



## A study of socio-economic conditions and political structure of West Dinajpur District Of West Bengal (1947-1992)

Suman Mandal

Independent Research Scholar, University of North Bengal, West Bengal, India

### Abstract

West Dinajpur was formed as a new district of West Bengal in 1947 after the Partition of India. This district became an important border region and faced many serious problems such as refugee settlement, shortage of land, poverty, low literacy, and weak industrial growth. The economy of the district was mainly dependent on agriculture, and most of the people lived in villages. This paper discusses the socio-economic condition and political structure of West Dinajpur from 1947 to 1992. It focuses on population changes, landholding patterns, education, health facilities, agricultural production, and political developments. It also explains how political power gradually shifted from Congress dominance to the strong rise of Left parties, especially after food movements and land reform policies. Even though some improvements happened after land reforms and panchayat development, the district continued to remain backward due to poor infrastructure and lack of industries.

**Keywords:** West dinajpur, partition, independence, tebhaga movement, bargadars

### Introduction

West Dinajpur district came into existence in August 1947<sup>[4]</sup> after the Partition of Bengal. Before independence, Dinajpur was a large district under British Bengal. After the Radcliffe Line division, its eastern part went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), while the western part remained in India. The Indian part was named West Dinajpur and included in the state of West Bengal. Partition created huge social and economic problems. Many refugees migrated from East Bengal to West Dinajpur. This created pressure on land, food supply, housing, and employment. The district was mainly rural and depended heavily on agriculture. Lack of industries and weak transport networks made the district economically underdeveloped for many decades.

### Historical Background of West Dinajpur

Historically, Dinajpur was known for its fertile agricultural land and rural society and economy, though West Dinajpur is relatively less fertile. After 1947<sup>[4]</sup>, West Dinajpur became one of the border districts of West Bengal. It shared boundaries with Bangladesh and Bihar. Because of this border location, the district faced issues like illegal migration, smuggling, and political tension from time to time. In 1956, under the States Reorganisation Act, some Bengali-speaking areas from Bihar were added to West Dinajpur. In 1960<sup>[11]</sup> according to Sri V. Viswanathan's report an area of 732.88 sq miles of Purnea district of Bihar was transferred to West Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The transferred Police Stations were Thakurganj, Chopra, Islampur, Kishanganj, Goalpokhar and Karandighi. This increased the size of the district and brought more administrative challenges. The district continued to exist until 1992. Later, for better administration, West Dinajpur was divided into Uttar Dinajpur (North Dinajpur) and Dakshin Dinajpur (South Dinajpur). The West Dinajpur district has a glorious past and it is very rich in archaeological remains. According to traditional stories the Pandavas moved to this area and on their journey towards

north they kept their weapons inside the trunk of a big tree of Vimbar and Asuragar villages. A place Karandighi is named after the name of king Karna.

### Socio-Economic Conditions After Independence

The socio-economic condition of West Dinajpur after independence remained poor. According to the 1951<sup>[1]</sup> census, 115, 510 persons out of 720,573 persons declared themselves as having from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on account of the partition of the province. Most of the people speak Bengali, but the farming classes, especially those of Rajbanshi, speak a kind of Bengali patois or dialect which is characterized by a huge number of Urdu and Hindi words and some words of central origin. The Muslims of this district have been declared as chiefly descended from Rajbanshis converted to Islam.

According to the Census of India (1961)<sup>[6]</sup>, more than 70 percent of workers depended on agriculture and related work. Most people lived in villages and depended on farming as their main source of income. The population increased rapidly due to the refugee influx and natural population growth. Refugees mainly settled in areas like Raiganj, Balurghat, and nearby villages. This increased pressure on land and caused division of land into small holdings. Many people became landless labourers or sharecroppers. The district also faced serious poverty and unemployment. In education, West Dinajpur remained behind the state average for a long period. The Census of India (1981)<sup>[9]</sup> reported that literacy in West Dinajpur was only 39.8 percent, while West Bengal's overall literacy rate was 48.7 percent. Schools existed in villages, but many children dropped out because of poverty. Higher education facilities were limited. Health facilities were also inadequate. Rural areas had few hospitals, shortage of doctors, and lack of proper medicines. Many people depended on local healers or travelled long distances for treatment.

### Agriculture and Land Reforms

Agriculture was the main economic activity in West Dinajpur. Paddy and rice were the major crops, and wheat, barley, gram (pulses), linseed, Sesamum, mustard, sugarcane, orchards, joar, and jute were also cultivated in some areas. However, agricultural production was often affected by floods, lack of irrigation, and dependence on monsoon rainfall. Many farmers used traditional way and had limited access to modern farming methods and tools. Land relations were unequal. Large landowners and jotedars controlled a principal share of land, while small peasants and sharecroppers worked under difficult conditions. Although zamindari was abolished in West Bengal, exploitation of sharecroppers continued in many places. After 1977, the Left Front government started Operation Barga, which aimed to register sharecroppers and protect their rights. This helped many poor farmers in West Dinajpur. The policy gave more security to bargadars and reduced eviction threats. In some areas, agricultural productivity improved, but irrigation coverage remained low and uneven.

### Economy and Industrial Development

The economy of West Dinajpur remained mainly rural. Industrial development was very weak. Only small-scale industries existed, such as rice mills, jute-related processing, handloom weaving, and small cottage industries. The district did not have large factories or major industrial centres. Because of this, job opportunities outside agriculture were limited. Small towns like Raiganj and Balurghat grew slowly as trading centres. Refugee settlement also helped in the growth of some semi-urban areas. However, most people still depended on farming, daily labour, and small business. The district faced food crises during the 1950s and 1960s. Rising prices and shortage of food created unrest among the poor. Food movements and protests became common, which later influenced the political development of the district.

### Political Structure and Administrative System

West Dinajpur was governed through a district administration headed by the District Magistrate. The district was divided into subdivisions and blocks for better governance. After the introduction of Panchayati Raj, village-level local government became important in rural development.

In the early post-independence years, the Indian National Congress was the strongest political party. However, over time, left-wing parties like CPI, RSP, and later CPI(M) gained influence. The Tebhaga movement (1946-47) had already created a strong base of peasant mobilisation in the region. The food movement of 1959 played a major role in increasing political awareness. People protested against food shortages and price rise. Such struggles strengthened the support for left parties. During the 1967 and 1969 United Front governments, the influence of left-wing politics increased. Finally, after 1977, the Left Front came to power in West Bengal and remained dominant for decades. The Left Front period brought important reforms such as land redistribution, Operation Barga, and stronger panchayat institutions. These reforms increased participation of rural people in politics and reduced the dominance of traditional elites.

### Political Movements and Leadership

West Dinajpur district witnessed various political movements after independence of India. One important

movement was the anti-Bengal-Bihar merger movement of 1956<sup>[2]</sup>. People protested vigorously against the idea of merging Bengali-speaking areas with Bihar. This movement created a sturdy sense of Bengali identity and regional unity. Peasant movements also saw in the district. Many farmers protested against eviction and exploitation by jotedars. Food movements, refugee problems, and unemployment also contributed to political mobilisation. Local leaders like Dr. Dhirendranath Banerjee and other political activists played an important role in organising people. These movements made the district politically active and helped in shaping its political culture.

### Conclusion

Between 1947 and 1992, West Dinajpur remained a district with serious socio-economic challenges. Partition created refugee pressure, population growth, and land shortage, which affected the rural economy. Agriculture remained the main occupation, but lack of irrigation and poor infrastructure limited growth. Industrial development was slow, education and health services remained below the state average also. Politically, the district experienced a major transformation. Congress dominance weakened over time, and left parties became stronger due to mass movements and peasant struggles. The Left Front government's land reforms and panchayat system brought some improvements and increased political participation. However, overall development remained uneven. The division of the district in 1992 ended the administrative identity of West Dinajpur, but the socio-economic problems continued in the new districts of Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur.

### References

1. Census of India. District Census Handbook: West Dinajpur. Government of India, 1951, 13-24.
2. Ghosh A. "The Bengal-Bihar Merger Movement of 1956." *Karatoya*, 2017:10:178.
3. Biswas A. Post-Independence West Bengal's Economic and Political Crisis and Utpal Dutta's Drama: A Brief Assessment. *The Academic (International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research)*, 2025, 1021-1025.
4. Pain SK. Leftist in Undivided Dinajpur (1947-1977). *Frontier An Independent Weekly Since*, 1968.
5. Sarkar R. Block Wise Status of Agricultural Productivity: A Case Study of Uttar Dinajpur District, West Bengal, India. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 2025, 1-3.
6. Census of India. District Census Handbook: West Dinajpur. Government of India, 1961:4(9):54.
7. Basak C. Partition of India and Refugee Resettlement in West Dinajpur District. *International Journal of History*, 2022:4(1):92-95.
8. District Gazetteer of West Dinajpur. Government of West Bengal, 1974, 143-147.
9. Census of India. District Census Handbook: West Dinajpur. Government of India, 1981, 211.
10. Ghosh S. Operation Barga: Changing Scenario of North Bengal's Rural Society (1930-1982). *Indian Scholar; An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal*, 2017:03(4):230-236.
11. Government of West Bengal. Panchayat Records, 1960, 34-36.
12. Chatterjee P. *The State and Politics in West Bengal*. Oxford UP, 1997, 203-207.