The possible effects of the abolition of the zamindari system on the rural economy and rural welfare require to be examined carefully. An attempt will be made below to assess the probable effects among others, on the following: (i) agricultural production and distribution, (ii) wage of the agricultural labourer, (iii) rents of the cultivating tenants, (iv) employment in rural area, (v) conferment of new rights on the cultivating tenants or labourers, (vi) rural welfare, etc.

At the outset, we should lay stress on the fact that the abolition of the zamindari system is not tantamount to nationalisation of land or other gifts of nature. The purpose of the abolition is not what was intended to bring about by buying out the English landlords in Ireland under the Land Purchase Acts passed by the British Parliament. As our moves for reforms in general appear to be guided by considerations of what was thought to be desirable in the Western countries, especially in U.K. we may perhaps describe here briefly the land system that obtained in England and the agrarian conditions prevailing under the zamindars in the permanently or temporarily settled estates in what were formerly provinces of British India.

In England vast areas belonged to big landlords and the area owned by small free-holders was insignificant in comparison. The areas held by peasant proprietors were like mere islets in an ocean. The landlords let out their lands in farms to farmers who held the farms for a stipulated period at a rental agreed upon. The rights and obligations as between the landlord and the tenant were governed by the lease under which the farmer held the land. The farmer had no permanent right in the lands held by him and after the expiry of the period of his lease, his tenancy was terminated. Landlords invested capital for the improvement of the farms and tenants got the benefit, at least a portion of the benefits, of the improvements resulting from the capital outlay of the landlords. The position was that the tenants had no permanent right in the lands held from the landlords, and the period for which the tenancy would last as well as the rent at which it was held was a matter of contract between the landlord and the tenant. On the other hand, the landlord spends money for the improvement of his land and the benefits of the improvement effected at the landlord's investments, accrued at least partly, to the tenant.

In the provinces of India (now Class 'A' States) where the permanent settlement is in vogue, the zamindars hold the land as proprietors subject to punctual payment of a land revenue, fixed in perpetuity, to the Government and also subject to various rights of the tenants, some of which have been created by grant or contract, others owe their origin to custom or to special statutes enacted for the benefit of the tenants. Unlike in England, only a very small percentage of the total acreage (not perhaps exceeding 10 per cent) is in actual occupation of the zamindars, and not less than 70 per cent of the acreage is held by cultivators who have permanent right of occupancy in their lands. The occupancy rights of such cultivators are heritable and transferable and the rents they pay are reasonable and cannot be enhanced except, in accordance with the provisions of law which are very stringent. In West Bengal with which this article deals, the rents payable by the cultivators having permanent right of occupancy cannot be enhanced now. The cultivating tenant (ryot) has the right of possession and of transfer without any reference whatsoever to his landlord, the rent he has to pay is fixed and is not enhanceable, his right to his land is heritable, and the landlord cannot dispossess him even if he defaults in paying rents. The only remedy the landlord has is to sue in the court for a decree for arrears of rents and to sell in execution of the decree for rents and other sums, if not paid within a specified time.

Effects of the Abolition of Zamindari in West Bengal
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tenants over the revenue the zamindars have to pay to the state is enjoyed by a large number of people, including the middlemen between the actual cultivator and the zamindar. The probable effects of the abolition have to be examined in this context.

The abolition by itself cannot give any incentive to increase agricultural production. For the cultivating tenant, having right of occupancy in his holding, it will not firing any reduction of rent; the only change it will effect is the substitution of the state as the rent-receiver in place of his immediate landlord. This change is of no consequence to him, rather if the amount of rent remains the same, he would prefer his old landlord with whom he may have personal ties and who will not be entitled to recover arrears of rent by stringent and harsh summary procedure as the state. The hindrances to agriculture, such as fragmentation and sub-division of holdings, inability to use fertilizers and improved implements, etc. owe their origin elsewhere than in the zamindari system, as they are common in ryotwari system also, it is possible, however, that under the state as the sole rent receiver, effective steps may be taken for the consolidation of holdings. The abolition is not likewise likely to increase demand for agricultural labour and hence to raise wages. As already pointed out there will be no reduction in ryots' rents. On the other hand, the abolition will effect employment in rural areas as the persons employed for collection of rents will lose their jobs, it will also effect the class of rent receivers as their income horn rentals will vanish and the amount of compensation provided for them and the manner of payment cannot easily give them alternative occupation. It will be poor consolidation to the men who lose their jobs and incomes that the scope of employment under the Government in the rent collection and other connected departments will expand. It will be helpful to the Government which has to face retrenchment of surplus stall. Even with absentee landlordism, some portion of incomes from rents I bound to he spent in the locality on which rental income is derived. This has the tendency to provide employment and increase welfare in the locality.

Provisions have rightly been made under separate acts to protect the agricultural labourers known as 'bargadars' from eviction and a statutory limit has been placed to the share of the produce that can be claimed by the owners of lands from the bargadars.

A maximum landholding limit has been stipulated and the landlord will have to surrender the area in excess of the prescribed limit. This limit might have anti-social repercussions. The landlords may be tempted to cut down trees on the excess area. When the Government are encouraging growing of trees in various ways, lands with fruit and valuable trees should have been excluded from the operation of the maximum limit. If the landlords circumvent the provisions of the maximum limit of landholdings, form limited liability concerns and take to large-scale fanning with the help of tractors, etc, the abolition of zamindari system will indirectly bring benefits to the country. We should conclude by pointing that as the welfare of rural areas is bound to be adversely affected by the abolition of zamindari system, the Government should earmark a portion of their rental income for improvement of rural areas for which the Government has started community projects.

The primary object of the abolition of the zamindari system appears to be the immediate vesting in the state of all the intermediary rent-receiving interests between the state and the ryots (cultivating occupancy tenants). After the preliminary objective has been achieved, what steps the Government actually takes for the improvement of agriculture and for the betterment of the lot of the agriculturists, beyond punctual realisation of rents, still remains to be seen. The position of the persons holding their lands under the ryots, (ie of under-ryots) and of the bargadar, who cultivates the land of another person on condition of delivering a share of the produce of such land to that other person, and bears the risk of production, require separate examination. These and the effect of the abolition on the country, especially on the middle class, will be examined in the context of the history of the system and the special circumstances of the state in a subsequent article.