CHAPTER ONE

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I.1 BACKGROUND : PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

Development of agriculture depends on positive and dynamic development of man-land relations. The dynamic development of man-land relations again depends on equal distribution of land among tillers both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The distribution of land and the intensity of rights on land among various sections of society have been an integral part of the process of social formation, including the process of differentiated social stratification. There are three elements who play important role in the agrarian structure: they are the land owners, tillers and agricultural labourers.

Historically socio-economic and political forces have influenced agrarian structure of all social formations. As a consequence agrarian relations have also undergone changes from time to time; some times the changes were favourable to agricultural development and sometimes were constraints to it.

In the pre-independence period plots of land were under ownership law and control of the landlords. Government supported this agrarian structure, without taking notice of the exploitation of the masses. After independence the situation started changing. The independent Government found that the extant features of the traditional agrarian relations (tenurial
forms) were a roadblock to its quest for the creation of an egalitarian society on the one hand and stimulating agricultural productivity on the other. Keeping the objectives 'egalitarian society' and 'agricultural productivity' in view, the Government has enacted a series of land reforms legislations, envisaging fundamental changes in agrarian relations. Legislations conferring security of tenure and regulation of rents and ceiling laws have been passed by the State government as well. The overall effect has not, however, been remarkable on agricultural productivity and preempting the process of polarisation of income and wealth among various agrarian classes.

The impact of land reforms, which is responsible for the present pattern of land relations has no doubt affected agrarian structure which significantly changed the mode of production, productivity, economic growth and social justice. Agrarian social structure is conditioned essentially by the extant character of property structure in land resulting in a network of production relations and the broad socio-economic framework within which production is carried out.

Like other parts of India, West Bengal has also suffered the same consequences of agrarian reforms and is still under semi-feudal-capitalist pattern of land relations. The agrarian society being hierarchically structured the land relations among the peasants are highly complicated and differentiated. A radical transformation, which was necessary to ameliorate the conditions of the 70 per cent of the poor peasant of the State, could not be brought about even after the independence from the
colonial rule. The colonial rulers had been responsible for the development of the present pattern of land relations. The pattern was responsible, to a great extent, for the decline and disappearance of the village industries connected with agriculture. In place of it the colonial power encouraged and helped to develop a feudalistic pattern of land relationships. This problem was further accentuated by the existing property inheritance laws. This pattern had however, brought about a colossal change in the countryside; it initiated the process of alienation of land from a large section of the population and subsequently turned them into a class of landless agricultural labourers and share-croppers.

The colonial interest helped the growth of a 'legal' feudal phase of agricultural economy in West Bengal introducing the Zamindari System (the Permanent Settlement 1793), which created a 'permanent' vested interests in the land and its produce. It not only created vested interests but controlled the production possibilities to buttress the home industry of the colonial authority.

After the attainment of independence the Government of India had promised to eradicate the obsolete and anti-people system of land relations; and as a measure to solve the pressing problems it abolished the Zamindari system in 1953. But this petty reform could not solve the problem which the agrarian society of India was facing.
Since the abolition of Zamindari system a number of legal reforms measures have been adopted but the level of implementation has remained at a very low level. This is clear from a statement of the Sixth Five Year Plan. It stated that "If progress of land reforms has been less than satisfactory, it has not been due to flaws in policy but due to indifferent implementation. Often the necessary determination has been lacking to effectively undertake action, particularly in the matter of implementation of ceiling laws, consolidation of holdings and in not vigorously purusing concealed tenancies and having them vested with tenancy occupancy rights as enjoined under the land".

As a result of the failure of the land reforms measures the number of landless peasants is growing rapidly and disparities between landless and land-owning peasants are widening more and more.

Though the existing pattern of land ownership and tenurial forms has given rise to many problems, the production in West Bengal agricultural sector during the period stretching from 1960-61 to 1980-81 has shown a considerably increasing trend. The main question of concern here, therefore, is: why the benefit of the increased production has not been equally shared by different sections of the peasantry who are engaged in agricultural activities and why a section of the peasantry growing rich while another section (landless agricultural labourers and share croppers) living in abject poverty? The answer to this question could be found if we look into the
pattern of existing land relations in West Bengal agrarian system. The mode of production and distribution are characterised by semi-feudal and capitalist features.

The prevailing pattern of land relationships has brought into fore the following situations:

(i) It has created a new pattern of class stratification in the agrarian system. In the process of stratification there has appeared a class of semi-feudal-capitalist agro-elite (or precisely, agro-bourgeoise) who are the most dominant exploiters of the peasantry. The important means through which they exploit are the inheritance rights, protective class-state mechanism like police, laws and courts;

(ii) It has also brought about a class of landless labourers (the growing proletarianisation due to alienation) whose only means of survival is labour. This class has been utterly helpless and their rights either as wage earners or crop-sharers are barely protected. They still live under the domination of big landowners and money lenders.

Excepting these two classes there are existing a few more categories of peasants: they are namely, (i) medium farmers, (2) small farmers, and (3) share croppers (bargadars). Growth of differentiated agrarian class structure is the resultant effect of various land reform acts passed by the Government from time to time since independence of the country. An analysis of the impact of land reforms Act could be made here to delineate the various features of the impact.

The West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act was passed in 1953, and by this Act the Zamindari system was abolished and ceilings on holdings were introduced. The West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 provided for a ceiling of 25 acres on existing individual
holdings and a large number of exemptions. This ceiling could not progress much ahead. Evasion and illegal transfers made the Land Reforms Act ineffective. Hence the impact of this Act on the viable development, with equity consideration, of agriculture in West Bengal was also marginal. No doubt the Zamindari system was abolished, but on its place there appeared agro-bourgeoise who occupied dominant political and economic positions in the countryside and has still remained dominant under different guises.

Realising the failure to distribute land among landless agricultural labourers and share-croppers, the Government of West Bengal made a series of amendments during the period between 1955 and 1972. The Acts and their amendments, however, could not be satisfactorily implemented on various legal and judicial grounds. In 1972 the State Assembly of West Bengal passed the Land Reforms (amendment) Bill fixing the ceiling on family basis, providing for a family of five to hold a maximum of 17.30 acres in irrigated areas. But exemptions, regarding fisheries, extra land for orchards, etc. remained as they were earlier. This again created the problem of evasion and misappropriation of huge amount of land. The impact of land relations on agricultural productivity could be found by analysing and comparing productivity level of land under different patterns of land relations and size-class of holdings.

In 24 Parganas we find the number of Jotedars (big land owners) is more than the district of Burdwan. In Burdwan the distribution of land has been much less skewed than it is in the
district of 24 Parganas. As a result the production is quite high (this is, however, no less dependent on other factors of production, especially the available irrigation facilities) and the pattern of output distribution to some extent positive towards equity. Land productivity and distribution of output are, therefore, great deal influenced by the pattern of land relations.

The pattern of land relations which are the direct outcome of various legislative measures, are also responsible for a large number of share-croppers and growth of landless agricultural labourers.

As regards the barga system, Mr. A.N. Seth, the then Director, Land Reforms, Planning Commission, in his report on the Barga System in West Bengal (Oct. 1966) said "A large area in West Bengal is cultivated on barga. The problem seems to be on the increase. Bargadars provide management, capital and labour and share the risk of cultivation .... Though bargadars are not regarded as tenants under the West Bengal laws, barga arrangement possesses all the characteristics of tenancy. The present laws regulating the barga system are inadequate and their implementation has been ineffective. As a rule, the bargadar pays about half the produce to the landlords as rent. He is still liable to ejectment on grounds of resumption which hangs like a Democle's sword over his head. The barga system is disincentive to land development and agricultural production. It also results in the accumulation of a large portion of the
marketable surplus in the hands of comparatively few landlords who are powerful enough to evade procurement and sell large quantities of the surplus to the rural poor at exhorbitant prices" (Government of India, Implementation of Land Reforms, 1966, p. 157).

However, by successive amendments of the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1961, the position of the bargadars has been made a bit secure. The fear of Democle’s sword had been a bit lessened. The right of cultivation by bargadar had been made hereditary and grounds for eviction made rather stringent. Besides, bargadars’ share of the crop was raised from 60 per cent to 70 per cent in such cases where land owner did not supply necessary inputs.

Implementing ceiling law upto 1975, 6.10 lakhs acres of agricultural land was available for distribution out of which 6.08 lakhs acres were distributed by October 1975.

In order to save the rural poor from the exploitation of the money lenders and big land owners, two new statutes, namely, the West Bengal Estate Acquisition (Second Amendment) Act, 1973 the West Bengal Restoration of Alienated Land Act, 1975 and were passed. The first provided that the civil courts would have no jurisdiction in matters relating to alternation of any entry in the records-of rights. The second provided for the restoration of land transferred during the period from 1968 to May 1973 by the poor raiyats because of financial distress. The largest number of jotedars were found in 24 Parganas, Midnapore, Bankura, Malda and Cooch Behar: 24 Parganas alone had 1,882 jotedars and
under them there were 32,856.17 acres land; while Burdwan, Hooghly and Howrah had 291,325 and 32 jotedars respectively. This was the picture of land relations in these districts upto 1968.

Despite various measures adopted by the State to bring about an even relation in land tenure, the problem has still remained critical and alarmingly uneven and exploitative. Agitations by the poor peasants and radical left parties, have many times highlighted the defects of the semi-feudal and capitalistic agrarian system of West Bengal.

The pattern of land relations in West Bengal calls for a radical transformation. Distribution of land would not solve the agrarian problems of West Bengal. Procured land was distributed among the farmers but they could not enjoy the right of ownership for long time due to their poverty and it again went to the jotedars and money-lenders. Along with the allotment of land they needed sufficient financial assistance so that they could cultivate the land they were allotted without being dependent on the borrowings from the money lenders-cum-jotedars who operate like octopus in rural India. Many studies have found out that the ownership has gone back to the jotedars ultimately. The poor farmers, because of their lack of inputs and implement and perpetual debt-bondage-dependency could not continue to hold their land for cultivation. Either they became landless labourers or exploited share cropper after re-alienation from the land. And the process of realienation from the land have had wider ramification on the alienated classes.
The following information and data clearly reveal and underline the magnitude of the problems related to agrarian structure of West Bengal. Any effort to solve the problems of poverty, inequality and growth should be made with the following perspective:

(a) About 65 lakhs families in West Bengal are directly dependent upon agriculture, out of whom about 23 lakhs families are landless agricultural labourers (38.48%).

(b) 25 lakh families own less than 7 1/2 bighas of land per family and most of them are bargadars.

(c) 9.5 lakh families have holdings (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 can be called middle peasants.

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

I.2 WEST BENGAL AND ITS TOPOGRAPHY

The lush green and verdant land of West Bengal streches from the snow clad Himalayas to the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal. Its topography presents two distinct divisions: all hilly and mountainous areas lie in the north while the southern parts presents a picturesque panorama of fertile plains, criss-crossed by many rivers and rivulets and dotted with beautiful coconut and other tropical fruit trees. The northern part of West Bengal is not so thickly populated as the southern part. In density of population it occupies second place after Kerala.

* 1 bigha is equal to 2766 sq. yards.
Regarding its boundary West Bengal is bounded on the north by Sikkim and Bhutan, on the east Assam and Bangladesh, on the south the Bay of Bengal and on the north by Nepal, Bihar and Orissa. It is comparatively small state having an area of 87,882 sq. kms. It is situated between latitudes 21°30' - 27°14' North and longitudes 86°35' - 93°53' East. Across the State runs the tropic of cancer.


Physiography: "West Bengal may broadly be divided into two major natural divisions: The Himalayan North and the alluvial Gangetic Plains stretching to the south ending in the deltas of the Bay of the Bengal. The northern most district of Darjeeling and parts of Jalpaiguri are in the foot-hills of the Himalayas. Some places in Darjeeling have an elevation of 12,000 ft. or more above the sea level while in the extreme south of the State there are marshy swams of the Sunderbans interspersed with numerous creeks and streams of the estuarine low lands.

"A number of hilly rivers and streams, namely, the Teesta, the Torsha, the Jaldhaka etc. traverse the northern districts of the State. The plains of the south are watered by the
Bhagirathi, and its tributaries like the Mayurakshi, the Kangsabati, the Damodar and the Rupnarayan.

"The laterite soil zone in the western end of the State comprising the districts of Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum and parts of Burdwan is an extension of the Chhotanagapur plateau and somewhat different from the alluvial Gangetic plains. It is largely plain lands with an undulating landscape and dotted with hills and hillocks, the highest elevation of about 2,000 ft. being attained in the Ayodhya hills in the district of Purulia.

Soils: "The soil of the West Bengal is of four principal types, namely, brown, podsolic, lateritic, alluvial and mangrove. The first type, podsolic, suitable for tea plantations, is found in the hill areas of the north. Laterite soil is found in the district of Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum and parts of Midnapore and Burdwan. The plains of the northern districts and the south are within the alluvial tract. The soil is of superior fertility and suitable for khariff, rabi and other crops. The mangrove soil in the Sunderbans is of limited use for cultivation because of its high salinity.

Climate and Rainfall: The climate in West Bengal is mainly tropical and extremely humid and oppressive especially during the monsoon months. The western districts of Purulia and Bankura and some areas of Midnapore have dry summer resembling the summer in Chhotanagpur."
The mean annual temperature in the state varies from place to place. The winter is short in the State lasting from mid-November to January in most areas. The Himalayan north and the hilly subdivisions of Darjeeling have the coldest and longest winter, extensive areas in the Himalayan district experiencing snow-fall and recording temperature below 0°C. The western districts also have longer and colder winter than the districts in the Gangetic plains. The summer time begins from February and the maximum temperature is recorded in the month of May. The western dry districts of Purulia, Bankura, Midnapore and parts of Birbhum and Burdwan have the hottest summers. The maximum temperature ranges between 45° and 48° in places like Durgapur City (Burdwan), Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram (Midnapore) in this region. The city of Calcutta and the neighbourhood have an oppressive summer, the maximum temperature rising up to about 43°. Besides the hilly areas of the Himalayan north low temperatures also recorded in these districts, the temperature coming down occasionally to 6° in places.

"The State gets its rainfall mainly from the South-West monsoon current from the Bay of Bengal. Tropical cyclones originating in the Bay often hit the coastal areas of the State". The tropical cyclones and tidal waves play havoc in their wakes destroying standing crops, houses, and other properties. It has remained a major-cause of natural calamities that befall on the coastal population of the State.

"The average rainfall in the State is about 180 cm. of which the maximum precipitation of about 130 cm. occurs during the monsoon months of June to September. Rainfall varies widely from region to region. The Himalayan foothills have the maximum rainfall of over 400 cm. The districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar constitute one region where rainfall is quite heavy and well above the State average. The western most districts of Purulia, Bankura and parts of Midnapore are comparatively dry with scanty rainfall and considered as drought prone areas. The plain districts in the Gangetic delta have average rainfall".

Demographic Background: West Bengal had a population of 44,312,011 according to the Census of 1971. West Bengal ranks 4th amongst states by size of population; the first 3 states in order are (i) Uttar Pradesh, (ii) Bihar, and (iii) Maharashtra. West Bengal has a population density of 504 sq. km. and is the second most densely populated State in the country ranking just below Kerala which has a density of 549.

Since the turn of the 20th century the population of the State has recorded a steady rise from decade to decade except for a slight fall during the decade 1911-21. The variation in population since 1801 to 1871 is shown below:

2. Census of India 1971, op.cit., p.4
### Table 1.1
Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage decade variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>16,940,088</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>17,988,769</td>
<td>+6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>17,474,348</td>
<td>-2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>18,897,036</td>
<td>+8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>23,229,552</td>
<td>+22.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>26,299,980</td>
<td>+13.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>36,926,279</td>
<td>+32.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>44,312,011</td>
<td>+26.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>54,485,560</td>
<td>+22.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sex Ratio:** West Bengal had 23,435,987 males against 20,878,024 females according to 1971 Census. The sex ratio (number of females per 1000 males) works out to 891. This is a slight improvement over the ratio of 878 in 1961. The changes in the sex ratio since 1901 are shown below:

### Table 1.2
Sex Ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"West Bengal is one of the few states in the country with a heavy net immigration. Preponderance of males amongst the immigrants from the neighbouring states of Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh is the main reason for sex ratio being unfavourable to females in the State."

Economic Activities: "The working population of the State constitutes 27.91 per cent of the total population. The statement below gives the distribution of the working force by broad industrial categories. The percentage of workers in each category to total workers is also shown in the Statement".

More than 58 per cent of the working population of the State are engaged in agriculture. Agricultural labourers alone constitute more than a quarter of the working force. Industries including household industries together with other services account for another quarter of the Total Workers.

Rural and Urban Population: Out of the total population of 44,312,011 of the State, only a quarter (24.75 per cent) live in the cities and towns and remaining 75.25 per cent live in the villages. The proportion of urban to total population is increasing steadily in the State. The pace of urbanisation has not, however, been rapid enough indicating, amongst other things, a slow rate of economic growth. The statement below indicates the trend of urbanisation during the last seven decades.

3. Census of India, op. cit., p.6
4. Census of India, op. cit., p.7
## Table 1.3

### Distribution of Working Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>%age to total workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Workers</strong></td>
<td>12,368,944</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Cultivators</td>
<td>3,954,910</td>
<td>31.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td>3,272,198</td>
<td>26.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Livestock, forestry, fishery, hunting and plantations, orchards and allied activities</td>
<td>383,358</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Mining and Quarrying</td>
<td>115,478</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Manufacturing, processing, servicing &amp; repairs:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Household Industry</td>
<td>333,701</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Other than Household Industry</td>
<td>1,405,710</td>
<td>11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Construction</td>
<td>124,312</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Trade and Commerce</td>
<td>981,378</td>
<td>7.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Transport, Storage &amp; Communications</td>
<td>516,797</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Other Services</td>
<td>1,301,104</td>
<td>10.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.4
Urban Population: West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Urban Population</th>
<th>% increase in Urban Population</th>
<th>% increase in Urban Population over the decade</th>
<th>Percentage of Urban Population over the decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>16,940,088</td>
<td>2,066,550</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>17,998,769</td>
<td>2,349,608</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>13.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>17,474,348</td>
<td>2,517,874</td>
<td>-2.91</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>14.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>18,697,036</td>
<td>2,695,867</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>15.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>23,229,552</td>
<td>4,740,222</td>
<td>22.92</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>20.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>26,299,980</td>
<td>6,281,642</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>23.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>34,926,279</td>
<td>8,540,842</td>
<td>32.78</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>24.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>44,312,011</td>
<td>10,867,033</td>
<td>26.87</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>24.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>54,485,560</td>
<td>14,433,488</td>
<td>22.95</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>26.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

India is predominantly an agricultural and economically backward country with more than 50 per cent of the total population living below the poverty line. About 70 per cent of the population still directly depend on agriculture for their livelihood; and about half of her national income comes from agricultural sector.

Despite many breakthroughs in the fields of industry, technology and agriculture, the country has hardly made any
significant dent in alleviating the conditions of the peasantry. The problems of rural poverty rather have multiplied in course of time and assumed multiple dimensions.

Keeping in view the problems, a micro study has been undertaken touching upon various aspects of agriculture and agrarian social structure. Here the problems addressed to are confined to West Bengal agrarian structure. The major focus of attention is on: (i) **Pattern of land relations**, (ii) **agricultural development**, and (iii) **agricultural labour movements**. In fact it is an enquiry into the causes of agricultural backwardness of West Bengal.

(i) **Conceptual Framework**: In social science it is not possible to analyse any present phenomenon scientifically without tracing its historical background. Since every phenomenon is a synthesis or anti-thesis of multiple elements/factors, it would, therefore, be appropriate to underline the problems, identify them conceptually and correlate them scientifically to reach certain conclusions to draw policy measures. The issues which are to be addressed have been given in the diagram depicting conceptual framework. To assess the social and economic consequences of land relations the conceptual framework will take into account every aspects of agrarian structure of a given unit which is to be studied.
The diagram clarifies the conceptual framework of the proposed study in brief. It brings into relief the important variables that are to be studied. Some variables are preconditioning factors while some are outcomes of the process.

With this conceptual framework attempts will be made to trace the past of the events and the historical surroundings in which the events, namely, legislative measures, peasant revolts, etc. took place. A brief but precise details of the pattern of land relations in pre-independence era will be attempted for proper understanding of the situation during the projected study period between 1950-51 and 1980-81.
Efforts would also be made to show the functional relationships between land and labour, and in the relationships the relative bargaining power of the labouring classes. (For clear understanding of the position of various classes, each class will be defined according to their socio-economic and political power orientation and stakes).

In addition to this, an attempt will be made to show the gradual deterioration of the living standard and proliferation of the agricultural labourers, small peasants and share croppers. It will also be endeavoured to show the impact of hierarchical and hereditary tenurial system of agricultural development.

Attempt will also be made to show how far the development of present agrarian structure has been influenced by political and economic factors and to what extent it has contributed to the establishment of ordinal relationships (not cardinal ones) in social formations.

(ii) Scope of the Study: The study includes a short history of land relations and land reforms in pre-independence era and a brief note on agricultural development and growth of various agrarian classes.

In the study of post-independence era it includes the instances of various legislative measures and their impacts on agricultural development in West Bengal. This study will also focus on the process of formation of different agrarian classes and their organisation for rights on lands and wages.
The study will focus attention on: (i) legislative measures after independence, (ii) pattern of land relations, (iii) pattern of productivity vis-a-vis agricultural development, and (iv) the process of agricultural labour movements.

To be precise it will attempt to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the measures since the Permanent Settlement in 1793 adopted by the Colonial Rulers to land questions?
2. What are the impacts of those measures on the pattern of land relations, production, productivity and distribution of wealth, especially agricultural wealth?
3. What extent productivity, land use pattern, development of agricultural infrastructural facilities and tenurial arrangements have been evolved since independence?
4. How different policy measures are evolved?
5. What factors have contributed to the evolution of various policy measures?
6. How various classes have appeared in agrarian social structure?
7. What are the present pattern of landownership in West Bengal?
8. What are the factors responsible for the growth and spread of share cropping system?
9. What are the modes of production prevailing in agriculture?
10. What are the factors responsible for the growth of agricultural labourers and the problems of their organisation?

The above questions assume very critical significance because land is the most important means of production as about 70 per cent of West Bengal's population directly depend on it. The pattern of land relations has important significance on production and distribution of agricultural wealth. Through
these questions efforts would be made to delineate the agrarian problems and underline their solutions.

(iii) Approach: The approach of the study will be: (i) to take an overview of the historical development of land relations and its present pattern at the State and district levels, (ii) to develop conceptual framework for assessing the extent of influence exerted by pattern of land relations on production, and land use pattern and agricultural development in general, and (iii) to carry out in-depth study and analysis of land relations, agricultural development, modes of production and agricultural labour movements at village level. In brief the approach will be as follows:

Diagram 1.2
SOURCE-APPROACH

Secondary Sources

GENERAL

Pattern of Land Relations → Agricultural Development → Agricultural Labour Movements

SPECIFIC

Pattern of Land Relations → Agricultural Development → Agricultural Labour Movements

Primary Sources
(iv) Objectives: Objectives of the Study are to analyse and find out:

* different class relationships in West Bengal agriculture;
* those relationships which have been conducive to production and product distribution;
* those relationships which have been detrimental to the agricultural development of West Bengal;
* causes of development of different pattern of relations in agrarian structure;
* observe the trends which have been produced by the various legislative measures;
* definite effects of legislative measures on different classes of agrarian society of West Bengal;
* prove that successive legislative measures have exerted only marginal impact on land relations and productivity;
* the causes of slow progress of the agricultural workers movements; and
* formulate plan and policy measures which would be conducive to social justice and fair distribution of economic benefits.

The Study is based on certain hypotheses formulated on certain inferences drawn from previously known facts and attempts will be made to test them with empirical evidence. The following are the major hypotheses intended to be tested:

1. In areas where capitalist farming has substantially grown, the proportion of landless labourer is likely to be high;
2. In areas where movement of agricultural labourer is strong, capitalist farming is also high.
3. The areas of high degree of irrigation are also areas where capitalist farming has been growing.
4. Introduction of new varieties of crops and multi-cropping has occurred in areas where capitalist farming is growing.
5. Areas of near large urban centres are also of expanding capitalist farming.

6. Capitalist farming may be developing in certain areas of high incidence of landless labourers, without significant introduction of new agricultural implements, like tractors, irrigation implements, etc.

7. Growth of capitalist farming is by no means inconsistent with absence of purchase of modern equipment by the majority of farmers, since they could hire these machines on certain service and amount basis in cash or kind, from others.

8. Tenurial forms and size-class of holdings determine input-factor allocation, production and distribution in agriculture.

9. Legislative measures have influenced landrelationship considerably.

(v) Methodology: The pattern of land relations and its impact on agricultural development and agricultural labour movements will be studied in two phases and at five levels. The 'phases' connote historical time-periods. The first phase is the pre-independence period and the second phase is the post-independence period. The pre-independence period covers certain issues that influenced agrarian relations enormously, the first one being the Permanent Settlement in 1793. The first phase thus forms the historical backdrop of the present study.

The second phase covers the period between 1950-51 and 1960-81. This period has been marked by various legislative measures, peasant upsurge and development of radical political thinkings, about agrarian questions.

In the second phase variables/factors like land holdings, tenurial patterns, legislative measures, agricultural classes, production of important crops, introduction of bio-technology in
agriculture, and infrastructural facilities will be discussed over certain period. Trends of growth rates of various factors and different variables will be examined and an attempt would be made to see the impact of the prevailing pattern of land relations on the above variables, to bring into relief the agricultural development trends in West Bengal during the period under study.

The 'levels' connote: (i) **State level**, (ii) **District level**, (iii) **Village level**, (iv) **Household level**, and (v) **Respondent level**.

In this study various aspects of agrarian problems mentioned above will be examined both quantitatively and qualitatively. The study will be a time-series one. The study will highlight the various features of agricultural development vis-a-vis legislative measures which might have influenced the various changes.

Variables which will be studied at State level, will also be examined at district level by following a time-series analysis. An inter-district comparison among different variables will also be attempted.

At village level the study will examine issues which will be borne out by the study and analysis of data, information and observations at the State and district level. At village level the study will focus on the inter-village 'economic relationship' with reference to 'nodal' village and 'peripheral' village
economies to determine the issues at development of capitalism in agriculture and their relative position in the economic frame.

Since the pattern of land relations is the pivotal point of discussion, the trends and magnitudes of agricultural development would be measured in terms of ownership of land holdings by various size-classes of holdings.

At household level, the study will take into account socio-economic, political, educational and occupational positions to show to what extent these aspects are determined by the households' relative ownership of land.

At respondent level opinion will be sought to determine his/her levels of socio-political and economic awareness.

At first two levels i.e., at the State and districts levels' the development of agriculture in West Bengal will be described in general. The discussion will include both the State as well as all the districts.

At the village, households and respondent levels' some purposive selection procedure will be followed to identify households.

For the purpose of our study two villages will be selected - one village will be supporting in nature in its relation with the 'nodal' village, and the nodal village itself. All the households of the subordinate village will be surveyed through questionnaires and household survey schedules; and from the
'nodal' village only those households will surveyed who will be identified by the surveyed households of the peripheral village on account of their having economic relations with them (households of nodal village).

The main purpose of following such method is to establish the 'operational strategies' of emerging capitalist farming and its locational/spatial 'nexus' and environments for growth.

This will be done in the following manner: first, all the households of the 'peripheral' or 'subordinate' village will be surveyed and after the survey it would be established with whom in the 'nodal' village they have major economic interactions/dealings.

Once the households are identified they will be surveyed through administering household schedules to seek various informations and collect relevant data. In studying these two villages no special sampling technique will be followed. In fact it will be survey-cum-certain specific-result oriented method to suit our effort to examine the pattern of land relations and its impact on agricultural development.

For certain specific reasons the focus of our attention will be on the pattern of each group of households' relations to land holding size they cultivate by themselves and by hired labour; and their respective productive capacity and efficiency for surplus generation.
Special attention will be given to small farmers (who owning land but cannot use their capital and labour fully on their land as the owned land is not enough to absorb their capital and labour) who undertake cultivation on share-basis if land is available for such operation or sell their surplus labour as agricultural wage labour.

In this study efforts will also be made to study the conditions of the agricultural labourers in general and landless agricultural labourer in particular with special reference to their organisational problems. This will be done through surveying the agricultural labour households of the 'subordinate' village which will be selected for the study.

Data regarding various aspects of farm-households will be collected, keeping in view the major focus of the study: identification of modes of production especially the controversial 'capitalist mode' of production relation in agriculture.

Information/data thus collected will encompass the economic aspects of the peasant households with reference to their holding sizes; and with reference to their holding sizes other social, political, demographic and attitudes aspects would also be studied and examined.

Attempt will be made to establish possible correlations between the size of holding and family-size, between landholding and educational status, between landholding and occupational
pattern, agricultural implements, farm assets, consumer durables, livestock, etc. The impact of land relations will be examined in the light of the following diagramatic model 1.3

Diagram 1.3

LAND QUESTION

Institutional Set-up (Agrarian Structure)

Legal Status (Legislative Measures)

Ownership and Tenurial Pattern

Distribution (Size-class of Land Holding)

Agricultural Development

Inputs

Infrastructure Finance Mechanisation Fertilizer Irrigation Labour

Production and Landuse-pattern

Distribution of Production

Surplus Generation and Expropriation

Agricultural Labour
(vi) **Information and Data Base**: Information and data for the purpose of the study will be obtained from:

(a) published sources like, Census Reports, Statistical Abstracts, Books, Journals and other Publications;
(b) through questionnaires/schedule; and
(c) personal interviews and observations.

I.4 **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The struggle for independence addressed a number of issues, inter alia, related to economic problems of the country in general and agricultural problems in particular. Since land was the dominant means of production and a vast segment of the population directly depended upon land for survival, the 'land question' attracted intellectual attention of both professional intellectuals and political activists. 'Land problems', therefore, formed one of the important political propaganda plank of the dominant national political parties which were the Congress Party and other left parties in the pre-independence period.

A brief review of literature before independence, however, shows that the question of land was discussed from ownership-point of view and in fact literature that came into being after the Permanent Settlement dealt mainly on the question of ownership and pattern of revenue collections. One of the most important studies was done by Baden Powell. Other important

writings include contributions by Saha, Sinha, Mukherjee, Gopal, Islam, Sinha, Dutt, Chatterjee, and Umar. Most of the these studies were non-empirical and historical in nature except Islam's. The above works throw light on the following phenomena: first, they endeavour to highlight the process of development of landed interest in relation to general economic development of the country; second, they try to show the intensity of colonial exploitation and consequent deprival of peasant from land-ownership and its general implications on agrarian society of Bengal in particular.

Islam, however, with huge amount of empirical evidence collected from various sources try to underline the historical

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2. K.B. Saha, Economics of Rural Bengal, Chukerverty, Chatterjee and Company, Ltd., Calcutta, 1930.


process of under-development of agrarian economy of Bengal. These works are, however, few among the vast number of works on general aspects of agrarian economy of Bengal.

After independence a number of studies have been conducted which touch upon important aspects of agrarian structure, namely, production, land-ownership pattern, tenancy, size of holdings, mode of production, and agricultural labour movement. Important contributions by Rudra, Khasnobis, Bardhan, Saini, Sau, Chakraborty, Dasgupta and Chandra, in analysing the above


aspects has been quite helpful. Once again these are a very few in comparison with the vast number of literature that has recently come up.

Most of these studies cited above are concerned mainly with theoretical reconstruction of agrarian structure with proper empirical evidence. These studies analyse and find the following phenomena: First, in the production side, it finds that there is inverse relationship between farm-size and productivity. Exception, however, has been marked by Rudra (Indian Agricultural Economics: Myths and Realities, new Delhi, 1982 pp.150-190). Second, in the case of prevailing pattern of farm-size, some studies reveal that size of holding around five acre is 'economic holding'. Third, capitalist penetration in agriculture is slow. Four, differentiation in the peasantry is still not class oriented. Fifth, agricultural labourers are still the most unorganised section of the peasantry. Six, most of the studies have been conducted during the last two decades and as a result address the issues pertaining to the contemporary history.

Farm-size and productivity issues have become central in the analysis of agricultural production. After 'farm-size and production per acre' the central issue in agrarian question was tenurial forms and productivity and problems of factor-


combinations. Subsequently, peasant organization and agricultural workers movement took up important position in the discussion. Along with this trend of discussion and analysis the identification of the modes of production in agriculture and class differentiation in agrarian structure dominated the discussion scene over a decade. A large number of articles and books appeared and a debate of high magnitude took place to conceptualize the prevailing modes of production in agriculture.

Thorner points out that, “The set of rural classes proposed by various authors ranges from Ashok Rudra’s drastic duality to Nirmal Chandra’s six-fold groupings, and even longer number of categories used by Joan Mencher and Utsa Patnaik”. She further suggests that, “Early interventions in the debate were largely limited to economic issues. Later papers have paid increasing attention to elements of consciousness and culture, with special reference to caste. One of the weaknesses of Marxist studies on India has been precisely a failure, perhaps even an unwillingness, to deal adequately with the basic facet of Indian society”. She further comments that, “If some one with no personal experience of mass leadership may be permitted to pass


22. Alice Thorner, op. cit.

23. Ibid.
comment on her fellow academics, I would say that most of the political prescriptions smack of the armchair and the scholar’s candle."

It should, however, be mentioned that debate which took place addressing issues in agrarian structure of India in general and West Bengal in particular from the failure of land reform measures which wanted to redistribute land among the landless rural households as a measure to alleviate their economic conditions.

"The general objectives of agrarian reform have been:

- Abolition of the Zamindari system and similar systems and better security for the tenants;
- Abolition of Share-cropping;
- Decrease of tenancy-rates;
- Improved living and working conditions for landless labourers;
- Co-operative organisations of farming with the final goal of cooperative village organisation; and
- More equitable distribution of land by fixing of ceilings with exemptions for modern and intensive large holding under owner-cultivation".25

It has been widely criticised that legislative land reform measures have not been successful in redistributing land and abolishing tenancy. With regard to failure of land reform measures to alleviate the condition of rural poor the studies of


25. Theodor Bergmann, Agrarian Reform in India, Agricole Publishing Academy, New Delhi, 1984, pp.30-31.
Some earlier studies conducted to analyse agrarian structure of other countries especially of USSR have thrown great deal of light on the aspects which have been central to this study. The earlier studies have brought many aspects of agrarian structure in sharp focus and these analyses have played important role in formulating policy measures. The most important studies were

conducted by L.N. Kritsman and his School. The study of Chayanov may also be mentioned. More recently, Clines efforts in determining the impact of land reform could also be mentioned. The review of earlier literature is however is not exhaustive here nor it has been possible to mention all the works individually. We have found that the existing literature was mainly concerned with macro-level analysis of agrarian structure. However, we agree with some arguments put forward by these studies mentioned above, but differ also on the ground that macro-level studies do not always represent important under-current of agrarian structure. We have, therefore, tried to give a macro-analysis and subsequently tried to focus on the micro-level analysis and this way we have attempted to highlight the various aspects of agrarian structure and the process of agricultural development in West Bengal.

37. Terry Cox, Peasants, Class, and Capitalism: The Rural Research of L.N. Kritsman and his School, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986. Cox has given a detail which covers the important aspects of Kritsman's thoughts and have also brought into sharp focus all the issues which home modern day relevance.
