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in kind), almost all the operational costs of cultivation were incurred by the tenants. But under the changed situation the sharing of input costs between the landlord and the tenant has become an imperative necessity as the yield potentials of the new technology can be realised only through optimal application of costly inputs which the tenants by themselves may be unable to purchase owing to their generally poor economic condition. Under the system of sharing of input costs, both the landlord and the tenant stand to gain, the former because he gets a larger absolute share in kind, and the latter because the assured intensive use of his labour and capital is much better rewarded and also because the risks involved in incurring the heavy cost of adoption of new farm technology get almost equally distributed. It was observed that the cost of seed, fertilizer, pesticides and diesel were being shared in the ratio of 50:50 between the landlords and the tenants which is certainly an improvement over the conventional system of no sharing of input costs between the owner and the tenant.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the new farm technology has significantly altered the pattern of farm size and tenurial relations. The medium sized farms have in general gained in size at the cost of the very large and very small farms. The proportion of owner cultivators is on the increase, which is a healthy trend in the system of land tenures. Besides, the new practice of sharing of costs of non-conventional inputs also augurs well for the rapid transformation of our traditional agriculture into a modern and dynamic business.

EFFECT OF AGRICULTURAL LEGISLATIONS ON LAND DISTRIBUTION IN WEST BENGAL

Ratan Ghosh*

With the availability of the 26th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) report on land holdings for the year 1970-71, we are having at our dispcsal the reports on land holdings for the year 1953-54, 1959-60, 1960-61 and 1970-71. So when the NSS was collecting data for its 8th Round (1954-55), land ceiling was to be imposed on agricultural land. And again during the 26th Round (1971-72), the modified land ceiling act was in the air. The total area of agricultural land which vested in West Bengal by the operation of the ceiling laws comes to about 10.25 lakh acres upto April, 1976, out of which so far only about 6.20 lakh acres have been distributed to about 8.47 lakh

* Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta-27. The author is extremely indebted to Prof. Ranjit Lahiri and Sri Jayanta Bhattacharya for their valuable comments and suggestions. But, he alone is responsible for the imperfections that may remain.

families.[1] An attempt is made in this paper to explain the changes in the distribution of land of West Bengal in terms of 'surplus land' distributed by the Government after acquiring it through the legal ceilings on the ownership of land.

I

Though the NSS is the only source where the information on holding-size classification is available over time, we have some reservations about the NSS methodology of data collection and the results obtained through this process in a State where the ownership pattern is so complicated and so widely varying from place to place.[2] If we examine the NSS land holding data for West Bengal in Table I, we observe some discrepancies in the figures. For all the years the difference between the NSS estimates of area owned and the figures of 'net area sown' supplied by official sources is of the order of about 15 per cent, and particularly this difference is about 27 per cent for the year 1970-71. And within a year (1959-60 to 1960-61), there has been an increase in the proportion of households by about 5 per cent, but the total 'area owned' has risen by about 8 per cent. Again from 1959-62 to 1970-71 there has been an *increase* of about 15 per cent in the number of households while the total 'area owned' has *decreased* by about 12 per cent.[3]

The figures for surplus area declared and area distributed are more or less consistent. We obtained these figures from various sources for different periods (see Table II). But only the data for 'seventies create some confusion. In one report,[4] we have the total distributed area as 6.20 lakh acres upto April, 1976. But from the other reports[5] this area is about 4.51 lakh acres. And surprisingly enough, in both cases the Government officers are the primary source.

So while examining the effect of surplus land distribution on the ownership holdings one should keep in mind the limitations of the data-base as stated above.

The approximate position of land distribution before the imposition of the ceiling law can be obtained from the 8th Round of the NSS for the year 1953-54. The West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 provides for a ceiling on the existing holdings which was 25 acres for agricultural lands and 20 acres for non-agricultural land including homestead, both on an individual basis. Though very insignificant amount of land has been vested in the

1. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (a Bengali daily, Calcutta), May 24, 1976.
2. Ratan Ghosh, "A Note on NSS Land-holding Data," *Frontier* (Calcutta), Vol. 8, No. 50, June 26, 1976.
3. Ratan Ghosh, "Land Distribution and NSS Land-holding Data: An Appeal for New Methodology," to be published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (1976).
4. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, May 24, 1976.
5. *Bangladesh* (a Bengali weekly, Calcutta), July 2, 1976, and Proceedings of the Seminar on Implementation of Land Reforms, Patna, February, 1973.

TABLE I—PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS OR RAIYATS AND AREA OWNED IN RURAL BENGAL : 1953-54 TO 1974-75

Size class of ownership holdings (acres)	1953-54		1959-60		1960-61		1959-61		1970-71		1971-72		1974-75	
	House-hold	Area owned	House-hold	Area owned	House-hold	Area owned	House-hold	Area owned	House-hold	Area owned	Raiyats	Area owned	Raiyats	Area owned
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
Below 2.50	73.5	15.9	72.1	17.9	69.3	17.5	70.6	16.9	77.6	27.3	86.2	34.4	—	—
2.50—5.00	12.6	18.6	14.3	22.8	16.8	26.0	15.6	24.7	12.6	25.7	7.0	17.4	—	—
Below 5·00	86.1	34.5	86.4	40.7	86.1	43.5	86.2	41.6	90.2	53.0	93.2	51.8	90.0	44.1
5.00—10.00	8.6	25.5	8.9	26.8	9.8	28.8	9.4	28.1	7.3	27.7	4.4	21.3	5.8	16.5
10.00—15.00	2.8	14.0	2.6	14.0	2.6	13.4	2.6	13.8	1.7	11.6	1.3	11.3	2.1	11.3
15.00—25.00	1.9	14.8	1.9	16.1	1.3	10.9	1.6	13.5	0.7	7.1	0.7	9.5	—	—
15.00 and above ..	2.6	26.1	2.1	18.5	1.5	14.3	1.8	16.5	0.8	7.8	1.1	15.8	2.1	28.0
25.00 and above ..	0.7	11.3	0.2	2.4	0.2	3.4	0.2	3.0	0.1	0.7	0.4	6.3	—	—
Households (thousand)	4,274		4,662		4,914		4,789		5,538		—		6,500	
Area owned (thousand acres)		10,231		10,316		11,374		10,850		9,556		—		13,400

Source : (1) The figures for the year 1959-60, 1960-61, 1970-71 and 1953-54 are given in the NSS Report Nos. 36, 144, 156, 215 and 10 respectively. (2) The figures in col. (8) and col. (9) are obtained by averaging col. (4) and col. (6) and col. (5) and col. (7). (3) The figures for the year 1971-72 are obtained from a report published by the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal, 1971. (4) The figures for the year 1974-75 are obtained from a Seminar on land reforms held recently in Delhi by officers of various levels and Departments of West Bengal and reported in *Patriot*, January 13, 1976.

TABLE II—AREA DECLARED SURPLUS OR TAKEN POSSESSION BY THE GOVERNMENT AND AREA DISTRIBUTED

(*lakh acres*)

Time period	Agricultural land vested	Area taken possession	Area distributed	No. of families who got land (lakhs)	Source
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Upto 1967	3·37	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	(1)
1967—1970	3·43	—	2·32	2·38	(1)(2)
Upto May, 1972	9·25	7·02	3·67	N.A.	(3)
1972-January, 1976	0·47	0·32	0·21	N.A.	(4)
Upto April, 1976	10·25	8·56	6·20	8·47	(5)
Due to 1953 Act	9·36	N.A.	4·30	4·50*	(6)
Due to 1971 Act	1·00	1·54	2·50	4·00	(*)

Sources : (1) Ranjit Lahiri, "Land Reforms in West Bengal" (a Bengali pamphlet), *Manisha* (Calcutta), 1975.
(2) Hare Krishna Konar, "Co-operation of Peasant Movement Alone Can Assure the Success of Land Reforms," *Yojana*, Vol. XIII, No. 23, November 30, 1969.
(3) "Land Utilisation and Reforms," A Report by Land and Land Revenue Department, Government of West Bengal, 1972.
(4) *Bangladesh*, July 2, 1976.
(5) *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, May 24, 1976.
(6) Proceedings of the Seminar on Implementation of Land Reforms, Patna, February, 1973.
* Estimated (from 3 and 5).

State and almost no land has been distributed in late 'fifties, the proportion of area owned for the size-group of 25 acres and above has declined by about 8 per cent, and at the same time this proportion for the size class 2.5—5 acres has increased by about 6 per cent while the proportion of households in this group has increased by about 3 per cent. These changes cannot be explained in terms of the surplus land distributed by the Government, because the proportion of land in the lowest size class has increased by about one per cent, while the proportion of households in this group has decreased by about 3 per cent. Then why do we observe this shift of area owned from the uppermost size class to the lower size-group? Because "ever since the imposition of ceiling or even before when the coming measures were in the air the big land holders involved have been preparing to take up their fight with the State to frustrate the relevant provisions of the Act." The owners of the surplus lands adopted various methods to evade their acquisition. They evade the ceiling (*i*) by creation of subordinate tenancies in favour of near relatives and *benamdars*; (*ii*) by creation of religious and/or charitable endowments or institutions; (*iii*) by retaining agricultural and non-agricultural lands under the garb of tank-fisheries; (*iv*) by distribution of lands among reversioners in advance by way of family settlement; (*v*) by partition of land among father and sons by invoking the privileges of the *Mitakshara* law of inheritance;

(*vi*) by resorting to 'triangular' transfers—'X' transfers land to 'Y' (a third person) who re-conveys the same to X's son, etc.[6] So when the NSS was collecting data for the 16th and 17th Round (1960-61 and 1961-62), the big land holders already adopted all the means to frustrate the relevant provisions of the Estates Acquisition Act.

Before 1967 only 3.37 lakh acres of agricultural lands were vested in the State and very insignificant amount of surplus land has been distributed. And mainly during the United Front regime, an intensive drive was launched for the detection of evasion of ceiling. As a result of this drive, additional 3.43 lakh acres of land were vested in the State, out of which 2.32 lakh acres of land were distributed to 2.38 lakh households. "About 9.36 lakh acres of agricultural land have vested in the State by the operation of the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953,..... 4.30 lakh acres have been distributed—3.82 lakh acres amongst landless cultivators and small raiyats holding not more than one hectare of land."[7] And this land was distributed among about 4 lakh households. But according to the NSS data, in the size-group of 5.0 acres and less the total area owned has increased by about 7.7 lakh acres from 1959-61 to 1970-71, while the number of households has increased by about 9 lakhs. And in all other size classes both the number of households and area owned has decreased in the 'sixties, particularly in the size-group of 15 acres and above the total area owned has decreased by about 10.5 lakh acres (equal to the total vested land) and the number of households by about 45 thousand.

This is nothing unexpected. Because in late 'sixties acute peasant movements swept over the whole Bengal. The court injunction, even the police intervention in some places could not prevent the marginal farmers from occupying the surplus lands of the rich landlords. So the poor peasants were able to take possession of 2-3 lakh acres of *benami* land in addition to the Government-distributed surplus land and the psychological fear due to peasant movements and forthcoming modified ceiling act made the rich farmers to suppress all the 'undesirable' information on land holdings,* both of which are reflected in the NSS land distribution for the year 1970-71.

So it is quite reasonable to conclude, that both the figures of surplus area declared or taken possession and area distributed in this State by the operation of Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 have been suitably incorporated in the NSS land holding data for the year 1970-71. The effect of Government's surplus land distribution is apparently to increase the number of households and area owned in the lowest class of ownership holding and to decrease the same in the highest group. However, for all the years (1953-54 to 1970-71),

6. "A Note on the Evasion of Ceiling under the W.B.E.A. Act 1953," Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal, 1968.

7. Proceedings of the Seminar on Implementation of Land Reforms, Patna, February, 1973.

* We are not ignoring here the question of fragmentation and other factors.

the pattern of ownership distribution of land holdings remains more or less the same in terms of Lorenz ratios.

II

Next we will examine the effect of modified ceiling law on land distribution. The West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1971 provides ceiling on a family basis. And a family consisting of not more than five members can now hold up to 5 hectares (12.4 acres) in irrigated areas and 7 hectares (17.3 acres) in other areas. In the course of operation of this law from 1971-72 to 1974-75, additional land of about 1.5 lakh acres has been taken possession and altogether about 2.5 lakh acres have been distributed to about 4 lakh households. But, in this period we do not have any reliable estimate of land distribution for rural Bengal. Here we will use a study made by the Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal in six thanas with a total area of 642 square miles after the completion of vesting of all surplus land under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953. About the representative character of these thanas, this report states: "The thanas have been selected in such a manner as would include lands scattered over all the three administrative divisions in northern, southern and western parts of the State. Particular care has been taken to include lands with different degrees of productivity. .... So, the area covered under this review has got the representative character and as such can be reasonably relied upon for forming a general idea about the future developments in agrarian sector of the entire State."[8] The results are given in cols. (12) and (13) of Table I. The gross discrepancies in the land distribution that we observe between 1970-71 and 1971-72 are, mainly, due to the differences in the data collection techniques of the NSS and the State authorities. The NSS collects data on the basis of oral enquiries, while for the year 1971-72, individual records (*Khatian*) have been consolidated alphabetically to get information about the total quantum of land held by raiyats possessing lands in different slabs. And land distribution for the year 1974-75 is given in cols. (14) and (15) of Table I.[9]

But while examining the figures of land holdings, we notice that the proportion of raiyats decreased by about 3 per cent and that of area owned by about 8 per cent in the size class of 5 acres and below from the year 1971-72 to 1974-75. During the same period for the size-group of 15.0 acres and above the proportion of raiyats increased by about one per cent and that of area owned by about 12 per cent. So in the 'seventies, the surplus land distribution has not reflected at all in the figures of land holdings as supplied by the official sources. In spite of the claim that 2.5 lakh acres of surplus land have been distributed among 4 lakh households, the concentration of agricultural holdings has increased in the 'seventies.

8. "A Peep into Future: A Case Study of the Next Phase of Land Reforms in West Bengal," Directorate of Land Records and Surveys, West Bengal, 1971.

9. These figures are obtained from a Seminar on land reforms held recently in New Delhi by officers of various levels and Departments of West Bengal and reported in *Patriot*, January 13, 1976.

"The programmes which could have led to a radical change in the agrarian structure and the elimination of some of the elements of exploitation in the agrarian system and ushered in a measure of distributive justice were those of tenancy reform, ceiling on agricultural holdings and distribution of land to the landless and small holders. But the programmes of land reforms adopted since Independence have failed to bring about the required changes in the agrarian structure." And in the case of land ceiling the amount of surplus land distributed is too insignificant (about 4.5 per cent of the total area owned) to affect the ownership pattern. But if we could recover all the *benami* lands (which is estimated to be about 40-42 lakh acres in West Bengal)[10] and distribute this among the poor peasants, the agrarian structure would have changed substantially.

1.0 *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, March 20, 1976.