INTRODUCTION

The study of the emerging land relations in India has developed into one of the most important aspects of social science research. There are many major issues relating to agrarian relations at the level of the country as a whole that have generated controversy and debate. In the present study an attempt has been made to study the major issues in the light of the developments in the agrarian scene in Western Uttar Pradesh. The study is based on the following major hypotheses: (1) the inequality in the distribution of land ownership has not been substantially altered in favour of the rural poor through land reforms (P.C. Joshi).¹ (2) the number of agricultural labourers has increased and they are largely being retained within the agricultural sector (P.C. Joshi).² (3) the new technology has increased the overall volume of work in certain operations (H.L. Laxminarayan).³ (4) the increased labour demand associated with the new technology has been offset by mechanisation (C.H. Hanumantha

2. Ibid.
(5) the new technology has largely benefited the rich farmers (F.R. Frankel). (6) there has been an increase in share-cropping and small farms have increased in number (P.C. Joshi). (7) institutional credit has been mostly monopolized by the rural rich while rising agricultural prices also tend to increase the profits earned by this class (Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Utsa Patnaik).

The above are some of the major issues on agrarian relations at All-India level. There can be no meaningful search leading to macro insights without a detailed and data based study of the problems at the micro level. India is a large country with marked regional and inter regional variations in agrarian relations. Therefore, there is a greater need to study the problems at regional levels.

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1. Technological Change and the Distribution of Gains in Indian Agriculture, Delhi, 1975.
Clearly, while the importance of regional studies to verify all India hypotheses will not be denied by anyone, it can be argued that regional specificities are likely to distort any inference drawn for the country as a whole, unless these are constantly borne in mind. Ideally, one should look for and choose the most typical region. For this there cannot be an easy indicator; and it is by no means the intention here to argue that Western U.P. is such a representative region. However, there are three important considerations which underlie our choice of this region.

First of all, in Uttar Pradesh (excluding the Himalayan districts) the Zamindari Abolition came in almost its classic form and very soon after Independence. This enables one to separate here the consequences of this category of reform from those of the next stage of reforms, based on land-ceilings, which came in the sixties. Such a neat separation is not possible for many other regions in India.

Secondly, Western U.P. falls within the wheat zone and, therefore, well within the area of the Green Revolution from the very beginning. And yet owing to pressure on land and only very limited land reclamation through canal irrigation, agriculture is here essentially intensive, while in the Punjab and much of Haryana, by comparison, it is far more
extensive. One could say, therefore, that Western U.P. is far less atypical of India than the Punjab; and introduction of technology here cannot be as directly attributed to labour shortages as say in Punjab.

Finally, the fact that Western U.P. is not among the more industrialised regions of India (the Delhi industrial region has mainly developed in the last two decades on its fringe, and largely outside of its limits) is another positive factor behind our choice. The pull of industrial employment, and other rural impacts of urban industrialisation, can practically be excluded here as major factor in the changing agrarian situation. (They cannot, of course, be regarded as non-existent or even insignificant). In this respect too the region of Western U.P. may well mirror the situation in India as a whole better than industrially advanced as well as backward regions of the country.

The districts covered by this study comprise the Agra and Meerut Divisions of Uttar Pradesh. These districts are Dehra-Dun, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura, Agra, Mainpuri and Etah. The district of Ghaziabad has been relatively recently carved out of the Meerut District.
The State itself is identical with what before 1947 was the most populous province of British India, bearing the name of the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh. In terms of population, Uttar Pradesh is India's largest State. It varies in character both geo-physically and economically. It has a widely different terrain and range of precipitation. Essentially, however, it is divisible, geographically, into two unequal parts; the Himalayan portion, and the Ganges Plain.

D.H.K. Spate has divided the 'Ganges Plain', again, into two major portions. These are the Upper Ganges Plains and the Middle Ganges Plains. Most of the Middle Ganges Plains lie in Bihar; but we are concerned here with what Spate has described as the Upper Ganges Plains. The Upper Ganges Plains incorporates the Divisions of Meerut (excluding the Dehra-Dun district), Agra, Rohilkhand, Lucknow, Allahabad (excluding the tahsils of Handia, Phulpur, Meja and Karchhana) and Faizabad (excluding the tahsils of Utraula, Balrampur, Faizabad, Tanda, Akbarpur, Sultanpur, Kadipur and Patti) and the Southern part of the Haldwani tahsil of Naini Tal.

Spate has divided the Upper Ganges Plains by a line running roughly from the Yamuna-Ganga confluence at Allahabad
across the north-north-west to south-south-east section of the Ghaghra. This does not correspond well with the alignments of isohyets but does divide two main crop-areas, the wheat producing areas mainly to the West of the line, and the rice zone, with an acreage double that of wheat, in the east. It also divides U.P. into two parts – Western U.P. and Eastern U.P. The Western U.P. Plains represent the best agricultural region in the whole of the State. The region has a very high production level, generally. One of the reasons for the high production level is that nearly all agricultural developments, in the past, took place mainly in the Western part of U.P. A major development was the construction of a network of canals which reduced the element of risk in agriculture and gave farmers incentive to experiment with new techniques and crops.

The Upper Ganges Plain of U.P. is a sub-humid region between the dry Punjab Plain and the humid Middle Ganga Plain. The average annual rainfall varies between 50 cm and 140 cm with an uneven spatial distribution.

Soils of Western Uttar Pradesh are classified into three main varieties: loam, bhur and matiyar. Loam is a mixture of sand and clay in almost equal proportions. Bhur
contains 75 per cent of sand in it. Matiyar contains a greater amount of clay and is darker in colour.1

Wheat, barley and millets are the main crops of Western U.P. and they together account for about 60% of the total cropped area in this region.2

The economy of Upper Ganges Plain is dominated by agriculture which, together with its related activities forms the most important source of employment and income. The proportion of the net sown area to the total area varies between 82 per cent in Mathura to 62 per cent in Mainpuri in Western U.P. The eastern and several other districts of the Awadh Plain, on the other hand have a higher proportion of Usar and other waste and barren lands.

The Upper Ganges Plain has a very low percentage of land under forest (8.4%) as compared with U.P. as a whole (12.8%) which in itself is not a high proportion. Some of the districts of Western U.P. e.g. Saharanpur (13%), Pilibhit (20.7%) and Mainpuri (12.1%) have more than the average area under forests in the Upper Ganges Plain.

The Upper Ganges Plain is one of the highly irrigated agricultural regions of India and irrigation has played a dominant role in boosting its agricultural prosperity, particularly during the last one hundred years. There is a wide sub-regional and district level variation in the percentage of area under irrigation. Most of the districts of Western U.P. have a high proportion of irrigated area. Tube-wells constitute a major source of irrigation in Western U.P. But tanks and jhils are negligible as sources of irrigation.

The Upper Ganges Plain has a diversified cropping pattern. There is a very high emphasis on the food-crops and over 85 per cent of the total cropped area is devoted to such crops in this region. Wheat is the premier crop of Western U.P., and one fourth of the cropped land in the region is under this prized crop. Wheat replaces rice as one goes west-ward where the fertile loamy soil, adequate and assured irrigation and the small but highly beneficial winter rain and suitable temperature regimes are significant factors.

The other major crops of Western U.P. are rice, millets, maize, pulses, oilseeds and sugarcane. Rice is second to wheat in importance in the region of Upper Ganges Plain claiming one-sixth of the total cropped area. It is an important crop in the districts of Saharanpur and Pilibhit in Western U.P. where it occupies 17.3 per cent and 32.0 per
cent of the cropped land respectively. The district of Dehradun is also famous for rice cultivation. But in the districts of Aligarh (1.4%), Meerut (2.5%), Muzaffarnagar (7.6%) and Bulandshahr (8.8%) it is rather unimportant and in the districts of Mathura (0.5%) and Agra (1.8%) it is negligible.¹

Millet and maize together claim 16.8 per cent of the total cropped area of the Upper Ganges Plain. Bajra is the most important millet crop of this region. The Districts of Agra and Meerut divisions form a compact zone cultivating this crop, the area varying between 9.2 per cent of the total cropped area in Bulandshahr to 24.7 per cent in Agra.²

Sugarcane and cotton are the major commercial crops of the Upper Ganges Plain. Sugarcane occupies 7.5% of the crop land in Upper Ganges Plain. It is one of the important crops of Western U.P. The area under sugarcane varies between 24.3 per cent in Muzaffarnagar and 10.6 per cent in Naini Tal in Western U.P. cotton is concentrated in the west plain between Muzaffarnagar and Mathura where each district devotes more

² Ibid., p.167.
than one per cent of its crop land to cotton. But the acreage under cotton has now been mostly switched over to sugarcane.  

The Upper Ganges Plain is one of the most densely populated parts of India. The population of this region has shown an overall growth of 47.3 per cent during 1901 and 1961. Western U.P. as a whole is the area of overall high growth (50-80%) excepting the districts of Etawah, Farrukhabad, Mainpuri and Aligarh which show medium overall growth (35-50%). Shahjahanpur and Pilibhit are the areas of low growth (below 35%). Etah shows high growth rate (80%). The increased rate of growth, it is generally accepted, was due to continued improvement in medical and health services, resulting in greater longevity and decreased mortality.

Within the Upper Ganges Plain there is much disparity in respect of economic development, West U.P. being the most developed and the Awadh tarai the least. In Western U.P. there is still considerable scope for further economic development; specially there is scope for further crop diversification and introduction of new crops like soyabean.

The population of Western Uttar Pradesh increased from 2.28 crores in 1951 to 3.93 crores in 1981, that is by about 73 per cent. The net increase in the total population of Western U.P. between 1951-81 was 1.65 crores.\(^1\) The proportion of population of Western U.P. to the total population of Uttar Pradesh was 36 per cent in 1951 but this proportion came down to 35.5 per cent in 1981. This means that the population of other regions of U.P. increased comparatively by a faster rate than that of Western U.P.

All the regions of Uttar Pradesh are predominantly rural. According to the 1981 census 82.0 per cent of the total population of the State lived in rural areas and 18 per cent in urban areas. This percentage is 76.2 and 23.8 respectively for Western U.P. West U.P. has the highest percentage of urban population compared to other regions of Uttar Pradesh. The level of urbanisation, decreases as one moves from west to east. A few large villages in the West U.P. have even developed into centres of trade and commerce. It is the most progressive region in the State and the supply of hydro-electric power has helped in the development of agro-based industries e.g. food-processing, edible oils, paper and pulp and sugar manufacturing.

\(^{1}\) Census of India, Uttar Pradesh, 1951 & 1981, p.5.
In an agrarian economy the extent of occupation and possession of land plays an important role in determining the economic and social position of a person. Land relations in the narrowest sense would mean the relationships among various classes and persons working on, and associated with, agriculture. Various agricultural classes emerge as a result of their relationship with land. Some classes own the land, some take in on rent while others merely work on it for wages. The prevailing agrarian relations provide an index to the structure and nature of an agrarian society.

Before the advent of British rule in India private property in land was not fully developed. The state, intermediaries and peasants were involved in a network of customary rights and obligations. The agrarian system was based on the prevailing divisions of labour fortified by the caste system.

The concept of private property in land, with the right of sale and alienation, emerged as a result of introduction of British revenue systems. They created an intermediate strata of landlords together with the establishment of revenue extracting mechanisms at the district and village levels.
It has been argued that the agrarian structure in U.P. was not a feudal but rather an authoritarian paternalistic system, with the village zamindar as a local potentate at the head and the tenants, share-croppers, landless labourers, etc. constituting the lower levels in the hierarchy.

In this study an attempt has been made to examine the land-relations in Western U.P. as they have emerged after independence, especially after the implementation of land reform legislation, which broke-up the older system. The land reform legislation abolished the institution of absentee landlordism, but a new class of landowners - the bhumidhars - were allowed to emerge. The occupancy tenant in some cases benefited as the lands they had cultivated earlier became theirs by law. They took to self-cultivation and prospered. The landlords, afraid of losing their lands due to the impending land reforms, evicted hereditary tenants and took over their land for self-cultivation; most of the evictions took place in the case of smaller tenants. The clause allowing retention of Sir and Khudkasht lands, and the later imposition of ceilings allowed the zamindars to keep large tracts of land. The landless Harijans were worst hit despite some efforts of the Government to protect their interests.

After 1951 the agrarian relation have undergone marked changes in Uttar Pradesh. A study of the new emerging landed classes, share-croppers, cultivators, landless
labourers, etc., and their inter-relationship is of vital importance. The ownership, use and control of land and its produce provide, even today, a key to the understanding of the agrarian structure and its problems as a whole.

The present thesis is based on the study and analysis of data drawn from diverse sources. Reports of various commissions, official and unofficial surveys, and a large number of books and articles have been consulted. A detailed Bibliography is provided at the end.

The study begins (Chapter I) with the description of agrarian relations on the eve of zamindari abolition. This helps in understanding the changes that have taken place in agrarian relations after the abolition of Zamindari system. Chapter II deals with the abolition of Zamindari in U.P. and examines its effects on agrarian relations in the region. Chapter III traces the changes in cropping pattern since 1951 and their impact on different agricultural classes. Special attention has been paid to the development of irrigation and the benefits accruing from it to different sections of peasantry. An attempt has also been made to calculate the compound growth rate of area under important crops for the period 1951-81. The original sources of data on whose basis these calculations were made are 'Uttar Pradesh Mein Mukh Fasloon Ke Ankde' and 'Season and Crop Reports. Chapter IV
studies the introduction of modern technology in agriculture and the changes it has brought in the existing agrarian relations in Western U.P. Chapter V deals with the conditions of agricultural labourers particularly since early sixties. Wages, burden of debt and employment position which are the major factors determining the living conditions of agricultural labourers have been examined. An attempt has been made to trace and analyse the changes that have taken place in the economic conditions of agricultural labourers in Western U.P. during the period 1951-81. Chapter VI is devoted to the study of ceiling legislation, the surplus land actually secured under it and the extent of the distribution among agricultural labourers. Chapter VII discuss the movement of agricultural prices of the major crops in Western U.P. based on statistical data taken from the Farm (Harvest) prices of Principal crops issued by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics. It also deals with the distribution of agricultural credit by government and private agencies among different rural classes and examines the ways in which the supply of agricultural credit influenced the productivity and profit on the farms belonging to different classes of cultivators. The major findings and issues have been summarised in the concluding chapter.