

BOOK REVIEWS

BALJIT SINGH & SHRIDHAR MISRA, *A Study of Land Reforms in Uttar Pradesh*, Calcutta, Oxford Book Company, 1964, xxii+266 pp.

Twenty years have already passed since India attained political independence, but, as at that time, agricultural problems are still among the most important of the problems which India is facing. The land reform which was carried out in the 1950s was an event of the first importance not only for the agriculture of India in the post-independence period, but also for the Indian economy as a whole. However, Indian land reform is not a mere event in the past. It is a task for the present day, at a time when demands are continually being made for a solution to be found to the food crisis which at present is in process of becoming a serious political problem.

Now while it appears that on the one hand in spite of differences of attitude and emphasis there is over-all agreement as far as the evaluation of the land reform and its limitations is concerned (as shown, for example, typically in the papers by P. C. Joshi, S. C. Gupta, G. Parthasarathy, M. L. Dantwala, Bowani Sen in the October, 1962 issue of *Seminar*), on the other hand there are fairly wide divergences of opinion regarding the interconnexions between land reform and agricultural questions, and regarding the future course of development of Indian agriculture. We may say such a state of affairs constitutes a problem in studies of land reform in India. One of the reasons for the appearance of such a problem is to be found in the fact that evaluations of the land reform were carried out principally by examination of the provisions of the land reform acts, and they were supplemented by examination of fragmentary factual materials. A second reason is to be found in the fact that concrete source-material which would make possible a dynamic analysis of post-reform Indian agriculture in full perspective has been lacking.

Under these present conditions of study, as well as in the light of the fact that India possesses an extensive territory of considerable diversity, so that there are marked differences in land tenure from region to region and as a result of land administration being in the hands of the Provincial administrations the content of land reform differs greatly from Province to Province, the intensive surveys and studies of a Province or region which have been appearing recently must surely have a great significance for future studies, even granting that they put forward nothing specially new regarding the evaluation of the land reform itself.

If one is to attempt from a new angle the kind of comprehensive study of land reform which H.D. Malaviya carried out immediately after the first land reform, the work under review will certainly be one of those which will have to be read, along with, first of all, the works of A. M. Khusro, V. M. Dandekar & G. J. Khundanpur, and the works of R. R. Misra, B. Sarveswara

Rao, S. K. Basu, Dool Singh, and others,* the *Farm Management Surveys* covering a series of Provinces.

One of the authors of this work, Professor B. Singh, is Head of the Department of Economics of Lucknow University, and is known to us in Japan through his earlier work, *Next Step in Village India*, Bombay, 1961. The book is compiled from the results of A Survey of the Economic and Social Effects of Land Reforms in Uttar Pradesh commissioned by the Research Programmes Committee of the Indian Planning Commission, and, as is shown by the fact that somewhat more than a third of the total number of pages is devoted to Appendices consisting of Tables of various kinds, the work is a report of on-the-ground surveys and is mainly concerned with the presentation of factual data. The field surveys were carried out from the summer of 1960 into the following spring covering practically the whole area of Uttar Pradesh, and intensive sample surveys were carried out on 765 households.

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the Indian land reform is its continuity over a markedly long period. We must regard the whole of the period extending from the beginning of the 1950s to the present day as constituting the process of implementation of land reform. This has been due not merely to the fact that a long time was required in passing the land reform act and carrying it into effect, but also to the fact that the land reform has been supplemented by a succession of new acts passed since it began. Consequently, land reform in India means a process of long-term change in land tenure, and land reform is still being carried forward in the form of the enforcement of a ceiling for existing land holdings. In the present work comparisons of the land tenure and others are principally made between two periods; namely, before the implementation of the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1952 (the period 1948-1950) and after it (the period 1957-1959), and since this is so the work might be more accurately entitled "A Study of the Socio-Economic Effects of the Implementation of the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1952."

The book consists of three Sections. Section I contains an account of "the land system, cultivators' holdings and land use before zamindari abolition," as well as of "the origin, scope and method of this survey." In Section II the "legislative measures, administrative machinery, extent and cost of zamindari abolition" are taken up, and in Section III comparisons of conditions of before and after the land reform are made from a number of angles.

In dealing with such questions as land tenure, land utilization and others, the authors look into differences among types of landholder, regions, castes, and communities. Now, in making regional comparisons, the author divides

* A.M. Khusro, *Economic and Social Effects of Jagir Abolition and Land Reforms in Hyderabad*, Hyderabad, 1958; V. M. Dandekar & G. J. Khundanpur, *Investigation into the Working of the Bombay Tenancy Act 1948*, Poona, 1957; R. R. Misra, *Effects of Land Reforms in Saurashtra*, Bombay, 1961; B. Sarveswara Rao, *The Economic and Social Effects of Zamindari Abolition in Andhra*, Delhi, 1963; S. K. Basu, *Land Reforms in West Bengal*, Calcutta 1693; Dool Singh, *A Study of Land Reforms in Rajasthan*, Pilani, 1964.

Uttar Pradesh into Eastern, Central, and Western Regions, but would it not be more appropriate to divide the Province according to differences in land tenure when attempting to make clear the socio-economic effects of changes in the land system? For example, we feel that in the Western Region at least he should have divided the Region into the area formerly belonging to the state of Oudh and the area formerly belonging to the North-Western Provinces.

As is well known, Uttar Pradesh, along with West Bengal and Bihar, is a typical zamindari area, but it is distinguished from the other two Provinces by the fact that it has a notably large number of medium and small zamindars. As is pointed out in the *Report of the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Committee*, 1948, the zamindars are divided into landlord zamindars and peasant zamindars, more or less according to size of land-holding, and it has been held that the latter are basically cultivators and not rent-receivers. The sample surveys published in the work under review show that of the zamindari households before the land reform 61.4% were peasant zamindars, and that there were zamindars, although only very few, who had practically no land at all and who were agricultural labourers or members of the scheduled castes. It excites our interest to know what influence was exercised on land reform in Uttar Pradesh by these peculiarities in the system of land ownership, but the book does not provide any direct answer to this question. From the nature of the work we may suppose that the task of elucidating this question is to be left to the reader.

The authors reveal many interesting facts, such as that in practice it is difficult to distinguish between cultivation by means of hired labour and cultivation by share-cropping, and "some share-cropping is concealed under the category of cultivation through hired and outside labour," or again regarding the land transfers which have taken place in the nine years since the land reform, but on a number of points one feels that the question at issue has not been sufficiently elucidated. For example, in Section II the authors say that the reason for the fewness of the cases of purchase of bhumidari tenure is that there is not a very strong incentive to acquire bhumidari tenure, but in Section II they say that the acquisition of bhumidari tenure is due to social and political reasons, rather than economic reasons. Again, in the interview surveys 73.8% replied that they could not acquire bhumidari tenure because of the lack of the necessary funds. Hereupon the authors remark as follows: "If the cultivators had had ample funds it is clear that more of them would have acquired bhumidari tenure." This explanation strikes us as particularly unsatisfactory. Might not the situation have been made clearer if the authors had surveyed for the reason with reference to size of holdings? Again, it is established that on the land utilization side there was an increase in the cultivated area after the land reform and the area devoted to commercial crops underwent a marked expansion, but one regrets that the authors did not look into this matter with reference to size of holding, or with reference to bhumidar, sirdar, and asami tenure.

In the words of H. D. Malaviya, Uttar Pradesh has been "the cradle of the Indian peasant movement and the storm centre of India's fight for freedom ever since the 1857 War of Independence.... Again, it was the U. P. provincial unit of the Indian National Congress which first raised the demand for the abolition of the zamindari system and other far-reaching agrarian reforms.... Its land reform legislations, as also its scheme for the restoration of the ancient glory of India's *Gram Panchayats*, have served as models for subsequent identical legislation of other states." But today, now that the land reform is past, there remains no sign of the former glories of the peasant movement in Uttar Pradesh. May this be because the land question and the agriculture question have now been entirely solved? The facts revealed in the many studies which have been published to date deny this. For example, Daniel Thorner, in his book *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, Delhi, 1956, says: "In sum, the Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition Act has provided for a new hierarchy of tenure-holders in place of the old ones; but the two are all too recognizably similar." On the other hand, however, the work under review informs us that while more than 90% of total agricultural land had been tenant land of various kinds, after the land reform sample surveys show that the area of cultivated land actually lended out to tenants, including land cultivated in tenancy in the form of share-cropping, amounts to no more than 10.5% of the total area of cultivated land. Furthermore, among these tenants were included some members of the upper stratum of the peasantry who were enlarging the size of their holdings by borrowing land under the share-cropping system. And may we not say, as Daniel Thorner recognizes, that although the sirdar's rents may be unchanged, the fact that these rents are levied by the government and not by zamindars is a change which has an important significance for the mechanisms of rule in the village?

B. Singh, the author of the work under review, pointed out in Chapter 3 and at the end of Chapter 4 in his previous book, *Next Step in Village India*, that former zamindars, rich peasants and others were combining in opposition to poor peasants of the lower castes, agricultural labourers and others, and that the contradictions and opposition between these two groups were becoming more intense. Walter C. Neale also draws attention to such a state of affairs in his *Economic Change in Rural India, Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh, 1800-1955*, New Haven and London, 1962.

While hoping that surveys and studies such as the work under review will be produced in future in regard to the period from 1959, we look forward to comparisons and examinations of the studies published hitherto being made on the basis of the facts revealed in this book. (*Masanori Koga*)