2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rabindranath Tagore wrote the following lines on March 22, 1916, in his article, titled ‘Palli Prakriti’, “This is the very soil of our village, our mother, our nurse, in whose lap our country is being born every day. The mindset of our educated has been afloat maintaining a distance from this soil up in the firmament of lofty ideals – Our union with this soil will be complete and justified only with the down pour of the rain.”

Our plans were aimed ab initio (from the beginning) at implicating the idea of the economic development of the rural masses because our country is elementarily rural. But the plan-formulators did not have much affinity with either soil or her sons as well. Moreover, they represented the class of society, which did not hesitate to rob nature and the inhabitants of our country of resources for the purpose of appeasing their own apetite for self-gratification, who gained most out of the darkness underneath the lamp. So the plans were made ostentatious generosity, which ultimately trickled down to the real needy in microscopic proportions through multilayered intermediaries. It was for this reason that the Tebhaga act enforcing due rights for the bargadars and share croppers was passed after a long-drawn struggle for its attainment. A country-wide agitation ensued to ensure the enforcement of the act, many a plot of land was irrigated with blood of peasants and land-labourers.

The most unfortunate part was that it was not possible for an illiterate tiller of land to know about the right of the land and legislative support. A few right-thinking people, however, took up the responsibility and initiative of educating peasants by imparting them valuable in information about their well-being braving the stiff resistance and oppression, rained by landlords.

The Tebhaga and Naxalbari Movements in the decades of ‘40s and ‘60s are the worth mentioning in the history of Agriculture in Bengal. The constant influx of the refugees from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal after independence exerted an extreme pressure on food production by a constantly increasing demand for food. This pressure produced a deep impact on the agriculture and agricultural system in West Bengal. The land reform programmes, the expansion of irrigation system, the use of high
yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural credit to farmers, etc. have changed the total agricultural system radically in West Bengal.

Having briefed the state of land relations in West Bengal, I now propose to state the objectives of my research and to examine the changes which have occurred in the agricultural systems and its impact on rural society during the Left Front regime. It is to be investigated with special reference to the present living standard of Landless Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal.

To accomplish this objective, I propose to answer the following research questions:-

i) How far has the Left Front Government’s policy on distributing vested land to the landless, improved their socio-economic position?

ii) How far has Operation Barga improved the socio-economic position of the bargadars?

iii) What is the role of Panchayats in distributing of vested land and other activities to the poor peasants in West Bengal?

iv) What was the impact of Green Revolution on agriculture like use of High Yielding Seeds, Extension of Irrigation system, Use of Fertilizers, Institutional Credit to the poor peasants etc. in West Bengal?

v) How far has the Left Front Government’s agrarian policies enabled the peasants to resist globalization?

vi) Did the Left Front’s agrarian policies significantly alter the power structure of the rural areas in favour of the lower peasants’ classes?

vii) Are the previous ruling classes in rural Bengal fighting back to recover their authority or have they compromised with the new establishment by joining its organizations like Kisan Sabha?