ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the land relations in Western Uttar Pradesh as they have been shaped during the period 1951-81. It covers the districts of the Agra and Meerut divisions.

Land Relations have been defined as the relationships among various classes and persons working on, and associated with land. After the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1951, land relations in Western U.P. underwent marked changes. The institution of absentee landlordism was in law abolished. On the eve of zamindari abolition most of the land was tenant operated; now the new landowners (the bhumidhars) cultivated the land themselves as well as through hired labour. Inequalities in the distribution of land-holdings have persisted; though this inequality is comparatively less marked in West U.P. In Western U.P. land settlements during the British period were mostly made with small and medium sized zamindars under Bhaiachara land tenures. After zamindari abolition occupancy tenants benefited as they became the owners of the land they cultivated earlier but for the landless labourers no essential change occurred. Land reforms also failed to check the practice of share-cropping. Thus the exploitation of
small and marginal peasants and landless labourers continued even after land reforms (chapter II).

Commercialisation of agriculture also affected land relations. Generally poorer cultivators and share-croppers could not afford to grow commercial crops and had to be content with inferior grains. Production of commercial crops has been undertaken mostly by richer peasants. This further accentuated the degree of income disparity between the small and marginal peasants and the richer peasants (chapter III).

There was no scope left for any further expansion of cultivated land in the region by 1971. Therefore production could increase only by intensification of agriculture. The Green Revolution technology was adopted in the late 1960s. It consisted of (1) high yielding variety technology and (2) mechanisation. The HYV technology is scale neutral, but not resource neutral. Larger farmers have reaped greater advantage from HYV technology due to its higher cost. The high yielding variety technology had a positive impact on the demand for labour in our region. Double copping, transplanting, application of inputs and weeding required more labour. Mechanisation of agriculture (in operations like irrigation, ploughing and threshing) has occurred on a larger
scale in the districts of Western U.P. compared to other regions of the state. This has resulted in displacing human labour and has adversely affected its demand (chapter IV).

At the bottom of the land system is the class of agricultural labourers. In addition to economic exploitation they are socially discriminated against because a big section of the landless labourers belong to the scheduled castes. Wages of agricultural labourers did not move upward by the same rate as the cost of living index. Most of the debt incurred by agricultural labourers was for consumption purposes, which is an indication of acute poverty (chapter V).

The caste system in Western U.P. is clearly related to exercise of differential rights in land. Upper castes are the main landholding castes and the majority of the agricultural labourers belong to lower and untouchable castes (chapter V).

The Uttar Pradesh Imposition of Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings Act, 1961, was passed to improve the economic conditions of agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers. Stricter legislation on agricultural ceiling was passed in 1975. The area actually taken over by Government by 1980 in Western U.P. was however modest in size. The land
actually distributed among agricultural labourers and small farmers was still smaller. The resistance to ceiling by landowners in West U.P. was much greater than by their peers in Central and Southern U.P. where both the acquisition and distribution of land were on a larger scale. The ceiling legislation was not implemented very effectively and hence landholdings of rich peasants (bhumidhars) were not reduced to any significant degree (chapter VI).

Prices have an important bearing on agrarian structure. Since rich farmers are the monopolisers of commodity surplus, they gained from price rise. But the relative position of agricultural labourers deteriorated because they are the net buyers of agricultural produce. The actual working of the credit policy of the Government has further widened the resource gap between the large and the small farmers (chapter VII).

These detailed findings lead us to some broad conclusions. The agrarian relations in 1981 are vastly different from those in 1951. Self-cultivated ownership holdings are today the dominant form instead of rent receiving landlord holdings. But these has been no egalitarian redistribution of land, rather the original unevenness of operational units was reproduced under the consolidation of Holdings programme. This not only preserved
rich peasant farming, but helped to enlarge it. Former landlords operating sir and khudkasht and prosperous rich peasants have tended to grow into capitalist farmers, with HYV seeds, private tubewell irrigation, mechanisation and growing markets for agricultural produce. Owing to cheapness of labour, and the heavier labour input in small farms, this process is still not very advanced, but is certainly identifiable. Under these transformed relationships agricultural production has certainly increased. Production of commercial crops has increased even more. But the benefits of these changes have not proportionately reached the lower strata of the rural population, the landless labourers and poor peasants. Despite land-ceiling legislation the agrarian structure remains very deeply differentiated and inequitous.