

Land Market and Landlordism in the Dacca Division at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

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This paper seeks to throw a new light on the dynamics of the landlordism of the Dacca division in eastern Bengal during the period from 1880 to around 1910 by making a methodological as well as detailed study of various aspects of land transfer.

In Bengal, where a very intricate tenurial structure flourished under the Cornwallis system, the land market naturally comprises varied transactions in widely different landed interests. The author, therefore, feels it essential for making a meaningful analysis of the land market to divide it into two segments: landlords' and peasants' markets. The former is composed of perpetual leases and the mortgages and sales of zamindari and intermediate landed interests, while the latter consists of the mortgages and sales of both ryoti holdings with right of occupancy and at fixed rate of rent. The landlords' market is indicative of mobility in the pyramidal structure of the so-called zamindari system, the peasants' market reflecting changes at the base of rural economy.

There is observable a sharp contrast between the behaviour of these two land markets. The landlords' market shows a clear tendency to stagnate or even to decline, with a single exception of mortgages which increased rather rapidly. This is construed as an indication of the relative stability of the zamindari system at the turn of the century. On the other hand, the peasants' market kept on expanding by leaps and bounds throughout our period. The number of sales of ryoti holdings with right of occupancy increased about five times from 7,917 of 1885-86 to 37,219 of 1904. The aggregate area transferred by such sales during

22 years from 1882-83 to 1903 is estimated at about 30 per cent of the total cultivated area. The sale price per bigha shot up from Rs. 10 in the 1880's to Rs. 30 in the 1900's. This vigorous expansion of the peasants' market inevitably resulted in a rapid stratification of ryots, which in turn led to the emergence of the notorious *barga* system.

The development of the *barga* system since the end of the nineteenth century should be regarded neither as a mere addition of one more layer to the already congested tenurial structure of the zamindari system nor as a simple expansion of the traditional *barga* system which had been adopted in landlords' *khas* lands since the eighteenth century. The new *barga* system must be qualitatively distinguished from both of these in that it came into being as the result of radical changes in economic condition of the actual cultivators, the most important feature of which is the above-mentioned stratification of ryots through land transfer. It is a new type of landlordism different from the so-called zamindari system. It is suggested in this paper that the new *barga* system is comparable to *kisei jinushi-sei*, or parasitic landlordism, in the specific sense of the term which is widely accepted among Japanese historians and social scientists.

Landlordism in the Dacca division at the turn of the century, thus, came to have a dual structure, in which the old stagnant zamindari system coexisted with the new *barga* system, or parasitic landlordism, emerging from below. Researches done so far on landlordism of modern Bengal seem to have underestimated the importance of this structural change.