CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION
CONCLUSIONS

The pattern of land relations in West Bengal in the pre-independence period was dominated by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The Permanent Settlement virtually changed the whole tenurial arrangements in Bengal and gave a new direction to the agricultural scenario.

The aim behind the arrangement of the Permanent Settlement was to extract from the peasantry the maximum possible revenue with minimum direct administrative trouble. To achieve this aim they spawned the so-called zamindari system; and the zamindars were given full right of ownership of land, and the cultivator became tenant overnight.

The system generated large number of intermediaries in land relations. These intermediaries were actually the parasites without any contribution to the process of production.

The zamindari system thus consolidated the feudal phase in Bengal agriculture. This system reigned supreme for almost hundred and fifty years at stretch. During early 20th century the depredation of this system came to the surface and serious thinking was done to correct some of its disadvantages, but no serious efforts were made to improve the conditions of the tenants.
It was only during the post-independence period when spectacular change took place and important legislation was introduced. In 1950 the Bargadars Act was passed. This was followed by the Estate Acquisition Act of 1953, and thereafter the West Bengal Land Reform Act of 1955.

The growing discontent among the peasantry and their rising political consciousness during this period, were some of the important reasons which led to the above enactments.

The legislative measures adopted to abolish landlordship, zamindari system, protection of sharecroppers' interest and redistribution of land acquired by the State through imposing ceiling laws, between 1950 and 1970 led to important structural changes.

The changes ushered in four phenomena: first, peasants got back their rights on land which they gradually had lost due to the permanent settlement; second, tenants rights were partially protected; third, large-scale evasion took place due to serious loopholes in the legal system which was left deliberately unplugged by the regime; and four, peasants' relations to the State became direct.

These phenomena were further coupled with growing fragmentation of existing holding size, demographic pressure, stagnant economy in general, non-proliferation of institutional credits, kept the peasants' dependent on the money lenders' capital. As a result agrarian economy became non-viable and production stagnated.
While introducing legal reforms and making efforts to achieve equity in distribution of income and wealth through redistribution of land little attention was paid to the possibility of technological viability of holding size either by consolidation or cooperation. As a result, the land reform measures which have generated hopes in the minds of dispossed marginal peasants could not be much use. Agrarian economy was deprived of the advantages of consolidation of holding. Under these circumstances had there cooperative and joint cultivation been introduced, agriculture would have become economically profitable.

The enactments were with the view to protect the interests of the share croppers, acquisition of vested land and distribution among the landless agricultural labourers and rural artisans. The legislation, however, could not make any dent in the tenurial arrangement till 1970. This was due to large-scale 'evasion and 'benami' transfer and innumerable loopholes in the Acts.

The period between 1967 and 1975 was a period that witnessed radical legislative direction by the government and violent supression of genuine demands of the sharecroppers and landless labourers by the State machinery. Both administrative machinery and judiciary were used ruthlessly to wipe out the organised strength of the landless agricultural labourers and rural proletariat.
The situation, however, changed after the Left Front government came to power third time and launched massive programme to alleviate the situation of the landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and other rural proletariat in a big way.

Thus Government helped the disadvantaged groups by giving them institutional credit so as to protect them from the money lenders' rapacity. As we have already noted that the moneylenders have been the single most factor which hindered the progress of the rural proletariat.

During the colonial regime there was hardly any investment in agriculture. Lack of irrigation facilities and technological change did not allow this sector to grow. Under these conditions it was meaningless to expect any change in productivity; and there had always been a situation of food shortage. This brought a lot of suffering and misery to the people of rural areas. (See Table 9.1)

After independence particularly after 1950 the situation was laid to a better position. The use of fertilizer, increasing irrigation facilities and introduction of modern implements in agriculture can be seen. All this activities brought positive change in agricultural productivity in the State.
The situation of pre-independence Bengal can be summarised as follows:

1) Through Permanent Settlement land which is an important means of social wealth allotted to the zamindars leaving millions of tenants landless labourers.

2) Intermediaries exploited the tenants by enjoying the surplus created by the tenants.

3) This situation strengthened the features of feudalism in the State.

4) This is obvious that the above condition was not at all conducive to agricultural development. This can be observed from the figures given in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1

Growth of Output, Land Productivity, Acreage and Population in West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bengal Presidency</th>
<th>Average Annual % Rate of Change in Land Output</th>
<th>Productivity</th>
<th>Average Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881-1947</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foodgrains  
-0.73  
-0.55  
0.00  
0.65

Non-Foodgrains  
0.23  
0.59  
-0.41

All Crops.  
-0.45  
-0.34  
-0.06

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Since independence the national government took steps to abolish zamindari system, put ceiling on landholdings and protection of share croppers. Steps were taken to achieve these objectives but the success was not impressive. The position mentioned below may clarify the statement:

a) about 65 lakhs of families in West Bengal are directly dependent upon agriculture, out of whom about 23 lakh families are landless agricultural laborers.

b) 25 lakh families own less than 7.5 bighas of land per family and most of them are bargadars.

c) 9.5 lakh families have holding (per family) between 7.5 and 15 bighas of land and they can be described as small peasants.

d) the holding of 5.5 lakh families is between 15 and 30 bighas and they can be called middle peasants.

e) number of families owning more than 30 bighas land are about 2 lakhs.

As presented in Chapter III tenancy has not been completely abolished and sharecropping system is prevailing. Agriculture of the State is still the economy of small and marginal peasants and there is preponderance of landless agricultural labourers and decreasing farm size. This has hindered the introduction of modern technology and strengthening of institutional credit system. All these put together agricultural of the State could
not enjoy the economy of scale. While introducing land reform the economics of plot and availability of institutional credit was miserably ignored.

According to the programmes of the Congress Party during the independence movement that in free India a policy of land to the tillers should be adopted. However, legislations did not go along with the commitment. Change was there but it is the question of rate of change.

On the basis of this study it can be said that the problem of landless agricultural labourers still need much attention. The existing structure includes an increasing number of marginal and small farmers. Medium and large farmers could not become a part of the agrarian economy. This situation actually led to an economically non-viable agriculture. Interests of the small farmers are protected not within but from outside as discussed in CHAPTER EIGHT. This is also one of the major weakness of the landless masses.

Summary of the important characteristics of agrarian structure of West Bengal can be presented as follows:

1. In West Bengal, agricultural under development is the result of 'feudalistic' and 'capitalistic' relationship with high intensity of exploitation of the agriculturists by the landlords and middlemen and intermediary interests by the help of market forces.
2. Agricultural economy of West Bengal is exposed to pre-technological and technological exploitation.

3. The problem of development and distribution in West Bengal agriculture is still a political-cum-managerial issue. It has not yet become fullfledged economic issue.

4. The present pattern of land relations and distribution are the products of concessional legislative measures.

5. West Bengal agriculture is an economy where labour is abundant and hence its supply side determines its functional and existential price.

6. In West Bengal agricultural labour which was considered almost free but their bargaining capacity is a hurdle in the operation of competition.

7. "Primordial Loyalties" are the major hinderances to class consciousness among agricultural labourers and rural proletariat.

SUGGESTIONS

The analysis of the various aspects of agrarian structure of West Bengal reveals that so far the policy measures adopted by different ruling political parties were to abolish landlordism and absentee landlords, protect interests of the agricultural labourers and allot small plots to the landless agricultural labourers and protect sharecroppers against eviction by landowners, and help small and marginal farmers through financial
assistance. These efforts were to provide a base to the peasantry. Steps taken especially by the left front government are commendable but still it has remained inadequate in the face of the growing magnitude of rural poverty and other problems.

In this background on the basis of the empirical analysis, the following suggestions could be put forth:

i) Efforts should be made to consolidate small and marginal farmers cultivable holdings to promote and develop co-operatives.

ii) The vested land which has been acquired by the State should also be consolidated and distributed to a collective of landless agricultural labourer households and they should be pursued to form cooperatives.

iii) The problems of share-croppers are no doubt serious in relation to productivity and ownership of land. Many studies have also shown that tenancy is sometime productive, but in most of the cases it is not so. In due course of time the tenancy, i.e., the sharecropping system should be abolished and the share-croppers should be made real owners. The system is rather ridiculous. Once ownership right is granted to the sharecroppers, they should also be encouraged to develop and promote cooperatives.
iv) Adequate institutional credit facilities should be arranged so that small farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers do not remain under the clutches of money lenders.

v) Institutional credit which is to be given should be of a critical minimum level determined both by the size of holdings, labour/land ratio and family size. Without taking into consideration of these aspects, any financial assistance would not be fruitful.

vi) Off farm employment opportunities should be expanded so as to absorb landless agricultural labourers and other under-employed rural proletariat.

vii) Effort should be made to expand irrigation facilities so as to reduce dependence on rainfall.

viii) Diversification of crop production should be encouraged and research institutes should be requested to assist farmers.

ix) Farmers should be given extension education through a proper network of educational organisations.