CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

An in-depth study of the peasant agriculture in Assam through the inductive-empirical method ultimately leads the author to conclude the work with the following suggestions, epilogue and prognosis.

14.1 SUGGESTIONS

The scope for further physical expansion of arable land in the state being limited, serious efforts should be made for intensive use of whatever land is available for the peasant in order to achieve higher productivity in agriculture. The agricultural land in Assam has been increasingly used for growing foodgrains, mainly paddy in response to the food requirement of the rapidly increasing population, indicating little commercialization of agriculture. Unless the yield per unit area of rice is increased, its hectareage cannot be reduced to make room for growing other cash crops which would derive higher income to the peasants. The validity of the hypothesis that the intensity of cropping is increased by the pressure of rural population, suggests the exigency of the application of modern inputs and the transformation of traditional farm technology.
supported by the essential infrastructure. Intensification of agriculture should be achieved not by the force of population pressure, but by a choice of scientific farming.

The analysis of the crop-combination pattern and agricultural regionalisation results in two general principles, viz. (i) a combination of fewer crops is an indication of greater productivity; and (ii) the core areas grow the most typical crops of a region whereas the marginal areas show a transitional pattern. The crop-combination regions should, therefore, be demarcated properly for a successful planning of crop-husbandry.

During the decade, 1965-75, there was a very slow rate of increase in the agricultural efficiency in the State. Efforts should, therefore, be made to increase both yield and agricultural efficiency by crop-rotation, inter-culture and also by the use of modern inputs according to the suitability of each crop-combination region. The knowledge of crop-weather calendar should be disseminated through the extension services.

Agricultural productivity may be increased greatly by human efforts in a variety of ways such as intensification of cropping, increased use of fertilisers, manures, improved seeds and irrigated water and crop-rotation technique, terracing, control of pests and diseases and choice of more profitable crops or agricultural practices in relation to the market economy.
Amongst the natural hazards that have been inflicting untold miseries to the peasants in Assam, flood is the most menacing one. By its very nature, magnitude and complexity, control of the Brahmaputra should be treated as a national problem and as such it should be taken over by the Government of India. Since even with the best efforts, appreciable benefits of flood control measures are not likely to be achieved within a short time, some well-thought-out agronomic programmes are needed to correctly and effectively utilise the flood-affected areas, as also to improve their production efficiency. Proper selection of crop-rotation can help the flood-affected peasants to a great extent. For the pre-flood period, early varieties of paddy like 'Dumi' or 'Bala' can be grown, as these short duration crops can be harvested before the onset of flood. 
Rama 2-B Would very well suit this situation (Mid February to June). Three varieties of paddy, namely 'Negeribas', 'Kakubas', and 'Kolangi' may be suggested for low-lying areas as they can stand water-logging and flood. Crop-rotation of 'Boro', jute and autumn 'Ahu', in that order, can be a sound agronomic measure to avoid flood damage. Research emphasis is required to find paddy varieties which are not only of short duration and flood resistant, but also high yielding at the same time. The suitable crops for post-flood period are mustard, wheat and rabi pulses depending on the regional variation of soil characteristics. But successful growth of rabi crops
requires an adequate supply of irrigated water, fertilisers and improved seeds. Timely distribution of the quality seeds among the peasants is highly essential in the flood-prone areas.

For the adoption of successful agronomic measures, identification of the flood-affected areas in the State, as also the nature of the floods are inevitable. But the existing village maps, as maintained by the Village Surveyor (‘Mandal’) do not contain information regarding fields that are chronically or occasionally affected by floods. Although broad maps of flooded area have recently been prepared by the Agriculture Department, correct identification of areas on the ground is absolutely necessary, since the extension agency at the block level would need to be organised to disseminate separate agricultural technology for such peasants who have flood-prone holdings. Suitable steps should be taken by the Land Record Department in consultation with the Flood Control and Agriculture Departments to prepare such maps and indicate the fields subjected to floods of the three kinds by suitable legends.

Besides, such survey and mapping need to be revised periodically.

Because of its peculiar terrain, rolling topography, and very heavy rainfall, the entire State is in urgent need of a well-comprehensive programme for soil conservation and water management. The Soil Conservation Department should take up various measures such as gully plugging, afforestation and
stream bank protection. The State should be fully alive to the problem of soil erosion and take appropriate steps, whenever necessary.

Besides flood and soil erosion, drought is another natural hazard for peasant agriculture in Assam. Rabi cropping is made difficult during the prolonged winter drought season. Irrigation must, therefore, be provided for raising multiple crops in order to obviate the adverse effects of both flood and drought.

As the protection of crops from pests and diseases is beyond the capacity of the individual peasants, the Government should take measures for adequate supply of insecticides and pesticides to the peasants at the appropriate time. In order to make the poor peasants capable of purchasing these chemicals, they must be provided with subsidised credit. Permanent measures should be taken to protect the standing crops from stray cattle and wild animals. This can be done cheaply by enclosing one compact farmland containing many individual farms. Adoption of chemical weed-killers for controlling weeds in the crop-fields is necessary not to allow the productivity of a crop to fall.

For successful operation of agriculture by the peasants and the achievement of maximum growth rate, apart from the removal of all sorts of natural hazards, health of both the peasants and their draught animals must be improved. In view of
the serious deficiency of draught pair per cultivator, at least one pair of healthy draught animal must be provided to a genuine cultivator until peasant agriculture is mechanised so that his potential labour is not under-utilised.

Industrialisation and development of tertiary sector are so insignificant in Assam that they have not been able to divert the surplus labour from agriculture to other occupations. Therefore, urgent steps should be taken to develop industries and the tertiary sector in order to make agriculture economically more efficient by releasing the surplus labour force from it.

As the peasant agriculture is a way of life associated with the traditional elements of the peasant mode of production, it cannot be transformed easily unless farms are organised in a completely new line either capitalistic or cooperative. The malady-ridden socio-economic structure of the traditional society must be rationalised and reorganised to fit into the productivity-oriented money economy of the modern world.

The Law of Inheritance should be amended to prevent further deterioration of the farm size. Besides, new laws should be enacted to debar the non-cultivating adult members of a family, employed in other occupations, from inheriting the agricultural land and purchasing such land from other peasants.

Anti-progressive religious attitude, sense of despondence, fatalistic belief, superstition and the grip of
traditional customs would gradually disappear from the peasant society, if the process of technological transformation, modernisation of socio-cultural institutions, and inculcation of economic sense in the minds of the peasants are ushered in through progressive education. The penetration of the market economy into the rural society, spread of education, development of transport and communication, and urbanisation have started the process of obliteration of the caste system which affects occupational mobility and make the society static and closed. But the election politics seems to have arrested this process, as the division of the electorates into various groups of caste, creed and community helps the political parties win the support of a particular social group of electorates. Such political motive would not be able to withstand for a long time to come, if the standard of living of the peasants could be raised by organising them and their activities.

The Raiyatri system of land tenure and various land reform measures of the Government have led to the creation of small peasant proprietorship and the stratification of the rural society into a few antagonistic socio-economic classes. The creation of a new type of peasantry with millions of small cultivators who are deprived of easy access to the modern factors of production is a measure for establishing social justice only temporarily at the cost of economic gains. On the
other hand, innovative measures, sought to be taken by the Government with a handful of privileged farmers are steps only towards increasing overall agricultural output at the cost of social justice. There is, therefore, only one alternative way to eliminate this contradiction of the present Government policy: that is the creation of joint co-operative farming, pooling the means of production of the small individual peasants together in order to make farming an economic proposition as well as an institution of organised co-operative pattern of living of the rural community. It is through this measure again, that the creation of antagonistic classes may be deterred within a short period. The land reform measures adopted by the Government so far, have been found to be a failure in equitable distribution of land among the peasants, in raising the farm size to be economically viable, in bringing economic benefits to the peasants or to the State, and also in consolidating fragmented landholdings. It has failed both in offering equal opportunity for economic development and establishing social justice. The problem of the diseconomy of small peasant proprietorship can be solved either by encouraging capitalist farming with big-sized holdings to grow, or by organising the small peasants in co-operative farms with the State's patronage. The latter institution is evidently more suitable for an underdeveloped region like Assam, where majority of the farms are of economically
Adoption of improved technology is not possible unless the farm size is raised to an economically feasible unit, tenurial security is ensured, and consolidation of fragmented landholdings is made. For consolidation, the following measures should be taken in stages, one after another as given:

1. Fragmentation of holdings should be prohibited by legislation.
2. Non-cultivators should not be allowed to possess cultivable land.
3. The names of all the genuine cultivators should be registered.
4. Once the infrastructure is built up with the foregoing measures, the agricultural lands of the State may be nationalised.
5. Thereafter, either lands of economic sizes may be distributed amongst the registered peasants on the family basis, or joint co-operative farms may be organised throughout the countryside on compact blocks of agricultural land.

Another way of consolidating scattered holdings is the creation of voluntary Co-operative Village Management. The Co-operative Village Management assumes that peasant proprietorship exists. It makes a distinction between the unit of management and the unit of operation. The resources of the whole village community are pooled together and utilised for securing maximum increase of production and employment by means of co-operative activities within and beyond the village. The ultimate goal of this scheme is the organisation of an integrated
socio-economic rural structure in which agricultural production, village industries, marketing and rural trade, agricultural training, service centres, and rural education are organised on a co-operative basis. Vis-a-vis the incompetence of the existing land reform measures to bring about economically feasible holding size, the schemes suggested above would be the only practical remedies for the solution of the problems of size-disability and tenure disincentive.

Technological transformation of peasant agriculture through the co-operative organisation can increase the labour-absorbing capacity of the agricultural sector along with simultaneous development of secondary and tertiary sectors, needed to support the on-going process of technification in agriculture. Earnest effort must be made to combine all the factors of production and also the various kinds of modern inputs in a balanced way. Within the purview of infrastructure apart from irrigation, rural electrification, agricultural credit, transport and communication, etc., there comes the agricultural marketing which needs special attention, for it provides a stimulus for commercialisation and technification of agriculture. As the majority of the peasants in Assam are compelled to make 'distress sale' of their produce just after the harvest at a cheaper rate, the peasant farming in Assam cannot be transformed into a profitable commercial farming without the organisation of a co-operative marketing system or the
institution of joint co-operative farming linked with the co-operative or State-trading.

The above synthesis may be concluded with the general statement that the creation of a myriad of unorganised small peasant proprietors is not a rational measure for agricultural development in an underdeveloped region. It has, in fact, turned out to be a device for political gain of the ruling elite in the underdeveloped countries with the dumb and socio-economically stunted mass. This obviously lacks the exigency of a rapid socio-economic development in the countryside.

14.2 AN EPILOGUE

The foregoing analysis and synthesis reveal clearly the deep-rooted malady of small peasantry, factors and causes of this abysmally depressed sector of economy, and also the asynchronism of the peasant mode of production. Though various suggestions have been made to remedy the different problems separately, the overall solution lies in the hands of the policy makers. Undoubtedly, there are no two opinions regarding the necessity of modernisation of peasant agriculture and transformation of the socio-economic structure of peasantry. But the direction, in which this is to be accomplished, depends solely on the political strategy pursued for agricultural development.
In any attempt to organise an agricultural development programme to affect a large number of spatially scattered peasants, the Government is confronted with a dilemma, as to how far the voluntary and active participation of the peasants in the programme can be generated, and to what degree the paternalistic and coercive measures, proposed to be taken in order to compel their performance, can be relied. It is observed that different countries of the world adopt different development strategies according to their respective political ideology. Three distinct strategies, to development in general and for solution of agricultural problems in particular, can be identified: These are the technocratic, reformist and radical strategies. They differ in the objectives, ideologies, dominant forms of land tenure, as well as in the way the benefits of the economic system and growth process are distributed. These differences constitute differences in style which are related to the classes on which the Government depends for support.

The three styles of agricultural development represent three distinct approaches to the agricultural sector and to the people who live and work within it. India is a democratic country backed by a nationalist ideology. But it is found to adopt a mixed strategy with technocratic style in some regions and reformist in some others for agricultural development. Adopting technocratic style in Punjab, Haryana, and Western U.P.,

Griffin, K., 1974, op. cit., pp. 198-203.
capitalist farming has been encouraged to grow, whereas in areas like Assam, small peasant farming has been created with various land reform measures. Consequently, there starts the process of polarization of the rural masses into rich capitalist farmers and the landless wage-labourers. In Assam, the ruralites are divided into groups having different interests. They are landlords, middle peasants, small peasants and agricultural labourers. In formulating agricultural policy, it would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that there is a harmony of interests in the rural community as a whole. The State Government here has not been able to adopt the technocratic strategy for want of sufficient capital resources. But it has implemented some of the land reform measures including the reduction of land-ceiling level to only 6.80 hectares. As a result, the big land-owning class has gradually been eliminated from the rural scene. Some of them are converted to middle peasants and the others have diverted their resources — both man and material — to the non-agricultural sectors. As a result, unlike Punjab and Haryana, capitalist farming has not been growing in Assam. On the other hand, due to the uneconomically small size of holding, small peasants are forced gradually to merge in the class of landless labourers by the growing economic pressure on the cost of living as a result of penetration of laissez faire market economy in the countryside.
Under such a situation, with 80 per cent of the peasants being small ones and the big peasants tending to be non-existent, the radical strategy seems to be the appropriate one for the development of agriculture. But this strategy entails the adoption of some sort of coercive measures. The liberal democratic government in India cannot use compulsion. The Community Development Scheme in India depends too much upon voluntary efforts and is reluctant to undertake reforms which would bring about a closer relation between effort and return. The system of money-lending, share-cropping and the persistence of economic inequalities, are all obstacles to the successful functioning of the Community Development Programmes and the development of the spirit of co-operation among the people. The purpose of the C.D. Schemes is to preserve many essential features of peasant life unlike the Chinese Communes. But the truth is that rural economy can prosper if it remains at the extraordinarily low level of organisation. After reaching a certain point in the development programmes under the C.D. Schemes, skilled labour becomes imperative and, therefore, the abundant unskilled and underemployed labour is found to be unusable. The success of the development programmes depends largely upon the leadership in the village and the inter-village councils. But the leadership is drawn from the big landowners and higher castes. Besides, the rivalry of the village factions, which
coagulate around the principal landowning families, often hinders the progress of the schemes. Unfortunately the movement seems unable to channel the abilities of an important age-group towards productive ends so that the majority of the young people in the rural areas are unorganised, and their constructive potential for economic and social improvement is either wasted or gradually turning into cynicism and restlessness.

It is now clear that the political strategy of a particular Government is of paramount significance in creating a particular system of agricultural economy and agrarian structure. Political strategy is generally formulated and adopted at the national level in relation to the international as well as intra-national socio-political and economic milieu. Within the national framework of India, a small State like Assam with smaller number of public representatives in the Parliament, has a very insignificant role to play in the formulation of national policies and strategies appropriate for its agrarian development. Consequently, the State Government has been following the broad national policy and strategy with inadequate measures, resulting in little impact on the peasant agriculture in Assam.

Ultimately the problem of the selection of strategy crystallises into the dialectics of peasant family farming
versus organised farming in the shape of co-operative, commune, collective or capitalist organisation. The incorporation of new forms of agricultural organisation into the traditional peasant societies, is not an easy task. The principal attraction of family farming in peasant societies is the close relationship between property and security. Even in times of crisis and calamities, the ownership of land ensures a minimal security that cannot be substituted by anything else. This residual quality associated with the peasant's agricultural life is significant, not only to the individual, but also to the State. Because 'in providing them with a minimum of security, it allows the burdens of general poverty to be shifted to and dispersed throughout the rural areas amongst the less articulate and unorganised peasantry ...'2.

On the other hand, the proletarianisation of the peasant mass with the introduction of a new type of organisation based on factory-like mode of agricultural production makes them lose the sense of economic and psychological security. But the most important advantage of this system is that it allows the development of a new and progressive form of organisation which is a crying necessity in a hopelessly backward region like Assam. It further gives the workers their right to

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work with the benefits of production assured through their trade unions, political parties and the notion of the welfare Government. Such an organised system of agricultural production has been found to make possible a tremendous increase in agricultural wealth in both the capitalist and communist countries of the world, adopting, however, diametrically opposite institutional organisations.

Unfortunately, it is not an easy matter to introduce new institutions which would proletarianise the peasantry in the industrially backward non-communist countries with a heavy burden of surplus agricultural population. If such a country strives to do so in order to secure the advantages of the new forms of agricultural organisation, then its Government will not be able to bear the burden of implementing the scheme of welfare for a large agricultural population without productive forces or wealth adequate for the task and the support of a suitable political ideology. On the other hand, the residual quality of peasant life would no more be there to enable the Government to shirk its responsibility for a large section of the small unorganised peasantry. In such a situation, the proletarianised peasants would be in a hazardous position with no small landed property to provide them the feeling of economic and psychological security on the one hand, and without any social and economic security granted by the Government on the other. In an
underdeveloped country, small peasantry are used cleverly by the ruling class as a safety valve in the form of a great reservoir dammed to contain a large number of distress/people who would otherwise revolt against the existing regime. It is a matter of relief to the ruling class of an underdeveloped agrarian country that the unorganised peasantry continue to remain complacent with their small private holdings, which have absorbed an excessive amount of time and energy of the peasants and thereby converted them to an ignorant and dumb section of the society.

Lastly, for the unorganised peasantry of Assam, the radical strategy is found to be appropriate for rapid transformation of the traditional peasant agriculture. Within the present framework of political structure of India, the convenient institution for the organisation of the peasantry would be the State-controlled Co-operative.

14.5 HINTS TO FURTHER WORK

As a pioneering work in the field of peasant agriculture in Assam, it had to be carried out with various difficulties and limitations, and, therefore, does not claim to have dealt all aspects of the problem. But it is hoped that this work may inspire the researchers in the disciplines of geography, sociology, and economics to undertake more intensive, in-depth and purposeful studies on a wide range of aspects of peasant agriculture both at the micro and macro regional levels in spatio-temporal
dimensions. A very useful study that may urgently be undertaken is the verification of the findings of this work at the micro-regional level with the help of primary data collection and quantification. Some of the possible topics for research in the line of this work may be based on the following questions.

1. How do the physical barriers and natural hazards affect the agrarian economy and social life of the peasants in Assam?

2. What are the impacts of flood and soil erosion on agriculture in different areas and on different classes of the rural society and what could be the solution of these problems?

3. What impact has been made by the immigrant peasants on the agricultural economy in Assam during the last several years?

4. In what different ways do the peasants of different communities of the State adjust to the process of changing agrarian structure under the impact of the penetration of market economy and spread of education and transportation?

5. Is the process of agriculturisation responsible for the break down of the closed and subsistence nature of agrarian economy in Assam?

6. Whether there have happened the phenomena of horizontal and vertical movements of the peasants in Assam?

7. How do the socio-cultural institutions act as the inhibitory factors for transforming the traditional peasantry into a modernised community for maximum agricultural growth and development?
8. Whether the peasant agriculture in Assam has been still a subsistence farming or recently been commercialised or in the process of transition from subsistence to commercialisation?

9. Whether the agricultural land use has been oriented towards the market centres following the Von Thaddenian Model or towards the principal transport and communication lines?

10. What type of impact has been made by the process of urbanisation, industrialisation, development of tertiary sector and spread of education on the changing pattern of peasant agriculture in Assam?

11. What are the effects of the various measures adopted by the Government for the development of agriculture in Assam during the Five Year Plans?

12. What are the effects of land reform measures on the socio-economic structure of peasantry?

13. What contributions have been made by the peasantry towards the emergence of the neo-middle class in Assam?

14. What impact has been made by the C.D. Schemes, Panchayati Raj and Co-operative organisation on agricultural development in Assam?

These are only some of the challenges to be faced by the researchers who have an earnest and serious interest in undertaking purposeful works. Such in-depth studies are of utmost necessity for this backward State of India in order to formulate a development strategy and a scientific regional
planning of agriculture within the framework of the overall economic planning of the State and the nation as a whole.