

### **Abstract**

‘Rights to land’ have always been a controversial and sensitive area of deliberation. Land rights, in general, can be understood as legal rights to own, use, access, control and manage land along with its resources. Such rights are linked to questions of livelihood, development, social justice and identity. India being a predominantly rural country, agriculture has been the prime source of livelihood and revenue. The productive capacity of agriculture in turn primarily depends on land and its quality. Land, especially productive one, is scarce and hence is contested. The idea of property in land in the legal-rational sense was born out of India’s colonial experience. Lord Cornwallis’s Permanent Settlement constituted the creation of the notion of private property in land which was officially vested in the zamindar. The transition from ‘land to the zamindar’ to ‘land to the tiller’ surrounding the question of land ownership and use, while traversing a timeline of more than a century, maintains the thematic continuity connecting the early colonial to the post-colonial period. This entire study keeps land rights as the central theme in its account and analysis of the politics of resistance in Midnapore and also thematically linking it to its revolutionary legacy. Two resistances in the district, divided by almost two centuries, have been deliberately chosen to highlight the continuity of the link between land rights and resistance. If the Chuar rebellion (1767-1800) was about loss of special land privileges by a community along with the effects of Permanent Settlement clauses on the traditional zamindars, the Left mobilised movements of post-colonial Midnapore (1967-1971) was a reaction to the feudal system of exploitation that was entrenched by the effects of the Settlement, thereby demanding its abolition along with claims of land usage rights by the actual tillers of the soil. Hence, divided by centuries and united by issues and strategies is the defining tagline of this study.