Land –Related Problems and Socio- Political Tension in Bengal: Special Reference to Jalpaiguri District (1947- 2004)

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Abstract: During the Colonial period the agrarian systems and agrarian structure were changed in the different parts of India by introducing various systems, such as Permanent Settlement, Raiyotwari Settlement, Mahalwari Settlement and in some parts of Bengal and India as well lands were declared as waste lands where British- India Govt. was the proprietor of the lands declaring Government Khasmahal. Whatever settlement was introduced, everywhere the peasants, particularly the small peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers were exploited and deprived tremendously in the colonial- agrarian – economy. The indigenous people of Jalpaiguri district, nay North Bengal namely Rajbanshi, local Muslim and some tribal communities once who had large amount of lands known as jotdars were economically solvent, simple in habit, most of them were uneducated and completely depended on lands; they had no alternative sources of income because they were not interested in trade and commerce or service in different sectors. But after independence since the implantation of Land Reforms Programmes most of the jotdars lost their lands and became sharecroppers or labourers due to heavy indebtedness. Lands were utilized for commercial purposes by introducing cultivation of commercial crops like jute, tobacco, tea, blue, etc. The cultivation of commercial crops was profitable, but the profit was obtained by the zamindars, jotdars, intermediaries, mahajans and ultimately the Britishers depriving cultivators. In a nutshell, it can be said that the feudal system in agrarian field was strong during the colonial period as because five or six stages of intermediaries such as jotdars, talukdars, chukanidars or mulandars, dafadars, dar-chukanidars, dar-darchukanidars etc. were created who had only intention to gain more revenue or wealth by hook and crook depriving and exploiting the cultivators where there was no question of sympathy or co-operation to the cultivators.

After independence in 1947, the Indian Government tried to reform agrarian structure and agrarian systems like other reforms and development in different fields. As there were feudal and semi – feudal system in the agrarian field of India till then, existing many big zamindars-jotdars and intermediaries, many of whom had giant – sized zamindari or jotdari areas and belong to thousand acres of lands, on the other hand there were so many people who had no land to dowel or livelihood, it was necessary to reform the agrarian system and agrarian structure by abolishing the feudal and semi – feudal system in the lands. Before independence the demand was raised to abolish the zamindari and jotdari system. The report of Floud Commission was come out in 1940 where proposed to abolish the zamindari and jotdari system and declared in favour of sharecroppers or adhiars to have 2/3 of produced crops. But it was not implemented in the colonial period. (Floud Commission Report). In the post-colonial period by introducing the Land Reforms Programmes the work of land acquisition and distribution among the landless people was started by the Government. It is no doubt the that the Land

Key words:- Jotdar-zamindar, Sharecropper or bargadar (adhiaar), Giri, Land Reforms Programmes, Kamtapur and Greater Cooch Behar movement.

Introduction:
By introducing colonial agrarian systems, the traditional structure of India broke down more or less, the village community faced a crisis; and many benevolent zamindars lost their zamindari by the law of ‘Sun Set’, many peasants must sell their lands and became sharecroppers or labourers due to heavy indebtedness. Lands were utilized for commercial purposes by introducing cultivation of commercial crops like jute, tobacco, tea, blue, etc. The cultivation of commercial crops was profitable, but the profit was obtained by the zamindars, jotdars, intermediaries, mahajans and ultimately the Britishers depriving cultivators. In a nutshell, it can be said that the feudal system in agrarian field was strong during the colonial period as because five or six stages of intermediaries such as jotdars, talukdars, chukanidars or mulandars, dafadars, dar-chukanidars, dar-darchukanidars etc. were created who had only intention to gain more revenue or wealth by hook and crook depriving and exploiting the cultivators where there was no question of sympathy or co-operation to the cultivators.
Reforms Programmes had some positive roles as because many landless people got land for their shelter and livelihood. But many indigenous jotdars or landholders lost their lands and became helpless as a result of which many discontents and grievances have been accumulated in the minds of indigenous people of North Bengal.

Analysis of the main theme:

Naturally, the Government realized the necessity to reform the agrarian systems by abolishing *zamindari* and *jotdari* systems all over India, but the task was very difficult as because the *zamindars* were politically, socially and economically powerful in position and in many spheres they occupied politically strong position. In spite of that Govt. was eager to drive in the reform of agrarian structure of India. Dr. Pradip K. Bhowmik writes, “Therefore the Central Government proclaimed only those agrarian policies which were feasible within the limitations of the contemporaneous rural set up.” He again writes, “It varied from abolition of intermediary tenures as emphasized in the first plan to reform of tenancy in the second plan and also provisions for ceiling on agricultural holdings in the third plan. The concern for tenurial reform and redistribution of land holding pattern was noticeable in the successive plan documents.

Land reforms in post – independence period in West Bengal began in slow motion and it only remained in papers, practically it was not implemented in the reign of Congress Govt. The West Bengal Bargadars Act (1950), the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1953) and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1955) were passed gradually. Theoretically, by these Acts Government wanted to abolish *zamindari* and *jotdari* systems as well as abolish all the intermediary systems.

The main reason of agrarian crisis is the failure of land reforms and the second cause is the refusal of Government to assist the peasants for irrigation, manure, loan and legal prices, the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act were passed in 1953 and 1955. According to the Act, the ceiling of agricultural land has been decided 25 acres on the present and future *jotes*…… For not to settle the ceiling of surplus land at per family instead of person, not to take initiative to stop the unauthorized and illegal alienation, and distribution of lands, not to take the cooperation of the peasants to implement the Acts, *zamindar –jotdars* have become able to conceal lands with the help of Governments administration.

According to the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953 the ceiling of different classes of lands are as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ceiling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Agricultural land</td>
<td>25 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Non-agricultural lands</td>
<td>20 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Only non-agricultural 15 acres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Tank Fisheries</td>
<td>No Ceiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Orchard</td>
<td>No Ceiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Land held by institution</td>
<td>Established excluding for Religious and charitable Purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Ceiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Forests</td>
<td>were completely vested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d) In the case of a *raiyot* having a family of more than 5 members, 5 standard hectares plus 0.50 standard hectares for each member in excess of 5 subject to an overall upper limit of 7 standard hectares for a family, however large it may be.

e) In the case of other *raiyot*, 7 standard hectares. A standard hectare has been defined to be equal to 1 hectare in an irrigated and 1.40 hectare in other area.

The ceiling will not apply to any agricultural land held by a local authority or a *raiyot* in the hilly portion of the district of
Darjeeling, but the exemption of ceiling provisions in respect of hill areas expired on 31st December, 1977 and so the hilly areas were then subject to the ceiling.

The work of land Records over ceiling and distribution among the landless peasants and labourers actually started from 1967 by the State Govt. of West Bengal. We get in district gazetteer of land records and surveys, West Bengal it is not possible to say the exact total quantities of lands that vested before 1967. 6

Movement for Land Reforms gained momentum when the United Front (U.F) consisting of the centrist and leftist parties was voted to power in the state for two short spells in 1967 and 1969. 7

After formation of the United Front Government the movement for finding out the hidden lands, occupying the khas lands, rescuing the benami lands (lands recorded in false names) reached in a top. Peasants from every corner of Bengal assembled in a movement –from occupying surplus lands in tea gardens of North Bengal to finding out the hidden lands which were shown falsely as mechhogheri in South Bengal. 8

The formation of the United Front Government in 1967 and 1969 was a remarkable to the landless and small peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, during these periods crores of poor peasants, agricultural labourers and sharecroppers emerged as a creator of history with a new awareness and self confidence and emancipated themselves from the bondage of the oppressor jotdars and hoarders ………. The organized peasant movement occupied 18 lakh bighas of land and distributed among the landless people.9

Beside the land acquisition and distribution by the United Front Govt., land was occupied forcefully by the peasants lead by left parties. Ranjit Kumar Mitra pointed out that 4 lakh acres land was occupied forcefully during the reign of 2nd United Front Government. 10

About 3,00,000 acres of land were forcibly occupied during the United Front regime. In this way, the work of land reforms, acquisition and distribution of lands got a new motion by the interfering of United Front Ministry, particularly by the leading role of the leftist parties to the peasants, labourers and bargadars as because they started to organize themselves against the land holders who were holding lands over ceiling, and then started to occupy lands forcefully with arms. There were many instances of occupation of vested land forcefully by the Krishak Sabha in Jalpaiguri like elsewhere in West Bengal.

Anil Ch. Chakraborty, a jotdar, inhabitant of Jalpaiguri had been occupying 300 bigha lands in Chapadua village of Kukurjan in the district of Jalpaiguri and obtained crops from the bargadars. This year the bargadars under Krishak Sabha capture all paddies after cutting the crops. The jotdars became failure to take action against the bargadars. 11 It is found in Jalpaiguri, (local weekly news paper) about the motion and activities of the peasants, labourers including bargadars led by Krishak Sabha. The cutting and harvesting of crops in this year is going to be finished almost safely……….The peasants proves that they can not protect their crops as they cultivate their land. Jotdars, who have occupied benami land illegally, joined the different parties of united front and they attack in different places with the support of these parties. But they ultimately, could not be succeeded. 12

Nitai Das Chaudhuri, a former local leader of C.P.I.M who had died two years ago pointed out that the movement of occupation of khas lands and benami lands of jotdars was going on actively in the villages of Bholadabri, Banchukamari, majherdabri and many other villages of Alipurduar subdivision under the leadership of Krishak Sabha and C.P.I.(M). 13 Promod Nath, a local leader of C.P.I.(M) who was directly involved in the movement of occupation of land argued. “There was huge number of ceiling surplus lands occupied illegally by the jotdars. At the first stage movement was started by Krishak Sabha of Communist Party (M), then the landless peasants out of any party or dogma joined the movement. Initially land was identified as a vested land or ceiling surplus land collecting information from the department of land & land revenue. Then the peasants had been assembled in the spot under the leadership of krishak sabha, generally landless people joined spontaneously in the movement. 14

Beside the land acquisition and distribution to the landless peasants and labourers, the United Front Government passed West Bengal Land Reforms (Audit) Act, 1969 and West Bengal Land Reforms (2nd amendment) Act, 1969. By the West Bengal Land Reforms (Audit) Act, 1969, the intention of the Government was to protect the sharecroppers or bargadars from the eviction of their land and by the West Bengal Land Reforms (2nd amendment), Act, 1969, the Govt release the raiyots to pay the rent of the lands and the Government decided to fix up the amount of land revenue after reviewing properly. 15

898, 66 Dec. khas land was forcibly occupied in the Nagar Berubari area by the communist party and Krishak Sabha on 28.12.1969 and 15 acre benami land was occupied and
distributed to 19 families on 01.01.1970 of Bhupendra Nath Roy inhabitant of Khariza Berubari. The Krishak Sabha of Patkata area continued their movement and 52 bigha land of the jotdar Umesh Ch. Sen, 105 bigha land of Trailakya Sharan Sen 206 bigha land of Bhaben Roy, the ex-M.L.A and the leader of S.S.P were occupied and distributed among the landless 98 families.

20 bigha land of Dolo Panchayet of Bholardabri was occupied by the Krishak Sabha.

75 bigha land was occupied in Belakoba by the communist party (M) on the 28th April, 1969 and distributed it to the landless peasants. The benami proprietor of the land was Akshay Roy and the real proprietor was Samsuddin Ahamed, the Congress leader.

Adhir Saha, a local leader of C.P.I (M) of Takomari in the district of Coochbehar, adjacent to Jalpaiguri district pointed out that after identification of Khas land or ceiling surplus land the expedition for occupying lands was started under the leadership of Krishak Sabha of Communist Party (M). Beside the member of Krishak Sabha or communist Party general people also joined this movement. 150 bigha lands of Nonibar Prodhan, 155 bigha lands of Avay Chand Dhan, 160 bigha lands of Baishakh Dhani 100 bigha lands of Jarman Rabha and 90 bigha lands of Dhan Proshad Dhani were occupied by krishak sabha and distributed to the landless people.

Jalpaiguri, 15th July, 1969 showed the occupation of khas lands in the different parts of the district of Jalpaiguri in such way –

Panikouri (Rajganj police station):- In this area 16 acres land was occupied led by communist party (Marxist) and Krishak Sabha and the said land was distributed among the 23 landless families.

Khalishamari Mouza (Kamakshyaguri):- About 100 bigha land of the jotdar, Dakshina Mohan Roy was occupied by the Communist Party (M) and Krishak Samiti and it was distributed among the landless peasants and bargadars.

East Chikliguri (Kamakshyaguri):- About 80 bigha land of the jotdar, Kutub Mian who possessed it illegally was occupied by the CPI (M) and Krishak Samiti, other than this more land was occupied by the Krishak Samiti from Parokata and Dakshin Parokata.

Kukurjan (Rajganj):- Jotdar Bhagaban Singh possessed huge amount of lands illegally in the dominating area of S.S.P Krishak Samiti occupied 225 bigha land from the said jotdar.

Jashodanga (Alipurduar):- In this area 118 bigha khas land was occupied by the peasants lead by D.Y.F.I.

Pangarpar (Bahadur Anchal):- 800 bigha khas land was occupied by the Krishak Sabha of Pangarpar lead by Anathbandhu Sarkar and Upen Roy, the leaders of Communist Party (M) and it was distributed among 24 landless peasants.

Rajadanga Anchal (Mal Police Station) :- 109 acre land in Cheng Mari Mouza of Majhgram village was distributed among the 71 families during 26th June to 3rd July led by Communist Party (M).

Bimal Dasgupta showed the acquisition of vested land and distribution among the landless people as follows:- Mal-Meteli circle

Total vested land in Government record =16,587.41 acre, Land occupied by Government up to April, 1969=12,372.44 acre. Land distributed among the landless peasants up to May.1969=6867.40 acre, land distributed among the landless peasants in the month of June, 1969=241.95 acre. For Homestead land=64.80 acre.

Total Vested land distributed among the landless peasants or occupied by the peasants, but not distributed officially by the Government in the month of July and 10 days of August, 1969- Mauza- East damdim =58.11acre, Mauza- demka jhora = 55.25 acre, Mauza Hayhay pathar=18.48acre, Mauza lower Chalsa= 290.30 acre, Mauza- Nepu Chapur =60.00 acre, Raja Danga No.1 Panditpara=62.00 acre, West Sangapara=65.00acre, South Saripkuri=45 acre, North Saripkuri=35.00acre, Raja Danga Fauchhar Alam Khas=35.00 acre, Baragharia Fauchhar Alam Khas= 35.00 acre,

In different mouzas land distribution has been postponed in approximate 1849.62 acres of land in the different mauzas of Meteli Police Station.

In the occupation of the peasants without having license=2509.00acre Total vested land distributed after the formation of United Front Government=2914.98 acre (Approximate).

The following table shows the amount of lands distributed in the district and West Bengal up to 1994 – 95
Land reforms in West Bengal under Left Front Government got a new life in the history of land reforms in India after independence. Dr. P.K. Bhowmik writes, “The Left Front Government’s approach to land reform is different from that of the earlier Congress Governments in the state. The latter had adopted a policy of growth before distribution. ……The policy shift may be attributed to the realization by the Left Front Government that “Green Revolution” unaccompanied by restructuring of agrarian relations would reinforce existing inequality in the agrarian sector.

Among the alienators there were Sri Hem Naskar, the minister of cabinet, Sri Ardhendu Naskar, deputy minister, Sri Hrishikesh Tripathi, the matrimonial relative of Ajoy Mukherjee, the cabinet minister, Matrimonial relative of Sri Jadabendra Panja, the president of Provincial Congress, Sri Khagen Das, M.L.A, Ila Pal Chaudhury, M.P of Congress, All of them alienated thousand bighas of lands illegally to the relatives and friends.

Sri Fate Chand Maheshwari the biggest jotdar of Jalpaiguri district alienated 6 thousand acre lands authorized by Government. But, no step has been taken against this jotdar, because his son is a worker of Jalpaiguri ella Congress.

Debesh Roy pointed out that a jotdar in the Duars recorded 25 acres of lands in the name of his elephant. …A jotdar of Haldbiari in the name of his only son Amir Ali Prodhan, recorded lands in such a way -25 acres for Amir Ali, 25 acres for Ali Prodhan, 25 acres for Amir Prodhan and 25 acres for Prodhan Ali.

In 1974, Krishak Sabha circulated at the time of starting the new settlement work that the real motive of the Government was (1) To legalise the right of the Jotdars on benami land (unauthorise land),(2) To eject the sharecroppers and peasants who occupied the unauthorised land of the jotdars 3. To record the right of the mahajans (moneylenders ) on the land who took land by mortgage for indebtedness of the peasants.

Progress made by the state in respect of LRP as of December, 1995 was as follows:

- Agricultural land vested: 1.24 million acres.
- Distribution of vested land: 994 thousand acres.
- Bargadars recorded: 1.468 million.
- No. of recipients of homestead land: 272 thousand.

Benoy Krishna Chowdhury showed the land vested by the Government and distributed among the landless peasants up to Dec, 1995 as follows –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District / State</th>
<th>Area of Vested land distributed in hectares</th>
<th>No of Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>37950.25</td>
<td>62610</td>
<td>26491</td>
<td>31143</td>
<td></td>
<td>120244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>386842.84</td>
<td>830914</td>
<td>464108</td>
<td>974937</td>
<td></td>
<td>2269959</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P. K. Bhowmik showed in his book about the land distribution during the reign of Left Front Government – “In West Bengal, till 1994, about 9,12000 acres of agricultural land had been distributed to over two million of people, of these 55 percent belonged to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes comprising 26 percent of the population in the state.

The total amount of land held by various ex- intermediaries and tenants over and above the original stipulated ceiling, which was vested in Alipurduar Sub division of Jalpaiguri, upto 31 March 1973 amounted to 39,288.45 acres. Regarding Jalpaiguri Sadar Subdivision, there is some discrepancy between the figures given by the settlement wing and the Management wing of the Land Revenue Department. According to the
former 1,68,215.05 acres of land were vested till 31 March 1973. The later wing maintains that up to that date 1,55,341.96 acres were vested. Total amount of land which was vested was not distributed, as because some amount of land was under litigation. Only 51004.53 acres of land was redistributed of which 16,046.70 acres were on raiyoti settlement and 34,957.83 acres were settled on the basis of one year license which was renewable.  

Following Table shows the distribution of Vested Land for agricultural purpose to the landless and small cultivators in the district of Jalpaiguri 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area of Vested Land (Hectar)</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E.A.</td>
<td>L.R.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>39461.18</td>
<td>5107.67</td>
<td>24667</td>
<td>15623</td>
<td>5031</td>
<td>8990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>39461.18</td>
<td>5107.67</td>
<td>24667</td>
<td>15623</td>
<td>5334</td>
<td>9454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>39461.18</td>
<td>5107.67</td>
<td>26288</td>
<td>16299</td>
<td>5334</td>
<td>9454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>39461.18</td>
<td>5107.67</td>
<td>30935</td>
<td>16299</td>
<td>5334</td>
<td>16211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above statistics, it can be said that there were no similarities in the data of land distribution among the landless and small cultivators because it is found from the report of Key Statistics of the district of Jalpaiguri, 1977 – 78 that 39461.18 hectar lands had been distributed by the Estate Acquisition Act and 5107.67 hectar had been distributed by Land Reforms Act. Another report of District Statistical Handbook, Jalpaiguri, 1998, showed that up to 30th Sept, 1993, 44763.94 hectar lands had been distributed to the landless and small cultivators. But, it is followed in different villages of the district, that a large amount of lands have been distributed to the cultivators after 1977. D.L.L.R.O., Jalpaiguri is failure to supply exact figure of year wise land acquisition and distribution since the implementation of the land Reforms Act, 1955. They only can provide the up to date figure of the same. So, due to paucity of exact figure of year wise land acquisition and distribution, it is not possible to show a clear picture of the output of land Reforms programmes of the district in the period of present study.

Limitations of the Land Reforms in West Bengal

From various sources such as Government and Non-Government records, writings of different scholars, historians, economists in books, journals, periodicals dissertations and field surveys, it can be said that the land reform programmes in West Bengal particularly during the period of United Front Govt. and Left Front Govt. is a remarkable task comparing with the other states of India. In spite of that it can not be said that the land reforms programmes has been succeeded completely.

Secondly, the ceiling surplus land occupied by zamindars, jotdars and intermediaries was same in all parts of West Bengal. But it was not scientific because there were lot of differences in land in accordance with fertility and value in different region of West Bengal. Production of crops was not same in all parts of West Bengal. So, the ceiling of lands measuring on quantity was a blunder, it should be fixed up in accordance with quality and value of land.

Thirdly, there were many differences between the landlords of North Bengal and South Bengal. The zamindars and intermediaries of South Bengal had alternative sources of income other than their zamindaries such as business, industries and service but in North Bengal almost all the cases except very few, the zamindars- jotdars and intermediaries were completely depended on land. They had no alternative sources of income other than agricultural cultivation, particularly the jotdars of Rajbanshi, tribal and local Muslims were uneducated, simple and unconscious. It is common knowledge that in East Bengal most of the zamindars and renters were upper caste Hindus and the majority of the peasants were Muslims, while in Jalpaiguri there was no such demarcation as the majorities of the jotdars as well as the sharecroppers were Rajbanshis. Even the Muslims had their representatives in both classes. In the tribal communities, the jotdars and sharecroppers of projas belong to same community. As almost all the cases the jotdars had no alternative sources of income, they had been gradually demolishing after losing their lands by the Land Reforms programmes. In most of the cases, the lands, remaining after vesting were divided among their sons & daughters. Naturally, after one or two generation the lands gradually decreased. Not only that they became like a fish without water because they were not laborious, not efficient in other technical works, naturally to maintain their families they sold their lands. There were so many instances in North Bengal that the then jotdars sold their lands and became later on agricultural labourers or
day labourers in the different sectors in different parts of India. Some instances of such condition are given which is collected from field work by the author.

Khagendra Nath Das, S/O Late Nara Nath Das, 77 years old of Chaparerpur, P.S Alipurduar Dist- Jalpaiguri, was a member of jotdar family and they had 18 hal land (270 bigha) which was cultivated by their raiyots or chukanidars. Now he has only 6 bighas of land and he has six sons and one daughter of whom only his elder son is doing service in Calcutta, rest of his five sons are jobless. His brother, Khajen Das and Brojen Das are completely poor, Khajen Das (Roy) is a day labourer and Brojen Das (Roy) is also a day labourer works on Road. 34

Premanada Prodhan, S/O Late Nanibor Prodhan, 76 years, vill. Takoamari, P.O Rashikbill, Dist- Coochbehar told his father Nonibor Prodhan was a jotdar who had near about 800 bigha lands, cultivated their land by halua or projas by 50% share of produced crops. His father Nonibor Prodhan could not submit the records of lands to the Land Revenue Dept., he recorded his lands to unauthorized persons (Benami) as a result of which they were able to have only 56 bigha lands by the permission of court which was divided among four brothers. Now among his four brothers Subodh Prodhan has only three bigha lands, and 3rd brother (Jakha) have no land and he became completely poor. 35

Late Manta Barman (Manta Dhani) of Singimari, P.o. Rampur, Dist- Coochbehar had near about 500 bigha lands. He was killed by Naxalites. Among his four sons three sons had died, only one son Namalchon Barman is living with poverty. 36

Ramesh Roy, S/O Late Santeswar Roy (Dhangu Roy), 48 years of Chapani, P.S Samuktala, Dist Jalpaiguri stated that his grand father late Bankanath Roy (then jotdar) had 300 hal lands (4500 bigha) and four sons – (1) Kalicharan Roy, (2) Ramdayal Roy (3) Brojen Roy and (4) Santeswar Roy. After vesting and division of land his father Santeswar Roy obtained 5 hal (75 bigha) land and now he (Ramesh Roy) obtained only 15 bigha lands and his each cousin (5 brothers) obtained 4 bighas of land and they are living very ordinarily. 37

Noni Mohan Sen of Basusuba near Maynaguri informed me of his tragic situation. His grandfather was a jotdar having 85 bighas of land, the jotdari was still existed upto the period of his father. A large portion of land went under the river Tista at the time of flood in 1968. At present he had approximately 40 bighas of land with proper necessary documents. But, for a wonder that no land have in his possession; all the lands were occupied unofficially by the cultivators or sharecroppers who cultivated lands but no share is given to the land holder. He surprisingly expressed that he tried to obtain his share but he became failure. Now he does not go to the cultivators for either having his share or reoccupy his possession on the land. 38

Other than these few instances there are many indigenous families in all over North Bengal once they were jotdars or zamindars, now their successors have become agricultural labourers, industrial labourers, servants or doing many of them inferior works or illegal works which is a tragic situation. Now many questions arise about the success of the Land Reforms. Should it not remain any laws or systems to protect such types of jotdars or intermediaries only depending on agriculture? Prof. Ananda Gopal Ghosh pointed out that a proposal was taken in the conference of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti in Jateshar in 1957 to recruit a representative of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti in the committee of distribution of surplus lands as they were only agricultural-based people unlike the zamindars of other parts of West Bengal. But the Government did not accept the proposal of the Samiti as a result of which many problems & crises raises in the socio-economic and political situation of North Bengal. 39

One of the causes of demolition economically of the local jotdars was heavy immigration in the district from outside. As a result of immigration and changing economic policies local jotdar faced in unequal competition with the immigrants which was a question of struggle for existence and in this life – struggle they lost their lands except few instances.

The following table shows the population increasing and their variations in the district, Jalpaiguri. 40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>201,659</td>
<td>914,538</td>
<td>3,908,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>712,879</td>
<td>13,592,922</td>
<td>1,750,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3,447,544</td>
<td>17,501,599</td>
<td>2,214,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3,447,544</td>
<td>17,501,599</td>
<td>2,214,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3,447,544</td>
<td>17,501,599</td>
<td>2,214,871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be said easily that huge number of people immigrated in the district from 1872 to 1981; accordingly the lands for cultivation were not increased. Maximum number of people of total
population lived in villages, because percentage of urban population in 1951 was 7.22, in 1961 was 9.11, in 1971 was 9.60 and in 1981 was 14.05. As there were no large industries except tea – industries, major portion of population had to depend on agricultural land for their livelihood. Naturally, land crisis was seen for which local people particularly the local jotdars were affected gradually.

Fourthly, Land reforms mean not only acquisition and distribution of land to the landless people. Land reform is not only a means of securing better distributive justice but also one of improving the social status and dignity of the poor cultivator as well as his political influence. Besides land acquisition and distribution, technological systems and instruments for agricultural purposes including irrigation systems, soil conservation, seeds, manure should have been improved to increase production. Because, day to day population has been increasing, lands are being divided among the members of the families after each generation; as a result of which amount of land per family have been decreasing. In such a situation production should have been increased from insufficient land, side by side lands are to be conserved from soil pollution. Manjula Bose writes in her editorial address, “Since the pressure of excess population on land will continue for some time to come in the near future, technological and organizational development should proceed, as far as practicable under this constraint. Technological development are however easier to achieve than organizational restricting. It is found in the field survey in the different villages of Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar district that most of the villages are out of irrigation facility, electric facility. The peasants in these villages are not aware of the modern technological improvement in agriculture; they depend on the traditional method of cultivation.

The following table shows total number of villages, total area and irrigated area in different P.S. of the district, Jalpaiguri -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of P.S.</th>
<th>No. of inhabited villages</th>
<th>Total area (in hectare)</th>
<th>Percentage of Cultivation</th>
<th>Percentage of irrigated area to total cultivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rajganj</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38497.41</td>
<td>26.02</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44262.07</td>
<td>79.17</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>51859.38</td>
<td>45.68</td>
<td>9.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Metiali</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20489.39</td>
<td>39.84</td>
<td>40.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Maynaguri</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>49304.60</td>
<td>68.52</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nagrakata</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34073.76</td>
<td>83.94</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Banarhat</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28391.93</td>
<td>47.89</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dhupguri</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25325.61</td>
<td>75.99</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Birpara</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18717.88</td>
<td>71.18</td>
<td>9.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Falakata</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>34911.28</td>
<td>64.22</td>
<td>15.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Madarihat</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15835.36</td>
<td>57.75</td>
<td>6.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Alipurduar</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>68472.20</td>
<td>67.11</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kalchini</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>69512.82</td>
<td>29.16</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kumargram</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86984.17</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>736</td>
<td>586637.86</td>
<td>50.67</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Uppendra Nath Barman wrote, “The ceiling of Khas land has been fixed up, but no sufficient measure has been taken up for increasing productions in the land in North Bengal as a result, most of the people once depended only on land have been destroyed in the end of destiny and living completely in a impoverish condition.”

Beside these, communication and marketing system is one of the important factors for the economic development of the peasants. It is also found in the field survey that many villages have not proper communicational facility and marketing system. Due to insufficient roads and infrastructural facility various crops produced by the peasants are not possible to transport different parts of the country to have proper value as a result of which peasants are less interested to cultivate, sometimes they became confused what type of crops they have to cultivate.

In one study area of Chakraborty and Ghosh, it was found that around 85 percent of the assignees of vested lands had never seen an agricultural extension worker and no improved seeds of the field survey, even though there was a

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scheme to supply minikits to the poor peasants. For the lack of all agricultural related improvements mentioned above, small and marginal peasants have been suffering from different economic crisis, beside this many of them do not have alternative sources of income and they become failure to maintain their families. So, due to heavy poverty they sold their lands and become landless labourers.

Fifthly, though it is demanded that the operation Barga is a Landmark of Land reforms programmes, but from many aspects it could not be a pillar of success. From different sources it is found that a large number of bargadars, probably 600,000 to 1 million, still remain unrecorded. P.K. Bhowmik writes “At the initial stage, OB was marked with spectacular success. But the over all success was not satisfactory. Out of the estimated 2 million bargadars the Land Records Department could register the name of about one million bargadars only. The reason behind this they trend to record their rights.” Hillol Kumar Chakraborty showed in his article “The land Reforms in West Bengal and the Bargadar” that many bargadars were not interested to record their names in the record of rights due to fear of eviction. He writes, “Thus in all probability, we may argue that a poor bargadar would naturally think that if he would claim to be recorded as a bargadar during the current survey and settlement operation, he would simply invite fresh exploitation from his landowner and may lose his barga land.”

Conclusion:
It can be said that the land Reforms Programmes had a positive role because by this programme many landless people including sharecroppers got their right on lands. The slogan ‘Land to the tillers’ became successful. But in the case of North Bengal unlike other parts of West Bengal the picture was slightly different. In North Bengal the indigenous people namely Rajbanshis, Tribals and local Muslims were completely dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and all most all of them are illiterate. So, while going on Land Reforms Programmes many of the jotdars or landholders were failure to hold their lands for not to furnish their proper documents of lands to the authority of land department of the Government in time. Many of the jotdars having only 25 acres of lands fell into critical crisis for their livelihood, because suddenly the amount of land decreased from thousand acres to 25 acres. They had no alternative way to earn. So, they could not maintain their families by shortage income. Beside this, at the time of disease, marriage of daughters or sons or any crisis period they sold their lands or property gradually and ultimately they became landless or proprietors of little amount of lands. It is found from the field survey in different parts of North Bengal that many indigenous jotdars or landlords lost their everything soon after the land Reforms Programmes beginning and the successors of the said jotdars or zamindars or intermediaries became labourers, many of them stepped into different parts of the country for earning money as a labourer, many of them involved in unsocial and anti-social activities.

Since the attainment of independence of India in 1947 lot of discontents and grievances were being accumulated among the indigenous people of North Bengal, particularly, the people of Northern portion of North Bengal were intensively affected and victimized. They were affected socially, economically and culturally as a result they protested against all sorts of deprivations and negligence in time to time organizing and conducting socio-political movements such as Uttarakhand- Utjas, Kamtapur movement and Greater Cooch Behar Movement etc.

In the recent years it is followed that different parts of North Bengal a socio-political tension has been going on. Different political movements such as Uttarkhand- UTJAS Movement, movements for separate states like Kamtapur movement, Greater Cooch Behar movement have been going on. Beside these, sometimes terrorist activities led by KLO (Kamtapur Liberation Organization) was started which killed many lives of political leaders. So, all these movements disturbed the environment, peace and integrity of North Bengal.

So, the reasons behind all these movements were deprivations, oppressions and psychic discontents. One of the vital reasons of these movements were losing of lands by jotdars and landlords because it is followed that most of the leading personalities of these movements coming from previous jotdars families. So, the land-related issues behind the socio-political tension of North Bengal cannot be denied. So, it is utmost necessary to search for the land-related issues behind the discontents and grievances of the formerly landholder classes and should take necessary measures and initiatives by the Government and intellectuals.

Notes and references

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3. 8th Conference of C. P. I, Muslim Institute Hall, Kolkata, 8th-12th April, 1959.
5. Tushar Kanti Ghosh, Land Reforms in West Bengal; Legislative and Achievement, Deputy Secretary, Land Utilization and Reforms, Land and Land Revenue Department, in Manjula Bose, Ibid, pp. 150 – 51.
7. P. K. Bhowmik, op cit, pp. 3 – 4
13. Interview with Nitai Das Chowdhuri, 78 years, of Bholardabri, P. S. Alipurduar, Dist Jalpaiguri
14. Interview with Promod Nath, 62 years of South Jitpur, Dist Jalpaiguri
18. Interview with Promod Nath, Jitpur, P. S Alipurduar, Dist – Jalpaiguri
20. Interview with Adhir Saha, 55 years of Takoamari, P. O. Rashikbil, P.S Tufanganj, Dist – Coochbehar.
23. P. K. Bhowmik, op cit, p. 46
24. P. K. Bhowmik, Ibid, p. 4
25. Memorandum of C. P. I. to the President of India, West Bengal State Committee, July, 1959.
27. Tathya Sambad, 30th May, 1976, No. 22.
30. P. K. Bhowmik, op. cit, p. 5
31. Ibid, p. 212
33. Subhajyoti Roy, op. cit, p. 129.
34. Interview with Khagendra Nath Das, 77 years, s/o Late Nara Nath Das, of Chapar par, P.S. Alipurduar, Dist Jalpaiguri
35. Interview with Premandana Prodhan, 76 years, S/O Nanibor Prodhan of Takomari, P.O. Rashikbil, P.S. Tufanganj, Dist – Coochbehar.
37. Interview with Ramesh Roy S/O late Santeswar Roy, 48 years of Chapani, P.S. Samuktala, Dist Jalpaiguri.
38. Noni Nohan Sen, 72, S/o Late Pabitra Mohan Sen, Basusuba, Chapadanga, P.S. MalJalpaiguri
41. Manjula Bose, op. cit, p. VIII
42. Manjula Bose, op. cit, p. VIII
44. Upendra Nath Barman, Uttar Banglar Sekal O Amar Jiban Smriti, Jalpaiguri, 1388 B.S, p, 50
45. Field Survey in the different villages of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri District.
46. B.K. Sinha and Pushpendra, op. cit, p, 119
47. B.K. Sinha and Pushpendra, op. cit, p, 120