamindar:	Land lord. Owner (originally tax farmer) of a landed estate.

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