

# AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN A NORTH BENGAL PEASANT MOVEMENT BELT: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Manabendu Chattopadhyay & Arun Kumar Chatterjee

WE undertook a socio-economic survey in the rural areas of Siliguri Sub-division in recent years, to study the structure and change in the agrarian relations of production in an area, where large scale peasant mobilisations and revolt occurred a decade and a half ago. Siliguri Sub-division (known as 'terai' area) is covered by the four police stations of Siliguri, Phansidewa, Kharibari, and Naxalbari. We excluded the Siliguri P.S. from our survey because of its largely non-agrarian character.

Since the area under investigation is covered by large tracts of forest and tea plantations and is not homogeneous in physical and techno-economic terms, it was necessary to obtain first-hand basic data (economic and socio-political) before undertaking an intensive survey on agrarian issues. The purpose of this paper is to present some results of this preliminary survey, conducted between December 1981 and March 1982.

Data from secondary sources, largely available from different census reports and Gazetteers, do not furnish adequate information on various aspects of land, labour and credit relations, without which the agrarian social reality cannot be comprehended. Furthermore, available secondary source data, which have been collected by agencies at the primary level, are not directly relevant to any specific theoretical framework. For these reasons, it was necessary to obtain some first-hand basic data before undertaking an intensive survey on agrarian issues. A village-schedule was initially canvassed primarily to obtain an approximate idea of the relative strength of households of the various agrarian class categories (i.e., big peasant, middle peasant, small or poor peasant, tenant and labourer) and their caste/community affiliations. Identification of various agrarian class categories was made on the basis of the villagers' perception and knowledge about the socio-economic status of the respective households in the village. In order to do this a PPS (Probability Proportional to Population Size) sample of 25 percent of the total revenue units (*moujas*), on the basis of 1971 census listing, was taken against each of three police station areas under study. This procedure was necessary because of the large variation in the population. Nearly 32 *moujas* consisting of 90 jotes (villages) were selected in the three police stations.

Since a *mouja* is constituted of a number of jotes, the village schedule was first at the jote-level of the selected *moujas* and from this, *mouja* level information was collated on the basis of the jote-level information. The schedule was canvassed among three groups of people, chosen on purpose, two from landowners, one each from labourers and tenants and one each from village

officials and influential persons. Thus, in all, we tried to get six schedules filled for each jote of the selected moujas. This enabled us to identify in particular the revenue units (moujas) where cultivable land markets, in terms of leasing-in and leasing-out, and their interplay with labour and credit markets, existed. It is true that, on the basis of such type of data, interrelations of various agrarian class categories cannot be drawn. Neither can the estimates of population belonging to different agrarian classes be provided on the basis of such kind of survey design. Since the primary objective of our survey was not to estimate the numbers but to identify the *existence* of the agrarian classes and subsequently to study the interrelationships of various classes, within which the dominant class could be identified, the design followed by us seemed to be very helpful for the purpose. However, it may be mentioned that the present study is part of the larger study which is underway at the moment.

### Evolution of Agrarian Relations

The terai region of North Bengal is situated in the foot hills of Darjeeling, where the two international borders of Bangladesh and Nepal touch its southern and western parts respectively.

The terai was annexed from Sikkim in 1850 and its southern part was placed under Purnea district. Because of the dislike of the inhabitants to this transfer it was later cancelled and the whole area was subsequently attached to Darjeeling.<sup>1</sup> The whole of the hill area and a greater part of the terai at that time was under forest. However, after annexation, large areas of forest land were brought under cultivation, either for tea plantation or for paddy cultivation. The land had been allotted by the British Government among 544 *jotedars*<sup>2</sup> in the terai area immediately after annexation. Since then the settlement was renewed from time to time, the number of *jotes* vis-a-vis *jotedars* increased over time as the forests were cleared for cultivation (other than tea) in each year. The *jotedars* renewed their *jotes* every year but in fact they had hereditary rights which could not be rejected.<sup>3</sup> A summary picture regarding the growth of *jotes* in the terai area is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Number of Jotes in the Terai Area: 1850-1925

	1850	1853	1867	1879	1897	1919-25
No of jotes	544	595	808	—	834*	860*

\* Excluding *hats*, Source: Dash 1947, p 227.

Apart from *jotedars*, there were *ticcadars* and *dar-ticcadars* who were tenants under *jotedars* and *ticcadars* respectively, having no right of occupancy however long they might have been in cultivation. The *jotedars* and *ticcadars* usually employed some labourers for the entire work of

1 See, Dash [1947], p 227.

2 The term *jotedar* has been applied generally to those who hold land directly under government and pay revenue to government, having a right of occupancy.

3 The two Acts — Act X of 1859 and Act VIII of 1879 regulated the rights of the tenants in the terai.

cultivation. They were known as *adhia*s. Thus, a four-tier system prevailed in the agriculture of the terai. This will be discussed at length in the following pages.

Apart from the cultivation of paddy and all other food crops, tea plantations played a major role in the economy of the terai since its annexation. Experimental plantations had been started in this region in 1862 and other gardens had been established by 1866.<sup>4</sup> Although after 1891, the tea industry entered a period of depression, mainly because of labour scarcity in the local areas, it, however, maintained a distinct role in the exploitation of local resources. In 1940, the number of gardens in the terai was 51. After 1940, the number of gardens remained constant and in the present decades, it has started to decline.<sup>4a</sup>

At the time of the annexation, the terai was a very thinly populated area; the population in 1872 was about 48,000. The population has been increasing since, as may be seen from the following table:

**Table 2**

Population (in thousand) and Density of Population per square mile (in hundred) in Siliguri Sub-division of Darjeeling District: 1872-1971.

Years	Population (in '000)	Population density (in '00)
(1)	(2)	(3)
1872	47,985	NA
1881	63,038	NA
1891	72,993	NA
1901	87,129	269
1911	86,595	268
1921	87,276	270
1931	92,684	278
1941	104,544	323
1951	130,832	405
1961	219,848	680
1971	301,799	NA

Source: (a) *Bengal District Gazetteers (Darjeeling)*, 1947.

(b) *District Census Handbooks 1961, 1971*.

NA = Data not available.

We can identify two stages of population growth in the terai. Originally the place was thinly populated, with a few tribes, such as the Metch and Dhimol in upper terai, and the Rajbansi and Muslim in lower terai. When the reclamation of land took place, particularly after 1850, there

<sup>4</sup> Plantation areas were exploited by large capitalists or departmental agencies. The concentration of economic power of this class was reinforced by the Act X of 1859 and Act VII of 1879. According to these Acts, the 30-year tea lease was transferable and heritable, but these leaseholders had no right to sublet.

<sup>4a</sup> The data provided by the Tea Board, Calcutta in *Tea Statistics* of the last two decades give such an indication.

was a steady increase of immigrant tribal and semi-tribal population from Chotanagpur, Ranchi and Madhya Pradesh. They came mainly for wage-labour occupation in the tea gardens, but some also worked for farm households. Census figures show the following to be the numbers of people of different communities in the district, although it has been reported that the majority of the population recorded against each community was resident in the Siliguri Sub-division, i.e., in the terai area.

**Table 3**  
Relative strength of population by selected communities: 1872-1941 (in thousand)

Community	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Rajbansi	23.1	—	—	29.5	28.9	23.2	27.0	18.1
Koch	—	30.8	—	—	—	—	0.1	—
Dhimal	0.9	—	0.6	—	0.4	—	0.4	—
Metch	0.9	—	0.3	0.3	0.2	—	—	—
Santal	—	—	—	1.9	2.2	3.6	4.3	4.0
Oraon	1.6	—	4.6	8.0	7.5	11.0	12.4	12.4
Munda	—	—	0.3	4.0	3.4	5.3	5.1	5.0
Muslims	5.2	6.7	7.9	—	—	6.9	6.8	6.9
Nepali	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.6

Source: Dash 1947, pp 66-69.

The table shows the steady increase of Rajbansi population in this area, particularly before 1941. People belonging to Santal, Oraon and Munda communities also increased during the period 1872-1941. Interestingly enough, the Rajbansi population and the Koch population are not found at the same time. The only year (1881), except for a small number in 1931, in which the Koch community existed, the Rajbansi population was missing. This has led to the observation that the Koch and the Rajbansi are one and the saem.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Rajbansis were a predominant group in the terai, the numerical strength of Muslims and Nepalis could not be ignored. Muslims were found mostly in the rural areas of Phansidawa, Siliguri and Kharibari thanas. The Nepalis were found mainly in the towns.

The 1961 census data provide some interesting results regarding the caste/community

<sup>5</sup> See, Risley, [1891], p 491; and Sanyal [1965], p 14.

characteristics of the population in the terai. These can be summarised as follows:

**Table 4**  
Caste/communitiy characteristics of the population in the terai, 1961.

Items	Rural	Urban
(1)	(2)	(3)
I Percentage of S.C. to total population	19.42	8.76
II Percentage of S.T. to total population	36.38	0.55
III Percentage of Rajbansis to total SC population	46.91	1.87
IV Percentage of Oraons to total ST population	33.18	0.95
V Percentage of Mundas to total ST population	9.95	0.77
VI Percentage of Santals to total ST population	8.55	0.21
VII Percentage of Muslims to total population	8.62	4.24

Source: *Census of India*, 1961, pp 256 & 260.

The figures presented in Table 4 show the following:

- the numerical strength of the Rajbansis in the rural terai is further strengthened by the 1961 data;
- among the scheduled tribe population, the Oraons are the most predominant, in the population of rural terai;
- overall percentages of SC and ST population in the terai area show that these two groups are the main mobilisers of the local rural resources. Although the people of other communities, such as the Muslims and the Nepalis are constituents of the agrarian social structure in terai, they are still a minority group in the total population.

Thus, the Rajbansis, Oraons, Mundas and Santals constitute a large population in this region. Historically, their immigration from such places as Assam, Chotanagpur and the neighbouring regions seems to have been prompted by the needs of the landowners, as well as plantation owners, to have a labour force, which could clear forests and engage in labour occupations.

Apart from this aspect of migration, there has also been an inflow of Rajbansis in recent years from Nepal and Bangladesh. They differ in speech, ritual and other cultural spheres. The local Rajbansis keep a distance from them. This second phase of migration started since the partition of Bengal in 1947. A large number of people from East Bengal, especially from Rangpur and Dinajpur immigrated here.<sup>6</sup> The Nepalis also entered the terai from time to time. Besides, the

<sup>6</sup> Data on migration in the terai are not consistently available. In 1961 *Census Handbook of Darjeeling* (p-61) we get the following information on a district level which also highlights the problem:  
While the total immigrant population of the district is 169,334, within India it is Behar (40,287) from where the people immigrated most. From countries like Nepal (41,109) and Pakistan i.e., Bangladesh (38,162) people have come in huge numbers. Thus, 70.60 percent of the total immigrants come from these three places.

Behari population has been in continuous contact with terai since long. The entry of these groups since 1951 has drastically changed the population composition of this area as may be seen from Table 2.

The huge increase of population, after 1947, in the terai has aggravated the land-hunger of the people. At the initial period of annexation, the volume of population in this area was so small that the people did not find any difficulty in getting employment and earning either from cultivable land or from the tea gardens. In fact, there was a balance between the growth of population and the growth in demand for hired farm labour and tea garden workers. This situation, however, was reversed after the 1940s, when the economy had already reached a point in which further employment was not called for. Thus, with the growing population, the number of unemployed and under-employed increased and the process of pauperisation among the peasantry as well as labourers began. The process was further accentuated because of the backward conditions of production in this region. The census data of the last few decades give such an indication.

**Table 5**

**Growth of cultivators and agricultural labourers in Siliguri sub-division and Darjeeling district: 1961-81**

Agrarian categories	Darjeeling district			Siliguri sub-div.	
	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cultivators	99,703 (37.47)	86,054 (30.47)	94,635 (26.93)	32,300 (49.03)	27,466 (5.09)
Agricultural labourers	7,807 (2.93)	25,783 (9.13)	30,848 (8.78)	3,354 (27.05)	11,012 (10.85)
Total workers	266,105 (42.60)	282,442 (36.13)	351,462 (34.92)	65,871 (29.96)	101,521 (33.64)

Figures in first bracket indicate percentage to total workers.

Figures in third bracket indicate percentage to total population.

Table 5 shows an absolute rise of agricultural labourers from about 8 thousand in 1961 to 31 thousand in 1981 in Darjeeling district. The proportion of agricultural labourers to total number of workers reveals a tendency to increase definitely during the period 1961-71, but such a trend is not noticeable during the current census decade. Further, the data show that the number and proportion of cultivators in the Darjeeling district have decreased considerably during the period 1961-81. Although the data on Siliguri sub-division for the census decade 1971-81 are not available, the same conclusion, however, can be drawn regarding this area on the basis of the 1961-71 data. Thus, whether or not this strongly suggests a downward mobility from cultivators to agricultural labourers, expressing thereby the phenomenon of proletarianisation of

the rural poor<sup>7</sup>, the data definitely suggest that the migration of people from other places in India or outside India have swelled the ranks of the landless population. From this point of view, the process indicates more the reduction of the rural poor to a state of immeasurable misery rather than its proletarianisation.

Let us see how the relations of production in this frontier region have undergone changes at different points of time within this historical agrarian condition.

Readily available historical material on agrarian relations in this region is dismally inadequate. Except for some impressionistic ideas regarding the existence of agrarian class categories in the terai, the details of land-labour relations and the roles of credit institutions in these interrelationships cannot be comprehended from the secondary source material. Thus, we find that the principal feature of this region is the high percentage of sharecroppers. Compared to the sharecroppers, the percentage of agricultural labourers seems to be very marginal.<sup>8</sup> We do not, however, get details of the sharecropping arrangements in this region, except the following few words reported in the Gazetteer of 1947: "*Adhiars* are really labourers and *jotedars* and *ticcadars* usually employ *adhiars* to do the whole work of cultivation and take little direct interest in the operations of agriculture. *Adhiars* receive the use of plough and are given seed and subsistence (these last two often on loan at interest) and in return get half of the crop grown. The *Adhiar* has little in the way of rights, capital or credit" [Dash 1947, pp 228–229].

Many writers consider the *adhiari* system as sharecropping, in which a person is employed for a year for all the agricultural operations of farming in lieu of a share of the produce as his remuneration. Although, the *adhiars* lived mainly by tilling others' land on a crop-sharing basis, they normally did not have a pair of cattle, a plough, and seeds as infrastructure of production, at least in the 1890s. Therefore, the other interpretation of *adhiar* might go in favour of its being a labour category, as in the Gazetteer of 1947.

Whatever the status of *adhiars* might be, the agrarian hierarchy in the British period in the terai region was headed by *jotedars*, who had a right of occupancy (treated as raiyats). Under each *jotedar* there were a number of *ticcadars*, who had no right of occupancy but worked as tenants under the *jotedars*. There were also a number of *dar-ticcadars*, who were tenants under *ticcadars* having no right of occupancy. Within this kind of land tenure structure, *adhiars* were employed both under *jotedars* and *ticcadars* to do the entire manual work of cultivation. The following figures of tenancies are available from the Gazetteer of 1947, which furnish information about the relative strength of the agrarian hierarchy in the terai during 1898–1924.

Table 6 shows that during 26 years, all the categories of people under the four-tier agrarian hierarchy increased. The increase was more dramatic in the *ticcadar* category, than in the others. This indicates the phenomenon of absentee *jotedars* with respect to their direct supervision and active participation in farm work. This became possible because of the concentration of a high proportion of cultivated land leased out by them to peasants of different

7 For an extensive discussion of this point see, Bandyopadhyay [1971], Mukherji [1978].

8 See, Mukherji [1978].

**Table 6**  
Relative strength of different types of tenancies

Types of tenancies	Number		Areas	Areas un-	Total
	1898	1924	cultivated (1898)	cultivated (1898)	areas (1898)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Jotedars	778	860*	15,115	43,244	58,359
Ticcadars	4,757	6,104	25,886	9,329	35,215
Dar-ticcadars	2,803	4,672	6,667	853	7,520
Adhiars under	2,659	NA	8,334	396	8,730
(a) jotedars	1,744	NA	5,736	257	5,993
(b) ticcadars	915	NA	2,598	139	2,737

Source: Dash [1947], p 229.

\* Out of these 535 *jotedars* were recorded as tenure holders.

categories described above. The *jotedars* generally lived on rent or combined this with extraction of labour-rent from hereditary farm servants such as *adhiars*.

Data on land tenancies after 1924 are not available even now. It is therefore difficult to assess any change that may have taken place between the different categories of people in the agrarian hierarchy. However, it seems clear from the data of recent census reports as well as from the data of Ishaque Survey, 1944-45, that the majority of the agriculturists (nearly 80 percent) in this region are *adhiars*, cultivating lands of *jotedars* on the *adhi*<sup>9</sup> system. The position of *adhiars* is very unsatisfactory, as the share they get is hardly sufficient to maintain themselves. The system keeps the *adhiars*, forming so large a proportion of the population, in perpetual poverty.

From the secondary source material we also find that most of the *jotedars* were Rajbansis, a few were Muslims, Beharis and high caste Bengalis. Although the *adhiars* were mostly Rajbansis, the incidence of Oraon, Munda and other scheduled tribe *adhiars* was not insignificant. This situation does not seem to have altered altogether.

Thus, the study of agrarian relations in this region means by and large the study of the *jotedari-adhiari* system, in which the people belonging to scheduled castes and tribes play a vital role. Interestingly, the two classes — a class of landowners and a class of labourers — are found to exist within the *same* community in this region. This is perhaps an unique feature of the terai compared to the other regions of West Bengal.

Unfortunately, a macroscopic survey, covering all these peculiarities in the crystallization of the *jotedari-adhiari* system in particular, and the agrarian social system in general, is not available for this region. As a result, it has been impossible so far to find out objectively the causes and

<sup>9</sup> For details regarding 'adhi' system, See Mukherji [1978], pp 34-35.



consequences of the agrarian movement that occurred in this region in 1967. Admittedly, we get some impressionistic ideas regarding the system, but these are not sufficient to assess the nature and extent of the various elements that entered into the system with resulting contradictions.

For example, the *jotedari-adhiari* system is characterised as a system of exploitation of the labour of the *adhiar* by every conceivable means, keeping him utterly dependent on the *jotedar*. The dominant position, since the consolidation of the *jotedari-adhiari* system, is that of a class of "landowning-moneylenders" belonging preponderantly in this region mainly to the Rajbansi community. It operates in such a fashion that any attempt towards the development of the exploited class would never get off the ground. The social power wielded by the *jotedars* was so strong that it could even frustrate legislative measures, the most important elements that form the rules of civil society. Such a power, emerging out of various economic and extra-economic advantages enjoyed by the big landowners in the social milieu of the rural areas, could be called the main element of exploitation and oppression of labour. A thorough study on these aspects of agrarian relations is required to understand the causes and consequences of the movements in this region.

The sample villages under study are primarily characterised by a mono crop economy, viz. the cultivation of early kharif paddy (Aus) or jute on high lands and kharif paddy (Aman) on low lands. It is, however, interesting to note that quite a good number of villages (42 out of 90) show signs of using modern inputs in agriculture (Table 7). Contrary to popular impression, the incidence of modern inputs in a mono-crop economy is far from negligible.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 7**

Distribution of sample jotes differentiated by use of modern inputs in Naxalbari, Kharibari, and Phansidewa.

Police stations	Modern inputs (jotes)		Total
	Some use	No use	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Naxalbari	9*	13	22 (8)
Kharibari	16	16	32 (12)
Phansidewa	17	19	36 (12)
Total	42	48	90 (32)

Note: \* (1) 4 *jotes* have some use of modern inputs but the extent of use is not certain.

(2) Figures in bracket indicate number of sample mauzas.

<sup>10</sup> By the term 'some use of modern inputs', we mean that the majority of the villagers use HYV seeds, chemical fertilizers, etc., but the use of pump-sets, deep tube-wells, etc., for irrigation is virtually absent. By the term 'no use of modern inputs', we mean that the majority of the villagers do not use HYV seeds, chemical fertilizers, pump-sets, etc.

On the face of it, this fact alone is not enough to suggest that this region has taken to "development". One has to examine the nature of production relations to see what kind of picture emerges.

Let us now take the agrarian class categories<sup>11</sup> and see how the classes are concentrated in the villages according to the incidence of modern inputs. There is no doubt that the big and middle peasant categories are important, though not the only users of modern inputs. If we proceed with the analysis of the assumption that *jotes* giving evidence of 'some use' of modern inputs are at least moderately developed, then we can see that the concentration of big and middle peasants are marginally higher in these villages. In contrast, the poor peasants and tenants and the agricultural labourers have a relatively greater concentration in the backward *jotes*, where modern inputs are not used at all (Table 8).

**Table 8**

Distribution of high to moderate concentration of structural categories by use of modern inputs in the sampled *jotes* of Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa.

Modern inputs	Structural categories		
	Big and middle peasants	Poor peasants and tenants	Agricultural labourers
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Some use	28.5%	90.4%	80.9%
N = 42 <i>jotes</i>	(12)	(38)	(34)
No use	20.7%	97.9%	83.3%
N = 48 <i>jotes</i>	(10)	(47)	(40)

Note: Figures in bracket indicate distribution of *jotes* with high to moderate concentration of respective structural categories.

Thus the relatively higher demand for tenants in the backward villages, where poor quality of land enhances the tendency for letting out such lands to the tenants is quite understandable. But, moderately developed *jotes*, where production risks should be relatively low on account of better land and use of modern inputs, paradoxically enough, do not have a higher concentration of labour!

In order to understand the phenomenon clearly, an analysis of data indicating change in the composition of the agrarian class categories over time, reported by the villagers themselves, between two types of villages may be useful.

<sup>11</sup> In the classification of the peasants in this locality, we have depended on local opinion. In the local parlance, a big peasant holds land over 10 acres, a middle peasant between 5 to 10 acres and a small peasant less than 5 acres.

Table 9

Frequency of *jotes* indicating reported change in the composition of the agrarian categories over time

Modern inputs ( <i>jotes</i> )	Reported trend	Structural categories		
		Big & middle peasants	Poor peasants & tenants	Agricultural labourers (CL, Att.)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Some use  N = 42 <i>jotes</i>  (moderately developed)	Increasing	(1,3)	(32,7)	(27,5)
	Decreasing	(21,29)	(7,26)	(8,14)
	No change	(8,4)	(1,4)	(4,0)
	Not available	(12,6)	(2,12)	(3,23)
No use  N = 48 <i>jotes</i>  (backward)	Increasing	(5,3)	(35,2)	(35,6)
	Decreasing	(25,28)	(7,29)	(2,15)
	No change	(5,12)	(2,4)	(9,2)
	Not available	(13,5)	(4,13)	(2,25)

Note: Figures in bracket indicate the distribution of *jotes* against each agrarian class category.

It can be seen from Table 9 that there is not much to distinguish between the moderately developed and backward *jotes*, in the pattern of increase or decline in the composition of big and middle peasants over a period of time, as reported by the respondents. While there has hardly been any increase in the rich peasant category, the middle peasant category shows a uniform decline. Neither is there much to distinguish between pattern of increase or decline in the poor peasants and tenants between the two types of *jotes*. Interestingly, the poor peasants seem to be consistently increasing in number, while the tenant category is generally on the decline. Whereas the casual labour category is increasing, it is more pronounced in the backward *jotes*. The attached labour category is also generally on the general decline. Thus the two "feudal" categories, the tenant and the attached labour, are on the decline.

Coming now to the data on types of tenancy vis-a-vis the productivity of land, we observe that there are mainly two types of tenancy, in terms of both cost and crop shares (Table 10). The 50:50 crop and cost share by tenants is the older customary form of tenancy in this region, while 75:100 crop and cost share is the state-sponsored (post reform) form of tenancy. The significance of 75:100 crop and cost share lies in the relative freedom of tenants in production relations, while the customary form of tenancy (50:50. crop:cost share) remains the more exploitative type.<sup>12</sup> It will be fruitful to recall that large-scale peasant mobilisation in these three

12 For a detailed discussion of the point see. Chattopadhyay and Ghosh [1983].

**Table 10**  
Yield per bigha in jotes by types of tenure

Tenants' share	Yield per bigha of paddy (in maunds)					
	Naxalbari		Kharibari		Phansidewa	
	Irriga- ted	Non-irri- gated	Irriga- ted	Non-irri- gated	Irriga- ted	Non-irri- gated
Crop: Cost	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
75 : 100	7	2	—	5.5	4.5	5.5
50 : 50	11	6	—	4.5	8	5

regions, during 1967-69, was focussed on such share-cropping issues. However, the co-existence of both types of tenancies bely one's expectation that large-scale peasant mobilisation should have altered the traditional form of tenancy.

Although 75:100 form of tenancy gives greater freedom to tenants in production relations, the observed variations between the two types of tenancies, in terms of yield per bigha in irrigated and unirrigated lands, suggest that tenants practising the customary form of tenancy are more innovative of the two (Table 10).

The phenomenon of output-raising innovativeness, in the case of tenants belonging to the category of the customary type, becomes clearer when comparisons are made between the two types of tenancies vis-a-vis incidence of modern inputs, yield per bigha, and average daily wage rate of casual labourers (Table 11).

**Table 11**  
Average yield per bigha and daily wage rate of casual labourers by tenancy types and use of modern inputs in the jotes of Naxalbari, Kharibari, Phansidewa

Tenants' share	Modern inputs	Avg. yield per bigha (maunds)		Avg. daily wage rate of casual labourers	
		Irriga- ted	Non-irri- gated	Male	Female
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
75:100	Use	5.83	5.33	5.58	4.89
	No use	5.50	4.06	4.67	3.75
50:50	Use	11.00	5.75	5.25	4.50
	No use	—	5.25	4.67	4.16

The following observations can be drawn on the basis of the data presented in Table 11:

- (a) yield per bigha is relatively higher in areas where the customary form of tenancy operates in combination with some use of modern inputs;
- (b) the average daily wage rate is relatively higher where the post reform form of tenancy operates in combination with some use of modern inputs.

The two different patterns of the incidence of yield and wage, between the two types of tenancies, suggest that the customary form of tenancy is the more exploitative, not only in terms of output-input relations, but also in terms of wages paid to the labourers. On the contrary, 75:100 types of tenancy seems to indicate more a contractual type, in terms not only of the tenant's crop and cost share, but also of the labourer's wage. Moreover, the use of modern

**Table 12**

Sharecropping arrangements by caste/community — class stratification and use of modern inputs

Caste/community	Modern inputs	Types of tenancy (crop:cost)	
		Weaker section villages*	Mixed class villages
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Predominantly Rajbansi jotes N = 22	Use (11)	75:100 (1)	75:100 (7) 50:50 (7)
	No use (11)	75:100 (2)	75:100 (6)
Muslim jotes N = 2	Use (2)	75:100 (1)	50:50 (1)
	No use (0)	—	—
Rajbansi & Muslim jotes N = 3	Use (2)	—	75:100 (2)
	No use (1)	—	75:100 (1)
Mixed caste jotes N = 63	Use (27)	—	75:100 (15) 50:50 (15)
	No use (36)	75:100 (3)	75:100 (23) 50:50 (23)

[Figures in bracket indicate number of villages.]

\* The villages composed of only labour and tenant households have been classified as "weaker section" villages.

inputs and relatively higher yield per bigha, in the 50:50 tenancy type, indicate that the landlords as well as the tenants belonging to this type are inclined to accept agriculture as the major area of investment. Since the tenants bear the entire cost of cultivation in the post reform form of tenancy type, in most cases they cannot afford to go in for the adoption of output-raising innovations more satisfactorily, due to their weak asset base, thus productivity of land is lower.

With this kind of production relations in recent years, let us examine how people of different castes and communities have entered into the system.

For this purpose, we have classified the sampled villages (jotes) into four types: (i) predominantly Rajbansi jotes, (ii) Muslim jotes, (iii) Rajbansi and Muslim jotes, and (iv) mixed caste jotes, and accordingly the data on tenancy types have been arranged against each type of village (Table 12).

It is very clear from the above (Table 12), that villages composed predominantly of deprived classes have decisively responded to the post-reform form of tenancy. Villages characterised by a more heterogeneous and elaborate class distribution allow for the co-existence of both the types of tenancies. From these observations, it is clear that sharecropping arrangements do not seem to be guided by specific caste/community influences, but perhaps depend more on the dominance and exploitation of the landlords, in the given socio-political situation in the villages. In this context, it is also interesting to note that the use or the non-use of modern inputs has been of little help in changing the customary tenurial arrangements to the more contractual type.

Coming now to the data regarding the productivity of land and wage rate of agricultural labourers by caste/community-class stratification and use of modern inputs (Table 13) we find that:

- (a) once again the discriminatory variable is the mixed class villages, which generally reflect greater productivity per bigha, and hence, greater innovativeness. Caste/community hardly influences this pattern.
- (b) In the case of wage rates of agricultural labourers, a relatively lower wage rate is found to be paid in the predominantly Rajbansi-mixed class villages than in those of other types. Interestingly, there is a tendency, although not very strong, of daily wage rates to become higher in the weaker section villages than in the mixed class villages.

Various patterns of relationships described above are based on very extensive village-level data. From the statistical point of view, therefore, no generalisation regarding the relationships is proposed. For this purpose, an intensive study, covering all aspects of agrarian relations, is already in progress. However, this preliminary study helps to obtain an insight into the emerging macro-picture of agrarian relations in this region, which may help us to understand the historical trend.

We have so far tried to explicate some of the historical trends in production relations in the terai area of Darjeeling district. We can now examine some aspects of agrarian relations in this region

Table 13

Average yield of paddy and wage rate by caste/community-class stratification and use of modern inputs

Caste/community	Modern inputs	Weaker section villages				Mixed class villages			
		Avg. yield of paddy (mds.)		Avg. wage rate		Avg. yield of paddy (mds.)		Avg. wage rate	
		Irri-gated	Non-irrigated	M	F	Irri-gated	Non-irrigated	M	F
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Predominantly Rajbansi Villages	Use	—	4	5.5	5.0	6.5	5.4	4.2	3.6
	No use	—	5	4.3	3.7	8.0	6.1	4.1	3.7
Predominantly Muslim villages	Use	—	5	3.0	2.0	—	5	5.0	4.0
	No use	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Both Rajbansi and Muslim villages	Use	—	—	—	—	6	5	6.0	5.5
	No use	—	—	—	—	—	6	5.0	4.0
Mixed caste villages	Use	—	6	5.3	4.7	7.9	4.4	5.7	4.5
	No use	4.3	2.8	6.3	5.5	7.9	4.3	4.9	4.1

and attempt to relate it to the contemporary situation, in the light of the results obtained in our village-survey data.

We have already seen that historically the region under study was marked by the predominance of *jotedars*, who leased out their lands to peasants known as *adhiars*, and lived on rent. The majority of tenants belonged to the *Rajbansi* category and their landlords were predominantly *Rajbansis*. The pervasiveness of a single community in the land market, which was historically a unique feature of this region, still, by and large, persists.

However, the four-tier system, revealed in the agrarian hierarchy in this region before the 1950s, has undergone changes in contemporary decades. Instead of a four-tier hierarchy, the three-tier structural composition, viz., of owner cultivation, tenant cultivation and landless labour is now in existence. This has been possible partly due to the land reform legislations in 1955 and their implementation, and partly to the agrarian movements that have taken place since 1967. Agricultural development in terms of technology and use of modern inputs has played an insignificant role in this region. Although some villagers use some modern inputs such as HYV seeds, fertilizers, etc., in the present decade, these have not helped significantly to change the

cropping pattern, intensity of cropping etc. Thus, the productivity of land is still very low and the wage rate of agricultural labourers is far from the state-sponsored rate. Thus, agrarian conditions in this region seem to remain backward in every respect in production, as they had been in the years prior to 1950.

Within this backward production conditions, we have found that the class of *jotedars*, who were typical landlords, were not satisfied only with the ground rent, but also practised usury in relation to their tenants (*adhiars*) for higher profit. Since the tenurial system was associated with backward production conditions, it took various forms that suited the landlords from time to time. For example, during the period of annexation, the *adhiars* were treated as labourers, but subsequently they were transformed into sharecroppers. Although it took various forms over time, the content of the arrangements remained more or less unchanged, i.e., it assured a higher share of produce for the landowners and provided for a 'back and call' relationship between *adhiars* and *jotedars*. Thus, landowners, wielding feudal authority over the tenants in a near stagnant economy, were the typical reality of this region particularly before the 1950s.

Now, we can be clear about the changes that have taken place, and are taking place now, and the direction of land reforms as well as of peasant movements. In one of the most backward agricultural regions, which the rural Siliguri subdivision is, the people have been freed from the most oppressive feudal 'unfree' category. In this context the role of the peasant movement in 1967 and the *barga* movement, following the efforts of the government to ascribe a more permanent right to *adhi* cultivators can be mentioned. The government's land reform measures, through 'Operation Barga', have helped in curbing considerably the dominance of the landlords, but at the same time this has created a problem of both absolute and relative deprivation amongst the tenants [Chattopadhyay and Ghosh 1983].

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