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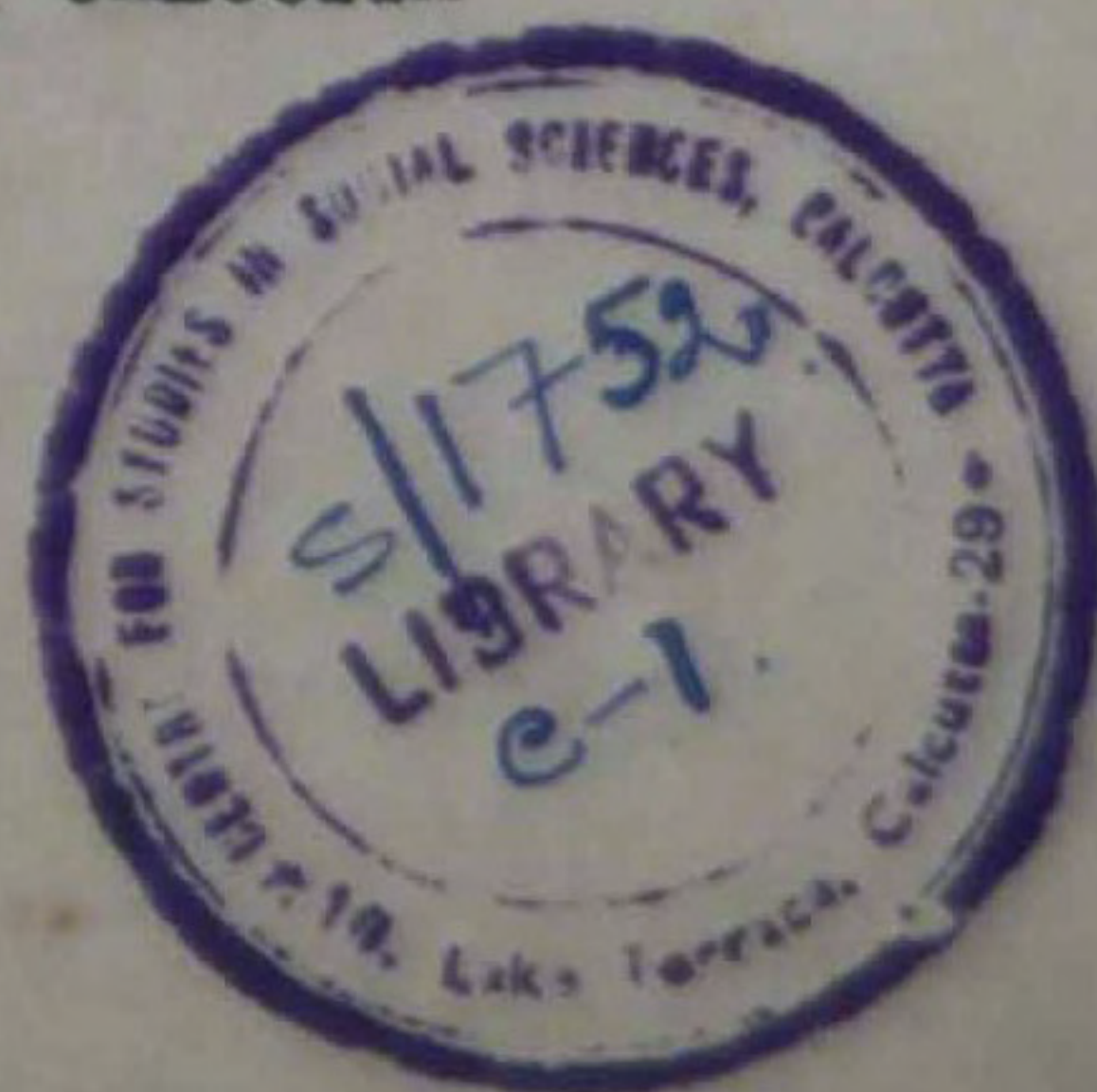
AGRARIAN CLASS FORMATION IN MODERN
BENGAL 1931-1951

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Earlier versions of Sections I and II were presented in two seminars; 'Commercialization of Agriculture in India' at the Centre of Development Studies, Trivandrum, November 1981; and 'The August 1942 Movement in India' at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, June 1983. These two sections have been subsequently revised and sections III and IV added for the present paper. I wish to thank Prof. Barun De and Prof. Asok Sen for their comments and Sm. Anjusree Chakraborty for drawing up the charts. Sri Manoj Kumar Sanyal has also put me in his debt by letting me use some of his own data.

Agricultural indebtedness and land alienation

The main aim of this paper is to examine the nature of change in the forms of credit or capital supply in Bengal agriculture through the 30s and 40s of the twentieth century, which were ultimately reflected in changing methods of land control and management, as well as in the forms of labour employment. The argument implies that a relatively new process of differentiation among the cultivating peasantry which had started some time before, picked up rapid momentum during this period and led to a restructuring of class relations in agriculture in almost all the districts of undivided Bengal. In the concluding sections of the paper a brief sketch of the land question and the situation of the labour force at the time of transfer of power and partition as well as what followed immediately after will be given; in an attempt to indicate questions that can be raised in regard to fresh research on problems of planned economic development and land reform as it was envisaged by the new national rulers. Finally, the consequences of wartime measures and policies on the economy of this region, and how they aggravated the problems just mentioned, will also be examined.

It has been pointed out elsewhere¹ that certain forms of exogenous pressure in the early 20th century had not only brought about important shifts/ⁱⁿ surplus extraction from agriculture through the market mechanism, creating extremely low equilibrium conditions in the countryside. The viability of small peasant proprietorship had also been destroyed. In the post-Depression era, Great Britain as an imperial power organised its entire Commonwealth system in such a way (so as to guard against disturbances in the world capitalist market) that it put a tremendous strain on Indian resources and people. In the

process, many economic institutions and practices which the colonial system had helped to create in its own interest, during a period of expanding international trade, were just swept aside in the last phase of colonial rule. One such institution was petty peasant proprietorship in Bengal province and the technical 'independence' of the petty direct producer in agriculture.

Apart from such well known consequences of the Depression of 1929-30 on the Indian economy as worsening terms of trade, fall in export surplus and in necessary imports, and a serious decline in the purchasing power of the Indian people, another very important development had taken place. This, as has been pointed out before², was the growing vulnerability of the country's economy to external pressures, exerted in the form of a comparative tightening or 'closure' of the Commonwealth market to the rest of the capitalist world as well as certain policy measures adopted by the imperial power to extract and repatriate surplus or tribute from India. These measures had led to increasing inequalities of income all over the country. Specifically in Bengal, the organised sectors of commerce and industry which largely belonged to expatriate British interests, tightened their control over the domestic market at this time. Such policies, along with the general market situation, combined to push traders and professional moneylenders in the countryside almost entirely out of their normal business. Certain other factors which will be referred to later, were also responsible for this virtual disappearance of the prevailing mode of credit. What is more important, however, is that the poorer or marginal cultivators who had borne the brunt of the pressure of a sharp fall in agricultural prices were at the same time left in a critical position, because of this sudden withdrawal of the traditional source of credit. What has been characterised as the 'depeasantization' of a large number of cultivators in

eastern India³ now started in right earnest. Rich and propertied sections of the agricultural population increasingly took over the role of creditors in the countryside. Unlike professional moneylenders who were interested mainly in raising the rate of interest on their loaned out capital, agriculturist creditors used their hold over a multitude of indebted peasantry to dispossess them of their small holdings; and then to resettle the very same people on the same plots of land with inferior rights and in a much greater degree of bondage to the creditors. Given this changed and new situation, there emerged a new group of rich peasant proprietors and a segment of relatively petty landlords who were able to exercise considerable control over the entire labour process in agriculture, through their ownership or control over land and agricultural credit. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the pressures of the world market had been transmitted to the domestic economy of Bengal mainly through the agency of exchange relations which governed capital supply and the market for agricultural produce. During the 30s and the 40s, however, such pressures got increasingly tied up with relations in agricultural production itself, in relations which governed the employers and the employed in the production of some of the most important crops grown in this region.

The consequences of a sharp fall in agricultural prices of all crops in Bengal at the time of Depression have been discussed at some length elsewhere.⁴ It had also been seen that the fall in jute prices was the most drastic, followed by a less sharp but more prolonged downswing in paddy and rice prices. More importantly, it had been noted⁵ that the relatively long spell of low paddy and rice prices was probably due to the virtual end of rice exports from Bengal, as well as the dumping of Burma rice in Bengal and elsewhere in India. This had the effect of bringing about something close to a state of demonetization

of the internal market for rice in the rural areas of Bengal. Transactions in paddy or rice largely replaced cash exchange for rice in the local markets of the countryside. This was to have an important bearing on the change in the nature of credit and market relations in different parts of Bengal and ultimately on the process of increasing rural indebtedness and land transfers from the economically weaker sections of the peasantry to the stronger.

Apart from the data relating to all crop prices including those for jute already referred to,⁶ we get another set of interesting long term comparisons of raw jute values in an official note⁷ on the conditions of agrarian distress which followed the slump of 1929-30. It was calculated that the annual average value of the jute crop in Bengal for the period 1900-04 was Rs.15 crores; for 1925-29, Rs.50 crores; while the estimate for the year 1931 showed that the value of the crop would drop to Rs.20 crores. If however one calculates on the basis of actual figures for the period 1930-33,⁸ the average annual value of the jute crop comes down to Rs.12.17 crores. The Director of Agriculture further pointed out⁹ that the average cultivator could not remain at the subsistence level if the price of raw jute fell below Rs.5-8 as. (Rs.5.50) per maund; reports were coming in from Dacca, Mymensingh and elsewhere that the poorer cultivators who had earlier sold their seed paddy found that stocks of grain were concentrated in the hands of substantial farmers, while they themselves had been left without any money to repurchase their seed paddy. It was reported that everywhere in Bengal, the smaller cultivators had exhausted their meagre stocks of seed paddy during the first year of the Depression, and were left without any provision for food in 1931. It is not, therefore, very difficult to see that the bigger cultivators with large stocks of grain began to advance paddy loans to those who were left without any stock, on

condition that the lenders should be paid back (with interest) in kind, i.e. paddy. The rates of interest on such loans in kind were almost invariably much higher than on cash advances. In this way, loans in kind became almost universal throughout the different districts of Bengal around this time. Earlier, this practice had been confined to certain areas only and had constituted a marginal element in aggregate rural indebtedness. The relation between the growth of this process and the phenomenon of growing landlessness as well as the spread of share-cropping from the middle of the 30s will therefore be our main concern in this paper.

The sharp fall in jute and all crop prices naturally brought down cash receipts for the agricultural sector as a whole, a point which becomes fairly obvious from the data presented earlier.¹⁰ Another recent estimate¹¹ shows a sharp reduction in gross money income from rice and jute in the ten important jute-growing districts of Bengal.¹² The drop was more than 50 per cent as the values of the two crops came down from an average of Rs.978 millions in 1926-29 to Rs.486 millions in 1930-34. Considering the size of holdings and the gross output of a large number of cultivating households at that time, it is easy to visualize how the fall in prices pushed them into greater and greater indebtedness. In 1937 for instance, a survey by the Indian Central Jute Committee showed that 78.5 per cent of cultivating families in eastern Bengal and 87.4 per cent in northern Bengal produced less than 30 maunds of jute in a given season. With an average yield of 15 maunds per acre, it meant that more than three-quarters of rural families in the jute belt possessed less than two acres of land.¹³ Even in 1939, when agricultural prices had risen to some extent and a fair amount of the agricultural debt had been liquidated, the Land Revenue Commission found that more than 50 per cent of the families in eastern and northern

Bengal cultivated less than two acres, and that at least 40 to 45 per cent of the agricultural population in these areas worked wholly or partly as sharecroppers.¹⁴

In fact, whenever sample surveys were conducted during this period, the data clearly showed a growing inverse relationship between holding size and the percentage of families under each size class. From the survey conducted by P.C. Mahalanobis and others on Famine and Rehabilitation, we get the following figures:¹⁵

<u>Area owned (in acres)</u>	<u>Percentage of families owning</u>		<u>Percentage of area owned</u>	
	1939	1944	1939	1944
0 - 2	78.5	82.0	20.6	21.9
2 - 5	14.6	12.1	27.9	25.8
5 up	6.9	5.9	51.5	52.3

The Ishaque Commission which conducted a plot to plot survey in Bengal during 1944-45 went into a more detailed break-up, giving the following figures:¹⁶

<u>Acreage group</u>	<u>Percentage of families owning</u>	<u>Percentage of area owned</u>
	1945	1945
(homestead only) 0	36.4	1.8
0 - 1	17.7	4.2
1 - 3	22.0	16.9
3 - 5	9.6	14.7
5 up	14.3	62.4

It is rather difficult to get any reliable estimates of total rural indebtedness in Bengal over time during this period. The Bengal Board of Economic Enquiry (1935) had attempted a thorough enquiry into rural indebtedness. It did not give any aggregate estimate of rural indebtedness in Bengal, but gave a variety of sample survey data. Before that, the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee of Bengal (1930) had estimated total rural debt in Bengal to be Rs.100 crores in 1928-29.¹⁷ Seventeen years later the Ishaque Report put the figure at Rs.150 crores,¹⁸ although by that time the Debt Conciliation Boards set up according to the provisions of the Bengal Agricultural Debtors' Act of 1935 had reduced Rs.50 crores of all outstanding rural debts in Bengal to Rs.18 crores.¹⁹

By and large it seems probable that indebtedness rose quite sharply from the 1929 level over the next few years, because of the widespread distress caused by the Depression; although institutionalized credit had dried up to a large extent. Actually, the increase in indebtedness must have been much greater than indicated by recorded evidence. Neither loans in kind nor unrecorded cash advances given by agriculturist creditors could have been included in the different estimates on rural indebtedness. From around the mid 30s to 1942 rural debts could be liquidated to some extent through large-scale sale or transfer of land from the debtors to the creditors and through legislation and debt conciliation. Indebtedness shot up again to an unprecedented level after the famine of 1943. Evidence from different sample surveys throughout this period, shown in Table 1 also seems to corroborate this hypothesis.

In Table 2, the sample survey figures for different districts for which data was collected and presented by P.C. Mahalanobis and his

team for the Board of Economic Enquiry in 1935 show two points very clearly. The income : debt ratio fell in all districts shown in 1933 from the 1928 level. And in the jute growing districts of Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dacca, Faridpur and Tripura (Comilla), the drop was somewhat more pronounced.

Table 3 showing All Bengal averages of the rate of growth in rural indebtedness in 1934 from 1929, as well as the rates of growth in some selected jute growing districts indicates very clearly that these rates were quite phenomenal for Dacca and Mymensingh, the two most important jute districts of Bengal. These districts accounted for nearly 12 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, at an average, of the total crop production of the province.

The sample data for the whole of Bengal also revealed that 43 per cent of the rural population in Bengal were indebted upto twice their annual income; 16 per cent upto 4 times; and another 18 per cent more than 4 times their annual income.²⁰

The poorest sections of the Bengal peasantry were undoubtedly the worst sufferers in the Depression and post-Depression periods. Another noticeable feature of the time was the decline and relative impoverishment of the older types of the rural elite which had been created by the Permanent Settlement and subsequent legislation through the early nineteenth century - mainly of the zamindar landlord class and the intermediate tenure holders. Large numbers of zamindari estates defaulted in the payment of revenue at the onset of the Depression, the amount of arrears being appreciably large.²¹ This trend continued well into the late 30s. Similarly, aggregate data for sale or transfer of intermediate tenures in Bengal showed some increase over the decade

Table 1Average Indebtedness of Sample Agricultural Families in Bengal*

Name of Enquiry Committee	Year of Enquiry	Average Debt Per Family (in Rs.)	Percentage of Indebted Families
Bengal Board of Economic Enquiry	1928	112	n.a.
	1933	137	77
Famine Enquiry Commission	1943	85.5	29
	1944	82	56.7
ISI Rural Debt Enquiry	1946	158	60

* Source : S. Mukherji 'Agricultural Marketing', CSSSC,
O.P. No. 53 Table O.O.

Table 2

Income : Debt Ratio for Average Agricultural
Families in Selected Districts of Bengal
for 1928 and 1933*

District	1928 Ratio	1933 Ratio
Burdwan	1.97	0.71
Birbhum	1.46	1.06
Bankura	1.29	0.35
Midnapur	2.40	0.77
Murshidabad	3.80	1.24
Jessore	3.15	1.03
Nadia	2.24	0.71
Pabna	1.77	0.51
Bogra	2.25	0.85
Rangpur	2.16	0.67
Rajshahi	2.05	0.62
Malda	7.83	2.63
Dacca	1.49	0.40
Faridpur	1.42	0.48
Chittagong	1.51	0.30
Tripura	1.25	0.44

* Source : S. Mukherji 'Some aspects of commercialization'
in Perspectives, 2, Table 14, p.265.

Table 3

Percentage Growth Rates of Indebtedness
in Selected Districts of Bengal, 1929 &
1934* (Unit : Rs. per family).

Districts	No. of Sample Families	Debt		Percentage Rate of Growth
		1929	1934	
Dacca	5401	154	257	01%
Faridpur	424	201	298	48%
Mymensingh	313	129	275	113%
Tippera	345	271	305	42%
Rangpur	1043	140	202	44%
Bogra	397	253	213	39%
Pabna	297	139	228	64%
All Bengal Average	6359	154	257	67%

*Source : Omkar Goswami, op.cit., Table VI, 11.

1929-30 - 1939-40.²² This impression of a certain degree of distress among superior tenure holders is strengthened when we look at the figures in Table 4, where column 1 for each district represents the number of sales of tenure and mukarari (permanent) holdings, and column 2 in every instance the number of sales of raiya (tenancy) holdings. The figures after 1937-38 in this table should not be taken very seriously because the 1938 amendment to the Bengal Tenancy Act abolished the system of registration fees payable to the zamindars for each sale or transfer of tenures or raiya lands and the practice of collecting land sale data at the district level was discontinued after 1939-40. It seems from this table that among the districts of western Bengal, the increase in sales of tenure lands was fairly impressive in Burdwan; in Birbhum, Bankura, Howrah, and to some extent, in 24 Parganas, the rise in such figures was also noticeable. When we look at the figures for the jute growing districts of eastern and northern Bengal, there appears to have been no clear trend for the districts of eastern Bengal. In northern Bengal, however, Dinajpur and Rangpur in particular, as well as Bogra and Pabna showed distinctly rising trends. The evidence seems to suggest that the older class of intermediate tenure holders were finding it more profitable to dispose of their rights in land to other people. In the following pages, there will be occasion to examine what the authorities in different districts had to say about the willingness of a new class of land grabbers to acquire all kinds of new rights in land.

Even more remarkable than the decline of traditional rural elites in Bengal at this time was the virtual disappearance of the professional moneylenders from the countryside. The economic reasons for the withdrawal of this class are perhaps fairly obvious. With the growing insolvency of the larger bulk of small or marginal cultivators,

Table 4 *

Sale or Transfer of Tenures and
Rajyati Holding

Year	Burdwan		Birbhum		Bankura		Midnapur		Hooghly		Howrah	
	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
1929/30	6537	8203	3914	3696	6807	1756	18913	10859	3183	4658	2936	2681
1930/31	8690	9860	4863	6620	6348	2323	9490	13703	2293	6700	3064	5195
1931/32	14246	8368	5052	6325	6994	2052	11124	18915	2368	6997	6123	2999
1932/33	8865	14917	5057	6840	7281	2561	11894	22523	2759	6859	6400	3435
1933/34	14589	8160	5685	7181	7356	2904	12156	21708	3057	6306	6318	3462
1934/35	17180	11233	6957	8251	9576	3358	10406	26017	4128	7913	7225	3119
1935/36	16011	9923	5929	7095	9172	3409	12542	30396	4021	6335	6938	3681
1936/37	13690	7714	5270	5624	8070	3094	10613	27170	3227	6021	6699	2651
1937/38	14619	8184	5788	5262	8230	3041	10673	24410	3249	5321	6206	2252
1938/39	15454	3810	6088	1970	9757	1028	11275	13781	3799	2739	5550	1015
1039/40	13450	-	5548	-	8216	5	13030	-	4214	-	3328	-

Year.	Dacca		Mymensingh		Faridpur		Bakarpur	
	Sec. 12 (3) & 13	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 18	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 18	Sec. 26
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
1929/30	n.s.	n.s.	2279	17663	2914	9549	17296	4825
1930/31	2381	15003	833	21442	2820	8338	14049	4959
1931/32	2414	15341	1202	16251	2818	9020	11232	8211
1932/33	3943	14560	1464	15957	2844	9155	9147	5699
1933/34	2462	16312	1543	18940	3104	10048	8098	5401
1934/35	3595	20744	1960	23339	3255	10263	9953	6039
1935/36	3268	20509	3191	43135	3757	13006	11499	9211
1936/37	3000	31000	1690	44209	4005	14902	11294	0293
1937/38	3030	29527	1500	32743	3925	14306	10115	4743
1938/39	3041	0799	1665	15545	3000	4091	0404	3920
1939/40	3130	-	2007	-	3421	-	8230	19

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Year	24 Parganas		Medinipur		Murshidabad		Jessore		Khulna	
	Sec. 12 (3) & 10	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 10	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 10	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 10	Sec. 26	Sec. 12 (3) & 10	Sec. 26
1929/30	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1930/31	13216	5036	4402	4622	2233	6675	6540	3210	3343	2006
1931/32	12403	5027	3600	4646	2411	7006	4427	2146	2607	1995
1932/33	11391	5954	4213	4213	2922	7270	4333	3020	2031	1972
1933/34	10047	6006	5365	3430	2914	6910	2991	2539	2047	1994
1934/35	12450	6969	4641	2940	3370	7525	3011	2720	2551	2210
1935/36	13033	7703	4199	2737	3340	7365	3143	2445	2200	3192
1936/37	12000	6914	4291	2630	2902	6671	2705	2137	2403	2607
1937/38	16094	8064	4103	2426	3126	6345	2306	1370	1926	2696
1938/39	16219	5145	4229	1233	2977	2000	1966	502	1817	1322
1939/40	16111	-	3027	-	3490	-	1605	-	2316	-

Year	Pabna		Malda		Chittagong		Nakhali		Tippere	
	Sec. 12 (3)& 18 (1)	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 (3)& 18 (1)	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 (3)& 18 (1)	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 (3)& 18 (1)	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 (3)& 18 (1)	Sec. 26 (2)
1929/30	7259	7319	248	4009	13016	2284	13595	2147	n.a.	n.a.
1930/31	842	9293	349	4814	18911	3507	10526	5152	2118	8726
1931/32	907	7618	458	4459	15768	3382	8758	5173	2098	12202
1932/33	898	6923	472	4914	16183	4075	9274	6070	2688	16330
1933/34	989	8021	502	4347	15098	5700	8556	6303	2672	19159
1934/35	987	9399	588	4200	17554	4568	9739	7207	3049	22230
1935/36	1324	11969	609	4448	17797	4809	11499	9211	3521	27799
1936/37	1193	10534	560	4226	17870	4671	11451	10693	3863	32143
1937/38	1117	9957	471	3416	18237	4615	9673	7761	2564	29852
1938/39	1002	2905	480	1615	15523	2559	11364	3251	2906	8735
1939/40	1321	-	589	-	9402	-	9568	23420	3699	56960

Year	Rajshahi		Dinajpur		Jalpaiguri		Rangpur		Bogra	
	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26 (2)	Sec. 12 & (3) 18	Sec. 26 (2)
1929/30	653	6301	3461	7646	897	903	277	8960	625	3982
1930/31	580	5067	7998	4019	700	706	275	6640	486	6693
1931/32	517	4805	€469	5416	718	686	378	6072	468	5244
1932/33	560	4206	€681	4024	574	427	301	6844	518	5712
1933/34	591	4479	€777	4002	833	389	410	6593	653	6978
1934/35	549	5234	€557	4739	969	466	650	7566	1039	9444
1935/36	620	5246	€409	5482	760	445	793	7721	1027	10081
1936/37	056	5303	7915	4092	756	496	1111	7310	994	9351
1937/38	070	4602	€145	5149	837	420	1033	6774	874	8712
1938/39	645	2105	€256	2786	837	420	1033	3694	1031	4221
1939/40	675	-	€282	-	791	-	1102	-	1056	-

* Source : Annual Reports of the Registration Department
(Govt. of Bengal), 1929/30 - 1939/40.

the rate of repayment must have gone down rather steeply. Secondly, because professional moneylenders seldom wished to acquire direct cultivating and/or cultivation management rights, they usually lent money on the security of land mortgages. With land prices, specially the prices of the smaller plots of land falling quite appreciably, (Tables 5), as well as the prices of their produce, it became extremely difficult for these creditors to realise either the interest or full payment in complete settlement of their loans.

Since the territorial limits of a particular plot of mortgaged land were fixed, they could not be extended to compensate for price depreciation over time. Moreover, the 1928 amendment to the Bengal Tenancy Act, by derecognizing a particular type of land mortgage (more about this, later) - the type which was largely favoured by professional moneylenders was also to a great extent responsible for the decline of this type of loan security. The net result of all this was, as mentioned earlier, a complete or total squeeze on the traditional type of rural credit.

The large majority of the cultivators however simply could not do without loans in a situation that was getting increasingly worse for them. There were no other people to whom they could turn, except the substantial farmers or 'jotedars', the name by which substantial farmers were known in large parts of Bengal. Such 'jotedars' had come to the aid of their poorer neighbours at the start of the Depression by loaning grain from their own surplus stocks. These loans, repayable only in kind, were given at much higher rates of interest than ordinary cash loans. In time, when repayment became due and the debtor was unable to pay (which must have been the case for large numbers of the indebted peasantry), the jotedar creditor was in a position to have the land of his debtor sold by a court decree.²³ Being cultivators themselves and often close neighbours of the sufferers, they usually had their eyes on those lands. In this they were very different from the professional 'mahajans' (moneylenders). So, what usually happened in practice was that having obtained a court decree, they themselves bought up the land. Unlike professional moneylenders once again, they were not unduly affected by the falling price

Table 5

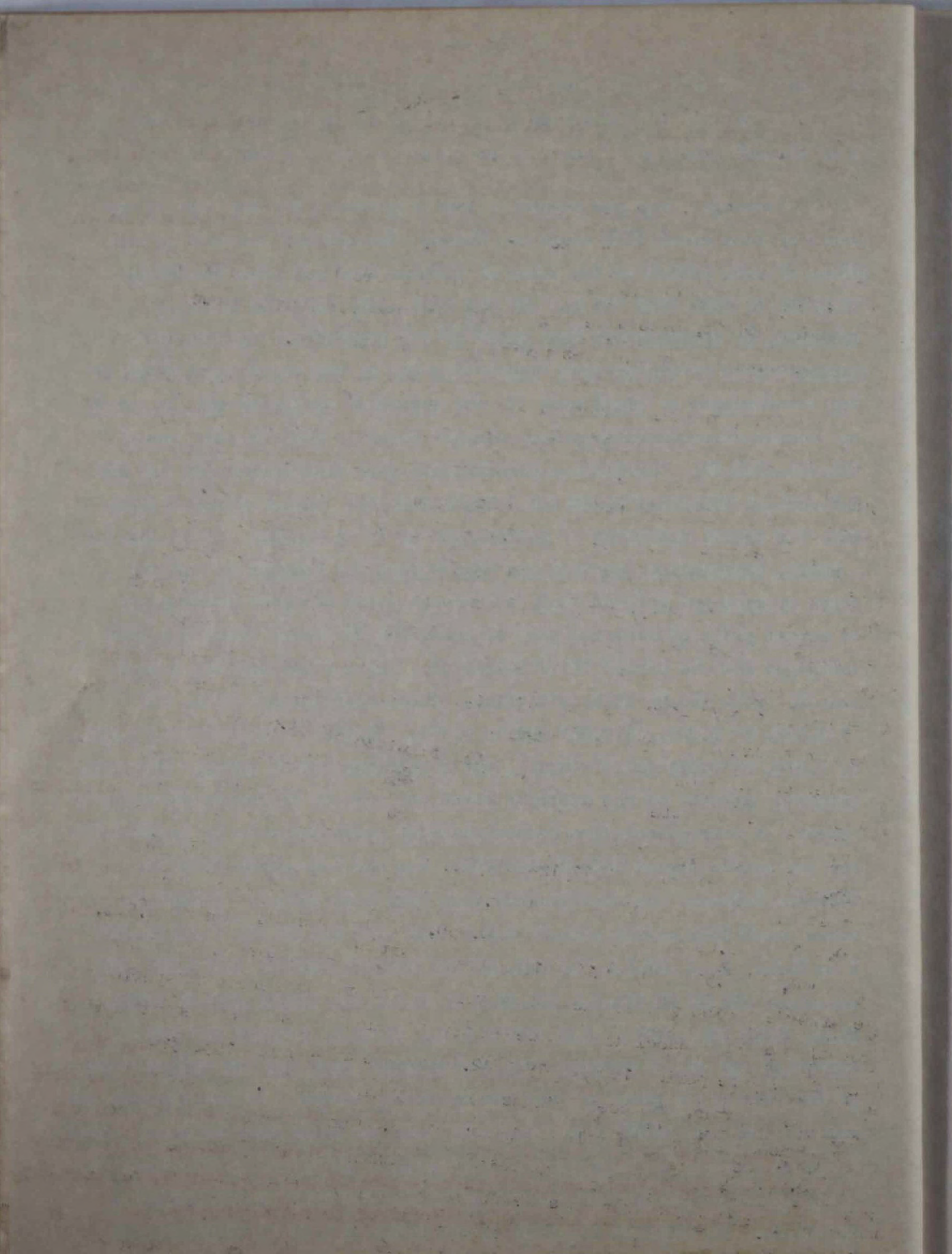
Average Value Per Document of Property
Transferred by Sale or Exchange in Bengal
1926--43*

Year	Sale or Exchange		(in Rs.)
	Above Rs. 100 (1)	Below Rs. 100 (2)	Average of all Transfers (3)
1926	439	52	286
1927	431	51	283
1928	441	51	294
1929	462	52	314
1930	595	51	292
1931	568	48	250
1932	527	47	217
1933	545	46	208
1934	571	46	183
1935	n.a.	n.a.	181
1936	"	"	179
1937	"	"	182
1938	"	"	178
1939	"	"	163
1940	"	"	185
1941	"	"	158
1942	"	"	172
1943	"	"	187

*Source : Annual Reports of the Registration Department
 (Government of Bengal), 1926/7-1943/4. The
 practice of showing aggregate values of regis-
 trations separately for properties below and
 above Rs.100/- was discontinued after 1934.

of land, for they could always demand (and get) more land in repayment if the debtor had it; otherwise they could also recover what was owed to them through free labour services provided in debt bondage.

Actually, the new buyers of land benefited from the fall in the price of land since they could buy cheap. The gradual recovery in the price of rice pushed up the value of returns they got from the share-croppers to whom they had let out the land newly acquired by them. Recently, an estimate has been made²⁴ of the association between the harvest price of winter rice (accounting for by far the largest share of the total output of rice) with (i) the number of mortgages and (ii) with the number of registrations for outright sales of land for the period 1905/06-1941/42. Correlation coefficients were also worked out for the sub-periods 1905/06-1929/30 and 1930/31-1941/42. These estimates were made for twelve districts of western and northern Bengal. For Bengal as a whole, correlation coefficients were worked out between a) harvest price of rice and sale of land, b) harvest price and land mortgages, c) retail price of rice and sale of land, and d) retail price and land mortgages for the period 1911/12-1939/40. The results of this latter exercise were indeed quite startling. These coefficients were, for a) 0.862, b) 0.808, c) 0.861 and d) 0.959, and the T statistics a) 8.511, b) 6.874, c) 8.511 and d) 16.761, all significant at 1% level. The more detailed exercise at the district level and for the different sub-periods revealed a fair association between harvest price and sale of tenant land for the entire period 1905/06-1941/42. For the sub-period 1930/31-1941/42, however, the coefficients were very high indeed. Except in three cases they showed values higher than 0.80 and in two cases higher than 0.90. In contrast, the association between harvest price and land mortgages was at an average somewhat poor for the entire period taken, while there was quite a high negative relationship between the two variables for the sub-period 1930/31-1941/42. Thus the low market value of land was not a deterrent for the expanding farmer. On the contrary it was an incentive to ^{grab} more and more land from the distressed sellers. What mattered most to this new kind of lender was how much of the produce he could extract from the actual and indebted cultivator as the former's own share. It was this response of the buyer of land to fluctuations



in the price of rice, that was being reflected in the estimates of relationship between price of rice and sale of lands. On the other hand, traditional rural moneylenders were no longer forthcoming with loans for the cultivators. This was borne out by the negative association between price and mortgage for the period 1930/31-1941/42.

It is not surprising, therefore, that we notice in Table 6 (columns 7 and 9) and Chart I a very sharp rise in outright sales of raiyati lands accompanied by a fairly steep decline in the number of mortgages over the period 1926-1943. From Table 6 again (columns 3 and 5), and Chart II (inset), it is possible to deduce that it was mostly the smaller plots of land with lower unit values that were changing hands faster at this time. On the other hand, there was a noticeable decline in the sale of bigger plots with higher unit values. These figures do not, however, include sales or transfers settled out of court. It is likely that the actual volume of land transfers was much greater.

Another tendency noticeable at the time was that the sale of entire holdings was more common in the case of small holdings. As the size of holding went up, it was possible for owners to retain parts of their holdings after repaying their debts. From the sample survey by P.C. Mahalanobis and others after the famine of 1943, we get the following figures:²⁵

Acreage Group	Percentage of families selling in each group	
	Part holding	Entire holding
0.1 - 2	7.4	6.1
2.1 - 5	15.3	1.2
5.1 - up	12.3	0.4

The question which arises is : how was all this reshaping the agrarian society in Bengal at that ? For the right answer we have to turn to the evidence supplied by officials as well as non-officials from the different districts of Bengal regarding, in the first place, the changing relationships between the rich farmers and the poor peasantry, and secondly the phenomenal spread and changing forms of sharecropping.

Table 6

Statement of Number of Registered Transfers of Property and
Their Values (Rs. 105 Lakhs) in
Bengal 1926-43*

Year	Gift		Sole of Exchange				Total of Col. 3+Col. 5 (7)	Total of Col. 4+Col. 6 (8)	Mortgages	
	No. (1)	Value (2)	Above Rs. 100 No. (3)	Value (4)	Below Rs. 100 No. (5)	Value (6)			No. (9)	Value (10)
1926	31051	117.33	319081	1400.79	207725	107.24	526805	1508.03	707659	1490.20
1927	33235	121.71	340876	1470.78	218100	111.75	558976	1582.53	712042	1542.81
1928	32230	117.97	351524	1548.82	211422	107.75	562946	1656.57	722411	1640.69
1929	34809	121.29	288065	1331.65	161179	83.14	449244	1414.79	588550	1357.30
1930	35016	107.78	152890	910.56	101494	51.54	254384	962.06	510974	1105.81
1931	29660	79.00	116737	663.70	105171	51.01	221908	714.71	376422	756.97
1932	33759	77.21	117793	621.03	123773	58.59	241566	679.62	338945	709.31
1933	35831	76.99	114228	622.58	140865	64.88	255093	629.46	313431	640.22
1934	37729	71.93	124217	709.05	176814	80.86	301031	789.91	349400	643.22
1935	41646	73.96	-	-	-	-	324919	789.54	357297	641.68
1936	44229	75.84	-	-	-	-	341901	794.15	352469	580.58
1937	47171	80.79	-	-	-	-	334573	816.36	302529	706.39
1938	40831	78.27	-	-	-	-	412358	905.65	164895	364.30
1939	30390	75.38	-	-	-	-	654875	1260.47	154780	325.37
1940	33087	84.42	-	-	-	-	646902	1430.91	160152	255.00
1941	32170	91.32	-	-	-	-	794276	1670.70	151553	251.11
1942	30742	80.73	-	-	-	-	916100	1787.46	106088	146.71
1943	38896	117.11	-	-	-	-	1698034	3626.91	83710	235.81

* Source : Annual Reports of the Registration Department
(Government of Bengal), 1926/7 - 1943/4.

II

Land alienation, 1931-42

Before we turn our attention to various reports and other kinds of evidence from the different districts and their subdivisions, it would be useful to have an idea of some of the provisions of the important legislative measures. Such measures had a bearing on changes that were taking place in the agrarian structure. It has been already noted that by section 12 of the 1928 Amendment to the Bengal Tenancy Act, the transfer of permanent tenures, allowed since 1819, now became subject to registration only after the payment of a certain fee to the superior landlord or zamindar. Section 18 of the same amendment extended the same terms to raiyati holdings at a fixed rent, and section 26B to occupancy raiyats. More important from our point of view was, however, the provision under section 26G which restricted the practice of a certain kind of land mortgage. The provision stated,

An occupancy - raiayat may enter into a complete usufructuary mortgage in respect of his holding or of a portion or share thereof for any period which does not and cannot, in any possible event, by any agreement, express or implied, exceed fifteen years, and notwithstanding anything contained in this Act or in any other law or in any contract, no other form of usufructuary mortgage so entered into after the commencement of the Bengal Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1928, shall have any force or effect.

Another type of legislative enactment that had the effect of scaring away the professional mahajans was specifically related to rural credit and the Agricultural Debtors' Act, passed in 1935 was aimed at relieving the indebted peasantry by scaling down their old debts. Under the terms of this Act, Debt Settlement Boards were set up in rural areas in 1936. The Bengal Moneylenders' Act of 1940 sought to impose restrictions on loan transactions by mahajans. It can be said, therefore, that legislation during this period greatly helped the process of a squeeze on mahajani credit, a phenomenon that had already appeared owing to a number of economic reasons.

This brings us to a rather curious feature about legislative measures of this period. The measures contained in these enactments sought to define relations between the zamindar type of landlord and the tenant, between the mahajan creditor and his debtors. But it completely ignored the new type of indebtedness that had appeared on the scene, as well as the growing problem of landlessness. There was also total silence in the legislation about the status and rights of the rapidly growing class of sharecroppers. These are, however, points which await analysis from political historians of the period.²⁷

Possibly the best way to begin a survey of the rural scene in Bengal during this period is to start with the new type of 'agrarian entrepreneur' who came to dominate it. This group of people had emerged from the ranks of the substantial cultivators who had succeeded to a great extent in withstanding the pressure of the Depression because they usually had fairly large stocks of surplus grain. They had even been able to give their indigent neighbours loans from their own surplus stocks. In many areas they were growers of jute as well, and not only did they cultivate it themselves, they also gave advances to the poorer cultivators because the traditional source of rural credit had dried up. In time, as debts mounted up, they were able to appropriate their debtors' lands and then to resettle them in the same lands as inferior tenants or sharecroppers. As employers of sharecropper they were very different from the older type of tenure holders who employed sharecroppers in their khamar or demesne lands. They were also different from the urban middle class landowners who preferred to hire sharecroppers because of their own absence from the farm. In contrast, the new employers were themselves cultivators, and often close neighbours and social equals of their debtor-cum-employees. They could possibly appreciate the hardship of the poorer peasantry and were initially quite sympathetic towards them. They were however in a much better position to manipulate the terms of lending in order to extract larger amounts of rent which would even cut into the margin of subsistence of petty cultivators. Ultimately the debtors were forced to yield to the creditors' pressure and surrender their lands to the latter.

One comes across a very perceptive description of this class in the Memorandum of the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha to the Flood Commission in 1939.²⁸ This particular passage has been quoted widely in subsequent literature on the subject,²⁹ it would, however, bear repetition here because of its contextual relevance :

Among other reasons encouraging the growth of sharecropping, we may notice the growth of a new type of landlord - the money-lender-cum-landlord. He has made his money by the exploitation of the cultivator and his earnings in the land; ... But he is not intending to cultivate the land anymore than the old fashioned zamindar did ... But, on the other hand, he will probably be a pushing and go ahead businessman not content like so many of the old landlords to sit back and let his estate go to seed while the rents come in annually. Now, to a landlord of this type the receipt of produce rents has every advantage; not only is the higher rate well worth the extra trouble of assessing and collecting his halfshare, but, and this is most important, this new type of landlord is already a trader in grain or jute. It will pay him, therefore, to take as rent the jute or grain grown by his tenants rather than take cash and then have to buy these raw materials for his business in the open market. In other words he is rationalising his business vertically. Consequently we find that amongst these new landlords it is the usual practice to have their lands cultivated by bargadars (sharecropper). They generally have acquired their lands by buying them in auction sales caused by the eviction of tenants who were their own debtors. Here again the same tenant is often registered as bargadar.

Throughout the 30s, reports came pouring in from different parts of the countryside that the older class of professional moneylenders had wound up their business not only because it had become unprofitable, very often they were simply unable to function. The preliminary Report of the Bengal Board of Economic Enquiry pointed out in 1935:³⁰ "...Moneylenders as a whole failed to collect any interest, much less any part of the capital of the outstanding loans during the last three years. Some of them might have sued their debtors in the civil courts, but owing to the absence of purchasers at a reasonable price, execution proceedings dragged on indefinitely..." In a similar vein, the Middle Class Association of Mymensingh in its oral evidence before the Flood Commission said,³¹ "mahajan's share of interest has been almost nil. On the other hand, although

mahajans are willing to be satisfied merely with principal, they are not getting even that". The Khas Mahal Officer of Faridpur also reported:³² "The Mahajans, due to depression, had very little cash in their hands. They had invested nearly their all to the agriculturists on the very high rates of interest then prevailing. This they could not get back". The Bengal Landholders' Association, in their reply to the questionnaire circulated by the Flood Commission specifically gave the reason that rural credit had dried up to a large extent because of the derecognition of a particular type of mortgage. They said: "No moneylender is now willing to lend money to a tenant on mortgage and whenever he (the cultivator) needs money badly, he has to sell outright a portion at least of his holding".³³

As a matter of fact, available evidence seems to suggest that even before the Depression caused a freeze on rural credit, moneylenders had been discouraged by the 1928 amendment about mortgages. Upto the late 20s, it was possible for the small holder to redeem his debt when prices were favourable and gain back possession of his mortgaged property. But as the credit relations started changing even a few years before the actual onset of the Depression, the marginal cultivators found that they had no other way of paying their debts to the new creditors, except through outright sale of part or whole of their landholdings. The subdivisional officer of Munshiganj in Dacca district was very specific on this point in his evidence before the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Commission in 1929, when he said :³⁴ "Usufructuary mortgage by which the usufruct is enjoyed in lieu of interest only, is not permissible under the new amendment of the Bengal Tenancy Act. Formerly, this class of mortgage was universal in this Subdivision. The moneylenders are unwilling to lend out any large sum of money on any other kind of mortgage. This has affected the credit of the raiyat seriously. Now, if the raiyat has to raise money, he has to sell his holding. Formerly too, the land passed to the hands of his creditor, but sentiments of ownership gave him an additional incentive to redeem the land as quickly as possible". Such little viability as had existed for the small peasant holding in the

early twentieth century, even under very low equilibrium conditions, was now beginning to disappear altogether.

This impression is strengthened on the basis of a fairly substantial amount of evidence, admittedly scattered over time and space, regarding the decline of productive investment and of existing agricultural production itself with the drying up of the earlier variety of rural credit. Thus even before the crash of 1930, the vice-president of Majergram Union Board of Nadia was reporting to the Banking Enquiry Commission³⁵: "For capital or for any permanent improvement the peasants of our district cannot get any loan from the village mahajan ... Even the mahajans are very tight and often refuse to grant loans in years of drought, etc., and as a result ... a good number of peasants become absolutely ruined and some of them even turn out to be thieves". The manager of the estate of the Nawab of Murshidabad (Rai Bahadur K.P. Maitra) told the Flood Commission ten years later³⁶: "In one of my tours in Rangpur district, I found lands going out of cultivation and on enquiry I learnt that raiyats have given up cultivation for want of plough cattle. When I enquired why they did not buy new cattle, the answer I had was that the mahajan had closed his doors".

It is not very surprising that whatever little productive investment the small or marginal cultivator had been able to afford before would halt once the mahajans had 'closed their doors'. The agriculturist creditors who had come to replace them would have had very little incentive in providing their debtors with the wherewithal for improved cultivation. They had a far greater interest in compounding the accumulated interest over the principal on either their grain loans, or seasonal cash advances in the jute growing areas, to trap the small cultivators irretrievably in their debt and then to appropriate their lands. Going back once again to the time of the Banking Enquiry Commission, we find that Sudhanya Kumar Roy, self-styled merchant, commission agent and Banker from Domar in Rangpur, telling the Commission³⁷: "The main defects are the high rates of interest charged by wealthy jotedars which stand in the way of fully repaying loans. Thus principal and interest accumulate to a pretty large

amount which the agriculturist in general cannot repay. Consequently the property mortgaged is sold by auction by civil court and generally passes on to the creditors ... There are occasions when shrewd and wealthy jotedars purposely advance money to certain agriculturists on rather easy terms and allow ^{to} the principal and interest to accumulate to pretty large sums in order / secure from the debtor certain choice and fertile plots of land in repayment of loans". In the predominantly rice growing district of Midnapur, the same process was being repeated according to the Sadar Civil Officer, testifying to the same Commission:³⁸ "Midnapur is proverbially a paddy producing district and the people prefer paddy-lending business to any other business as they find it quite safe from decoits. The business is more paying, fetching about 25 per cent. interest, which is also paid in kind paddy ... Moneylending business is declining and there has been a tendency of corresponding rise in paddy lending business ... When it is found by the banker that the debts have run too high to get cleared by the loanee, the banker goes to the civil court and easily manages to appropriate the lands of the loanee by civil court decrees". The vice-president of the Majergram Union Board (Nadia) also mentioned this fact.³⁹ "But mostly the peasants are compelled to take loans of paddy to suit the convenience of the mahajans. In that case the rate (of interest) varies from 40 to 80 percent". The Murshidabad Settlement Report (1924-32), found the process of land grabbing through grain loans at a pretty advanced stage.⁴⁰ "The majority of cultivators are forced to borrow by this method ... In any abnormal year of under-production, they are forced to borrow more and more, till at last, when the total advance exceed the capacity of their holdings, they are compelled to sell their lands ...". The process of land grabbing was not, however, exclusively tied up with the practice of grain loans. The freeze in the traditional type of rural credit was of course, most noticeable in the jute growing districts immediately after the Depression. We learn from the Rangpur Settlement Report (1931-38),⁴¹ "... the attitude of the mahajan was that as long as he could get even irregular payments he was content to let his capital lie.

Then came the slump of 1930, the effect of which was to freeze both credit and debt. The villagers with the greatest normal credit, i.e. those who held valuable jute lands, were caught with the biggest overdrafts from the mahajan. As land values toppled down in the wake of the falling jute market, the security for their extensive debts were largely wiped out and they were left in a far more difficult position than the cultivators in the paddy growing and sugarcane areas ... " But as the prices of all crops continued to be depressed for the next few years after 1930, this kind of a situation remained no longer true for jute areas alone. The Khulna Landholders' Association in their reply to the Floud Commission described the pattern of developments in that district in some detail.⁴² "... those who have but a small quantity of land and consequently no surplus money in their hands ... find no other alternative but to sell their lands to neighbouring well-to-do cultivators and creditor raiyats are every year purchasing more and more lands of the indigent cultivators and becoming big farmers - while the poor cultivators are being turned into bargadars." The same report went on to add: "Rich farmers are growing up in all cultivating villages who are acquiring all the lands of the poorer cultivators by khas kabala or purchase in execution of decrees on loans in courts. When the poorer people are required to sell small portions of their lands under necessity they do not get intending purchasers from outside. They will have to sell their lands to those village farmers only, at any price they offer; and these village farmers in order to avoid the restrictions put by the Legislature as to the quantity of land, will only make their sons and nephew separate from them ..." The story was being repeated in the predominantly rice growing tracts of western Bengal. We learn from the Burdwan Settlement Report (1927-34)⁴³ "... (the) bulk of the moneylending business is in the hands of richer cultivators who employ their surplus funds in this manner". Whenever a cultivator failed to repay his debts, "the cultivator's right in his land is sold up and he is resettled upon it as a korfa or bhagdar".

The 24 Parganas Settlement Report (1924-33)⁴⁴ also described the situation in almost identical language, "... the moneylenders are now owners of land and failure to repay the loan results in the transference of the holding and the cultivator is resettled upon the same land as an under-raiyat or bargadar".

The Dinajpur Settlement Report (1934-40) summed up the characteristics of this new species of land-hungry farmers in the following manner:⁴⁵ "All these men are of a class which may be described as practising large-scale farming, though it is farming not with any large capital sunk in machinery, but through the traditional methods employing either labourers or adhiyars (cropsharers). They are also the financiers of the countryside, and market much of the exportable surplus of the district... These big men have a certain amount of land on cash rents, but are tending to set more store upon the grain they get from the adhiyars. The ordinary landlord could probably prefer to let land on cash rents, assuming that he will get his rent with some degree of regularity, but these big jotedars are taking khas possession as far as possible. As was said of the PORSHA CHAUDHURIES, the landlords are glad if any tenant surrenders a holding".

The class that had come to the forefront in rural society was not a class of capitalist farmers who used capital intensive techniques or employed wage labour from a free market. Instead, they were a group who consolidated their 'semi-feudal' hold over the large mass of the peasantry through the debt mechanism and a systematic process of land-grabbing. The condition in which all this left the landless people increasingly taking to sharecropping is not difficult to imagine. We shall not go into the details regarding the spread of sharecropping, nor its changing forms in different parts of Bengal since these points have been fairly extensively discussed in recent literature on the subject.⁴⁶ It is sufficient, for the present, to take note of the fact that both sharecropping and inferior types of under-tenancy were growing in such a manner

that they tended to have a strong depressive effect on not only the economic condition of the class that was becoming 'depeasantized', but also on the future prospect of agriculture in this part of the sub-continent at the time of Transfer of Power and Partition of the country.

Immediately before the Depression, a deputy Collector from Mymensingh had informed the Banking Enquiry Committee :⁴⁷ "My idea is that lands are fast passing on to non-agriculturists and richer tenants. It is within my knowledge that in eastern Mymensingh a very large proportion of raiyats have already turned into landless labourers. Most of them now work as bargadars and being poor men with no landed security cultivate the lands as best as they can with their very limited resources. The bargadars are gradually becoming poorer day by day owing to increasing cattle mortality...".

As the manager of the Nawab of Murshidabad's estate pointed out to the Flood Commission in 1939,⁴⁸ "It is no point of honour for a raiyat to cultivate on barga system, but when his holding is sold wholly or in part he goes in for barga... The majority of the old bargadars were primarily under the tenure-holders and used to cultivate their so-called khamar land. But with the sale of occupancy holdings, the bargadars are coming in larger numbers under the raiyats purchasing such holdings".

The proliferation of the class of under-tenants was also a very similar process. The Birbhum Settlement Report (1924-32)⁴⁹ pointed out : "The under-raiyats are not a distinct class of people but often they are of the raiyat class who in addition to their raiyati area take in an additional quantity of land ... Occasionally the raiyat's land mortgaged is bought up by the mortgagee, the old raiyat instead of being turned out of the land is resettled as an under-raiyat". The moneylenders of the district, it was added, were mostly prosperous tenants.⁵⁰

The wide impression of a rapid spread of sharecropping and also to some extent of under-tenancy is strengthened by the statistical evidence of the sample surveys of this time. Although it is quite well known that there was a serious underestimation of the land under sharecropping for obvious reasons, the figures collected by the Floud Commission⁵¹ showed that of all lands transferred in undivided Bengal over a twelve year period ending in 1939, 30 per cent was cultivated by the purchasers themselves and their families, 31.7 per cent by sharecroppers, 24.6 per cent by under-tenants or under-tenants-at-will, and only 5.7 per cent by wage labourers. Taking the districts of western Bengal separately, the corresponding shares of cultivated land worked out at 31.5 per cent by purchasers' families, 33.7 per cent by cropsharers, 26.7 per cent by under-tenants and 8.1 per cent by labourers. For eastern and northern Bengal, these shares were 46 per cent by purchasers' families, 29.5 per cent by sharecroppers, 21.7 per cent by under-tenants and 2.0 per cent by labourers.

Viewed from a purely economic context, it can be said that as a result of developments through the 30s, a kind of sharp polarization between two segments of the cultivating population had taken shape in Bengal by the early 40s. This somewhat decreased the importance and relevance of other social groups in the rural scene. What was to follow in the middle and the late 40s was the articulation of an acute conflict between these two classes over large tracts of undivided Bengal.

III

Peasant Stratification, 1943-51.

This process of polarization did not, however, come to a halt as a result of widespread agrarian agitation in Bengal in the late 40s. In the following pages we shall have the occasion to examine some empirical evidence regarding the further spread of sharecropping and the emergence of agricultural 'wage' labour as an important category in the hierarchical scale of agricultural population groups in both segments of Bengal after Independence and Partition. Without wishing to minimize the importance of the 'Tebhaga' and other associated forms of agrarian struggle carried out under different names in particular localities of undivided Bengal, one cannot deny the fact that increasing alienation from land of the poorer peasantry was to become one of the most intractable problems facing the new administration in west Bengal. It was also one of the most glaringly prominent features in agrarian developments in the area that came to be known as East Pakistan.

It is not being implied here that increasing alienation from land meant total technical dispossession and uprooting from the soil for the larger bulk of the peasantry in Bengal. It is very likely that the majority of sharecroppers, and many among agricultural labourers, continued to possess very tiny plots of cultivable or home-stead land. Part of the explanation for this phenomenon probably lies in the very structure of the economy inherited from the colonial period. The process of primary accumulation had not completely dissolved the precapitalist structures and/or forms of expropriation. The process carried itself on by sometimes strengthening and sometimes weakening these precapitalist structures in the economy and by manipulating the precapitalist forms of surplus extraction according to its own needs for the moment. The relevance of this type of mechanism for primary accumulation in the context of Bengal's agrarian economy will be referred to again in the following and concluding section of this paper. On the other hand, it is also relevant to consider the argument⁵² that capitalism, in penetrating

pre-capitalist structures, had come up against the stubborn resistance of a peasantry unwilling to surrender its relatively autonomous existence within the bonds of solidarity of a 'community'.

Whatever the reasons it was this continuing and precarious link with land that prevented the mass of cultivators in Bengal from becoming a free-floating and vast 'reserve army of labour' during the 40s and 50s. Empirical evidence, as we shall shortly see, goes to show that many agricultural workers who were returned primarily as sharecroppers or agricultural labourers in demographic data did fall into the landowning size class of zero to one or zero to two acres. Bearing this clarification in mind, it would be interesting to follow how the process of alienation from land continued, through an examination of available data on landholding, occupational classification and wherever possible, on the rate of exploitation.

It would be easier to pick up the thread of events from the 40s through the early 50s if we take a look back at the situation around the time of that particular event which constituted the main watershed in modern Bengal's agrarian history - the great Bengal famine of 1943. In an earlier section of this paper,⁵³ we had already noticed that Mahalanobis and his team of colleagues had found an **inverse** relationship between holding size and the percentage of families under each size class. Turning next to the question of distribution of paddy land, we get the following interesting findings from the same survey.⁵⁴

Since paddy was the most important crop in the regions well as the main item of food, it was argued that the **distribution** of paddy land among different holding size classes gave the best indicator of the relative strength or weakness of the different strata of the peasantry in Bengal as well as of their vulnerability to famine conditions. Assuming the average size of a rural family just over five, it was argued that two groups or classes of families - those possessing no paddy land and those possessing zero to two acres of paddy land constituted the most numerous section of rural Bengal, and were the poorest who suffered most in any

crisis. The group immediately above them was made up of those who had two to five acres of paddy land and were the middle section in the agrarian society; while those with upwards of five acres of paddy land in their possession were the relatively affluent.

Dividing the province of Bengal in three classes, (A) the most severely affected areas in the 1943 famine, (B) areas quite severely affected and (C) areas less severely affected, two sets of tables were presented showing: 1) the cumulative percentage of subdivisions according to families owing no paddy land or owning between zero and two acres; and 2) the cumulative percentage of subdivisions according to mean acreage of paddy land per family in January of 1943.

The two tables together revealed that already by January 1943 (before the full effect of the famine was felt), only in 5 out of 13 or 41% of the subdivisions in class A, the paddy land owned was above 1.5 acres per family. The overall figures moreover indicated that in only 11 out of 41 or in about one-fourth of the subdivisions the average holding of paddy land per family was above two acres.

The survey also arrived at a provincial estimate of families owning various sizes of paddy land before the famine. This estimate showed that in January 1943, more than one third or 36.2% of rural families had no paddy land, while about two-fifths or 40.5% owned less than two acres. Thus, more than three-fourths or 76.7% of rural families in Bengal had either no paddy land at all or possessed less than two acres; and that less than one-sixth or 15.3% had paddy between 2 and 5 acres; and only a twelveth or 8% had above 5 acres. So, if two acres of paddy land were to be taken as the critical limit, only about 23% or less than one-fourth of the rural families belonged to what may be called the middle or upper level of prosperity; while 77%, or more than three-fourth were on the borderline or below the subsistence level.

The problem of concentration of landholdings raises the associated problem of concentration of income. In another contemporary study,⁵⁵ the question was taken up from the above mentioned survey and the matter of polarization of income arising out of property inequality was examined in the light of data from certain localities. It was noted⁵⁶ in summing up : "Numerically the jotedar and the rich farmer represent a very small minority as they comprise only a section of 3% of all rural families in Bengal. But the concentration of income of this group due to the concentration of the means of production (namely, land) is further enhanced by the concentration of agricultural wealth through sharecropping and cultivation by hired labour. In consequence, this group is undoubtedly the master of rural Bengal today because of its importance in peasant economy as a whole, both in regard to the share it has of the total means of production owned by the peasantry and to its share of the total produce produced by the peasantry."

If the unequal assets position and the consequent unequal wealth distribution were some of the main characteristic features of the emerging pattern of class relations in the middle and late 40s in Bengal, no less important were the regional variations in property and production relations that were revealed in an investigation carried out around the same time.⁵⁷ In this particular study the entire area of undivided Bengal was divided into four distinct regions, each with its own concentration index which gave the 'measurement of property and production relations' and the data were generated by a survey of undivided Bengal in 1945/46. The methodology used was explained thus : "the curves of concentration have been used to measure the concentration of land owned in different ranges of ownership and the concentration of holding cultivated in these ranges as cumulative percentages of area owned under different acreage - intervals and the corresponding cumulative percentage of area cultivated in the same region respectively. This curve has been called the curve of relative concentration as in this case the concentration both of owned land and of cultivated

(land) has been considered. The two variables thus related are really the concentration of the volume of production and the concentration of the means of production respectively." The four different regions marked out on the basis of this concentration index were : Region I-Jalpaiguri, Malda, Dinajpur, Khulna, Chittagong; Region II - Hooghly, Midnapur, Birbhum, Jessore, Burdwan, Dacca, Rajshahi, Rangpur, 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Howrah; Region III - Pabna, Mymensingh, Nadia, Bogra; and Region IV - Faridpur, Noakhali, Tippera and Bakarganj.

The survey, thus, in terms of the area covered was a comprehensive one and it would be worthwhile to try and summarize the qualitative conclusions that were presented. A Ghosh's quantitative data are presented in the form of an appendix to this paper and his tables 5 to 10 are reproduced there in the same format as he had presented them in his study. As regards the relationship between the concentration index and the percentages of area sharecropped, leased and the percentage of sharecropping families of all rural families (Appendix, Table 5), it was found that tenure conditions in areas with a high index of concentration were parasitical because the owners stayed away from cultivation and small owners cultivated more land in sharecropping. It was just the reverse in areas with a lower index. Lease, which implied better terms had much better association with a lower concentration index and was less prevalent in the higher index areas. As regards the general structure of ownership and the percentage of area cultivated under different ranges of ownership (Appendix, Table 6), it was found that the higher the concentration index was, the more polarized in reverse directions were the distributions of owned area and cultivated area. In Ghosh's words, "while under capitalist conditions concentration of ownership of the means of production and the concentration of production in a smaller number of hands go together, here because of the backward condition of technique, concentration of ownership does not go hand in hand with concentration of cultivation".

The occupational structure in the four regions (Appendix, Table 7) was found to be highly conditioned by the specific property production relations reflected in the concentration index. There was thus a higher density of owner cultivators in lower index regions and a higher density of agricultural labourers in regions with a high concentration index. In other words, the agrarian economy in higher index regions could be said to have lost its 'self sufficient' peasant character with the appearance / ^{of} capitalist methods of cultivation resulting in the pauperization of the peasantry, alienation from land and a greater incidence of agricultural labourers. Areas of low concentration index, on the other hand were found to have retained a well defined peasant base, with no marked advance in differentiation among the peasantry or uprooting from the soil. General decadence of the agrarian economy was also a characteristic feature of higher concentration index areas. Figures for the development of cultivated area, double cropped and fallow land, etc. (Appendix, Table 8) showed that regions of lower concentration were much more optimally utilized and cultivated. But there was a greater concentration on subsistence crops in these areas while the area under cash crops and orchards was higher in the high index areas, which were more associated with capitalist methods of cultivation.

The whole information was summarised through a productivity measure and other features of prosperity of the regions (Appendix, Table 9). It was seen that a lower concentration index went with higher productivity and more credit available to cultivators. But the holdings of agriculturists were noticeably smaller. This meant that on average, the low index areas were more prosperous, with less polarization, so that **property** was more evenly distributed. Although the units of cultivation were not large, the peasantry was more credit-worthy. Large holdings associated with a more capitalist organization were to be found in areas of high index. The bulk of the peasantry was actually worse off here than in the other case.

An attempt at measuring the rate of exploitation in different areas through incidence of rent per holding, proportion of rent to produce, cess per acre, etc., (Appendix, Table 10) revealed that rack-renting and more intense exploitation was to be found in areas with a higher index, and more interestingly, was inversely related to density of population which was, according to the sample survey of 1946, 364 persons to a square mile for Region I, 426 for Region II, 460 for Region III and as much as 741 for Region IV.⁵⁸ It was observed : "... what makes for intense exploitation is not population pressure so much as the extent of disintegration of the peasantry. Whatever force helps the disintegration of the peasantry changes the concentration index ... the association of low density (of population) with decadent agriculture in backward ... regions where routine exploitation of soil over long periods retards the growth of population itself ...". The prevalent assumption that a higher density of population was the cause of backwardness in agriculture was thus very strongly challenged by underlining the influence of institutional factors like property and production relations on productivity and the distributive system.

One of the consequences of peasant impoverishment and alienation from land was of course an increase in the ranks of agricultural labourers. The decennial increase in the number of agricultural labourers from Census data, specially from 1931 onwards had been noted in an earlier study.⁵⁹ One time estimates given by different surveys conducted throughout this period also corroborate the impression that there was an increase in the incidence of agricultural labour. The Floud Commission had estimated that 22.5 percent of all rural families depended mainly or entirely on agricultural wages,⁶⁰ though it did not include that category of families whose subsidiary occupation was tilling the land for wages.

A marked increase seems to have taken place within a few years as the estimate for January 1943 made by the Mahalanobis group showed that 34 percent of rural families had become partly or entirely dependent on employment as agricultural labour of whom 16.5 per cent combined agriculture with labour, another 16.5 per cent was entirely dependent on agricultural labour and one per cent subsisted on non-agricultural labour alone.⁶¹

Widespread agrarian distress on the eve of the great famine must have been responsible for this sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers. It was perhaps also a temporary phenomenon, for another sample survey carried out by the Indian Statistical Institute for the Government of Bengal in 1946-47, but published by the West Bengal Government in 1953, showed that the percentage of agricultural families for undivided Bengal in 1946 was 19 percent and somewhat less for West Bengal - 14 percent.⁶² Another interesting finding was that 57.9 percent of agricultural labour came from families owning no land at all and 28.9 percent from families with less than two acres of land. "Thus about 87 percent are from families with less than 2 acres and there is every justification for the popular belief that agricultural labourers belong, in general, to the landless classes."⁶³ The average amount of cash loan per family was also found to be less in the case of agricultural labour families compared to other occupation groups, and the same was true of paddy loans.⁶⁴ This, according to the survey exposed the low credit-worthiness of the group. Cultivators were found to supply 37.36 percent of the loans incurred by agricultural labour families, other important sources being moneylenders, proprietors and the government.⁶⁵

After partition, a number of large surveys were carried out in West Bengal. Two Agricultural Labour Enquiries in 1950-51 and 1956-57 found the proportion of agricultural labour households to be 25 and 24 percent respectively.⁶⁶

It should be remembered, however, that though there was no spectacular rise in the number of agricultural labourers in Bengal in the post-war period or immediately after Independence, sharecropping continued to increase at least at the same rate as after the Depression, if not faster. From a report of the West Bengal Government,⁶⁷ drawn up at the time of the new Settlement surveys in 1957/58 we find that not only was there a great discrepancy in the numbers of sharecroppers in different districts as returned by employers with returns given by the cultivators themselves at the time of the 1951 census, a sharp increase in sharecropping had been recorded wherever Settlement operations had progressed to any extent. For instance, in the case of Malda, it was reported that at the time of the Census of 1951, jotedars had given the number of sharecroppers in the district to be 11,836 according to the cultivators themselves, the figure was 31,965. At the time of the settlement of 1957/58, this number came to 40,117 according to attested records, but the revised figures under the settlement operations showed the figure at 49,820 and the area recorded under barga cultivation was found to be 77,389 acres. In West Dinajpur, the corresponding figures for 1957 were 13,012 according to jotedars, 43,755 according to cultivators, and the 1957 settlement figures showed 68,471 according to attested records and 76,054 according to the revised figures with 95,432 acres of land under barga.⁶⁸ For Burdwan, the figures at the time of the 1951 census had been 38,658 according to owners' statements and 73,719 according to the cultivators, while the current settlement estimates were then far from complete. In Bankura, the 1951 figures were 34,894 according to bargadars themselves and, strangely enough even more from owners' testimony, 39,747. The settlement operations, although far from complete, already recorded 48,626.⁶⁹ 24 Parganas had returned 28,462 bargadars according to owners and 1,12,644 according to cultivators in 1951, the 1957 figures were still not ready.⁷⁰ In Midnapur, the incidence of sharecropping was seen to have registered a marked increase over the years. Compared to the situation at the time of the Flood Commission when the share of the area under barga cultivation

was 17.1 per cent, the 1951 census estimated this area to be 25.2 per cent of the total cultivated/ ^{area.} In 1951, the number of bargadars was 79,395 according to owners and 1,54,219 according to bargadars themselves; by 1957, the Settlement enumeration, which was still going on, had already registered 2,01,908 persons under this category.⁷¹ Settlement operations had not made much progress in Birbhum or Murshidabad, the 1951 data showed 19,528 and 33,942 bargadars as declared by owners and cultivators for Birbhum, the corresponding figures for Murshidabad being 27,949 and 41,077.⁷² The same was the case for Howrah and Hooghly. Here, however, the discrepancy between the owners' and the cultivators' statements in 1951 was more noticeable - 6,591 and 21,447 in the case of Howrah and 18,295 and 52,235 in the case of Hooghly.⁷³ In Nadia, incomplete data about bargadars already showed some increase since 1951, 29,808 counted till then over 24,645 according to the cultivators and 10,093 according to employers in 1951.⁷⁴ Jalpaiguri maintained the same trend, the figures being 72,981 as compared to 64,259 and 12,376 in 1951.⁷⁵ The findings of the survey are summarized in Table No.7.

In East Pakistan, zamindari was abolished by an Act of the Legislative Assembly in 1956, i.e., before it was abolished in West Bengal. The expected redistribution of land from the Hindu zamindars to the Muslim tillers did not seem to have materialized, and the actual beneficiaries were probably the upper strata of the Muslim landed peasantry, new entrants from among the urban middle class and influential refugees from the Indian territories.⁷⁶ This was reflected in the fact, that according to the East Pakistan Census of 1951, the share of landless agricultural labourers stood at 23.96 per cent of agricultural population.⁷⁷ As mentioned already, agricultural labourers constituted 25 and 24 per cent of agricultural population in West Bengal according to the Agricultural Labour Enquiries of 1950-51 and 1956-57, respectively.

Table 7 : Number of Bargadars (Sharecroppers) in West Bengal Districts according to the Census of 1951 and the Survey and Settlement Operations, 1957-58.*

<u>Districts</u>	Census 1951		Settlement 1957-58 ^(a)	
	<u>According to landowners</u>	<u>According to Sharecroppers</u>	<u>According to attested records</u>	<u>Revised figures</u>
Malda	11836	31965	40117	49820
West Dinajpur	13012	43755	68471	76054
Burdwan	38658	73719	28931 ^(a)	...
Bankura	39747	34894	48626 ^(a)	...
24 Parganas	28462	112644	106052 ^(a)	...
Midnapur	79395	154219	201908 ^(a)	...
Birbhum	19528	33942
Murshidabad	27949	41077
Howrah	6591	21477	17786 ^(a)	...
Hooghly	18295	52235	19000 ^(a)	...
Nadia	10093	24645	29808 ^(a)	...
Jalpaiguri	12376	64259	72981 ^(a)	...

* Source : Compiled from figures for different districts given in Govt. of West Bengal, Bargadars and their Problems. (n.67, above).

(a) Settlement figures for the number of bargadars were incomplete except for Malda and West Dinajpur.

Towards the close of the period under discussion, both agricultural labourers and sharecroppers, specially the latter had come to constitute a sizable proportion of the agricultural population in Bengal. There must have been considerable overlap between the two categories and this mix-up was aggravated by the fact that some sections of both groups were not entirely landless. It is also very likely that the demand situation in the labour market in agriculture governed to a large extent the specific terms or conditions of employment in a given season or a particular crop year. By and large, however, it is quite apparent that the system of sharing the produce at the time of harvest suited the jotedars most, for the majority among them had become substantial rural traders. On the other hand, supervision over daily wage earners working in cultivated units scattered into several fragments, situated at some distance from each other might not have been an attractive proposition. Thus, conditions had become quite favourable for a greater increase in the ranks of sharecroppers.

IV

The context of the national economy prior to Planning.

Economic life in the Indian sub-continent at the end of colonial rule had been moulded through two centuries of foreign domination. The net result was the poverty of the masses which had been brought about by a particular process of primitive accumulation, where the method of surplus extraction forced labour power to sell itself much below its bare needs of subsistence.

In agriculture, the whole system had been based, from the beginning on extraction of absolute ground rent which was realized by depriving the cultivating population of not only their legitimate share of profit, but also by eating into their wages. Not only was there no contradiction between the spread of an exchange network with the extraction of absolute rent, the entire process was made possible by the prevailing system or mechanism of exchange relations. The logical outcome of this was periodic

recurrence of famines, culminating in the greatest of them all - the Bengal famine of 1943. The labour market, as Marx had pointed out in the context of Ireland,⁷⁸ is regulated by the law of relative and absolute impoverishment in early capitalism as well as in colonial economies. In conditions of relative impoverishment, there is a relatively excess population, coming from the ranks of the dispossessed producers (the 'reserve army of labour') which enters into the labour market for wages to buy the wherewithal for living. When basic wage goods are out of reach for wage-earners, there is a condition of absolute impoverishment and absolute surplus in population, resulting in famines, epidemic deaths or largescale migration.

In the typical colonial situation, monopolistic control over land and capital could be manipulated in such a way as to extract absolute surplus from agriculture or manufacture. This was done through the exercise of non-economic compulsion at different levels, within the framework of an exchange nexus. It also meant depressing the market rate for wages even below subsistence requirements.

Indian history in the colonial period is full of instances where the growth of exchange has lapsed into a throw-back and the reemergence of severe semi-feudal exploitation at the slightest opportunity. It has been shown recently,⁷⁹ for instance, that in the early days of colonial penetration and expansion, the East India Company's efforts at controlling the local money markets and to regulate them in the interests of their own long distance trade, left in its wake demonetization and decommercialization in regions where cash exchange and financial institutions had been fairly developed. The same kind of phenomenon could be observed towards the end of colonial rule in Bengal. Following upon a remarkable shrinkage in commodity and cash transactions during the depression, a similar process of decommercialization and demonetization in the market for agricultural produce (specially rice) set in.⁸⁰ As we know, this led to a restructuring of production and exchange relations where landholders and rich farmers came to exercise semi-feudal authority over/majority of the proletarianized peasantry. But, as mentioned earlier, the proletarianization of the

peasantry did not completely snap the link with land, despite the poverty and despite the obvious non-viability of small holdings. As Lenin had pointed out in another context, such a situation was also obviously in the interests of large farmers. "Petty farming becomes stable when it ceases to compete with large-scale farming, when it is turned into a supplier of labour power for the latter."⁸¹

When generally deflationary conditions took a sudden and violent inflationary turn with the progress of the Second World War, the traumatic experience of 1943 in Bengal once again brought home the fact that the Indian population was hopelessly at the mercy of the pressure of international events, and more specifically, the interests of the British empire. With a revival of interest in the causes, nature and impact of the Bengal famine of 1943 in recent years,⁸² enough has been written on the subject. One interesting feature may however be mentioned in passing. There is a general belief that the Government of India and the Provincial Governments were caught napping at the time without any proper idea of the reasons behind the shortfall in foodgrains, the likely amount of the shortfall or what measures to take to ensure minimum supplies to the civilian population. Relevant records however, show that many in government departments concerned with such matters had warned top civil and military authorities about the impending disaster and recommended concrete action which was obviously totally disregarded. For instance, at a meeting of the Central Food Advisory Council, 24 and 25 August, 1942⁸³ it was clearly pointed out that shortfall in wheat in the market was almost entirely due to hoarding and speculation. Defence authorities were requested to distribute their total purchases over a number of surplus regions to relieve pressure and to give preference to those areas where normal trade and transport facilities had been suspended as a result of defence strategy. Provincial governments were also urged to mobilize indigenous transport like bullock-carts and country boats to ensure systematic supplies in different localities. That not only was such advice ignored but exactly an opposite course of action was ruthlessly

pursued is fairly common knowledge. Again, in July 1942, in a statement before the National Defence Council,⁸⁴ it had been pointed out that in the third year of the war, the anticipated shortfall in rice alone if all the Provinces and Princely States were to be aggregated, would be 2248 thousand tons (despite a surplus of 1351 thousand tons in Bengal alone) as compared to a normal shortfall, based on average of the preceding five years, of 1368 thousand tons.

The famine of 1943 was not an isolated nor an unexpected crisis. The impact of the war had not only triggered off very high and continuously mounting defence expenditure, resulting in deficit financing at an unprecedented scale, it had also diverted essential consumer goods from the civilian market and for the first time made the black market or a parallel economy take a firmly entrenched position in the national scene.

Defence expenditure in India rose from Rs.49.54 crores in 1939/40 to Rs.869 crores in 1944/45, of which India's share rose from Rs.49.54 crores to Rs. 458.32 crores.⁸⁵ The rest was chargeable to Britain. The peculiar method of repayment adopted at this time by Britain did not increase Indian revenues because India was paid back in sterling which was credited in favour of the Reserve Bank. Against this reserve, the Reserve Bank issued paper currency and made it available to Government for necessary payments.⁸⁶ As a result, total money supply rose from Rs. 317 crores in 1939 to Rs. 2190 crores in 1945.⁸⁷ In effect, therefore, the sterling balances were blocked and could not be used for purchases abroad. This expansion in monetary circulation accompanied by scarcity of civilian goods as a result of diversion to war effort and speculative hoarding of essential goods naturally resulted in enormous increases in the price level. The general price index rose to Rs.236.5 in 1943/44 with August 1939 as 100,⁸⁸ the rise in the price index of rice alone rising to 951 in December 1943,⁸⁹ for obvious reasons. Apart from starvation and death in Bengal, there was a marked fall in the consumption of essential goods all over the country; civilian consumption of cotton goods fell by more than 23 percent from the peace time level by 1943/44 and home production of kerosene had halved during the same time.⁹⁰ There was no break-through in

industrial production either, and indeed industry was to fall into a deep recession once the war was over.

The problem of inflation, recession and a general stagnation in the economy naturally engaged the attention of both government agencies and private entrepreneurs in the years immediately following Independence and partition of the country.⁹¹ The problem at this juncture was similar to standing at a cross-roads, with the direction that future economic planning would take, being far from clear.⁹²

Appendix

From A. Ghosh, 'Economic classification of Agricultural Regions in Bengal' in Sankhya, Vol. 10, Parts 1 & 2, 1950.

Table 5 to 10

Table 5

Concentration index, percentage of area sharecropped, leased and percentage of sharecropping families.

<u>Region</u>	Mean Index of concentration	P.C. of area cultivated by croppers or lease holders	P.C. of area sharecropped	P.C. of area leased	P.C. of sharecropping families
I	6844	44.3	39.6	4.7	82
II	6395	34.8	29.0	5.8	56
III	5791	35.7	21.6	14.1	53
IV	5182	21.6	12.9	8.7	20

Table 6

Percentage of families in ownership size classes, Percentage of families owning and cultivating below and above 10 acres.

<u>Region</u>	P.C. of families in ownership size class (acres)				P.C. of area owned by families with (acres)		P.C. of area cultivated by families owning (acres)	
	0	0-5	5-10	above 10	0-10	above 10	0-10	above 10
I	41	41	11	7	52	48	76	24
II	37	49	10	4	67	33	86	14
III	26	60	9	5	70	30	83	17
IV	20	73	6	1	88	12	88	12

Table 7
Percentage of Categories of Agricultural Workers and Percentage of Cultivating Families.

Region	Mean Index of concentration	Cultivating owners	Tenant cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	P.C. of families depending on Agri. (Floud Commission)	P.C. of families according to sample survey, 1945/46	Cultivating according to census 1941
I	6844	27.6	9.3	22.8	22.4	44	63
II	6395	31.0	6.2	22.7	25.3	54	67
III	5791	40.0	5.8	18.5	24.1	63	70
IV	5182	52.5	4.0	15.4	15.5	70	77

Table 8.

Percentage of area utilized, double cropped, follow, waste and others

Region	Utilized	Cultivable waste	Uncultivable waste	Fallow	Orchards	Double cropped	cultivable to cultivated
I	41.6	9.9	17.2	9.5	7.7	14.2	51.8
II	49.2	7.8	16.5	2.2	4.9	16.0	62.0
III	65.3	8.0	15.9	1.6	3.6	30.0	68.5
IV	75.0	4.1	21.1	1.2	4.4	29.3	92.0

Table 9
Availability of land, bullock and credit
and value of crops.

Region	Mean area per tiller	Mean bullock per acre	Value of crops Acc. to Floud Comm.	per acre Acc. to Season Crop. Reports	Mean loan per family (Rs.)	P.C. of indebted families
I	7.3	0.40	45	44	46.0	38.7
II	5.1	0.40	46	51	66.2	51.0
III	5.0	0.29	51	49	68.5	56.4
IV	2.5	0.22	56	58	95.2	58.8

Table 10

Rent per holding, proportion of rent to produce,
cess per acre and debt per family.

Region	Proportion of rent to produce	Rent per holding (Rs.)	Debt per family (Rs.)	Cess per acre (Rs.)
I	30	51.5	33.7	0.35
II	33	48.4	51.0	0.45
III	18	38.4	56.4	0.36
IV	24	29.0	58.8	0.28

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49. Birbhum SSR, (1924-32), by B.B. Mukherji, Calcutta, 1937, p.61.
50. loc. cit.
51. Floud Commission Report, Vol. II, Table VIII(F), pp.120-1.
52. Apart from the great spurt in the theoretical literature on this subject in recent years, the most thorough discussion along these lines to date on the specific situation in Bengal may be found in Partha Chatterjee, Bengal 1920-1947, pp.xvi to Iiv.
53. See, n. 15 above and discussion thereon in the text with relevant figures.
54. Mahalanobis et al., 'A Sample Survey of After Effects of the Bengal Famine of 1943' in Sankhya, Vol.7, Part 4, 1946, p.372 et seq.
55. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, 'Note on concentration of Agricultural wealth in Bengal' in Sankhya, Vol.7, Part 4, 1946. Also, R. Mukherjee and M.M. Mukherjee, 'Note on concentration of wealth in Bengal villages' in Sankhya, Vol.7, Part 3, 1946. pp.327-8.
56. R. Mukherjee - loc. cit.
57. A. Ghosh, 'Economic Classification of Agricultural Regions in Bengal' in Sankhya, Vol.10, Parts 1 & 2, 1950. pp.109-18.
58. ibid., Table 4.
59. S. Mukherji, 'Some Aspects of Commercialization', pp. 227-8, Tables 2 and 3. Somewhat different estimates are given for 1901-1941 in Nilofar Matin, 'Process of Land Alienation Among Peasants; A Case Study of Bangladesh' M. Phil. dissertation in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, the Hague, Netherlands, p.58, Table 3.1.
60. Floud Commission Report, Vol. I, p.117.
61. Mahalanobis et al. op.cit. p.365.
62. Govt. of West Bengal, Final Report of Enquiry into the Condition of Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal, 1946-47, Calcutta, 1953, p.6.
63. ibid. p.9.
64. ibid. p.25, Table 5.2.
65. ibid. p. 26.
66. Cited in W. Schendel and A.H. Faraiize, Rural Labourers in Bengal, 1880 to 1980. Rotterdam, 1984, p.44.

85. B.R. Tomlinson, Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947, London, 1979, p. 93. Table 3.2.
86. M.D. Joshi, 'Currency' in V.B. Singh (ed.) Economic History of India, 1857-1956 (1978 edn.), p.405. The sterling balances accumulated at this time was £1250 Millions.
87. Tomlinson, op.cit., p.94.
88. Joshi, loc. cit.
89. Tomlinson, loc. cit.
90. ibid. p.96.
91. See in this connection, Govt. of India, Ministry of Industry and Supply, Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the Central Advisory Council of Industries, Simla 1949, pp. 58-60 and Conference on Industrial Development in India, New Delhi, 1947, pp.120-28. Also, Nehru Memorial Library and Records, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Collection, (B) Subject files, Industry & Commerce, Sl. No.44, File no.44 Papers relating to Inter-dominion Conference, Calcutta, April 1948.
92. An attempt to trace the process of subsequent developments will be made in my article 'The Capitalist class and perspectives on industrial policy, 1946-56' in Economic and Social Planning in India: Principles and Practice (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, forthcoming).

67. Govt. of West Bengal, Department of Land and Land Revenue, Bargadars and their Problems, Parts I & II, Calcutta, 1958.
68. *ibid.* pp.1-6, 'Malda and Dinajpur' by Nikhilendra Nath Akhrodhari
69. *ibid.* pp. 7-22, 'Bardwan & Bankura' by A.C. Sen
70. *ibid.* p. 25.
71. *ibid.* pp.26-30. 'Midnapore' by S.M. Bhattacharya
72. *ibid.* pp.31-33.
73. *ibid.* pp.34-38.
74. *ibid.* p.39.
75. *ibid.* p.46.
76. Nilofar Matin, *op. cit.* p.68 refers to the discussions in articles by A. Abdullah in The Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol.IV, no.1, 1976 and K. Siddiqi in M. Alamgir (ed.) Land reform in Bangladesh, Dacca, 1981 on this point.
77. *ibid.* p.72, Table 3.3
78. Karl Marx, Capital Vol.I, Chapter XXV and Vol.III, Part VI, Chapter XXXVIII and Marx and Engels, Ireland and the Irish Question, Moscow 1971 quoted in and discussed by Boudhayan Chattopadhyay in 'Notes towards an understanding of the Bengal Famine of 1943 in CRESSIDA Transactions, Vol. 1, no.1, Summer 1981. pp.112-53.
79. A.K. Bagchi, 'Merchants and Colonialism' in D.N. Panigrahi (ed.) Economic Society and Politics in Modern India, Delhi 1985,
80. S. Mukherji, 'Some aspects of commercialization' pp.256-8.
81. Quoted in M.V. Nadkarni, 'Marketable surplus, market dependence and economic development' in Social Scientist, Vol.7, no. 11, June 1979, pp.35-50, from V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.4, p.97. In this connection, N.K. Chandra, 'Peasantry as a single class : a critique of Chayanov', Working Paper Series, I.I.M. Calcutta, February 1985, p.22 may also be seen.
82. Amartya Sen, Poverty and Famines : An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation, Delhi, 1981 & Paul Greenough, Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal, The Famine of 1943-44, Oxford & New York, 1982.
83. N.A.I., Govt. of India, Department of Education, Health and Lands (Agriculture Section), File no.32-24/42-A (Confidential). Progs. of the meeting of the Central Food Advisory Council, also File no.2-7/42-A, statement by Hon'ble Member, Mr. Nalini Ranjan Sarkar before the National Defence Council on 9.4.1942.
84. File no.32-36/42-A, note prepared by Mr. N.G. Abhayankar on the Statement made by Mr. N.R. Sarkar before the National Defence Council, July 8, 1942.

NUMBER OF MORTGAGES & SALES IN BENGAL

1926 - 1943

CHART II

