

ECONOMICS OF RURAL BENGAL

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WITH A FOREWORD

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PREFACE

The present volume is an attempt to study the economic life of rural Bengal. The importance of such a study will be realised from the fact that 93 per cent. of the population of the province live in villages. A study of the economic conditions of rural Bengal thus means a study of the economic life of the great mass of the population of the province.

As a person who was born in rural Bengal, whose early life was passed in it, and who even at the present time spends a considerable part of the year there, I have always had an opportunity of studying the economic conditions in the rural areas in this province. This long association with rural life naturally created in me an interest in the study of the rural problems of this province, and the present volume is mainly an outcome of that interest.

I have to express my indebtedness to Sir Jehangir Coyajee for writing the foreword. To Dr. R. C. Majumdar I am indebted for the help that I received in the publication of the book. Among the colleagues of my department, I have a special obligation to Mr. Ajit Kumar Sen for reading the proofs and also for various useful suggestions. I have also to acknowledge the help that I received in the correction of proofs from two of my other colleagues, Mr. Amiya Kumar Das-Gupta and Mr. Birendra Nath Ganguly. Finally, my thanks are also due to my friend, Mr. Khiti Bhusan Ghosh, M.A., for going through the manuscript.

K. B. SAHA

DACCA UNIVERSITY,
January, 1930.

FOREWARD

It would be difficult to exaggerate the value and importance of intensive studies of the leading aspects of provincial and regional economics in the case of such a vast country as India. Indeed the value of general works on Indian economics depends on their being based upon monographs and studies of local problems. Fortunately, as regards the rural economics of India, we already possess quite a number of valuable studies of the latter kind. In the case of the Madras Presidency Prof. Slater and his pupils have conducted important surveys of rural conditions. On the Bombay side the works of Mr. Keatinge and Dr. Mann stand out as models of studies in rural economics. The Punjab has been fortunate in possessing men like Mr. Calvert and Mr. Darling who have not only enriched agricultural economics by their own works, but have inspired a number of very useful surveys by other local economists of distinction. On the other hand, Bengal suffered a great loss by the premature death of Mr. Jack who possessed every qualification for dealing adequately with surveys of rural conditions. It is therefore a pleasure to find a young and able economist like Prof. K. B. Saha undertaking the arduous task of giving us a general survey of the rural economics of our province. It is evident that he has prepared himself for the difficult task by a wide and careful study of the extensive material. In particular he has carefully read the various settlement reports which form a literature by themselves and amongst which Prof. Saha has delved with assiduity and discrimination. He has brought an economist's eye to bear upon the rich material before him and has consequently produced a very useful introduction to the rural economics of this province.

After a couple of preliminary and descriptive chapters Prof. Saha enters on the more difficult aspects of his work by

giving us a study—both careful and critical—of the standards of cultivation in the province and makes suggestions for their improvement. From that point forwards he has before him a succession of complicated problems to deal with, and he acquits himself very creditably, though it is to be noted that, generally speaking, his role is not that of the explorer but that of the able systematiser of widely scattered information. How well he has performed that task may be seen, for instance, in the chapter on "Land System" which contains a careful sketch of the economics of tenancy legislation and a well-arranged account of the various tenures. The same spirit of careful and searching investigation marks the chapters on rural labour and population. The last chapter is devoted to a study of middle-class unemployment. It was well that Prof. Saha gave a somewhat wide interpretation and scope to rural economics and included such a treatment of this problem in his book. One of his conclusions in it is to the effect that "if the middle-class young man is to look to agriculture for employment, he must seek land outside Bengal." This position sounds somewhat pessimistic but is certainly thought-provoking. It is to be hoped that Prof. Saha will develop the subject at greater length in the next edition.

It need hardly be added that Prof. Saha's book will prove useful to our students of Economics as well as to the general public which wants enlightenment as regards the problems of rural Bengal.

J. C. COYAJEE

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE,
CALCUTTA,
12th Dec., 1929

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