CHAPTER-I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Agrarian Reforms in India has a long history. During the days of East India Company questions regarding patterns of land tenure, nature of customary law, and maintenance of peace had acquired significant dimensions apart from the fact that its trade policies had also brought the peasants and artisans within the influence of the international market (A Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Vol.1, ICSSR, 1979, p. 82). These concerns of the administration evoked in some academics a practical interest in the study of rural problems. There were two broad lines on which the discussions of village community moved; first to finding out the traces of primitive communism, and second to describing 'little republics' character of Indian villages, which had remained unchanged from generation to generation. But, there was little attention towards agriculture and agrarian relations. However, Sociologists and Social anthropologists have not interacted with one another D.N. Mujamdar, (1955) while talking about this phenomenon, says, "we have so far been content to leave the business of study and evaluation of rural life and
its multifarious problems in the hands of economists”. He further notes that ‘there is a complete lack of first hand studies of our rural life and cultural setting.’ It was in the same year that M.N. Srinivas, (1955) edited, ‘India’s villages’ in which he included only those studies of anthropologists, who used latest techniques and methods in their fields. In the same year S.C. Dube’s ‘Indian Village’ and Marriott’s ‘Village India’ appeared on the scene. Thus we can safely conclude that 1955 was the crucial year in which rural sociological studies were carried out for the first time. These studies were mostly based on field observations, and this stage of consolidation continued for a decade. But, Land Reforms was consciously or unconsciously overlooked in these studies. This was the period when Land Reforms were introduced at one side and community development Programmes at the other. Even the study of social consequences of ‘zamindari’ abolition was left to economists.

Soon after independence the government introduced land ceiling laws, and subsequently various hand reforms legislation’s. These legislation’s were heralded initially as important steps that could change the existing agrarian relations. It was believed that by redistributing land the exploitation of the peasants could be ended. However, the legislative enactment’s did not bring about the desired
change. The critical examination of these legislations showed their loopholes. It was pointed out that there were serious problems pertaining to implementation of these Programmes. It was also brought out that these measures ultimately benefited only the rich and not the targeted poor farmers (Mencher, 1975). But, at the same time Land Reforms legislation in India brought about some changes in the rural stratification but these changes do not approximate the changes that were expected. One of the reasons could be that the policies of Land Reforms were not supported by all the contending pressure groups within the ruling class. The rural poor were not articulate nor sufficiently organized to influence and implement the legislations. Therefore, the fruits of reforms accrued mainly to certain intermediate social categories who were conscious enough to take the opportunities offered by the state (Joshi, 1970). These intermediate social categories were mainly from the dominant caste. For example, in Bihar the 'Brahmins', the 'Bumihars' 'Rajputs' and the 'Kayastha' who constituted what has come to be referred to as the upper castes have traditionally owned the major share of the land (Rajgopal, P.R., 1987, p. 52). The role of bureaucracy was examined in the past as well as at present. Members of these
communities had held traditionally senior and responsible positions in the administration.

Bihar was one among the first state to pass the ‘Zamindari’ Abolition Act in 1947. As a result, more than twenty million tenants were brought into direct contact with the state. The ‘yadav’, ‘koeris’ and ‘kurmis’ by virtue of the land that they acquired as cultivators at the time of the abolition of the ‘Zamindari’ system have become a new class of haves pitted against the have-nots. The ‘Zamindars’ used to get their land cultivated by the members of these communities who over a period of time had become efficient agriculturists. These cultivators became owners of the land as a result of Land Reforms and were the classes who stood to gain more than anyone else. Thus, these caste groups improved their relative economic and social position; and their large numbers give them positive strength under the adult suffrage (Ibid. p. 52).

Harijans, Adivasi, landless and poor peasants were not in a position to fill the void created by the decline of the upper caste landed gentry. It was natural that land and political power passed into the hands of the upper caste-raiyats/under-raiyats and intermediate cultivating castes. Bihar has been witnessing a sort of political revolution for
the last five decades; the 'raiyats' and under-raiyats of yester years now hold the reins of political power (Choudhary, P.K., 1993). Choudhary further notes, that 'the assertion of this class/caste took varied forms. In parliamentary politics, the socialists, the Lok Dal, the Janata Party and the Janata Dal became their channels of articulation, and since late sixties they resorted to all sorts of wheeling and dealing. They maintained a love-hate relationship with the Naxalite Movement which was actually the Dalit Agrarian labourers and poor peasants fight against upper caste landlords. This social transition has been marked by mayhem and massacres by militant Mass Movements and resistance by valiant fights and vile machinations. Land Reforms in Bihar have provided SC/ST agricultural labourers and poor peasants and marginal benefits. Out of the declared surplus of 2.99 lakh acres on 1st January 1984, only 1.9 lakh acres were distributed. The figures speak for themselves and one could infer from these figures that the legislation has failed to meet the expectations of the Land Reforms programme despite being the first state in independent India to launch it.

West Bengal passed the Estates Acquisition Act in 1953, which brought owners of the land into direct relation with the state. The Act not only abolished intermediary
interests in land, but also put a ceiling of 'khas' (direct) possession at 25 acres of agricultural land and twenty acres of non-agricultural land, the 'raiyyats' being covered by the legislation by defining them as intermediaries for the purpose (Basu, S.K., et al., 1963. p.1).

The basic idea of these Land Reforms was inspired by the national and international socio-political debates of 1960's. However, the task of putting the necessary enactment's on the statute book was not exactly a smooth sailing. Those in authority were not enthusiastic. It was because of these facts later on a conference of Agricultural Ministers held that no ceiling should be put to land-holding if that leads to lower production. The 'West Bengal Estates Acquisition Bill' was published on 5th May 1953 in the Calcutta Gazette. This bill provided the details of the method of the acquisition, of the method of assessment and payment of compensation at decreasing rates on higher slabs on net-income, of preparation of record-of-rights, etc. An intermediary, however, was given the right to retain ownership of certain types of land including non-agricultural land in 'khas' possession not exceeding 20 acres and agricultural land in 'khas' possession not exceeding 25 acres. All 'raiyyats' who cultivated their lands by 'bargadars' or sub-let their holdings were defined by the bill as
intermediaries and the state was empowered by the bill to acquire the agricultural land of all such 'raiyats', in excess of 33 acres.

The main consideration behind such an extra-ordinary way of defining a ‘raiyat’ as an intermediary by the West Bengal legislative assembly was to keep down the burden of compensation. Under the existing laws, the ‘raiyats’ had to be paid at heavier rates under the ‘Land Acquisition Act’ if their lands were to be taken over. On the other hand, according to the ‘Bengal Tenancy Act’ of 1885 a ‘raiyat’ possessing land in excess of about 33 1/3 acres could be deemed as a tenure holder (Basu, S.K., et al., 1963, p.8.).

There are various studies, which have dealt with, implementation and impact of Land Reforms. For example R. Dubhashi, (1986), while tracing the history of Land Reforms in India and the various factors that have contributed to the ineffective implementation of Land Reforms, argues that "the will to implement the policy has been sadly lacking at the state level where political power was closely tied to agrarian power structure. In addition, often there were ambiguities in the Central direction. The attitude of the bureaucracy towards the implementation of Land Reforms was generally lukewarm" (Kurukshetra, Vol.
35, No.1, p. 14). He further notes that “alliance between the rich peasants and the rural power structure, political structure and bureaucracy without any countervailing force of political groups of the under-privileged at the grassroot level was responsible for the ineffective implementation of Land Reforms” (Ibid., p. 14).

The author refers to objectives of the abolition of ‘Zmndari’ system in U.P. and tries to highlight how the share-cropping and other exploitative tenancy remained widely prevalent. The author further elaborates on different Five Year Plans and has tried to show how these plans have failed to achieve the desired results in the Land Reforms at state level, despite the guidelines from Central Government, Planning Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture. The investigator further mentions that the poor peasants, landless labourers, village artisans and craftsmen gained little from Land Reforms. The author concludes that the success of policy making lies in its implementation and that was lacking. And the lack of implementation at the state level made most of the policy decision at Centre level ineffective and failed to provide land for the targeted groups.

However, the author has failed to highlight that how the political will of Government of Jammu and Kashmir had
seen the successful implementation of Land Reforms despite many odds.

A.M. Khusro while discussing the farm size and productivity, in his book titled ‘The Economics of Land Reforms and Farm Size in India’ maintains that it is a myth that when farm size declines the productivity comes down. Khusro has substantiated his view by referring to 1950s and the 1960s empirical results that land ceiling is size-neutral. The author notes that “ceilings on agricultural holdings are preeminently a redistribute measure. The idea basically is to ration land, a crucial asset, in such a way that above a certain maximum, land is taken away from the present holders and is distributed to the landless or to the small holders according to some priorities. If this redistribution can be shown not to harm the most productive farm enterprises and in fact to augment the resources of the best farms, the case for ceiling becomes even stronger. In that case ceilings do not meddle with productivity but in fact promote higher productivity (Khusro, A.M., 1973, p. XIV). He further notes that “it is general rule in Indian agricultural society everywhere that as the size of holding increases, yield per acre decrease. Thus if, ceilings are imposed on large-size holdings, they do not chop off the most productive holdings but in fact the least productive ones. Ceilings are
thus not inimical to productivity and by far the greater probability is that the transfer of lands from large to small holders is a transfer from those who have a lower yield per acre to those who have higher yields" (Ibid, p. xvi). The author has lucidly shown how the per annum income from the land should have been taken as the criterion for the ceilings, taking note of the standard of living and consumption pattern in rural set-up.

The observations made by A.M. Khusro hold true for the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is reported from various studies by economists that small size of holding is more productive than the large size one. There are two reasons for that in the Kashmir context (a). The sense of belonging to the piece of land the peasant cultivates (b). The intensive labour required during sowing and harvesting season, because most of the land is cultivated by the labour force available within the family. Larger the size of holding, least the management in terms of inputs, irrigation, weeding etc. As the cropping pattern of the valley in case of paddy needs continuous irrigation for a period of minimum four months, the field-observation has also corroborated the points made by Khusro. But, at the same time field observations in our study revealed the tendency on the part of small peasants to sell the land, mostly to meet the demands of family
expenses, debt burdens and to buy agricultural inputs. Khusro's analysis is silent regarding selling of land by small peasants. In the absence of credit facility, which is true all over India the small peasants fall into the debt trap; it can be due to drought, famine or flood. All these natural clamities work against the small farmer and he sells some portion of his land to the moneylender or landlord as the only alternative available to him.

Yogendra Singh while summarizing the significant trends analyzed by the scholars of agrarian class structure notes:

(a) There is a wide gap between land-reform ideology projected during the freedom struggle or even thereafter and the actual measures introduced for Land Reforms. Consequently, socialist transformation in the class structure of the village has not taken place.

(b) This lag could partly be explained by the class character of the Indian political and administrative elite who are resistant to the needed radical reforms.

(c) The existing Land Reforms have initiated a process by which the security of tenure and
economic prosperity of rich peasantry has increased but condition of small peasants both in respect of economic level and tenurial stability has deteriorated.

(d) The feudalistic or customary type of tenancy has declined and it has been replaced by a capitalistic form of lease-labour or wage labour agrarian system.

(e) A new class of rich-middle stratum of peasantry has come into being, and not all members of this class are from among the ex-'Zamindars'.

(f) The class inequalities between the top and the bottom levels of the classes have increased rather than decreased.

(g) The benefits of Land Reforms have not been enjoyed by the agricultural workers, nor even by the ex-'Zamindars' as by the emergent middle peasantry.

(h) As a result of these contradictions in the agrarian class structures, the tension in the rural social system have increased and are bound to increase further, and finally.
(i) The sociological process dominant in the current class transformation in the villages involves 'embourgeoisement' of some and 'proletarianization' of many social strata (Singh Yogendra, A Trend report in a Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology, Vol. 1, p. 350).

Prof. T.K. Oommen while analyzing the Land Reforms in India, during seventies of the last century notes: "Soon after independence, the government introduced land ceiling laws, and subsequently various Land Reforms legislations. Prof. Oommen refers to the Mencher (1975) who notes that "these legislations were passed and enacted but did not bring about the desired change. Most of the studies published had already concentrated on the critical examination of the legislations and showed their loopholes, problems in implementation and how they ultimately benefit only the rich farmers, and, therefore, do not foster the development of small farmers" The effectiveness of implementation has varied and depends on the consciousness of the tenants, and thus on the nature of the organizations or parties supporting the tenants, the existing agrarian relations, the particular conglomeration of forces in existence in particular regions and especially the presence of
militant movements" (Oommen, T.K. Survey of Research in Sociology & Social Anthropology: '1969-1979'. ICSSR, Vol.1, p. 123). While highlighting the studies of Alexandra (1973), Mencher (1974a and 1974b) Betieille (1972), Jaunzi (1974) and Wood (1973), Oommen talks about changes in rural stratification system. However, these changes are few and do not approximate the changes that were expected. "One of the reasons could be that the policies of Land Reforms were not supported by all the contending pressure groups within the ruling class. The rural poor were not articulate enough nor sufficiently organized to influence and implement the legislations. Therefore, the fruits of reform accrued mainly to certain intermediate social categories who were conscious enough to take the opportunities offered by the state. The class polarization within the system became more visible after the introduction of these land reform legislations (Oommen, T.K. Ibid., p. 123-124).

Anand Chakravarti (2001), in his study 'Social Power and Everyday Class Relations,' examines agrarian class relations in village in Purnia district in Bihar. The study was conducted between (1978-80). The focus of the study is on the relations between the members of the dominant class and the sub-ordinate class of landless labourers. The dominant classes were/are 'Bhumihars' by caste and
appropriated overwhelming control over land resources. The 'Bhumihars' were/are simultaneously the dominant caste. However, the study is essentially concerned with the class relations obtaining out there. The central concern of the study is to clearly bring out the character of the relations of exploitation. The dominant theme of the study is to bring out the conflict of interests emanating from the appropriation of land, which happens to be main source of production. However, as the land resources are mainly controlled by 'Bhumihars', the role of the dominant caste in the structuring of class relations also becomes a significant factor.

The 'Bhumihars' were designated 'maliks' and labourers related to one another in a setting in which agriculture was preponderantly oriented commercially. The 'maliks' exercised total control over land, seeds, means of irrigation, ploughs and tractors etc. The material resources as well as labour processes were mainly directed towards the maximization of profits.

The study tries to deal with the problem of identifying agrarian classes. It also tries to examine as to whether the consequences of the use of improved technological inputs and the commercialization of agriculture had any bearing on
agrarian class relations with specific reference to changes in patterns of exploitation. It also investigates as to whether new class relations indicate the development of agriculture on capitalist lines. One of the central concerns of the study is to examine as to whether the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture hinges on the employment of free labourers or whether the process is compatible with various forms of un-freedom.

The study maintains that employment of landless labourers by 'maliks' gained currency during the late 1960's. The earlier practice was to lease-out the land to sharecroppers who carried out the multiple operations of cultivation. The phenomenon of hired labour became a dominant mode in the village only after 1969, when tractorization and canal irrigation were introduced. However it should not be construed that the new production relations based on the exploitation of landless labourers were entirely inspired by these technological changes. As a matter of fact, the changes were inspired by deeper causes, the most important factor being the perennial feature of class struggle. The conflicts of interest were deeply inspired by the determination of some sharecroppers to resist eviction and retain possession of the land leased-out to them by their 'maliks'. However, it has also to be admitted that the
phenomenal demand for labourers and their large scale employment were directly proportional to the emergence of the cropping pattern actuated both by the canal irrigation and the tractorization which together led to the expansion of area of cultivation.

The study explores class relations in Aghanbigha (pseudonymous name of a village in Purnea District of Northern Bihar, the original name of the village has been concealed with a view to maintain privacy of the respondents) by using the concepts of exploitation and domination. It is maintained that these concepts have a great explanatory rationale in bringing out the class relations of the village. It is so in view of the fact that the welfare of the exploiting class of the village depends upon the work of the exploited class. The exploiting class appropriates the fruits of the labour of the exploited class by virtue of possessing control over the means of production. Furthermore, the study maintains that the scope of class domination goes beyond material exploitation. The exploiting class not only exercises political power but also establishes its ideological domination. They exercise control over the 'system of values' underlying the relationship between the exploiters and the exploited.
The study argues that agrarian class relations in ‘Aghanbigha' in conjunction with the role of these elements of domination can not possibly be understood without taking account of caste. For example, even if a person is a small landholder and yet is a member of the dominant caste, his social standing will legitimize his control over labourers. Therefore, the role of the caste in reinforcing and legitimizing the class domination and exploitation can not be ignored in any sound and methodologically informed investigation of class relations.

The study brings out the exploitative dimensions of class relations in the said village. For example, certain specific characteristics of the extraction of labour were observed by the investigator. The labourers were subjected to intense surveillance by 'maliks' during various agricultural operations. This was done to ensure that no labour time was wasted. In view of the same, the study revolves round everyday class relations, focussing on the farms and fields where relations of exploitation underlying the labour process were enacted day after day throughout the year. The study also elaborates on the wages paid by 'maliks' to their labourers. It was found that the wages paid were considerably below the fixed daily wages officially ordained by the Govt. of India. Thus, by grossly underpaying
the labourers, the 'maliks' ensured to enhance their surplus value. The study has been professedly carried out within the Marxian framework. However, such concepts as 'mode of production', 'social formation', 'economic structure' etc., have deliberately not been employed. The investigator claims to have done so in order to be focussed on substantive issues instead of becoming entangled in ideological debates.

Andre Beteille (1969) in his study Caste, Class and Power: changing relations of stratification in Tanjore district. This study is an outcome of field research carried out in a village called 'Siripurm' of Tanjore district in Tamil Nadu. The central theme of the study is the phenomenon of caste, class and political power and their changing relations. The study, firstly, deals with caste, class and power separately. Subsequently, it tries to examine their interrelations in the context of change.

The study finds the caste structure of the village to be most rigid and complex. The caste structure, apart from determining the unequal ritual status of villagers, also dominates their economic and political life. The social life of the village is structured on caste lines. The settlement pattern of the village has also evolved on caste lines. The three primary segments of the village - Brahmins, non-
Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas are clearly segregated from one another in the village. The settlement pattern of the village continues to reflect the basic divisions of the traditional caste structure. The Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas are not only locationally separated in the village but perceive themselves as having distinct identities. They have also occupied different positions in the economic structure of the village as well. However, their political loyalties criss cross with regard to different ideologies and parties. With regard to the ritual hierarchy, the Brahmins are at the top. Non-Brahmins are at an intermediate position and Adi-Dravidas are at the bottom.

The study finds the class structure to be somewhat more horizontal than the caste structure, which is largely vertical. The class system comprises of landowners, tenants, agricultural labourers and their mutual relations. Caste, class and power relate in different ways to the broader phenomenon of social stratification. The caste system is clearly a hierarchical system. Land owners, tenants and agricultural labourers also constitute a hierarchy. However in the changing socio-economic and political scenario the traditional hierarchies of caste, class and power in the village also overlap and criss-cross. With the introduction of modern education, many areas of life are becoming
progressively caste-free. However, the physical structure of the village continues to be consistent with the cleavages in the traditional social structure.

The study finds that in comparison to the rigidity of the institution of caste as well as stability of the traditional economic structure of the village, the distribution of political power has witnessed a radical change. The traditional political elite of Siripurum, composed of 'Brahmins' landowners, has lost its grip over the village. The new political leadership of the village depends for their power on many factors in addition to caste. New organs and institutions have been created which, in their turn, have established new bases of power. The investigator found that of the fourteen members of the then village Panchayat, three were 'Brahmins, six were Non-Brahmins and five were Adi-Dravidas. However, the effective participation of Adi-Dravidas was found to be extremely low.

The study found that caste, class and power were closely interwoven in the village. They could be treated separately only by a process of abstraction. Such an abstraction, the study claims is necessary, with a view to reduce the diversity of empirical data to a few important and fundamental categories. Otherwise, caste, class and power in
Sripuram village referred in different ways to the same phenomenon of Social stratification.

Andre Beteille (1974) in his collection of essays titled 'Studies in Agrarian Social Structure', apart from other Socio-Agricultural phenomena, has studied Agrarian Relations in Tanjore District of Tamil Nadu. The essay describes agrarian relations in a District, which has witnessed certain major economic and political changes in recent years. Furthermore, the District has for long been characterized by extremes of inequality and a study of its agrarian system goes a long way, the author claims, in understanding of such inequality. It has also been the scene of intense political conflict between landowners and landless. In view of the same, the author further claims, this District offers important material for examining how traditional patterns of stratification respond to changes in the economic and political systems.

The problem of social stratification in India, claims the author, has mostly been studied from the angle of the caste. Some have argued, as if the hierarchical division into castes, entirely represents the system of stratification. However, there is a whole range of relations in rural India centering around the ownership, control and use of land. These
relations are not only partly independent of caste but they have their own pattern of organization. An analysis and examination of these relations can give us an understanding of the contemporary Indian rural agrarian class structure which phenomenon does significantly characterize and qualify the Indian Society of our times.

The study is an examination of the problem of social stratification from the angle of agrarian class structure. It is an analysis carried out with a view to bring out the role of ownership, control and use of land in stabilizing and perpetuating social stratification. However, such an approach, the author warns as, should not mislead us into thinking that the agrarian class structure is regarded to be somehow more important than the caste structure. The author classifies that the choice of this particular aspect of the problem has been made because it has largely been ignored in the contemporary sociological and social-anthropological studies of India.