

BOOK REVIEW

*'TENSIONS IN RURAL BENGAL: LANDLORDS,
PLANTERS AND COLONIAL RULE'
BY CHITTABRATA PALIT*

Sukumar Barai ¹✉**Article Ref. No.:**

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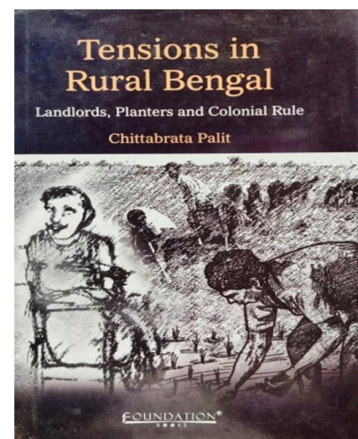
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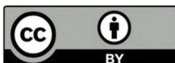
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The book entitled as 'Tensions in Rural Bengal: Landlords, Planters and Colonial Rule', written by *Chittabrata Palit*, has the objectives to address many types of tensions in colonial rural Bengal. This book has seven chapters namely (1) Landlords after Permanent Settlement, (2) Land resumption and landlord resistance, (3) Justice and police in the interior and the conflict over local authority, (4) Landlords and planters: the uneasy collaboration (1850-1860), (5) Landlords and planters: the growing confrontation (1850-1860), (6) Resistance to rent control: the genesis of Act X of 1859 and its aftermath



¹[First Author] ✉[Corresponding Author] Associate Professor, Department of History, Dr. Meghnad Saha College, Itahar, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, INDIA. Email: baraisukumar5@gmail.com



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and (7) Conclusion. It also contains a glossary, bibliography, two appendixes and an index. Contents portion has a preface, some abbreviations and an introduction phase. In this book, author has described various tensions in rural Bengal which were closely associated with landlords, planters and colonial rule.

In its seven chapters, the book has dealt with the clash between two alien systems of political economy – indigenous and metropolitan. The colonial rule tried to tailor the former to meet the metropolitan demands through certain revenue measures, viz Permanent Settlement of revenue, resumption of rent-free tenures and introduction of indigo plantation system and rent acts to protect the rich peasants. Actually Permanent Settlement was a revival of feudalism and was inimical to capitalist transformation. This book is a comprehensive study of the period of agrarian changes in colonial Bengal. It deals with an era that witnessed the first conflict between two alien systems of political economy. In this book author has expressed his views that the British rule wanted to monetise and commercialise the more or less subsistence economy by various agencies of improvement and of course by linking it to the international market. But its revenue system, administrative policies, the introduction of indigo planters and tenancy laws failed to transform the agrarian economy through the agency of landlords, planters and rich peasants. This was due to the colonial policy of maximising profits with minimum administration.

The book argues that many colonial measures rendered agriculture in Bengal as semi-capitalist. The petite economy was capitalistically exploited without providing proper infrastructure and inputs. It resulted in rural tensions of high magnitude – the protest of old landlords, fight over survey for resumption. It illustrates how the contrived policy of converting a dainty economy into the capitalist mode of production which ultimately died down to a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist equilibrium. Since then it has been caught in the throes of an unfinished transformation. In this way, several experiments were undertaken by the British rulers – Permanent settlement of revenue with a landlord class, resumption of rent-free tenures, introduction of indigo planters into the hinterland, regulation of rent and tenancy rights, but all these only led up to agricultural contortions. Though the book discusses the impact of the British rule on the Bengal agrarian society but it lacks theory as the class struggle between landlords and peasants has not been clearly demonstrated.