

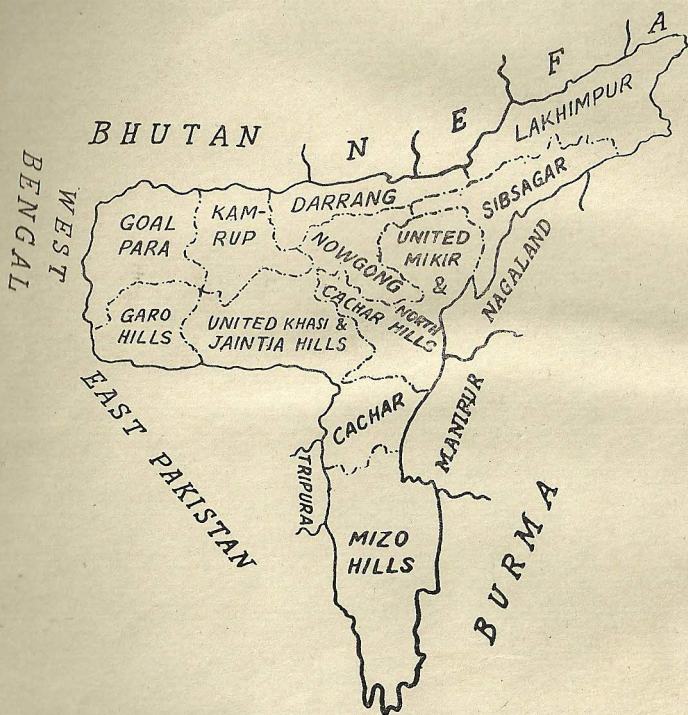
LAND
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AND
LAND
REFORMS
IN
ASSAM

NAKSHTRA CHANDRA BULL

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ASSAM

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LAND PROBLEMS AND LAND REFORMS IN ASSAM



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1968

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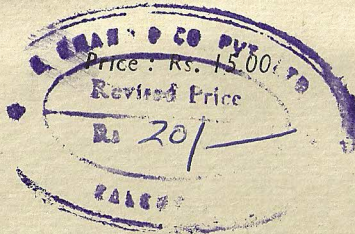
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FOREWORD

This is a comprehensive study of the land problems and the land reform measures enacted in Assam since 1947. The extreme density of population, practically all dependent on land for its living, provides the background to the problem. Beginning his study by examining the high and increasing pressure of population on land, the author has placed the land problem in the state in the correct perspective.

In the second chapter, he describes the historical background to land systems in the state beginning with the annexation of Assam by the British and lists the several land tenures then existing. The Zamindari and Raiyatwari were of course the two main tenures. But there were also a few other common tenures such as La-Khiraj and Nisf-Khiraj. The chapter provides a good descriptive account of these several tenures. In the same chapter are described the major provisions of three legislations which regulated tenancy prior to 1947, namely, the Goalpara Tenancy Act 1929, the Sylhet Tenancy Act 1936 and the Assam (Temporarily settled districts) Tenancy Act 1935. It will be clear from this chapter that Assam had all the land problems which are characteristic of a situation of high population density, namely, the existence of intermediaries, insecurity of tenancy, a growing number of uneconomic holdings, fragmentation of holdings and landlessness of a large part of the agrarian population.

Subsequent chapters are devoted to legislative measures taken since 1947 to deal with these problems, namely, abolition of intermediaries (Chapter 3), protection of sharecroppers (Chapter 4), ceiling on holdings (Chapter 5) and consolidation of holdings (Chapter 6). The intermediaries were abolished in the state by the Assam State Acquisition of Zamindari Act 1951. The intermediaries were allowed to

retain homesteads, buildings including the land they stayed on, lands up to a maximum of 400 bighas for the proprietors and 150 bighas for the tenure holders and gardens and orchards. Besides 50 bighas of land were allowed to the intermediary free of revenue. The last one is an unusual provision. The intermediaries were adequately compensated for the acquired estates. The author observes that because of lack of trained and adequate administrative machinery and absence of reliable record of rights the implementation of the Act, has been very slow. The Act provides for creation of a proper record of rights.

In addition to the Zamindari areas, vast areas were settled from time to time with religious and charitable institutions which were also in effect intermediaries. These were abolished by the Assam State Acquisition of Lands belonging to Religious or Charitable Institution of Public Nature Act 1959. An account of this measure is given in Chapter 7. The Institutions whose lands were acquired under this Act were to be compensated by a perpetual annuity on the basis of the net income and pending the fixation of annuity, an interim compensation was provided.

Share tenancies were protected and regulated by the Assam Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act 1948. The Act provided protection to tenants who paid rents in kinds. The share of the landlord was fixed on the basis of the contribution of plough cattle. If the landlord contributed plough cattle, his share was to be $1\frac{1}{4}$ th. Otherwise, it was to be $1\frac{1}{5}$ th. The Act also regulated termination of tenancy and resumption of land for personal cultivation and provided for Adhi Conciliation Board. Incidentally, on the basis of data collected by himself, the author points out that over 40 per cent of the landlords were engaged in non-agricultural occupations and that nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the Adhiars were landless.

Ceilings on land holdings were fixed by the Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1956 which was applicable to the plains districts of the State. The ceiling was fixed at 150 bighas or about 50 acres. In addition, orchards

up to 30 bighas were allowed. The surplus land was to be settled primarily with the tenant or sub-tenant in occupation of such lands. In point of fact, not more than 20,000 acres were declared surplus up to March 1965. It is obvious, therefore, that, as a measure of redistribution of lands, the ceilings Act proved ineffective. In the following chapter, the provisions of the Assam Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1960 are given. The author has made a useful comparison of this Act with similar measures in other states.

In a subsequent chapter the author deals with the problem of agricultural labour. He notes the growth in the agricultural labour population and examines the several measures under which they were to be provided with land such as from lands becoming available from enforcement of ceilings, lands available in Bhoodan and Gramdan villages and also other wastelands. The actual effect of these measures has been negligible and the problem of the landless agricultural labour remains largely unattended. In view of this the author addresses himself to the possibility of creating more employment opportunities in the rural areas for these people. The experience all over the country has shown that this has remained a mere talk.

It will thus be obvious that this is a comprehensive study and makes an important addition to the literature on the subject of land problems and land reforms in the country and especially in relation to Assam.

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V. M. DANDEKAR.

PREFACE

Land reform as a concept is open to a large number of interpretations. The term 'Land reform' is sometimes equated with 'agrarian reform', while there are many instances where it is used in a restricted sense implying only the changes in land tenures and the redistribution of land-ownership. In the United Nations' resolutions and reports land reform is treated more broadly as equivalent to agrarian reform or agrarian institutional reform. It includes changes in land tenures, i.e., reforms that improve the position of tenants or of hired farm workers, or enlarge the unit of cultivation or operation, as well as those that redistribute land so as to increase the number and proportion of owners. It also includes the establishment or strengthening of essential Governmental, co-operative or commercial agencies or services relating to agricultural credit, supply, marketing, extension and research. The ideal land reform programme is, therefore, conceived as an integrated programme of measures designed to eliminate obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in the agrarian structure.

In many under-developed countries land reform is a significant feature in the initial stages of economic growth. Its scope and significance, though, are conditioned by the existing socio-economic environment. In India the ideas on land reform have been passing through an evolution. During the 19th century and in the first four decades of the 20th century the main emphasis in land reforms was on the protection of the interests of tenants. In the post-Independ-



ence period the objectives are much broader. The post-Independence land reforms are expected: (a) to remove such impediments to agricultural production as arise from the character of agrarian structure, and (b) to create conditions for evolving an agrarian economy with high levels of efficiency and productivity.

Land reforms in Assam are based on the all-India land reform policy. Land reform measures in this State are expected to evolve a uniform land system, to bring about changes in the tenancy arrangements, to ensure re-distribution of land, to check subdivision of holdings beyond a certain limit, to consolidate fragmented holdings and to rehabilitate landless agricultural workers. In points of importance and volume, land reform legislation has been the most significant among the post-Independence legislative measures.

The chief purpose of this book is to give a clear idea about agrarian structure, land systems, land reform legislation and the impact of land reform measures on the agrarian economy of Assam. The work was originally carried out during the years 1960-1963 and was approved for the award of D. Phil. degree of the University of Gauhati in 1964. The thesis was revised with a view to publication while I was working as a Senior Research Fellow in the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, in 1965. In its present form the original thesis has undergone many changes.

This work is a pioneering study on land reforms in Assam and hence the field of study is underdeveloped. To make this study comprehensive it has been found necessary to trace the main trends of development in the agrarian structure of the State before presenting and analysing the recent land reform measures and their impact on rural economy. The first two chapters, introductory in character, outline the characteristics of agrarian structure, land systems

and the evolution of land reform policy. In chapters III to VIII the land reform measures are presented and analysed in the context of existing land problems. The broad aim is to make an assessment of the impact of land reforms on the agrarian economy of the State as revealed by published material and my own field investigation. The final chapter suggests some steps that should be taken by the Government for effective implementation and enforcement of the legislative measures.

I am greatly indebted to several individuals for helping me in various ways. I am profoundly grateful to Dr. P. C. Goswami, Director of the Agro-Economic Research Centre for North-East India, Jorhat, for his guidance, advice and, above all, his active interest in my work. I must also express my sincere gratitude and acknowledge my deep debt to Prof. V. M. Dandekar, Director of the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona, for writing the Foreword and for offering useful suggestions for improvement of the book. I am thankful to Mr. R. Barua and Mr. H. Singha who as Settlement Officers of Karimganj and Goalpara respectively supplied me maps of Karimganj Sub-Division and Goalpara District and also some useful information regarding the progress of land reforms.

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April, 1968.

N. C. Dutta

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CONVERSION FACTORS

	Area	
1 bigha	=	.331 acre or .133 hectare
1 katha	=	.017 acre or .007 hectare
	Length	
1 mile	=	1.61 kilometres
	Weight	
1 ton	=	1016.05 kilogram
1 maund	=	37 kilogram
	Money	
1 rupee	=	100 paise

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THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

1. Introduction

Assam is in the north-east corner of India and is connected with the rest of India by a narrow corridor of West Bengal lying below the foothills of Bhutan and Sikkim. It is virtually surrounded by foreign countries—Bhutan,¹ Tibet and China on the north, Burma on the east, Pakistan and Burma on the south, and Pakistan on the west.

Assam is a State of plains and hills. It comprises the whole of Brahmaputra valley and a part of Surma valley together with the intervening range of hills which form the water-shed between them. The State is divided into two natural regions — (1) the Plains, and (2) the Hills. Assam Plains comprise seven districts — Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur and Cachar.² Assam Hills³ consist of four districts — Garo Hills, United Khasi

1. Bhutan is attached to India by a special treaty.

2. Cachar District includes a small area of the old district of Sylhet which was merged with East Pakistan in 1947 as a result of partition of India. This area now forms a new sub-division, viz. Karimganj.

3. Under the Constitution of India, the hill districts have been declared as tribal areas within the State of Assam and the administration of these areas is governed by the provisions of its Sixth Schedule. The hill districts are called 'autonomous districts' inasmuch as provision has been made for the exercise of autonomy by the tribal people in certain specified matters—executive, legislative and financial. The District Councils were given the power to handle laws in respect of different matters *inter alia* the following: (a) the administration of land, (b) the use of canal or watercourse for the purpose of agriculture, and (c) the regulation and practice of *jhum* (shifting cultivation). No Act of the State Legislature in respect of matters falling within the purview of the District Councils can apply to the autonomous districts unless the District Councils so direct by public notification.

and Jaintia Hills, United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and Mizo Hills.

Assam is predominantly an agricultural State. Its geographical conditions are favourable for agriculture. The State is within the easy reach of monsoons. Average rainfall of the State is normally between 100" and 110" though it varies from place to place between 75" and 500". The climate is characterized by coolness and humidity. The hills get bitter cold during winter; the valleys get hot summer. Soil in the plains is mostly alluvial and only in places it is sandy loam. In the hills soil is either laterite or red loam. The soil and climatic conditions in most of the areas are ideal for the raising of a variety of crops.

2. Area and Population

The area of Assam is 47,091 square miles — 24,414 square miles in the Plains Division and 22,677 square miles in the Hills Division. In 1961, the population of the State was 11,872,772. Table 1.1, based on the 1961 Census figures, shows the distribution and density of population by districts.

The density of population in Assam in 1961 was 252 persons per square mile compared to the all-India average of 373 persons. The distribution of population, however, is not uniform in the plains and hills of Assam. According to 1961 Census the population densities in the Plains Division and Hills Division were 432 and 58 respectively. All the districts of the Plains Division, except Lakhimpur, had much higher density than the all-India average.

The growth of population in Assam during the decade 1951-61 was the highest among the States of India. During this decade Assam recorded an increase of 34.45 per cent compared to 32.79 per cent in West Bengal, 19.78 per cent in Bihar, 19.82 per cent in Orissa and the all-India average of 21.50 per cent. Over the past fifty years, the increase of population in Assam was 174.00 per cent. This phenomenal increase in the growth of population is due not only to natural growth, but also, in considerable measure,

TABLE I. I. Distribution of Area and Population by Districts.

State/Divisions/Districts	Area* (in sq. miles)	Population (in lakhs)			Rate of population growth 1951-61 (in per cent)	Density per sq. mile	
		Total	Rural	Urban		1951	1961
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
ASSAM	47,091	118.73	109.60	9.13	34.45	188	252
Assam Plains:	24,414	105.58	97.79	7.77	34.43	322	432
Goalpara	4,007	15.44	14.42	1.02	39.32	278	385
Kamrup	3,804	20.63	18.43	2.19	38.39	392	542
Darrang	3,369	12.90	12.39	0.50	39.64	274	383
Nowgong	2,167	12.11	11.30	0.81	36.51	409	559
Sibsagar	3,433	15.08	14.32	0.77	24.43	351	437
Lakhimpur	4,926	15.64	14.12	1.51	38.85	229	317
Cachar	2,688	13.78	12.82	0.97	23.53	415	513
Assam Hills:	22,677	13.15	11.79	1.35	36.00	43	58
Garo Hills	3,119	3.07	2.98	.09	26.91	77	99
United Khasi & Jaintia Hills } United Mikir & North } Cachar Hills } Mizo Hills }	5,546	4.62	3.53	1.09	27.10	66	83
	5,878	2.80	2.76	.03	69.08	28	48
	8,134	2.66	2.52	.14	35.61	24	33

* Area figures as furnished by the Surveyor General of India.

SOURCE : Census of India 1961, Vol. I, Part II A (1).

to migration of people from other States, and influx of refugees and illegal infiltrants from East Pakistan.⁵ The existence of reverine and cultivable lands and deficiency of local labour accounted for a steady inflow of migrants from other parts of India (including the areas of present East Pakistan).⁶

The population of Assam is overwhelmingly rural. About 92.3 per cent of the people live in rural areas in comparison to 82 per cent in India as a whole. Thus, the burden of demographic pressure on the rural economy of Assam is much heavier and the pace of urbanization is very slow.

3. Land Utilisation

The total area for which land utilisation statistics are

4. Since partition of India in 1947, there has been a regular inflow of refugees due to lack of adequate security for life and property of the minority communities and frequent communal disturbances in East Pakistan. At the end of 1957 the number of refugees in Assam was 4,87,000. (Source: **India 1958**, p. 152.). Since then, the number increased considerably. About 1.8 lakh refugees entered Assam in 1964 due to communal disturbances in East Pakistan. (Source: **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, April 4, 1965).

5. The number of Pakistani nationals, who were staying in the State illegally was estimated at 2.5 to 3 lakhs according to the Annual Report of the Home Ministry, Government of India. (Source: **The Amrita Bazar Patrika**, March 18, 1963). The figure seems to be an under-estimation.

6. The immigration into Assam has been from the following areas: (1) from Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh as labourers for tea gardens, and (2) from East Bengal (now East Pakistan) as settlers on agricultural land.

According to 1951 Census, the immigrant tea garden labourers form about 12 per cent of the total population of Assam. A considerable number of ex-tea garden labourers are settled on agricultural land in Upper Assam.

The virgin and fertile soil of Assam has attracted a large number of immigrants from East Bengal (now East Pakistan) during the last 50 years. The number of the immigrant farm settlers is over one million, of which about 85 per cent are Muslims. The pro-Muslim League policy of the Government of Assam from 1926 to 1944 (with a break of one year in 1939) encouraged the new settlers. The Government took the responsibility to settle the Muslim immigrants in a planned way in the selected areas. (Ref. Goswami, P.C., **Economic Development of Assam**, pp. 22-30).

TABLE 1.2. Total Area and Classification of Area in Assam 1957-58

(Figures in Acres)

Districts/State	Area according to Surveyor General of India	CLASSIFICATION OF AREA									
		Not available for cultivation			Other Uncultivated Land Excluding fallow Land				Fallow Land		
		Land put to non-agricultural use	Barren and unculturable land	Permanent pasture & grazing land	Land under misc. tree crops & grooves not included in net area sown	Culturable waste	Fallow land other than current fallow	Current fallow	Net Area Sown		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Cachar	1,719,680	605,746	115,600	211,700	18,000	82,900	N. R.	126,411	75,340	464,651	
Goalpara	2,549,120	517,686	180,690	934,780	83,200	53,500	"	87,650	48,130	610,611	
Kamrup	2,455,680	1,088,254	110,360	50,690	22,980	13,900	"	34,670	41,650	1,076,118	
Darrang	2,151,040	405,045	332,500	160,350	92,730	42,700	"	96,900	37,900	767,029	
Nowgong	1,386,880	274,277	120,350	90,350	19,530	18,490	"	23,500	22,750	598,420	
Sibsagar	2,211,840	710,139	240,520	79,960	100,020	135,200	"	98,490	90,650	739,998	
Lakhimpur	3,153,280	1,131,000	639,230	289,560	73,500	120,850	"	99,370	75,966	587,278	
United K & J Hills	3,549,440	170,665	N. R.	N. R.	N. R.	N. R.	"	N. R.	N. R.	122,248	
Garo Hills	2,015,360	92,383	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	177,319	
United Mikir & N.C. Hills	3,772,800	1,010,525	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	95,441	
Mizo Hills	5,205,760	4,984,920	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	116,430	
Total	30,170,880	10,990,640	1,739,250	1,817,390	409,969	467,540	"	566,901	392,326	5,355,543	

N.R.—Not Reported.

SOURCE: Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam. *Statistical Abstract of Assam, 1960-61.*

available is 3,01,70,880 acres. Table 1.2 shows the details of land utilisation in Assam for 1957-58. It can be seen from the table that the proportion of net cultivated area to the total area is very low (17.75 per cent). In 1956-57, the percentage of net cultivated area to total area in Assam was 17.65 compared to 44.63 in Bihar, 36.00 in Orissa, 59.00 in West Bengal and 40.00 for all-India average.⁷ Since then cultivated area in Assam increased very slowly. The net area sown in 1961-62 was about 5.52 million acres (only 18.29 per cent of the total area). The scope for extension of cultivation in Assam is very limited owing to the dearth of culturable waste land and higher cost of reclamation of waste land. The area of culturable waste land in the State has been estimated to be 65,360 acres of which 33,640 acres are within the tribal belts and 31,720 acres are outside the tribal belts.⁸ It is, however, possible to bring a large part of the fallows, long and current, under cultivation at a little cost and with some effort.

In 1958-59 the 'area sown more than once' in Assam was about 17 per cent of the net area sown compared to 16 per cent in West Bengal, 39 per cent in Bihar, 8 per cent in Orissa (1954-55) and 15 per cent for all-India.⁹ It is certain that the double cropped area in Assam can be increased by ensuring irrigation facilities.

The total net irrigated area in Assam in 1957-58 was 1.3 million acres. The percentage of net irrigated area to net area sown in 1957-58 was 24.5 in Assam compared to 25.8 in West Bengal (1958-59), 25.9 in Bihar, 13.7 in Orissa (1954-55) and 18.0 for all-India average.¹⁰ Assam

7. Central Statistical Organisation, Government of India, *Statistical Abstract of the Indian Union, 1961*, p. 28.

8. The figures were furnished by the Revenue Minister of Assam in the Assam Legislative Assembly. (Source: *The Hindustan Standard*, March 31, 1962). 'Tribal Belts' have been formed in the backward tribal areas of the plains districts. The right of transfer of land in these areas has been restricted to persons belonging to the backward classes.

9. Central Statistical Organisation, Government of India, *Statistical Abstract of the Indian Union, 1962*, p. 48.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

is endowed with two big rivers and their tributaries, and many streams. The Brahmaputra and Barak, with their tributaries, drain the heart of the plains districts of the State. There is, thus, abundant scope for the extension of irrigated area.

In order to get a fuller idea about the use of cultivated area, it is necessary to look into the allocation of land to the cultivation of various crops. The main agricultural products of Assam are rice, maize, jute, rape and mustard, sugarcane and potato. The acreage under rice is about 70 per cent of the total cultivated area. Jute comes next to rice and accounts for 6 per cent of the cultivated area. Oilseeds stand third in acreage, occupying 5.5 per cent of the total cultivated area. Maize grows well in Assam, but owing to lack of demand the crop is not extensively grown. The allocation of area under jute, sugarcane, mustard and potato is greatly influenced by market prospect.

People in the hill districts practise shifting cultivation. Farming techniques are being improved gradually for stabilised farming and soil conservation.

4. Pressure of Population on Land

The pressure of population in Assam, as in other States of our developing country, is pressure on the agricultural land. In 1951 the percentage of agricultural population to total population in Assam was 73.3 (excluding tea garden population) compared to 69.9 for all-India average. The classification of workers by broad industrial categories of 1961 Census shows that persons engaged in agriculture, cultivators and agricultural labourers, constitute 68.34 per cent of the total working population in the State. The agricultural workers in the State were 29.57 per cent out of the total working population of 43.27 per cent compared to the all-India average of 29.87 per cent out of 42.98 per cent.¹¹

The pressure of population on land in Assam can be well understood from the fact that the per capita net area

11. Census of India 1961, Vol. I, Part II-A (ii), p. LXII.

sown declined from 0.61 acre in 1950-51 to 0.46 acre in 1960-61. During the decade 1951-61, the area under food crops increased by only 10.60 per cent,¹² while the population increased by 34.45 per cent. As a result the food requirements are outpacing local production and the gap is steadily widening. The following table (No. 1.3) shows the per capita availability of net area sown and area under food crops in the different districts of Assam.

TABLE 1.3. Per Capita Availability of Net Area Sown and Area under Food Crops, 1961

<i>Districts/State</i>	<i>Per capita net area sown (acre)</i>	<i>Per capita area under food crops (acre)</i>
Goalpara	.40	.44
Kamrup	.52	.51
Darrang	.59	.46
Nowgong	.49	.46
Sibsagar	.49	.40
Lakhimpur	.38	.30
Cachar	.34	.37
Garo Hills	.58	.46
United Khasi and Jaintia Hills	.26	.18
United Mikir and North Cachar Hills	.34	.33
Mizo Hills	.44	.46
ASSAM	.46	.41

SOURCE : Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, *Statistical Abstract of Assam, 1960-61*, and *Economic Survey—Assam 1964*.

Among all the States Assam's position is fifth in respect of density of population per 100 acres of net area sown.¹³ of density per 100 acres of area under food crops in Assam is the highest among the eastern States of India. The following table (No. 1.4) shows the density per 100 acres of net area sown and area under food crops in Assam as compared to that of other States of eastern India and the all-India average.

12. Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, *Economic Survey—Assam 1964*, p. 3.

13. In respect of density of population per 100 acres of net area sown, Assam comes only next to Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar and Madras.

TABLE 1.4. Density per 100 Acres of Net Area Sown and Area Under Food Crops in Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and all-India

<i>States/India</i>	<i>Density per 100 acres of net area sown</i>	<i>Density per 100 acres of area under food crops</i>
Assam	232*	267
West Bengal	270	264
Bihar	236	193
Orissa	127	144
India	135	156

* Area figures relate to the year 1953-54.

SOURCE : *Census of India 1961, Paper No. 1 of 1962, Appendix III.*

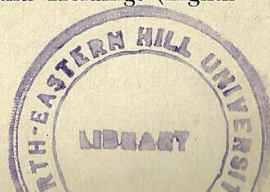
Owing to the slow pace of industrial development in Assam,¹⁴ the rapidly increasing population had to remain in the villages, thus causing over-crowding, which reacted on the agrarian structure of the State and led to the excessive splitting up of the peasants' properties. The pressure of population on land greatly reduced the size of land holdings, in many cases, below economic level. The average size of agricultural operational holdings has gone down from 5.42 acres in 1953-54¹⁵ to 4.13 acres in 1960-61.¹⁶ The extent of land hunger in the State can be understood from the fact that in 1953-54 41.57 per cent of the households had either no land or land less than 0.005 acre.¹⁷ The excess demand for land over its limited supply created the problem of rack-renting as a result of which the actual tillers of the soil do not get a reasonable return for their labour. Thus, the pressure of population on land is a serious obstacle to the improvement of agricultural efficiency as well as of economic condition of the rural population.

14. According to 1961 Census, less than 2 per cent of the total working population in Assam was employed in manufacturing industries.

15. National Sample Survey Report on Land Holdings (Eighth Round), No. 66, p. 60.

16. National Sample Survey Report on Land Holdings (Sixteenth Round). Quoted from B. R. Kalra's article 'Regional Variations in Policy Regarding Size of Agricultural Holdings', *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, April-June, 1965, p. 34.

17. National Sample Survey Report on Land Holdings (Eighth Round), No. 66, p. 4.



CONCLUSION

In the foregoing Chapters a comprehensive and systematic study has been made regarding the land problems, land reform measures, and the effects of land reforms on the rural economy of Assam. It has been observed that there are many shortcomings in the legislation, and the implementation and enforcement are, in most cases, slow and ineffective. Legislation was enacted without creating the proper atmosphere, studying the likely impact and strengthening adequately the revenue administration. The preparation of up-to-date record-of-rights did not receive the priority it deserved. The defective legislation and its ineffective implementation led to the frustration and disappointment of the small holders, share-croppers and landless people on the one hand, and enabled the well-to-do section to evade law, on the other. A large section of the villagers are still ignorant about the reform measures and the benefits flowing from them. As a result there is lack of the needed local support for implementation and enforcement of law and the reactions of the villagers towards the land reform measures are, in many cases, not as was expected. Thus, the impact of land reforms has fallen far short of expectations.

We have discussed in the preceding Chapters the need for and the possibility of improving the land reform legislation with a view to plugging the loop-holes and removing the shortcomings. But even an ideal legislation is likely to remain a dead letter if it is not effectively implemented and enforced. All necessary steps should be taken for effective implementation and enforcement of the legislative measures within a reasonable time and along a desirable line.

The existing revenue administration is over-burdened with multifarious functions and incapable of expediting the

implementation of land reforms. In view of this, a separate administrative machinery should be set up for the implementation of land reform legislation. Of course this will have to work in active co-operation and collaboration with the revenue administration. After the implementation is over, a part of it may be merged with the revenue administration for keeping vigilance and careful watch over the working of the legislation and tackling future problems relating to land reforms. The remaining part may be merged with the farm management wing, which should be created under the Agriculture Department, for co-ordinating the programmes of farm reorganisation and agricultural production planning.

Land reform measures should be taken by the State Government more enthusiastically and in all seriousness for successful implementation within the shortest possible time. It is to be realised that delay in implementation gives scope for evasion, creates feeling of uncertainty and retards agricultural development. More emphasis should be laid on the preparation and maintenance of an up-to-date record-of-rights which is an essential preliminary to the effective enforcement of legal provisions. The Assam Adhiars Protection and Regulation Act demands more effective implementation so that it can assure the **adhiars** that they will be required to pay only the statutory rent and their rights regarding minimum holdings will be protected. The remaining intermediary rights should be abolished with the least delay and final settlement of land with the tenants should be completed as speedily as possible. The lands found surplus under ceiling legislation, available waste lands and surplus lands in tea gardens should be distributed in a planned way with a view to increasing the size of the maximum number of uneconomic holdings, releasing more land for cultivation and providing landless households with house-sites.

A well-planned educative propaganda, with audio-visual aids, should be launched jointly by the Publicity Department, Community Development Organisation and the proposed administrative machinery for land reforms in order to remove the lack of knowledge among the villagers regarding the

benefits flowing from land reforms and to make them conscious about their rights and responsibilities. All the land reform Acts should be translated in the local languages in simple terms and these should be distributed free of cost among the villagers. Complaints of corruption and harassment against the officials should be invited from the aggrieved persons and these should be looked into by a special Department like the 'Flying Squad' in Punjab.¹ This will have a salutary effect on the villagers from the psychological point of view. The success of implementation of the land reforms depends greatly on the integrity and sincerity of the Government Officials on the one hand, and active support of the village community on the other.

As a supplementary measure adequate financial provisions should be made for the credit requirements of the intended beneficiaries of land reforms. Now the village community will need credit not only for the purposes for which they used to borrow in the past but also for securing the benefit of the land reform measures. The farmers will require money for purchasing land available for redistribution and meeting the expenses of consolidation of holdings. Thus, in the coming years there will be greater need for credit in the rural areas.²

It is high time for the State Government to give land reform measures the importance they deserve and to implement them in right earnest. We have sufficient reason to believe that the land reform legislation, if suitably improved in the light of our suggestions and implemented within the shortest possible time through a well organised and separate administrative machinery, will strengthen the structure of

1. See Chapter VI.

2. At present the institutional credit facilities in the rural areas are either absent or inadequate. The All-India Rural Credit Survey (1951-52) revealed that in Assam the proportions of credit from Government agencies and co-operative credit to the total borrowings were 6.2 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively. In the villages surveyed by the author, the co-operative banks have been found to play an insignificant role in the supply of credit. The absence of cheap and adequate institutional credit facilities forces the peasants into the clutches of money-lenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest.

the agrarian economy and this in its turn will increase agricultural efficiency, reduce greatly exploitation in society and improve considerably the economic condition of the masses. But if the Government proceeds half-heartedly and slowly with the reform measures, as they are doing now, the tension in the rural areas will be intensified to the benefit of none, the present low level of agricultural efficiency will continue, exploitation of the have-nots will go on unabated, possibility of redistribution of land will be foiled and the idea of establishing an egalitarian society will look somewhat like a hoax. In short, the purpose of land reforms will be defeated if timely action is not taken to modify suitably the land reform legislation and to implement and enforce the reform measures effectively.

Successful implementation of the land reform measures is a *sine qua non* of a prosperous agricultural economy. A sound agrarian economy can be ushered in through scientific farm management, provision for cheap credit and judicious price policy, only after necessary ground is prepared by implementing fully the programmes of land reform. So, the State Government should give top priority to removing the shortcomings in the legislation, educating the masses regarding the benefits flowing from them and fully implementing the land reform programmes. A vigorous, enthusiastic, sympathetic and at the same time realistic approach is necessary to rouse the rural people from their slumber and inertia, and to release the rural productive forces to rebuild a new and prosperous rural Assam.