Chapter 10

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The 19th century saw the emergence of the modern intelligentsia in Bengal. The word ‘intelligentsia’ is of Russian origin. It was first used in the 1860s by Russian writers like Bodorikyn to designate that section of the university educated youth who questioned all traditional values in the name of reason and progress. Though ‘intelligentsia’ and ‘intellectuals’ are often used to denote the same group, they are distinct from one another. All intellectuals are members of the intelligentsia but not vice-versa. ‘Intellectuals’ may be defined as a group composed of writers, public men, journalists and thinkers. This definition is more precise than Edward Shils’ which included ‘civil service, journalism, law, teaching and medicine.’1 These professions require either intellectual certification or intellectual skills but, not all these professions allow its members to function in society as intellectuals.2 Groups described by Shils as ‘intellectuals’ should properly be termed as ‘intelligentsia’. The former constitutes a subset of the latter, distinguished by their special role as transmitters of ideology.

The intelligentsia acquired a pervasive importance, first in modern western societies and then in societies outside the west when they began to assimilate western beliefs and to establish institutions resembling those of the west. In the overseas European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries, an intelligentsia influenced by their western style of education came into being alongside the more traditionally educated and motivated intellectuals of the indigenous tradition. The colonial intelligentsia, variously called ‘elite’, ‘western educated’, and ‘modern intellectuals’ recognised as playing a crucial role in their society and polity. The 19th century saw the emergence of the modern intelligentsia in Bengal. It was in Bengal that British rule was established first and there was spread of modern education. They were a product of the land settlement and western education introduced by the British.

The Permanent Settlement(1793) established a new order of landlordism. In place of the old landed aristocracy, a new class of hereditary zamindars was created. The new zamin-

1Shils, E.A., op.cit., p.199.
2Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi, op.cit., p.98.
dars were responsible for further division and sub-division of landed estates. Jotedars, talukdars, grantidars, patnidars and other kinds of sub-tenure holders created by the zamindars increased in number. Along with them there were also the banias associated with the English Company, gomasthas, brokers and small traders. All these came to constitute the middle class. They mainly belonged to the higher castes of Hindu society. They saw in western education an opportunity to improve their prospects. This prompted them to ensure such education for their sons. Exposure to a liberal education inspired them to think freely and question many old ideas and beliefs. They learnt to think, reason and apply their knowledge in social life. Thus gradually a section of the middle class was transformed into the intelligentsia. But the intelligentsia did not wholly belong to the middle class. A large number of them belonged to the propertied aristocracy — to families which had made their wealth mainly from land and trade.

In the meantime, the administrative requirements of the government led to the whole educational machinery being geared to satisfy the needs of public service. This had the effect of perpetuating the old emphasis on literary education as a virtual monopoly of the upper castes of Hindu society. The intelligentsia which emerged, cared more for position and influence in the civil service and councils than for mass education or economic development.

The intelligentsia, however, did not only consist of persons brought up in the institutions where knowledge was imparted through the medium of English education. It also included oriental scholars or men versed exclusively in the languages, literature and philosophy of this country. There were many who, in spite of lack of any formal English language education, acquired sufficient western education through their own efforts. In the early decades of the 19th century, the Bengali intelligentsia was broadly divided into two groups: Traditionalists or Orientalists and the Anglicists. The former upheld and promoted traditional education, culture and learning, while most of the latter thought poorly of oriental knowledge, culture and values and upheld the superiority of western knowledge.

Simultaneously, there were also men like Rammohun Roy in whom there we notice a sort of harmonious blending of western and classical philosophy. A great classical scholar he was inspired, by everything good in western society and tried to introduce it here. But unlike the more radical section, his interpretation of the world was based on his cultural heritage. This trend of thought was carried out by Debendranath Tagore, the Brahmo Samaj and the members of Tattvabodhini Sabha. They were moderate, liberal and progressive in their attitudes.

Traditional education also produced men who were part of intelligentsia society. They did not deny the importance of western education and knowledge. They were at the same time moderate and liberal in their outlook. They were equally keen to reform their society. There was little to choose between them and the western educated moderate liberals. They were not like the Orientalists who clung to everything traditional without making any attempt to remedy the existing maladies. Through their own efforts they imbibed the

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4Ghosh, Benoy, op.cit., p. 146.
The intelligentsia overwhelmingly joined such liberal professions as law, teaching, medical practices, journalism and government service. They were by occupation either salaried or professionals. They preferred professions like, law, teaching, journalism and government service to commercial activities. Trade and commerce had no appeal for the educated men. Most of them had a share in land ownership, as it supplemented income and was also a mark of status. A major portion of their savings was invested in the purchase of landed properties.\(^5\)

The Bengali intelligentsia was thus far from a homogeneous group. Various factors influenced their mental make-up in the 19th century. It was difficult for them to remain untouched by oriental influences. Then the teachings and activities of the Christian missionaries had an impact. But it was the introduction of western education which marked a turning point in the growth of rationalism, an essential attribute of the educated. It became possible for them to get acquainted with western philosophy, thought and science. This enabled them to become interpreter of change in the country and thereby to drive a wedge in the existing order of things. The 19th century intelligentsia, in spite of their differences, displayed certain common traits and tendencies which determined their behavioural patterns towards society and polity. One such trait was faith in progress which prompted its members to advocate reform and change in the existing order of things. They abhorred socio-religious evils. Both radicals and moderates worked on the whole for the modernization of society. In the economic field they supported business enterprise, focussed attention on the oppression of the peasantry and exploitation of the country by Europeans.

They however, failed to emerge as exponents of fundamental change in the economic and political system. Their faith in progress was conditioned by class ethos as well as constraints of economic and political dependence. They did not support any organized revolt or uprising. They mainly resorted to legal and constitutional methods for mitigating their grievances and effecting progressive changes.

The study of the Bengali intelligentsia reveals the absence of the Muslims from the new Bengali intelligentsia till the 1860s. This was due to factors partly connected with the socio-economic pattern of post-Permanent Settlement Bengal. The movement in favour of western education started among the Muslims rather late in the 19th century. It was only in the later part of the century that, as a result of the initiative taken by some of their leaders, the Muslims were able to acquire some benefits and facilities from the government in the sphere of education. In the 1880s and 1890s, the government made special efforts to remove the educational disparity between the Muslims and Hindus. Gradually a western-educated class emerged; even though the vernacular-educated section continued to exercise considerable influence. Some of them were soon to give proof of their liberalism in their handling of different important issues of the time. Like their Hindu counterparts they began to think deeply on wide ranging subjects and expressed their ideas through letters, speeches, essays and other literary works. Muslim representatives were also vocal during

\[^5\]Seal, Anil, op. cit., pp.39-42.
There was not much change in the composition of the Bengali intelligentsia in the first quarter of the 20th century. There was greater advancement in western education and the western-educated predominated. There was greater preference for liberal professions than for commercial activities. The link between land and the intelligentsia weakened considerably. There was greater dependence on education for survival. In the early 20th century there was also a prominent intelligentsia among the Muslims.

In our period, momentous changes took place in Bengal’s agrarian economy and the countryside. They were partly the outcome of the overall British economic policy. These changes started to occur in the last quarter of the preceding century. Consequently, the agrarian economy which emerged in Bengal in the 19th century was different in many respects from the one which the British had inherited after Plassey. To maximize land revenue the British introduced the Permanent Settlement. It simply defined the zamindar-government relation. Deteriorating land relations and recurrent famines, revealing the maladies in the agrarian economy, despite apparent signs of prosperity like increase of cultivation, expansion of market for agricultural produces, rising agricultural prices etc. prompted enactment of Act X of 1859 to bring about relative stability among the cultivating classes and restrict grounds for rent enhancement. The Act marked a new phase of prolonged landlord-peasant conflict over issues of occupancy rights and rent enhancement. The rent struggles in Bengal in the 1870s and the Bihar famine of 1873-74 convinced the government of the imperfections in the Act. After much deliberation, the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed in 1885 which only resolved the landlord-peasant conflict over the issues of occupancy rights and rent enhancement.

In the meantime, rural Bengal became subject to the rhythms and fluctuations of a wider capitalist economy. There was both qualitative and quantitative increase in the economic exchanges in which the rural people participated. The colonial state, directly through its effects on the pace of monetization in the indigenous economy and on population growth, was responsible for many economic changes. Destruction of traditional cottage industry made the increasing population more dependent on agriculture. Lack of non-agricultural avenues of investment and railways brought about changes in the rural economy. The inheritance law split up zamindari properties. Rack-renting and usury became the main means of accumulation of wealth. Credit needs of the peasants increased as also their dependence on moneylenders. The majority of the ryots were owners of small jots, many of whom cultivated the lands of others as sharecroppers or as day labourers. Prices of foodgrains went on increasing without bringing about simultaneous increase in the income of the ryots. The consequence was increasing impoverishment. Agriculture remained stagnant.

These trends continued well into the 1920s. Population continued to increase. In the face of rising prices and exploitation, land under sharecropping and the number of sharecroppers and day labourers increased. Small farm-owning landholders also suffered. The question of giving occupancy right to the sharecroppers became crucial. In 1928, an Act amending the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed. By then three issues had become crucial — the question
of giving occupancy right to sharecroppers and; the under-ryots and; giving occupancy ryots the right of land transfer.

In this work, the broad changes affecting Bengal’s agrarian economy have been analysed to put into a proper perspective, the intelligentsia’s perception of them. It is quite possible that in the process some of the vital developments, highlighted by recent researches, may have been left out. It may be observed here that, this study intended to analyse how the Bengali intelligentsia handled the important agrarian issues of their time, their perception of the agrarian changes. Here, the reaction of the intelligentsia to agrarian issues have been studied from two angles. In the first place, reactions to land settlements, agrarian relations, the rights of the peasantry, their condition, credit relations, tenancy legislation, the question of rent etc. have been analysed. On the other hand, their attitudes towards questions pertaining specifically to agriculture like techniques of agriculture, land productivity, organization of production, marketing etc. have also been studied. ‘Agrarian’ refers to both agriculture as a sector of the economy and also the broad agrarian social structure. The ideas of the intelligentsia on both aspects have been studied.

The intelligentsia reacted to the agrarian issues at two levels — one was at the level of ideas through essays, letters, books etc. The other was at the level of actions which included among other things, a coherent presentation of their views in the Council and associations, organization of ryot sabhas etc. The various ways in which they analysed these issues, shifts and changes in their attitudes and the actions that followed from their understanding of them have been studied. It is notable that some of their ideas are not actually supported by recent researches. Agrarian thinking of the intelligentsia has been divided into three broad phases — early 19th century, late 19th century and early 20th century.

In this study the Bengali intelligentsia — their emergence, traits, compositions and tendencies — have been discussed first. This has been followed by an analysis of the major agrarian changes taking place in Bengal in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Then the evolution of agrarian thinking in Bengal, beginning with Rammohun Roy till the 1850s have been discussed. The intelligentsia’s reaction to major agrarian issues in the late 19th century; their reaction to Act X of 1859; circumstances leading to Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885; commercialization and rural indebtedness have been analysed. Then the agrarian perceptions of some eminent intellectuals in the late 19th century — Vidyasagar, Sanjibchandra, Bankimchandra and Romeshchandra have been discussed. This has been followed by a discussion on the intelligentsia’s perception of agrarian issues in the first quarter of the 20th century. The ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and Pramatha Chaudhuri on agrarian issues have been studied separately. Some trends in the agrarian thinking of the Muslim intelligentsia in our period have also been studied.

The first phase effectively began in 1831 when Rammohun Roy gave evidence before the Select Committee of the British House of Commons examining the question of renewal of the Company’s Charter. He analysed in this connection the working of the agrarian economy of Bengal. This was the first comprehensive presentation of the agrarian question. The beginning of systematic agrarian thinking can be traced back to him. His concern for the Bengal peasantry influenced the intelligentsia throughout the century. He was
an advocate of the Permanent Settlement. But while he was an ardent admirer of its framework he was critical of certain associated issues involved in it. His criticism was from the point of view of the ryot, but all that was advanced on the premises of the main regulations of the Settlement maintained intact. His main focus was on how the revenue burden could be reduced by seeking other means of income for the government. He proposed a permanent settlement between ryots and zamindars and reduction in the ryot's rents. He pleaded for economic modernization for general economic advancement of the country.

His younger contemporaries, the Young Bengal leaders, highlighted the oppression of the zamindars and the misery of the ryots. Both could be traced back to the defect in the Permanent Settlement which gave the zamindars unlimited powers of oppression. They denounced the evils of the settlement and emphasised on the increasing animosity between landlords and tenants. They advocated self-sufficiency in the spheres of agriculture, trade and commerce.

The Tattvabodhini group, Akshaykumar Dutta, Iswarchandra Gupta and Harishchandra Mookherjee, prominent members of Bengali society, blamed the Permanent Settlement for all agrarian problems. They had definite pro-ryot sympathies. By the close of the first phase in 1859, when after a long period of non-intervention the government enacted Act X, the agrarian thinking of the Bengali intelligentsia reached a level of maturity. They were able to identify the major agrarian changes that had been taking place in Bengal. The intelligentsia emphasised the changing nature of agrarian relations and the growing tension between landlords and tenants. They also analysed the relationship between peasants and moneylenders. Commercialization had increased the cash needs of the ryots. But it failed to improve their lot. Their description of the working of the indigo system highlights this fact. There was increasing impoverishment of the rural masses. There was no room for capital accumulation. Consequently, there was no qualitative change in agriculture. There was no change in techniques of production. Thus the increasing impoverishment of the masses hindered any real economic modernization.

In the early phase, the newly emerging intelligentsia was fired with a reforming zeal. In a period when political considerations did not colour outlooks, while portraying the misery and helplessness of Indian peasants, they were not motivated by considerations for creating a mass base. On the contrary, the reformers needed British support in all their efforts to reform society. Yet, there was always an awareness that the British land settlement and all its accompanying abuses were responsible for this. Again, in this period the intelligentsia's connection with landed interests was very strong. Many of its members came from landed families. This, to an extent, coloured their thought processes. While identifying in the Permanent Settlement the root of all problems of the peasantry, they argued within its framework. Apart from Nabinkrishna Bose, nobody else was bold enough to suggest its abolition. Perhaps, they could not think of a viable alternative.

The Young Bengal gave lucid descriptions of the suffering masses. Yet, they failed to explain how this suffering could be reduced. The same is true about the other luminaries of the period like the members of Tattvabodhini Sabha, Akshay Kumar Dutt, Iswarchandra
Gupta and many others. The whole discussion revolved round the question of the deteriorating condition of the peasantry. They rightly diagnosed that while the landholding class benefited peasants' material condition worsened. But while the establishment of the British Indian Association in 1851, provided the former with an organization to safeguard their interests vigorously, peasants lacked any such representative organization. Most members of the intelligentsia portraying the miserable condition of the peasantry, failed to bring about concrete improvements in their condition. But members of the intelligentsia, who were also the members of British Indian Association were more vigorous in upholding the rights of the landlords.

One significant feature of this period is the failure of the intelligentsia to analyse in detail the exploitative character of the indigo system, the other great malady affecting a considerable section of the Bengal peasantry. The indigo uprising would bring to light how the peasants suffered under this system. The intelligentsia down to the 1850s also failed to suggest any measure by which, agrarian techniques could be modernized; how production could be increased; how credit relations could be improved and facilities provided for the availability of easy finance for the peasantry and; how better marketing opportunities could be provided. Certainly without these, there could be no real improvement in the condition of the peasantry.

In the second phase, beginning with enactment of Act X in 1859, certain significant developments took place which greatly influenced intelligentsia's perception of agrarian issues — enactment of Act X of 1859, Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and the two peasant revolts — indigo uprising of 1860 and the rent struggle in Pabna and other eastern Bengal districts in 1873. The main focus of intelligentsia's concern was on the question of peasant rights. Act X for the first time classified the ryots into three categories. The intelligentsia in the subsequent period was mostly concerned with the rights of the occupancy ryots. The fate of sharecroppers and landless peasants was ignored. For the first time, the question of peasant rights divided the intelligentsia into two groups — pro-landlord and pro-tenant. During the indigo uprising against the European planters, this division was not noticeable. The rebels were able to acquire considerable active support from them. But this friendship did not last long. From the 1860s onwards, a section of the intelligentsia, closely allied with the zamindars and the British Indian Association, emerged as champions of the landholding class, particularly in the period preceding the enactment of Bengal Tenancy Act. The activities of Kristodas Pal is an example of this.

In this phase, there was a growing demand for legislative interference to rectify the uncertain nature of the peasants' legal position. The intelligentsia became increasingly concerned with the growing deterioration in landlord-tenant relationship andconcertedly tried to convince the government about the gravity of the situation and the need for remedial action. As there was more and more depiction of the exploitation of ryots by zamindars and the impoverished state of the former, the intelligentsia became increasingly concerned about the problem and began to look for a satisfactory solution.

Among other issues which interested the intelligentsia were the relationship between the moneylender and the ryots, the structure of landed society, poverty, indebtedness, agricul-
tural commercialization and the general nature of agriculture. It is not that they always offered a coherent solution to all agrarian problems or that they always had an accurate understanding of these problems.

Since the 1870s a considerable section of the intelligentsia increasingly championed the peasant cause. Surendranath Banerjee emerged as the leader of this section. He and the members of the Indian Association tried to do for the ryots what, the British Indian Association was trying to do for the zamindars. But the Indian Association was mainly concerned about the rights of occupancy ryots. This period also saw some members of a newly emerging Muslim intelligentsia taking an interest in the fate of the peasantry — particularly as the majority of the exploited peasants were Muslims. However, the intelligentsia, even while supporting the peasantry, did not support any acts of violence or rebellion on their part against the landholders. This is clear from their stance during 1873.

About a highly educated section it is not possible to apply clear-cut categories — pro-landlord or pro-ryot. We may refer to Bankimchandra and R.C.Dutt. Both, in their early writings vividly described exploitation of the peasantry. But later they modified much of their ideas and expressed faith in the potential goodness of the landlords. In this period Sanjibchandra's work constitutes an important landmark. He was greatly interested in the condition of the ryots. He adopted a comprehensive method in describing the legal and social relation between zamindars and ryots. He discussed the grounds on which the ryots' rights were based.

Even the ardent supporters of the ryots like Surendranath, kept away from agrarian issues after 1885. Only a section of the rural intelligentsia, best represented by Harinath Majumdar, carried on a life-long crusade for the rights of the oppressed peasantry. These were men who lived in the countryside, amongst those for whom they were waging a struggle. The rest, western-educated and far removed from the real village, could never emerge as true champions. Besides, from the 1870s onwards nationalist politics came to the forefront. Need for creating a mass base influenced the attitude of the intelligentsia to agrarian questions.

Another crucial fact of this phase, is that literature increasingly became a mode of expression of the intelligentsia, reflecting their ideas on agrarian issues. However, it was mainly in prose and in plays. Some of the best known poets like Madhusudan Dutt, Nabinchandra Sen and others did not deal with any of the agrarian issues. It is difficult to explain. Nabinchandra Sen was a government official. But then, so were Bankimchandra and R.C.Dutt. The intelligentsia, also extensively used the press to air their views. But even the journals were either pro-landlord or pro-ryot in their attitudes. Hardly any of them maintained a non-partisan attitude.

It is also striking that, the intelligentsia in the late 19th century, like their predecessors, did not suggest abolition of the Permanent Settlement. All reforms that they wanted were within its framework. Besides, they too were not interested in modernizing agriculture. It is amazing, that while they were so acquainted with western ideas and philosophy, they

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seemed to have been unaware of the tremendous improvement and scientific development that had been taking place in western Europe. Their unfamiliarity with practical agriculture probably accounts for this. While they could see the misery of the peasants, their lack of knowledge made it difficult for them to realise that Bengal peasantry still followed the age-old techniques of farming. Securing of tenancy would not solve the basic problem of declining agricultural productivity.

In the period immediately following the enactment of Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885, there was a lull in the intelligentsia's interest in agrarian issues. Though the Act failed to satisfy all classes of ryots, even the pro-ryot sympathisers remained strangely silent on the issue. The enactment of the Act coincided with the birth of the Congress and political activities received a boost. It became a deliberate policy of the political leaders to stay away from all divisive issues. Besides a considerable amount of early Congress funds came from the landlords. This partly explains the absence of an agrarian programme in the post-1885 period.

In the third phase, that is, the first quarter of the 20th century, political activities were uppermost in the minds of the intelligentsia. Political considerations necessitated involvement of the peasantry. This in turn required evidence of concern for their rights. The Boycott and Swadeshi movement was the most significant political movement in early 20th century. But it lacked a peasant programme. It was indifferent to the question of landlord-tenant relationship at a time when the condition of the Bengal peasantry was slowly deteriorating. It was the closeness of the leaders with the landowning section that was perhaps responsible for the failure to evolve a peasant programme. However, a few little-known schemes for agricultural development was started. The main saving grace was Rabindranath Tagore. He pleaded for atmashakti; the necessity of bridging the gap between the elite and the masses; rural reconstruction; rejuvenation of the villages and; agrarian development. He was probably the only intellectual of his time who tried to translate his ideas on agrarian issues into practice. In his zamindari he tried to bring about a change in the techniques of production through scientific means. He realised what many of his contemporaries did not, that no real improvement in the condition of the peasants would be possible without overhauling the system of agriculture. Aware of the agrarian developments taking place in the west, he tried to implement them here.

Early 20th century saw the beginning of Praja movement in Bengal. Led by Fazlul Huq it soon emerged as a champion of the downtrodden Muslim peasantry. The movement took the form of an anti-zamindari movement and highlighted the growing crisis in Bengal's agrarian society. In the Kamrerchar Praja conference in 1914 the leaders formulated a demand charter of peasants which give us an insight into their agrarian ideas. They demanded abolition of zamindar's right to nazar and salami; reduction of rent; effective measures against illegal exactions by zamindars; occupancy right to the tenants when the land is cultivated by them for 12 years and the landlords should not be entitled to take it away from them because they would not pay higher rent; tenant's right to plant trees on his land etc. Such demands were repeatedly made by the leaders from time to time. The praja leaders did not always present their views on agrarian issues in an organized manner. But through their political activities they tried to realise their ideas. They tried to combine
sporadic actions by peasants against landlords or their agents or against moneylenders, with the more ordered forms of meetings, processions, boycotts, strikes and refusal to pay illegal cesses. These associations did not achieve anything of immediate importance, but they were precursors of the peasant organizations formed by Muslim politicians in the mid-1920s which later formed a backing for Huq’s Krishak Praja Party in the Legislative Council.

In the 1920s agrarian thinking became a part of organized politics. The Swarajya Party leaders were sympathetic to zamindars. Muzaffar Ahmad, who was closely associated with the Communist movement, on the other hand, established the Workers and Peasants’ Party to take up the cause of the socially downtrodden.

When the question of amendment of the Bengal Tenancy Act came up the intelligentsia became more vocal. The fate of the sharecroppers became an issue. But no one was still interested in the masses of agricultural labourers. Their failure to intervene directly in the agrarian class struggle made it impossible for them to emerge as leaders of the peasantry. Their failure to bring about a total transformation of the agrarian economy partly explains this. The intelligentsia failed to break all connections with the landholding classes. They still failed to suggest abolition of the existing class structure.

It was mainly the Muslim intelligentsia who whole-heartedly championed the cause of the peasantry. The exploitation of peasantry was consistently discussed in Muslim literature. Though the Hindu intellectuals supporting the ryots' cause often attacked the Hindu zamindars the target of Muslim writers was always the Hindu zamindars, with the exception of Masarraf Hussain earlier.

The Muslim intelligentsia was silent on the fact that the condition of the Hindu peasantry was no better. Nor were the Muslim zamindars and officials less oppressive. In general they were not much concerned with the multitudes of Hindu peasants and did not suggest any means by which their condition could be improved. Yet, simultaneously many of them realised that without the help of the better-off Hindus, the Muslims could not prosper. So, they appealed to the Hindus, particularly the prosperous Hindu merchants and traders, to involve the Muslims in co-operative economic ventures.

The Muslim intelligentsia, however, also failed on the whole to provide a plan for agrarian development. Without this there could be no real improvement in the condition of the peasants. Their agrarian perceptions were primarily limited to highlighting the miserable conditions of the Muslim peasantry and seeking reasons for it. They dealt with issues like agrarian relations, the role of moneylenders in the rural economy, the existing class antagonism and the exploitation of the upper classes. But they did not deal with issues relating specifically to agriculture on which the whole rural structure was based. Vital issues like agrarian yield, tools and techniques of production, adoption of scientific methods of farming etc. were overlooked.

However, in the early 20th century a group of intellectuals, led by Rabindranath Tagore, for the first time concentrated on agriculture itself. Among them were Nagendranath Gan-
gopadhyay, Rathindranath Tagore, Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, Nityagopal Mukhopadhyay and others. Many of them had direct knowledge of agricultural practices. They were aware of the improvements taking place in Europe and tried to introduce them here. They tried to modernize agricultural practices, to improve productivity, facilitate credit and provide better marketing facilities. They talked about educating the ryots. Without all these, they did not feel, that any real development could take place in their condition. Thus, while at one level agrarian issues became a part of organized politics, at another level men totally unconnected with politics took them up in real earnest. Their concern was expressed through their writings. Some of the widely read journals of the time like Prabasi, Modern Review, Sabujpatra etc. dealt extensively with agrarian issues. Some, particularly the group closely associated with Tagore, even actively tried to bring about improvement in agricultural practices.

The early 20th century intelligentsia, interested in overall rural and economic development, in their plans for constructive work took for granted the tacit support of the government. It is not certain what they proposed to do in case of the latter’s negative response. They could not really suggest any concrete social or economic programme attractive enough to draw in the masses. While remarking on the mistrust of the masses towards the educated classes, who were expected to conduct the constructive work, they could not suggest how this mistrust could be removed. They could not provide a solution to the basic problem of the land question.

Intelligentsia involvement in agrarian issues did not end with enactment of the Amendment of Bengal Tenancy Act in 1928. It continued well into the 1930s and 1940s. Under Fazlul Huq and the Krishak Praja Party agrarian issues were used for mobilization of the Muslim peasantry, at least partly for political gains. The sharecroppers continued to agitate for some rights. Eminent writers in this period like Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Manik Bandyopadhyay and many others used agrarian issues as themes for many of their compositions. Tagore’s experiments in Sriniketan continued even after his death in 1941. There is thus scope for further research on agrarian thinking of the intelligentsia in the post-1928 period.