

## INDIA AND THE COLONIAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

by Hamza Alavi

Important issues have been raised by Indian Marxist agricultural economists in a debate about 'The Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture'.<sup>1</sup> That debate is taking place in the context of farreaching changes that have taken place in Indian agriculture in recent years; changes that were once celebrated as 'The Green Revolution'. Today, its conservative authors as well as its radical critics are compelled, by the force of the contradictions in rural class relations (as well as in the economy as a whole) that have been brought to the surface as a consequence, to move beyond the limits of justification or condemnation, to analyse and assess the nature and significance of the structural changes that have been brought about.

The Indian debate on the mode of production revolves around the question whether in the last 15 or 20 years there has been a decisive movement in Indian agriculture from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist mode of production. Similar questions have been raised elsewhere. In fact a theoretical point of departure for the Indian debate is the well known polemical exchange between A. Gunder Frank and Ernesto Laclau about feudalism and capitalism in Latin America.' The protagonists in the Indian debate have looked at European (including Russian) historical parallels and theoretical propositions that have been advanced in those contexts; there is a surprising omission of any reference to the Chinese experience or theoretical contributions. A more serious criticism could be that by focussing on the agrarian economy, the debate conceptualises 'mode of production' too narrowly, although it must be said that on specific issues the wider contexts of the development in agriculture and some of the implications that arise therefrom are considered. In particular, as we would like to emphasise, both the concept of 'feudalism' in India (during the period of direct colonial domination) as well as the contemporary phenomenon of rural 'capitalism' cannot be grasped theoretically in all their implications except specifically in the context of the world-wide structure of Imperialism into which it is articulated. A consideration of that fact should lead us towards a conception of a colonial mode of production and the structural specificity that distinguishes it from both feudalism and capitalism in the metropolis.

The contemporary changes and the issues in the debate must be looked at in the context of the demands made on Indian agrarian economy by

Imperialism and the industrial development since independence, and the successive policies that were instituted to realise the objectives for those purposes and the dilemmas and contradictions underlying such policies. These in turn must be situated in the context of the changing framework of class alignments in the Indian political system. For the post-independence period, that requires an understanding of the complex class basis of the Indian National Congress, the Party which has been dominant in the Indian State, at any rate at the level of the central government, since independence. The class basis of the Congress has not been an unchanging one; the changes in that respect throw much light on the major shifts in agricultural development policy that took place at the end of the fifties. A brief review of that background is necessary to put the problems under discussion in a broader perspective.

Before independence, as it is generally acknowledged, the Indian National Congress embraced the whole gamut of social classes in India, other than the big landowners, who were then firmly allied to the British Raj (and such elements as the Muslim middle classes who provided the backbone of the Muslim League which eventually secured the state of Pakistan and also (e.g.) the rising elements of the untouchable castes, who provided the leadership of the Scheduled Castes' Federation, and other such groups). The Communist Party as well as the Socialists were all in the Congress, together with some extreme right wing elements. The leadership of the Congress, however, it might be said, was firmly in the hands of men who came from professional middle class background behind whom stood their powerful patrons the rising Indian bourgeoisie. During the course of the nationalist struggle the bourgeois and, especially, the petty bourgeois leadership and cadres of the Congress, ineffective against the British Raj by themselves, began to be more and more involved in mobilising subordinate classes on behalf of the nationalist cause. The Congress leadership was, for example, prominently involved in the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920, despite the opposition of Mahatma Gandhi and others. Pandit Nehru was amongst the founder members and later President of the AITUC. Likewise, the Congress leadership is also credited with having mobilised the peasantry. There again, the Congress role was an ambivalent one, for while calling upon the peasantry to speak for the Congress and the national struggle, they did little to make the Congress speak for the peasant. Gandhi, again, put forward a doctrine of 'trusteeship', advocating class peace, designating the landlords as the 'trustees' for the exploited peasant! When Gandhi led peasant 'struggles', they were those that were not directed against the landlords but against the British Raj, in the form notably of no tax campaigns. Nevertheless, that involvement with the peasantry was one that infused many of the Congress leaders and cadres with a populist ideology; among them Jawaherlal Nehru. Moreover, the Congress could see the landlord class to be the major class force that was

aligned against them, in support of colonial rule. They developed an anti-landlord rhetoric and were committed to radical policies *vis-à-vis* the rural society, especially to carrying out land reform.

The story of land reform in India is one of progressive attenuation of radical commitments that embodied the populist ideology which was then being proclaimed by the Congress demanding restoration of land to the tiller and the abolition of all intermediaries between the cultivator and the State. The legislation was passed, separately and differently by the different state legislatures. At the state level, however, the power of landowners was greater than at the national level and, invariably, a watered down version of the initial proposals appeared in the legislation which, in turn, was implemented indifferently by a bureaucracy which itself was not uninvolved with the interests of the landowning classes. The 'failure' of land reforms in India is a well documented story which is widely acknowledged and one need not embark on elaborating any details *here*.<sup>3</sup>

In the early post-independence strategy of agricultural development, land reform was to be complemented by Community Development and the National Extension Service, to build the rural infrastructure and to introduce new techniques. Jawaharlal Nehru was deeply committed to this and his initial claims tended to be rather extravagant. In 1955 he proclaimed: 'I think nothing has happened in any country in the world during the last few years so big in content and so revolutionary in design as the Community Projects in India. They are changing the face of rural India.'<sup>4</sup> That earlier strategy was also in line with influential ideas emanating from the US where the philosophy of community development and communication of new technology through a National Extension Service was much in vogue. Objective evaluations of the progress of the Community Development Projects, including Reports of the Government's own 'Programme Evaluation Organisation',<sup>5</sup> did not, however, bear out the optimistic expectations. The commitment to rural development expressed an economic need and in the light of disappointing results there was a willingness to learn. One of the more interesting expressions of that desire to learn was the despatch of two high powered delegations, sent at the same time in July 1956, to China to study Agrarian Cooperatives and Agricultural Planning, *respectively*.<sup>6</sup> The Reports, not surprisingly noted that the remarkable Chinese success derived from their transformation of the rural class structure and that little could be expected in India without similar change: 'To create an atmosphere favourable to the formation of agrarian cooperatives. . . (the) atmosphere should be one of equality and non-exploitation. In creating such an atmosphere, land reforms will play a vital role.' This view was reiterated by many influential advisers of the Government. Daniel Thorner, for example, wrote: 'But the success of rural cooperatives presupposes a modicum of social equality, political democracy and economic viability among the villagers. These preconditions have not

been present in village India. . . Two things must happen: (i) the power of the village oligarch must be broken. . . and (ii) the Government must become an instrument of the ordinary people. . .'<sup>8</sup> The limits of gradualism and incremental changes were manifest; progress could not be achieved without a major assault on the classes that dominated the countryside. That realisation marked the point of retreat from the radical vision.

The early commitment of radical solutions for rural development was not derived from a populist ideology alone, although the prevalence of that ideology amongst Congressmen greatly strengthened moves in that direction immediately after independence. There was a more basic concern that was felt by two of the dominant classes in the Indian political system, namely the indigenous bourgeoisie and the foreign imperialist bourgeoisie. They were both aware of the pressing need for deriving an increasing marketable surplus of agricultural produce to provide raw materials for industry and to feed the towns. For that they were not averse to sacrificing the interests of big landowners if they happened to stand in the way of the necessary conditions for increasing the agricultural surplus available for sustaining industrial development. It was widely believed at the time that the small peasant economy was more progressive than the 'feudal' exploitative economy, for the latter destroyed incentives for the producer. Productivity per acre, it was believed, was higher on the small holding. The small peasant strategy was therefore justified by the economic needs of the bourgeoisie. That view was reinforced by data provided, *inter alia* by a series of Farm Management Studies as well as by numerous other studies and surveys on which an army of economists went to work. They set about to explain and to celebrate the small peasant **economy**.<sup>9</sup>

It was, however, soon realised that the assumptions on which the small peasant strategy was based, did not in fact work. Although intensive use of family labour resulted in a higher productivity per acre in his case, the small peasant lacked the resources and the capability of making a radical advance in agricultural techniques that might raise productivity. Moreover, the smallholder with his tiny holdings could market but a very small proportion of his produce, so that a given increase in productivity in his case brought about a proportionately smaller increase in the marketable surplus. The bourgeoisie were not concerned primarily with an increase in the *productivity* of the small farmer and the consequent improvement in his well being. Their concern was primarily with that of increasing the *marketable surplus* that they required for industrial development.

The Chinese land reform, it was realised, had not created a small peasant economy. Rather, the destruction of the power of the landlord class was only a crucial stage in a dynamic revolutionary movement that released new forces and energies in the rural society, and made a transition, through mutual aid teams and cooperatives etc., to a radical reorganisation of the rural society and economy that brought in its wake

major leaps in progress and increases in productivity—and increases in the marketable surplus that sustained socialist construction in the towns. A reversion to a small peasant economy in India, even if that could be achieved, it was soon realised, would be a dead-end solution. Nor were the subordinate classes in India to be led on towards a path of revolutionary transformation of society.

Soon therefore, there was a disenchantment with the small peasant strategy of agricultural development. Perhaps a most important factor in the reversal of the populist strategy that followed and, most significantly, in the shaping of the succeeding strategy, however, was the re-alignment of class forces in the post-colonial state that crystallised in the fifties. That involved a new relationship between the indigenous bourgeoisie, the Imperialist bourgeoisie and the landlords who held sway in the countryside. Before independence the indigenous bourgeoisie had lined up with the forces of national liberation and had combated both the Imperialist bourgeoisie (though not unequivocally and not without examples of collaboration) and the indigenous 'feudal' class which was closely aligned with the colonial regime. That gave rise to a myth, propagated amongst others by Barrington Moore in his well known work,<sup>10</sup> that in India there was an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry which was the basis of Indian 'democracy'. The fact of the matter is that the adoption of universal adult franchise in the Indian Constitution of 1951 conferred a new political role on the rural power-holders, the landlords who dominated factional alignments in the villages.

The Congress leadership, in the context of electoral contest, forged new links with these local-level power-holders, that reversed the earlier antagonistic relationships. For the latter too, close links with the successor regime were no less valuable than their earlier links with the colonial regime. The role and influence of these local-level power-holders in the structure of power in India is widely recognised. One liberal academic, an anthropologist, refers to them as 'Vote Banks'<sup>11</sup> and another, who has produced a major work, on the Congress Party (which he greatly admires) refers to the fact that: 'Families which supported the pro-British Justice Party joined the Congress Party after independence. Many landlord families, eager to protect themselves against the proposed land reform legislation, joined Congress and, in some instances, entered the Legislative Assembly to play an influential role in shaping the character of the legislation. In any event, their influence on the enforcement and interpretation of the legislation by local officials has been greatly enhanced by their participation in the local Congress party and in local government bodies.'<sup>12</sup> While at the national level the indigenous bourgeoisie and the Imperialist bourgeoisie influenced the strategic decisions of the Government, the main body of the Congress Party machine was taken over by the landowning classes. There was a new alliance between the three dominant classes. There

was no more any question of the indigenous and foreign bourgeoisie attacking the interests of the landowning classes who were now their allies.

With the end of the British colonial rule, American influence in India grew steadily, somewhat obscured though it was in the early fifties by the marked contrast provided by Indian professions of international non-alignment against the background of the **McCarthyite** confrontation with communism. With the crisis of the Indian Second Five Year Plan in 1958, and the heavy dependence of the Indian economy on US aid, American influence became pervasive and manifest—this was countered, though only partially, by links between the Indian bourgeoisie and the Soviet Union, which had coloured the philosophy of 'non-alignment'. American 'advice' began to play an increasingly important role in the shaping of Indian policy in most fields.

The new turn in agricultural development policy was marked by a **Report**<sup>13</sup> by American experts, sponsored by the Ford Foundation which recommended a major shift in policy, away from the populist participatory concepts of Community Development to an emphasis on technological solutions to the problem of agricultural development within the terms of the existing class structure. From that new perspective emerged the 'Intensive Agricultural District Programme' or, as it is more commonly referred to, the 'Package Programme'. Its emphasis was on 'measures for immediate increase in agricultural production rather than measures for improving the general context for development or immediate welfare.'<sup>14</sup> The scheme also emphasised the criterion of profitability of the big farm as an enterprise, rather than on attempts to sustain the economically bankrupt (even if physically more productive per acre) economy of the small farmers. Finally, in concrete terms the new policy emphasised the provision of new physical inputs, and credit to buy them with, to the economically viable cultivators, in effect the rich farmers and landlords. They were now to have fertiliser, new seed, pump-sets for tubewells, and a variety of farm machinery, which the small peasant could not possibly afford for his tiny holding. Above all large amounts of credit were to be pumped into the willing hands of the rich farmers to enable them to buy new inputs. That was the 'Package Plan'.

It was this transformation of agricultural development strategy that provides the background to the rise of the 'capitalist farmer' in the sixties, which the current debate on the 'mode of production in Indian agriculture' is attempting to conceptualise and theorise. This is the 'Green Revolution' which was once celebrated but was soon to be viewed with growing concern.<sup>15</sup> The Green Revolution (and the changes that presaged it) brought about a large-scale eviction of sharecropping tenants and their replacement with American or Soviet made tractors, and the complementary employment of a much smaller number of full time wage labourers or sharecroppers. Many peasants who owned very small holdings and who

were able to get by previously because they were able to rent some land additionally, were now no longer able to do so and their farm economy no longer viable on the basis of the insufficient amounts of land which they now had, they were forced to sell the little land that they owned. There was a general pauperisation of large sections of the rural population in the midst of enormous increase in the prosperity of a few big landholders.

There was, secondly, a contradictory impact on the demand for labour that has probably contributed a great deal to generate militancy in the countryside. Large numbers of sharecropping tenants and full time labourers were displaced—the amount of full time employment declined very considerably. On the other hand, however, with the large increases in yields as well as increases in the cropped area (helped by irrigation) the *seasonal* demand for labour multiplied. There was a break on the one hand between the ties of dependence between the landlords and their full time dependents, the tenants. On the other hand the landlords and rich peasants were now more dependent than ever before on casual labour at harvest time; men who owned no long term obligations to the landlords. The bargaining power of labour increased greatly because of the considerably enhanced demand for casual labour and also the fact that the time factor is absolutely critical at harvest time. The landowners cannot afford to waste time while the ripened crop stands unharvested in the field while they try to browbeat recalcitrant labourers into submission. This has brought about an unprecedented increase in the militancy of agricultural labourers.

The enormous increase, thirdly, in the productivity of the large farms which accounted for the bulk of the cropped area (notwithstanding the stagnation of the small peasant economy) has brought about a *more than proportionate increase* in the marketable surplus, for practically the whole of the increase in their case is available for the market. This has brought about a very great increase in the cash incomes of these landowners and a corresponding increase in their cash expenditure. This has been a major factor that has stoked the fires of inflation. As a result of the inflation, the real incomes of those small farmers, who have not got the resources to enable them to participate in the feast of the Green Revolution and whose physical output is unchanged, have actually declined in absolute terms. Likewise, the eviction of sharecropping tenants has pauperised large sections of the labouring poor in the rural society. The urban working class and lower middle classes too have suffered because of the effects of the inflation, although the capitalist classes domestic and foreign have not failed to profit from their booming sales. The pauperisation of subordinate classes is reflected in the general climate of political militancy that we find in India today. Finally, the pauperisation of the small farmers who are unable to cope with the increasing economic pressures has led to an increasing amount of distress sales of land which is only too readily being bought up by the newly enriched substantial landowners. As compared with

the mildly egalitarian direction of the developments of the fifties, in the light of the land reforms, however badly implemented they might have been, we now see a movement in the opposite direction, for there has been an increase in the concentration of landownership. The current strategy, therefore, not only stems from inequalities in the countryside. It has greatly intensified the inequalities. We are witness to a strange paradox—a pattern of development that has not only created much wealth for a few but simultaneously and necessarily, greater poverty for the many.

The new pattern of 'capitalist farming' was crystallising even while official policy was still based on assumptions of the small peasant strategy. That new pattern was already much in evidence by 1953-54. That was demonstrated with clarity in a study by S.C. Gupta, published in 1962, which was the first major study to underline the development of 'capitalist farming'.<sup>16</sup> The following data underline Gupta's principal findings:

*Crop Year 1953-54*

<i>Size of holdings</i>	<i>Percentage of households</i>	<i>Percentage of area owned</i>
below 5 acres	<b>74.73%</b>	<b>16.32%</b>
above 10 acres	<b>12.77%</b>	<b>65.26%</b>

Gupta shows that, not unsurprisingly, the distribution of other farm assets was likewise distributed in similar unequal proportions. Less predictably, tenanted land also was not mainly in the hands of landless peasants or those with extremely small holdings, as was commonly supposed; such land also was largely taken over by big farmers who operated on a commercial basis. No less than 60% of the rented area was in the hands of big farmers who owned more than 10 acres whereas poor peasants with less than 5 acres, far more numerous, had no more than 20% of the rented area.

Gupta classified farmers in an hierarchy as follows:

(1) *Capitalist Farmers*: Those who undertake 'cultivation *mainly* with the use of hired labour and investment of capital (i.e. that they rely on wage labour for at least 50% of their requirements). They produce essentially for profit and the bulk of their output is destined for the market.' To give some idea of their relative weight' in the agrarian economy, Gupta estimates that they were about 6% to 7% of the number of farms, if the limit was set at 20 acres and above. He found that these capitalist farmers have 'the necessary drive, capital and technical skill to obtain maximum productivity per worker with the minimum cost and reap the highest profit per acre.'

(2) *Market Oriented Large Family Farms*: These are farms that undertake cultivation *mainly* with the help of family labour although they too employ labourers. They 'have a substantial marketable surplus and are therefore market oriented.' For the purposes of classification of empirical data Gupta adopts the criterion for this class of those who own between



10 and 20 acres (the figures would vary in different parts of India) and market at least 50% of their output. Such farms account for about 18% of the operational holdings but their share of the marketable surplus is greater than this. They rely for between a third and a half of their labour requirements, on hired labour. They invest capital but their capacity to invest is not very great. They strive for a maximum use of their family and hired labour force.

(3) *Smallholders*: These are at the bottom of the hierarchy. They account for about three quarters of all the holdings but have very little land. The bulk of the output from their tiny fragmented holdings is needed by them to eke out their own bare existence and they have very little surplus to market. 'The smallholders suffer more than they benefit from high prices of agricultural commodities. . . because they market only a small proportion of what they produce. . . On the other hand, where they depend upon incomes from subsidiary occupations, they figure mainly as buyers of agricultural produce and high prices erode their real incomes.' Gupta continues: 'All the evils of Indian agriculture come to their share; pressure of population and tiny fragmented holdings, severe underemployment, low productivity—all these problems are their problems.' What Gupta's study emphasises is the wholly misleading nature of stereotypes that are employed in a generalised way to describe the whole of the agrarian economy in terms that are here applied to the smallholders alone. While the bulk of the rural population was poor and backward, the bulk of the land was cultivated with great efficiency and profit by a few: 'India has small farmers but it does not have small farms.'

Gupta perhaps overestimated the extent of capitalist development of Indian agriculture by the early fifties, as it is now sometimes suggested. What he did misconstrue was the idea of its conscious creation by the bourgeoisie, which did but only later, adopt it as the basis of its agrarian strategy. He wrote: 'The capitalist mode of production has established its supremacy with the installation of the Indian bourgeoisie into state power. In a capitalist economy, the feudal burden on agriculture proved to be an anachronism and had to be liquidated.' As pointed out above, at the time in the early fifties, the policy of the State, which was dominated by the native and imperialist bourgeoisie, was still based on the small farmer strategy and was expressed in the commitments to land reform, community development etc.

The big farmer, however, had taken his future in his own hands, despite the contrary assumptions of public policy. The background to the rise of the big farmers was the enormous rise in agricultural prices during the war, after the long depression of the thirties, which had placed large financial resources at their disposal as well as an incentive to invest, and also the post-war availability of a variety of new inputs that made the investments possible. They prospered by virtue of the logic of the capitalist

system rather than through sponsorship by the bourgeoisie in power. The capitalist class wholeheartedly espoused the new policy but only later, in the sixties, by which time the big farmer had already manifested his efficacy for their purposes and also established a firm position in the structure of state power.

During the two decades that have passed since **1953-54**, the year to which Gupta's data relate, the trend towards extension of 'capitalist farming' has greatly accelerated. That refers on the one hand to the application of new inputs that embody modern technology and, on the other hand, the displacement of sharecroppers (tenants-at-will) by wage labourers. If we look at the developments in terms of *rates of growth*, the change appears to be quite dramatic. During the decade of the sixties the number of tractors went up more than **5** times, that of diesel and electric **pump-sets 5** times and tubewells almost **38** times. Fertiliser consumption went up ninefold and the area under new high yielding varieties of seed eleven times. The development is uneven regionally and there are pockets within various regions where the changes appear to signify a massive change in Indian agriculture.

These changes must, however, be viewed in the overall perspective of the Indian agricultural economy as a whole—the absolute magnitude of the changes might be considered against the background of the enormous size of the Indian countryside. If instead of percentages we look at global figures, the changes, significant though they are, appear to be rather modest. For example the number of tractors increased from a mere **31,000** in **1961** to **173,000** in **1971**, still quite a modest number considering the size of the Indian agrarian economy. Indeed, the change in chemical and biological technology accompanied by **tubewell** development, is far more impressive than the change in mechanical technology in the preparation of seed bed; harvesting is still labour-intensive. The former is made possible by increased supply of water, primarily through the greater exploitation of groundwater because that not only increases the amount of the supply but, unlike canal water, its timing is under the control of the farmer himself. The timing of water availability is quite critical with regard to the use of fertilisers. As against tractors that directly affect 'relations of production', we might consider the elements of mechanical technology that are geared to the increased supply of water as a separate category along with inputs that embody chemical technology (and the biological technology of the new seeds) which affect yields and do not displace labour. The number of **tubewells**, as we have noticed went up by a far greater percentage as compared to tractors, increasing from **19,000** in **1961** to **718,000** in **1971**. Fertiliser consumption (for which increased and timely availability of water is a necessary condition) went up from **300,000** tons in **1961** to **2.8** million tons in **1971** and the area under improved varieties of seeds rose from **2** million hectares to **23** million hectares. These figures can be seen in the

context of the overall area of the order of **350** million to **400** million acres. The modernisation of Indian agriculture is impressive but there is still a very great deal of ground to be covered before we can see it as having made a qualitative change.

Recent studies have urged caution in the interpretation of the magnitude of the recent changes, that are attributed to the 'Green Revolution'. As we have noticed technological changes have been a continuing phenomenon in Indian agriculture against the background of the wartime increases in prices of agricultural commodities, the accumulation of large resources in the hands of rich farmers and their progressive investment in agriculture as new inputs became physically available after the wartime shortages. These changes contrast with the stagnation during the depression of the thirties, but before that time, there is evidence also of considerable investment in the agrarian economy. It is not altogether surprising therefore when we are now told that: '*the trend rate of growth of agriculture shows a marked decline in the period covered by the so-called "green revolution"*'. Actual agricultural production since **1964-65** is uniformly below the semi-logarithmic trend line fitted to the production series from **1947-48** to **1964-65**; the same is true for food grains also, barring the single peak year of **1971**.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise the data relating to changes in 'relations of production' too must be taken with caution. Although Census figures of sharecroppers show a marked decline and those of wage labour show a marked increase, as it is widely recognised, this is, to a very considerable degree, a fictitious change, sharecroppers being declared as wage labourers; a nominal change that is made to circumvent the incidence of land reform legislation. A more reliable index of the extent of real change in this regard could be the number of tractors. However, even here, several considerations must be taken into account. On the one hand, because of the importance of the economies of scale for such an 'indivisible' input as tractors, many tractor owners whose own holdings are not large enough to employ the tractor fully, hire it out to other small farmers who cultivate their land themselves with their family labour. Insofar as that is done, the tractor displaces primarily animal power. The small landowner can then dispense with his pair of bullocks and save the high cost of feeding them, which, when reckoned in terms of opportunity costs, are higher today because of the greater productivity of well irrigated fertilised land which can be diverted from fodder crops to cash crops. A recent study of 'tractorisation' in some villages of the Punjab shows that there are **952** households of which **160** households between them owned **60** tractors; the tractors were hired out and the number of tractor-using households was no less than **731**. On the other hand, it should be added that the tractor owners are able to outbid ordinary sharecroppers and accounted in the villages studied for **76%** of the rented land. The overall impact cannot be determined by *a priori*

criteria but must be measured in the field, both with regard to its magnitude and its direction." For that, so far, we have inadequate data.

The **Punjab** is generally acknowledged to be one of the principal regions where capitalist farming has advanced more than elsewhere. In 1969-70 Ashoka Rudra and his colleagues set about to examine the situation in the **Punjab** to determine whether the agrarian economy there has made a decisive transition from feudalism to capitalism. They came up with the answer that it was not so. That conclusion was based on statistical tests of the postulate that the criterion of capitalist farming was a positive association between the following variables (and not just high values for each of them):

- i. the proportion of cash outlays on wages, per acre,
- ii. the percentage of the total produce that was marketed,
- iii. the value of modern capital equipment per acre,
- iv. value of output per acre.

Rudra's findings were strongly criticised by Utsa Patnaik.<sup>18</sup> Patnaik differentiated between two sets of propositions namely (i) that 'There exists, amongst the various classes within the non-capitalist agrarian economy, a small but growing class which may be identified as "capitalist"', and another, much stronger proposition (ii) that 'Agriculture is characterised by complete or near complete polarisation into two main classes, capitalists and wage labourers'. She suggests that Rudra's statistical criteria are relevant only to the second, much stronger proposition which, she points out was not being suggested by him. On the other hand, they have no relevance to the first **proposition** which **is** what was at Issue.

Without ourselves prejudging the issue of the 'mode of production' (and the concept of the 'colonial mode of production' and its post-colonial development that we would propose) even if we accept for the moment the suggestion of simultaneous existence of 'feudal' and 'capitalist' modes, in the terms in which they are conceptualised in the debate, one must point out that these formulations miss an essential problem. That is the problem of the necessary contradiction between modes of production in historical development; a new emergent mode of production stands in contradiction to the old disintegrating mode of production. If that basic Marxist postulate is accepted, there is a necessity, at each stage of historical development, to identify which mode is dominant and therefore represents the principal contradictions in the class struggle. This basic Marxist postulate has been elaborated and explained by Mao Tse Tung in his essay *On Contradictions*. The issue is not simply whether 'capitalist' relations of production **exist**, nor indeed whether they have completely done away with all feudal survivals, but precisely of the relative weight of each, the alignment of classes that represent each mode of production vis-h-vis each other and therefore the thrust of political conflict and the nature of the class struggle. None of the participants in the

debate have demonstrated ~~that~~ there is any conflict between the new rural 'capitalist' class and the 'feudal' landlords, if they can be structurally distinguished at all!

## II

To assess the structural significance of the new developments and to consider whether they have constituted a 'capitalist mode of production in Indian agriculture' the debate turns on four principal criteria; although the manner in which these have been treated by the different protagonists in the debates varies.<sup>19</sup> McEachern sums them up as follows: 'In assessing the passage from feudalism to capitalism under conditions of colonial imposition the following points have been used as indicators: First, the extent to which commodity production was generalised; Second, the extent to which landless labourers constituted a force of free wage labourers. (How free could wage labour be in a situation of limited alternative employment and a high incidence of debt?); Third, the extent to which capital in the countryside remained in the sphere of circulation and did not affect the production relations in agriculture, and Fourth, the significance of tenancy relations in agrarian production. Often it would seem that the main reason for describing the agricultural situation as semi-feudal rested on the belief that tenancy and sharecropping were incompatible with capitalism.'

The point of departure for the debate can be found in the polemical exchange between Andre Gunder Frank and Ernesto Laclau.<sup>20</sup> One would suggest that each of them emphasises one aspect of the mode of production at the expense of another. Frank speaks of 'The Myth of Feudalism' with reference to Brazilian agriculture emphasising the fact that it was already a part of a world capitalist system and could not be defined as a mode of production without reference to that fact. The Brazilian rural economy was engaged in a system of generalised commodity production. However, we would reiterate the views of those who have pointed out that this by itself, is not at all a sufficient condition for its definition as a 'capitalist mode of production'. Unfortunately there is a tendency amongst those who are engaged in the current Indian debate to carry their polemical attacks on Frank on this question to a point where the significant issue that he does bring to the surface is lost sight of or slurred over. That has to be grasped forthrightly as a major aspect of the whole theoretical problem. Frank rightly emphasises a point which is indeed central to Marx's *theoretical* conceptualisation of the 'feudal mode of production'. That point, premised on the specific characteristics of West European feudalism, is that it was a system of localised production and localised appropriation. The term feudalism has, however, been applied also (as a description) to the social formation and the mode of production that emerged in *Eastern* Europe

much later; in the 16th century onwards, under the influence precisely of the expanding demand for foodgrains from the West, under the influence of the early and rapid capitalist development and urbanisation, as well as growth of population, of countries of Western Europe. Eastern Europe, one would suggest, was thereby brought into a relationship with the centre of capitalist development in the West that was analogous to a colonial relationship and the mode of production there was a **proto-colonial** mode of production, a precursor of later developments on a world scale. The history of Poland began as a colonial history, the hinterland of Britain and Germany.

The 'second serfdom' in Eastern Europe (a descriptive term used by Engels in his letter to Marx) was involved in the production of foodgrains for the markets of the West. Indeed, as Perry Anderson points out, 'The grain trade is often adduced as the most fundamental reason of all for the 'second serfdom' of Eastern Europe.'<sup>21</sup> But the 'feudal mode of production' is by no means identical with serfdom. As Anderson points out, for example, 'In fact, serfdom had fairly generally disappeared in Northern Italy by the early 14th century, two or three generations before the same process occurred in France and England,' but the dissolution of serfdom was not yet a sufficient condition for the dissolution of the 'feudal mode of production' which remained. Nor does the existence of serfdom in Eastern Europe preclude the structural concept of an early form of the 'colonial mode of production'. Nor is the 'colonial mode of production' in Latin American countries ruled out as a theoretical concept because servile conditions exist. To reiterate Frank's point, given the incorporation of the colonial economic structure into the structure of metropolitan capitalism, the concept of 'feudal mode of production', constructed with reference to the historical reality of Western Europe, was not a concept that could comprehend the structural specificity of the colonial mode of production.

Frank emphasises that: 'the feudal system is a *closed* system or one weakly linked with the world beyond, . . . But this closure—and the duality as well—is wholly inconsistent with the reality of Brazil, past or present. . . Capitalism is embodied and developed as one single capitalist system: the "Brazilian" or "Paulist" or "American" capitalism are but sectors of this single world embracing system.'<sup>22</sup> Frank can be faulted for this statement insofar as this suggests a conceptual conflation of several different classes into a single one, namely the world capitalist class; it could not be otherwise on the basis of that formulation. The landowners of Brazil, the bourgeoisie of India and the great imperialist bourgeoisie would all be a single class, the capitalists of the world. They would all be different factions of that single class. That would obscure their mutual structural differentiation.

It is precisely to grasp conceptually the structural specificity of these

various classes, in the hierarchical structure of world imperialism, that we consider it necessary to conceptualise and theorise a 'colonial mode of production'. In doing so, we cannot afford to lose sight of the important aspect of the colonial mode of production that Frank does emphasise, namely its integration into a world capitalist system, so that its structural specificity cannot be understood except in that framework. The importance of Frank's vision lies precisely in the fact that he was able to conceptualise the *internality* of imperialism in the structure of the colony, a conception that goes far beyond that of domination from the outside. Parallel with that external integration of the structure of the colonial economy, the conception of a 'colonial mode of production' must also consider its internal disarticulation (an aspect emphasised by Amin) and reintegration *under imperialist hegemony*.

Whereas Frank focusses on the assimilation and subordination of the colonial agrarian economy in a worldwide capitalist system, Laclau focusses on the relationships within the productive enterprise, namely the relationship between the cultivator who labours to extract the fruits of the earth and his master who exploits him. He points out the absence of free wage labour in Brazilian agriculture which by that token is not 'capitalist'. It may be pointed out, parenthetically, that in making that point Laclau seems to equate the Latin American agrarian economy with the 'feudal regime of the haciendas', so that his conceptualisation of the mode of production thereby excludes large elements of Latin American agrarian economy, apart from the haciendas. These, one would argue, cannot be grasped within the framework of a conception of a feudal mode of production. Laclau, however, proceeds from the argument that the Marxist conception of 'mode of production' rests on a definition of relations of production and that the definitive condition of the mode of production in Latin American agriculture is its basis in servile rather than in free wage labour. He writes: 'When Marxists speak of a democratic revolution sweeping away the vestiges of feudalism, they understand by feudalism something very different from Frank. For them feudalism does not mean a closed system which market forces have not **penetrated**, but a general ensemble of extra-economic coercions weighing on the peasantry, absorbing a good part of the surplus and thereby retarding the process of internal differentiation within the rural classes and therefore the expansion of agrarian capitalism.'<sup>23</sup>

Several criteria are taken together in the above quoted sentence, each of which merits examination. We have already commented on the question of generalised commodity production which we would argue is incompatible with the theoretical conception of a feudal mode of production, although we argue further that the existence of generalised commodity production can occur within a 'colonial mode of production' as well as a 'capitalist mode of production'; therefore the existence of generalised commodity

production does not necessarily imply the latter.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, this characterisation turns on the concept of 'extra-economic coercion' being translated into the Latin American situation, because of *similar forms* of relationships between the cultivator and the master as in servile feudalism; whether its substance is identical must be considered further and we will examine this with reference to India. Thirdly, Laclau speaks of the feudal masters absorbing 'a good part of the surplus'. That immediately raises the question about the rest of the surplus, indeed a substantial part of the surplus, which is absorbed precisely by metropolitan capitalism and must be explained in terms of the 'colonial mode of production'. The appropriation of the surplus in a colonial economy cannot be explained therefore wholly within the framework of the local unit of production and appropriation, unlike the feudal mode of production.

Laclau does not disregard the problem posed by Frank namely that of the incorporation of the Brazilian agrarian economy in a world capitalist system and the insertion into it of capitalist relations (of production? of exchange?). He deals with the problems however by conceptualising them separately, as a feudal mode and a capitalist mode, *coexisting* within the single social formation or, as he terms it, 'economic system'. That formulation poses a problem that is unresolved. If the two were separate modes of production in a single social formation, a Marxist conception would postulate a *contradiction* between the two. But, on the other hand, the Brazilian reality, like that of the other countries of the Third World, is that the 'feudal mode of production' in agriculture is precisely at the service of imperialism rather than antagonistically in contradiction to it. Imperialism generates or preserves such forms rather than destroys them. This reality is reflected in Laclau's necessarily mechanistic resolution of the nature of their 'coexistence'; if they were indeed two separate modes of production in a single social formation they would be dialectically related, in mutual opposition and contradiction. Laclau, however speaks of Brazilian feudalism being 'connected' with capitalism and indeed he asserts 'the *indissoluble unity* that exists between the maintenance of feudal backwardness at the one extreme and the apparent progress of the bourgeois dynamism at the other.'<sup>35</sup> One would accept that as a correct representation of the Brazilian reality. But that *unity* exists precisely because it expresses a hierarchical structural relationship within a single mode of production, namely the colonial mode of production. To assert that we have two separate modes of production within a single social formation (or economic system) would require either the identification of the necessary structural contradiction between the two and therefore a rejection of the above formulation postulating a mechanical unity, or a refutation of the Marxist conception of the necessity of contradiction between coexisting modes of production, one in the ascendent and the other in disintegration, within a single social formation.<sup>36</sup>



We cannot postulate here a contradiction between colonial 'feudalism' and metropolitan capitalism, for it is precisely the latter that generates and supports the former. The specific structural features of colonial agrarian economy are formed precisely by virtue of the fact that Imperial capital disarticulates the internal economy of the colony, to use Amin's fruitful concept, and integrates the internally disarticulated segments of the colonial economy, externally into the metropolitan economy. Imperialism, far from holding out a promise of bringing about a revolutionary transformation of 'feudal' relations of production in colonial agriculture (as a separate mode of production in antagonistic contradiction to it) creates them and reinforces them. The two are indeed linked in an 'indissoluble unity' as Laclau says (although that phrase is perhaps too strong, as it stands) precisely because they are embraced within the framework of the colonial mode of production together and do not constitute separate and antagonistic modes of production. Their 'unity' is conferred by the unified structure of Imperialism, which includes both the centre and the periphery, united in a single formation; its contradictions cannot be grasped except within the total context of 'Accumulation on a World Scale.'<sup>27</sup>

The Indian debate accepts too readily the assumptions and arguments advanced by Laclau; having dismissed Frank's problematic totally. The protagonists proceed on that basis to consider whether the mode of production in the colonial period in India was 'feudal', and whether it is giving way to a 'capitalist' mode; and the criteria by which the transition from one to the other can be evaluated. The difficulty in applying the Laclau criteria to the older mode of production in India was brought to the surface in a study by Utsa Patnaik, whose work, taken in opposition to the study undertaken by Rudra and his colleagues has provided the point of departure for the Indian debate.

In the Indian context a major conceptual and theoretical difficulty was encountered. As Patnaik pointed out: 'The unique feature about the Indian agrarian structure as it had evolved in the colonial period just prior to independence (the feature which distinguished it from other comparable ex-colonial countries) was the existence and growth of a large force of full time agricultural labourers' which numbered no less than **31.2%** of the population supported by agriculture in 1931. Indeed, as she points out that may be an underestimate for if the 'large numbers of unspecified and general labourers. . . majority of whom were in fact likely to have been engaged in agricultural wage labour' were included, the percentage of that class would be as high as **38%**. That presents a central difficulty. If wage labour was the sole criterion of the capitalist mode of production then, she points out, 'we would have to argue that. . . even in the colonial period. . . a substantial capitalist sector has existed in agriculture covering as much as 20-25 per cent of the cultivated area, ever since at least 1930 (even if

plantations are excluded).<sup>28</sup> She continues: 'This in my view would be a superficial and incorrect argument. Operation on the basis of wage labour is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of capitalist organisation.'

Before, however, proceeding to consider other conditions of 'capitalist agriculture', Patnaik already resolves the problem posed by the existence of wage labour in the older mode of production by conceptually converting the category of the 'wage labourers' into unfree labourers. This we will examine presently. Patnaik's argument is that 'The rural wage labourers in India are indeed free insofar as they are not tied to particular pieces of land; but, in the absence of job opportunities, they are effectively tied to agriculture as a main source of livelihood. . . The absence of alternative employment imposes constraints analogous to the earlier explicit tying to the land. The totally unorganised nature of the destitute labour force. . . ensures that wages are wholly demand determined and in practice barely enough for subsistence. . . The choice between operating with hired labour and leasing out to tenants may represent for such landowners a purely contingent, reversible decision.'<sup>29</sup> But if in this way wage labour is transformed into unfree labour, we are left with a further problem: if the situation of the rural wage labourer is as Patnaik describes it, how does he become a 'free wage labourer' when he goes to work for a capitalist farmer, or, as is more likely, when his master changes over to 'capitalist' methods of farming? Was he unfree before? Is he any more free now? If he remains unfree, what happens to the criterion of 'free wage labour' that is postulated as a necessary condition for the definition of capitalist relations of production,

For profitable insights into this problem, we might turn to Lenin's analysis in his celebrated work: 'Development of Capitalism in Russia' where he elaborated a theoretical framework that has remained the basis of Marxist analyses of classes in the countryside. Initially he made a sharp distinction between the 'rural proletariat' and the other poor peasants. The focus on rural capitalism helped to counter the Menshevik view inasmuch as Lenin pointed out that capitalism developed in the countryside, in agriculture, as well as in urban industry. Likewise, Lenin used the concept of a revolutionary 'rural proletariat' against Narodnik conceptions of the 'revolutionary' role of the communal peasantry. However, we find that Lenin soon abandoned the sharp distinction that he had initially made between the rural proletariat and the other poor peasants, in his analyses of the roles of the different rural classes in the revolution. We have examined Lenin's writings and his revolutionary practice in some detail in an earlier article.<sup>30</sup> We would reiterate the view that both the 'unfree labour' of Patnaik's 'Dominant Landlords' as well as the 'free' labour of the capitalist farmers in fact share a common condition namely that of dependence, a personal dependence, on their master, a condition that is not static but is contingent and vulnerable. When structural changes break

down the conditions of dependence for the one, they break them down also for the other. We wrote recently: "The idea of a "rural proletariat" can all too easily suggest an analogy with the industrial proletariat on the one hand and a sharp distinction between it and the other poor peasants such as sharecroppers in a "feudal" mode of production. In fact the situation of the rural wage labourer is little different from that of the sharecropper. . . and the situation of both stands in marked contrast to that of the urban proletariat. The feature that is common to both categories of poor peasants is their direct and personal dependence on their landlord. . .<sup>31</sup> We have then proceeded to consider the conditions in which that relationship of 'dependence' is broken, not only in the case of the wage-labourer but also in the case of sharecroppers, as numerous cases of peasant militancy and revolutionary struggle have demonstrated. But this consideration does not suffice to settle the underlying theoretical issues that must be resolved within the framework of a conception of the colonial mode of production.

Paresh Chattopadhyay takes issue with Patnaik on this as well as on some other questions. He points out that in Marxism 'free labour' is conceived in a double sense, namely the freedom on the one hand of the labourer to sell his labour to any employer and, on the other in the sense that being deprived of the ownership of the means of production, he is freed to sell nothing but his labour. He therefore argues that 'If the rural labourers in India did not possess any other commodity but their labour power and if they were not tied to *particular employers*, in that case they, we submit, fulfil Marx's condition. They might be tied to agriculture in the same way as the industrial wage-labourers are "tied" to industry, but that is immaterial insofar as the rise of capitalism in the countryside is concerned.'<sup>32</sup>

The central criterion on which Patnaik bases her distinction between the contemporary 'capitalist' mode of production in Indian agriculture and the pre-capitalist, 'feudal' mode of production that preceded it is the *reinvestment of the surplus* and accumulation of capital. But she applies this criterion not within the framework of the colonial mode of production, as a whole, but within the narrowed context of accumulation within agriculture taken by itself, indeed within the single enterprise, the farm. She writes: 'We cannot take use of wage-labour to be *sufficient* condition for identifying *the capitalist farm* (emphasis added H.A.), under the specific historical conditions we have outlined. The criterion of accumulation and reinvestment must be specified as well. . . What is the mechanism by which the "antediluvian" forms of capital are to be replaced by the only form capable of changing the mode of production, *namely capital in the sphere of agricultural production itself?*'<sup>33</sup> To this argument Gunder Frank has retorted thus: 'To say that extended reproduction and accumulation is a criterion of capitalism is one thing, and to say that because the surplus is not invested in agriculture itself, or not in agriculture

in the same geographical area, but is instead siphoned off for investment in industry, not to say in Great Britain, is another thing altogether.' Quoting Patnaik's statement that 'we cannot take wage-labour to be sufficient condition for identifying the capitalist *farm* (Frank's emphasis) under the specific historical conditions we have outlined,' Frank writes: 'So now UP (Utsa Patnaik) has specified the economic formation with which she is concerned: the FARM! And not accidentally so.'<sup>34</sup>

Frank's point is well taken; and this demonstrates the difficulty in which we find ourselves if, in order to prove that there has been a transition to capitalist agriculture, we restrict the terms of our definition and focus on 'relations of production' conceived narrowly without considering other aspects of a mode of production. On the other hand, the issues that are raised by Patnaik and Chattopadhyay about changes that have occurred, cannot be dismissed in this way. We find that their analysis has clarified many aspects of the problem and, even if we have some way yet to go to conceptualise and theorise the 'colonial mode of production', they have already taken us quite far along the road towards that objective. Indeed Patnaik does recognise the larger problem. Quite explicitly she differentiates her own position from (i) those who see 'in these developments a strong tendency towards the capitalist transformation of the mode of production, so long **constrained** at low levels of techniques and productivity by **pre-capitalist** relationships in agriculture' and also from (ii) those who 'discount the significance of these developments (and) stress the fact that **pre-capitalist** relationships continue to predominate in agriculture and therefore by implication deny that a rapid transformation of Indian agriculture in a capitalist direction is **feasible**.'<sup>35</sup> That leaves several problems unresolved: (i) Would she postulate coexistence of two modes of production in the manner of **Laclau**, without postulating contradiction between the two, or (ii) would she postulate contradictions, in which case which mode would she consider to be the dominant one and what precisely **is** the nature and the locus of the contradictions between the two (what is the nature of class alignments and antagonisms), or (iii) is there indeed, as we would suggest, a single mode of production, the colonial mode of production, that might be conceptualised not in terms of a diffuse generalised conception of world-wide capitalism, nor by a dichotomy of the 'feudal' and the 'capitalist' in a mechanistic unity but their hierarchical structuration in a world-wide imperialist system.

Patnaik does refer to the wider contexts of the agrarian **economy**.<sup>36</sup> She writes: 'India. . . never saw an integrated development of capitalist production relations and generalised commodity production out of the internal contradictions of its pre-capitalist mode. . . We find that generalised commodity production was **imposed** from outside in the process of imperialist exploitation itself. India was forced to enter the network of world capitalist exchange relations; its pre-capitalist economy was broken

up. . . Generalised commodity production within the specific conditions created in India by Imperialism did not in fact imply the automatic development of capitalist relations in *production* IN AGRICULTURE (this **last** emphasis ours H.A.). It led to an inordinate development of capital in the sphere of *exchange*, to a prolonged disintegration of the **pre-capitalist** mode WITHOUT ITS RECONSTITUTION ON A CAPITALIST BASIS' (this last emphasis added H.A.). These observations do point towards the problematics of the colonial mode of production. Indeed she adds: 'It **would** show a very mechanistic **understanding** of the proposition that "wage labour and capital always go together" if we completely ignored imperialism and hence the specificity of the colonial **system**.'<sup>37</sup>

The specificity of the colonial transformation of India in a unified conception of the colonial situation rather than a mechanical dichotomy into 'feudal' and 'capitalist' sectors, is recognised and emphasised also by Chattopadhyay who notes that: 'The British preserved as well as destroyed the conditions of India's pre-capitalist economy, accelerated as well as retarded the development of capitalism in India. . . These **pre-capitalist** relations could remain because imperialism preserved them and thereby put obstructions to the growth of capitalism in India. But we have no doubt about the reality of capitalism as a trend in Indian agriculture. . . We should add that capitalism as a trend appeared in **agriculture** in the context of the general development of capitalism in colonised **India**.'<sup>38</sup> Chattopadhyay points out with clarity the contradictory and dialectical character of colonial capitalist development that is missing in some of the other formulations. **Equally** clearly the problematics of **the** colonial mode of production are recognised explicitly by Banajee who '**reject(s)** both the feudal and the capitalist characterisation and **argue(s)** that colonialism must be understood in terms of a specific mode of production, neither feudal nor capitalist, though resembling both at different **levels**.'<sup>39</sup> In this connection **Banajee** also refers to the political implications of these characterisations. The 'feudal' thesis has been used to support the view that the current epoch is one of a struggle of a revolutionary bourgeoisie against feudalism, which, by that token, postpones the struggle for socialism until the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' is completed. Attacking the Gunder Frank thesis **Patnaik**, on the other hand criticises those who, according to her, would say: 'Therefore all these countries are "capitalist". Therefore the only possible immediate programme of revolutionary political party in each of these countries must be a **socialist** revolution!' **Banajee** correctly criticises also the thesis, such as that which is commonly inferred from Gunder Frank's early statements, that what we have now is a global uniform capitalist system that operates identically everywhere. He writes: 'The process of integration of particular areas of the globe into a world market dominated by the capitalist **mode** of **production** was confused with the process of installation of the capitalist **mode** within those areas. . . The

distance between these concepts—integration of a given area into a world market dominated by capitalism/local installation of the capitalist mode of production—can only be established in terms of a theory of colonialism.'

The Indian debate on the whole has been valuable insofar as the issue of the colonial mode of production has thus been opened up. Before we proceed in the next section to examine the question, the nature of the colonial transformation in India and the nature of the consequent relations of production in agriculture, we would underline one aspect of the problematic that has not been touched upon. The debate has focussed on direct forms of exploitation of labour in the Indian agrarian economy, namely by 'feudal' landlords who employ sharecroppers and 'capitalist farmers' who employ wage labourers and, associated with that the question of the mode of appropriation of the surplus and the insertion of the agrarian economy into the colonial generalised commodity production. However there is a major element of the agrarian economy that is not involved in that particular way and whose structural role needs consideration. Three quarters of the number of farms (although only a tiny proportion of the cultivated area) is accounted for by smallholders or the so-called 'middle peasants'. Analysis of the colonial mode of production must define not only the place of the former in the economic structure but also that of the latter. That we will deal with presently.

### III

To conceptualise the 'colonial mode of production' theoretically, it might be useful to consider first the Marxist conception of the 'feudal mode of production' and in that light to look at the pre-capitalist economy in India before the colonial impact and the transformations that were brought about by colonialism.

A mode of production is a complex unity. There has been, all too often, a tendency to reduce that complex, dialectical, unity to a narrow definition of 'relations of production' that focusses on *forms* of relationships between the direct producer, the worker (whether industrial or agricultural) and the class that exploits his labour power. 'Relations of production' cannot be understood simplistically in terms of dyadic relationships, i.e. apparently one to one relationships, between the worker and his master for such relationships exist and can only exist by virtue of the totality of the structure-superstructure formation of a society that constitutes a dialectical unity. Parts or aspects of that unity cannot be understood without reference to the dialectically developing whole (and its internal contradictions). Even the analytical dichotomy of the 'structure-superstructure' conception is all too often interpreted in an empirical rather than a theoretical sense, so that this or that set of relationships is assigned to the one and other

sets of relationships to the other. That is a large issue that must be indicated here but which we cannot hope to pursue further in this paper.

What we do wish to emphasise here is the inadequacy of any conception of the 'mode of production' that is **premissed** narrowly on sets of relationships that are arbitrarily assigned to the 'structure', ignoring the totality. The polemical exchanges in the recent debates (including those between Frank and Laclau) have been of much value inasmuch as they have extended the definition of the mode of production beyond the concept of 'relations of production' (though still narrowly conceived), for 'relations of production' do not exhaust the definition of the mode of production. They have focussed also on other aspects, namely that of generalised commodity production (or its absence) and the mode of appropriation of the surplus and the difference between simple reproduction of **pre-capitalist** economic systems as against extended reproduction and capital accumulation of capitalism, **Nevertheless** the heavy 'economist' emphasis in the conceptualisation remains. It is necessary therefore, at the outset to emphasise the complex, dialectical, unity of the whole and the necessity to consider all the aspects of that unity for an adequate conceptualisation of the mode of production. The difference between such a totalised conceptualisation of the 'mode of production' and the concept of a 'social formation' in Marxist analysis is that the former is a theoretical construct that defines a coherent and historically defined set of relationships of production and appropriation whereas in a social formation more than one mode of production may be present, in a dialectical opposition, one in ascendance and the other, by virtue of that fact, disintegrating.

The excessive and misleading emphasis on the **form** of the relationship between the producer and his master has bedevilled discussion of the mode of production; in particular, that has obscured fundamental transformations that were wrought in the nature and the significance of such relationships by virtue of the colonial impact. Although the **form** of such a relationship often remains unchanged, its essential nature and significance undergoes a revolutionary transformation. That is why it is wrong to describe colonial economies to be those in which pre-capitalist relationships 'coexist' with 'capitalist' relations. Such **relationships**, transformed by the colonial impact are no longer 'pre-capitalist'. In India 'sharecropping' on land, has thus been equated with 'feudal' just as in Latin America the apparently servile relationships of the hacienda have been defined also as 'feudal'. But in neither case do they retain, apart from their superficial form, the essential nature of the 'feudal' relationships. That is one of the central problems that must be clarified (and the corresponding problem of the so-called 'coexistence' of the feudal and the capitalist modes of production in a colonial structure).

A decisive factor that underlies pre-capitalist modes of production, including the 'feudal mode of production', is that they are subject to the

limitations of exploiting land and the forces of nature on a low level of technology without the benefit of the enormous increases in the power of man over nature that were made possible by the embodiment of labour (manual and intellectual) in capital and technology that made the phenomenal advances in productivity possible under capitalism. The feudal mode of production therefore was limited to small commodity production and a natural economy in which production and appropriation of the produce, as well as the structure of power, were essentially localised; long distance trade was marginal to it as also the structure of power of feudal kingdoms which was tenuous and fragile.

In view of the limits on capital accumulation, the feudal economy was geared to the conspicuous consumption of the feudal lords. It was therefore a system of 'simple reproduction'; as contrasted with the system of 'expanded reproduction' of capitalism in which much of the surplus goes into capital accumulation and brings about a rise in the organic composition of capital (i.e. more 'capital intensive' methods of production). In a colonial mode of production we do not have either of these characteristics. The scale of investments that we have seen in the colonial agrarian economy, especially in very recent years has been possible only because of the encapsulation of the colonial agrarian economy within the highly industrialised world imperialist economy (and also the subordinated industrial development that has taken place within the colony itself under the aegis of the metropolitan bourgeoisie). Secondly, in the 'colonial mode of production' we have a system of expanded reproduction instead of a simple reproduction but of a deformed nature that characterises the colonial mode, because a substantial part of the surplus generated in the colonial agrarian economy (as well as that generated in colonial industry) is appropriated by the imperialist bourgeoisie and enters into expanded reproduction not directly within the colonial economy but rather at the imperialist centre. Its special characteristic is that the expanded reproduction, and the attendant rise in the organic composition of capital, benefits the imperialist bourgeoisie rather than the colony from which the surplus is extracted.

Another aspect of a feudal mode of production is the absence of generalised commodity production. This is a controversial issue inasmuch as serfdom in Poland and Eastern Europe was accompanied by generalised commodity production, agricultural production being geared to exports; that mode of production is often regarded as 'feudal'. But one would suggest that the feudal mode of production should not be equated with serfdom. It is well known that even in the classical feudalism of Western Europe, several different forms of relationships between the direct producer and his master have coexisted—feudalism is not identical with serfdom. The generalised commodity production in Eastern Europe was possible precisely because of the incorporation of the agrarian economies



of those countries within the ambit of the industrialising economies of the West. It was the Western capitalism rather than Eastern serfdom that generated it. I have already suggested therefore that we may regard this rather as a system of proto-colonial mode of production rather than a pure form of feudal mode of production. In the Third World generalised commodity production is also precisely created by and at the service of the imperialist economy. The subordination of the agrarian economies of the countries of the Third World to the needs of imperialism, as suppliers of food and raw materials (many of such countries often being condemned to monoculture) is commonplace. It has also been emphasised by Amin that their economies are *disarticulated internally*<sup>40</sup> so that segments of the colonial economies do not trade with each other; they are articulated only via their links with the metropolitan economies and they are subordinated thereby to the latter. The concept of internal disarticulation of the colonial economy is crucial for an understanding of the colonial mode of production.

The question of the form of the relationship between the direct producer and the exploiting class cannot be understood except within the framework of the structure of power and the legal and institutional structures in which such relationships are embedded. Laclau, for example, has referred to 'a general ensemble of extra-economic coercions weighing on the peasantry' as a definitive condition the feudal relationship in Latin America; and this is reiterated by others. But we cannot judge the significance and the nature of such 'coercive' relationships and the nature of 'coercion' without reference to the structure of colonial state power. The difference between the political system of feudalism and the colonial bourgeois state, with its legal and institutional framework, distances the apparently similar forms of relationships in the two cases. This critical condition is all too often dismissed by virtue of a narrow economist reading of Marxism. On the other hand, Patnaik, for example, dismisses the significance of property in land, enforced by the British in India somewhat disingenuously, by invoking the concept of 'relative autonomy of the super-structure', suggesting thereby that the structural forms and juridical forms were out of alignment with each other. She suggests that there was therefore 'necessarily inexact correspondence between production relations on the one hand and juridical forms (as well as other elements of the super-structure) on the other.'<sup>41</sup> But a closer examination of the proposition will show that such a view is self-contradictory, inasmuch as the 'relations of production' are themselves premised here on an aspect of the 'super-structure', namely the supposedly 'coercive' domination of the peasantry directly by the landlord. It is the nature precisely of that direct 'coercive' relationship that is at issue and needs to be examined carefully.

An essential aspect of the feudal mode of production, corresponding to its localised production and localised appropriation, is its localised structure

of power. Feudal kingdoms were precarious alliances; their true locus of power was at the base, in the hands of the local lords. The dialectic between the central authority and local power made it a complex polity, Anderson speaks of this as the 'parcellization of sovereignty'. He writes: 'Political sovereignty was never focussed in a single centre. The functions of the State were disintegrated in a vertical allocation downwards, at each level of which political and economic relations were, on the other hand, integrated. This parcellization of sovereignty was constitutive of the whole feudal mode of production.'<sup>42</sup> But the colonial regime subordinated the power of the local lords, under its own structure of institutionalised power within the framework of its *colonial bourgeois state*. It is in the light of that critical and decisive change that I wrote sometime ago that the bourgeois revolution in the colonies was already accomplished by the imperialist bourgeoisie, which created in the colonies a bourgeois state and bourgeois property and a bourgeois legal and institutional apparatus precisely as an integral and necessary complement to its economic domination.<sup>43</sup> Those who speak of the necessity of a bourgeois democratic revolution in the colonies, misconceive the problem by overlooking this—in neither Russia nor China was such a bourgeois state established by the imperialist bourgeoisie.

In the light of that outline of the main criteria of a feudal mode of production we can turn to the situation of India and the transformation that was brought about in the wake of its colonialist subordination. First of all, in pre-British India, *land was a possession*, held by virtue of the force at the command of the local lord, *rather than property* held under bourgeois law. However, not unlike the dialectic between central authority and local power in feudal kingdoms of Europe, the Mughal Emperors made attempts, but not always very effectively, to 'appoint' the local lords, who in turn often benefited from the legitimacy thus conferred on their possession, which was an asset for them in their contests with other rival local lords. In the words of Henry Maine 'Land in pre-British India was one of the aspects of rulership, whether viewed in the person of a *raja*, in the body corporate of a *bhaichara* (brotherhood) village, or in the person of the *zemindar*, the closest approximation to the Roman *pater familias*. Thus the Indian view of land was also *political*.'<sup>44</sup> Land was not yet a commodity which it was to become under the colonial institutional structure.

Land in fact was not yet the most valued resource in pre-British India, for there was an abundance of it relative to the number of people available to extract the fruits of the unyielding earth. The truly precious possession was labour. The labourer had therefore to be made *unfree* as a necessary condition for his exploitation. He had to be held by coercion. It was only when under the colonial regime all land was appropriated, and the labourer had no direct access anymore to 'waste' land and had nothing therefore to sell but his labour power that conditions of his exploitation in freedom

arose. Thus we are told that in pre-colonial India: 'In view of the shortage of cultivators, the Zemindars enjoyed the right to restrain the tenants from leaving the land and to compel them to cultivate all the arable land held by them.'<sup>45</sup> Over the heads of the cultivators stood a hierarchy of parasitic and powerful 'intermediaries' constituting a pyramid not unlike that in European feudalism. They did not own the land. They had 'rights' to shares of the produce. The mode of extraction of the surplus was, quite unambiguously, force.

A myth was propagated by the British in the 19th century that in Mughal India land was the property of the Emperor. They quoted, for example, **Bernier** that famous traveller who peddled myths that the Mughal Emperor himself might have liked to believe: 'The great **Mogol** is the proprietor of every acre of land in the kingdom.' That view was taken up and widely canvassed by influential men of the colonial regime like James Grant and above all James **Mill** (who too had entered the service of the East India Company). That, as **Éric Stokes** has pointed out, had the advantage of legitimising the claims of the colonial power to a large share of the surplus from Indian agriculture, for it had stepped into the shoes of the Mughal **Emperor**.<sup>46</sup> The colonial regime in India had a big stake in the direct extraction of surplus from agriculture; indeed until the extension of the railways in the second half of the 19th century, when it became possible to exploit the Indian agrarian economy by way of cultivation of bulky 'cash crops' which could now be transported economically to the metropolitan cities to provide food and raw materials, the main weight of the colonial regime on Indian agriculture was by way of direct extraction of the surplus in the form of heavy 'land revenues'.

But major changes were already under way. Amongst the most important of them was the institution of private property in land. The creation of a system of landed property was closely tied up with the system of land revenue 'settlements', beginning with the celebrated 'Permanent Settlement' in **Bengal in 1793**, by virtue of which the colonial state was to receive 90% of the rental from the land. Land, however, had now become a commodity that could be transacted within the framework of bourgeois law. The land which was not in private hands was deemed to be Crown land and appropriated by the state. No longer could the over-exploited peasant even think of escaping from his rapacious lord, and hope to settle on 'waste land' because that was now the property of the Crown. The appropriation thus of all land, as well as demographic growth, led to a situation in which the landowner had no longer to exercise 'coercion' over the cultivator as indicated above, for now the poor peasant was 'free' to sell nothing but his labour. He was now free to leave his master—and to starve. Thus although the *form* of the relationship between the cultivator and the landlord remained the same, namely share-cropping, its essential substance was transformed. It was no longer based

on direct coercion. It was based on the economic laws of a capitalist society and the economic necessities that it imposes upon those who are deprived of access to the means of production by the institution of private property.

Furthermore, the colonial regime transformed the feudal mode of localised production and localised appropriation by a complete transformation of the agrarian economy in the second half of the 19th century, when railways and steamships were to carry raw materials like cotton, indigo, jute and other commodities which were now to be grown by Indian farmers, to England. That was against the background of destruction of Indian industry and the pauperisation of the artisans who went to swell the ranks of the destitute on the land. Instead of a local exchange between Indian artisans and Indian agriculturists, the produce of agriculture was to be carried to distant shores and manufactured goods imported. The Indian economy was disarticulated and subordinated to colonialism. Its elements were no longer integrated internally and directly but only by virtue of the separate ties of its different segments with the metropolitan economy. It was no longer a feudal mode of production. It had already been transformed into a colonial mode of production. Generalised commodity production in the colony did not have the same character as that in the imperialist centre itself because of that **disarticulation**.<sup>47</sup> It was a disarticulated generalised commodity production; precisely a colonial form of deformed generalised commodity production.

Finally unlike the feudal mode of production that had preceded it, the colonial mode was no longer one of simple reproduction but one of extended reproduction. But here again we must recognise its deformity, arising precisely from its colonial status. The result of the internal disarticulation of the colonial economy and the extraction of the surplus by the colonial power meant that the extended reproduction could not be realised within the economy of the colony but could be realised only through the imperialist centre. The surplus value extracted from the colony went to support capital accumulation at the centre and to raise the organic composition of capital (i.e. higher 'capital intensity of investment') at the centre, while destituting the colonial economy. The colonial form was a deformed extended reproduction.

The destitution of the colonial economy and the relative lowering of the organic composition of capital (i.e. lower capital intensity of investment) in the colony, was reflected in a lower wage level in the colony. That has provided an opportunity for profitable export of capital to the colonies in the case of those industries which are labour intensive, so that a higher rate of profit could be realised thereby by metropolitan capital. It is in that context that we may consider the special role of the large number of destitute small-holders, **75%** of all farms in modern India, in the colonial mode of production. Because such farms are incapable of providing even

a bare subsistence to the bulk of the rural families, members of such families are forced to seek supplementary employment, not only in the villages but also in urban industry which was developed under colonial auspices. This enormously lowered the cost of reproduction of labour, thereby making it possible to lower wages even more than they might otherwise have had to be. The small peasant sector of the agrarian economy, that produces an insignificant amount of the marketable surplus and little direct profit for the colonial bourgeoisie through agricultural production, is not therefore just an irrelevance. It is not just a disintegrated element that somehow survives outside the colonial mode of production, beside the rich farmer economy that is directly geared to the production of cash crops and the generation of the surplus for the colonial economy. The small-holder class too is integrated into the colonial mode of production, for it is a valued supplier of cheap labour; it fulfils the need for the colonial economy of cheap reproduction of labour power. Its existence lowers the cost of reproduction of labour and therefore the necessary level of wages in the colonial economy. Here again, a description of this class as 'pre-capitalist' would do violence to its structural incorporation into the colonial (capitalist) economic structure. But nor is it itself 'capitalist'. Again, its structural characteristics can be defined only within a structural conception precisely of a 'colonial mode of production.'

We have identified certain structural characteristics of the colonial mode of production from an examination of developments in the Indian agricultural economy. Before proceeding to consider some wider questions that arise about the concept of the colonial mode of production we might conclude our examination of the Indian developments with some broad observations. Firstly we encounter, all too often, an *a priori* assumption that there is a conflict of interest between the so-called 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal' class of landlords and the bourgeoisie. Such assumptions are premised on a conception of the coexistence, in dialectical opposition, of a 'feudal mode of production' and a 'capitalist mode of production', so that such a class conflict is assumed to exist, *a priori*. Facts are forced into the mould of theoretical assumptions and examples of political competition that do not necessarily fit with such an explanation, are nevertheless 'explained' as examples of conflicts between the 'bourgeois' Congress and opposition parties and groups which, by definition, are designated: 'feudal'. Such an interpretation would violate reality insofar as we find *within* the Congress Party an alliance of the bourgeoisie and the landowners. Nor is there any evidence of conflict between the so-called 'capitalist farmers' and the so-called 'feudal landowners'. We find instead that the big farmer strategy has served the interests of the bourgeoisie both Indian and foreign, insofar as it has provided the required increase in the marketed surplus of agricultural commodities. The interests of the foreign

imperialist bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landlords and rich peasants coincide, in that respect at least

Secondly, the contemporary application of new technology and the corresponding increase in the 'organic composition of capital' (or the rise in the capital intensity of investment) in Indian agriculture, carries forward a development that was interrupted by the depression of the thirties and the World War; but it is, nevertheless, a development on a new scale. That development, however, has been possible only within the framework of the colonial relationship and the metropolitan industrial production (and the dependent indigenous industrial production) that has made available the new technological resources. Here again, there is a structural correspondence of interests rather than a source of structural conflict.

Thirdly, the development of 'capitalism' in Indian agriculture, insofar as it has gone and in areas where it has progressed, has brought about widespread destitution of all the subordinate classes. It has affected the rural poor directly by way of displacement of the permanent labour force (sharecroppers etc)—although with an increase in the seasonal demand for labour that only partially compensates them for the loss of their regular livelihood. This development, however, indirectly affects the small peasants, the urban lower middle classes and the urban workers, as well as the rural poor. This is because of the major inflationary impact of the enormously increased expenditure of the landowners and rich peasants whose incomes have multiplied and which have a very considerable weight in the total national consumption expenditure. The rapid rise in prices of commodities has eroded the real incomes of all these subordinate classes. Here we have a pattern of development which has created wealth for the few and simultaneously and necessarily poverty for the great majority. This has forced many smallholders too into destitution so that they sell their land to the big farmers, and descend into the ranks of the landless poor. The rural poor, both the smallholders as well as the landless workers, have no reserves to carry them through periodic shortages and a bad harvest is now transformed into a famine in which millions die.

Finally, there is a great increase in peasant militancy. That is not only because of their progressive impoverishment, as pointed out above, which is a factor that is particularly important for the smallholder (middle peasant), but also because in the case of the poor peasant the tie of economic dependence viz that between the permanently employed sharecroppers and wage labourers and their masters, is broken when they are thrown out. On the other hand, the enormous increase in the cropped area as well as in crop yields, has greatly increased the seasonal demand for labour at harvest time. That has increased the bargaining power of the landless labourers, especially at the time of the harvests. India is experiencing peasant militancy on an unprecedented scale. The resultant conflict cannot be explained in terms of a contradiction between a 'feudal' mode of

production and a 'capitalist' mode. There is no conflict between the urban and rural bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the landowners on the other—the indigenous—and foreign bourgeoisie have prospered too as a result of rising prices of commodities. Nor is there a conflict in which the wage labourers, (the 'rural proletariat'?) are aligned differently from the other subordinate classes in the countryside namely the sharecroppers and the smallholding 'middle peasants'. The alignments are the structural alignments and the conflicts of the colonial mode of production; not those of the feudal and capitalist modes.

So far our discussion has focussed on developments in the Indian agrarian economy and their structural implications. To comprehend the concept of the colonial mode of production we must consider also the other aspects of the Indian economy, both internal and external, in their historical development. In considering the latter context we have emphasised structural features that are specific to the *colonial* mode of production, especially the internal disarticulation and the external integration into the metropolitan economy. These features have, however, been subject to change as a result of indigenous industrial development, which in India has progressed to a higher level than some other colonial countries. A consideration of the structural changes that have resulted lead us from the concept of the structure of the colonial mode of production to that of the *post-colonial* mode. In the next section we will briefly consider some of these wider problems.

#### IV

The above discussion of some of the aspects of the 'colonial mode of production' must be qualified and elaborated further in several respects before we can advance towards an adequate conception of it. Two sets of questions, in particular, invite further consideration. Firstly, it follows from the criteria that we have used to define the colonial mode of production, in particular the mediation (and deformation) by the imperialist centre of the generalised commodity production and extended reproduction that is generated by the colonial economy, that the 'colonial mode of production' does not by itself constitute a complete unity; it can be conceptualised and theoretically understood only with reference to that larger structural formation. We are led to ask therefore whether we can with any validity speak of a colonial mode of production. Should we not speak instead of an imperialist mode of production that embraces a global unity. That consideration takes us into a highly problematic area and we encounter here major theoretical difficulties that are not easily resolved. In what sense can we postulate a unity of world imperialism? Would such a unity be premised on a conception of its homogeneity or do we assume a hierarchical unity of imperialist countries, say, under the hegemony of

the United States. Or, yet again, do we recognise their disunity and the existence of inter-imperialist rivalries. Whatever the fact may be, clearly we cannot settle it a *priori*, by definition. A recognition of the actual or theoretically possible disunity of imperialism introduces a complexity in the conceptualisation of the structural subordination of colonial economies that are not linked exclusively to a single imperialist power. Here we have a problem that is new to Marxist theory, which is familiar with the problem of simultaneous existence, in dialectical opposition, of more than one mode of production within a single social formation but which has not yet recognised the problematic of a mode of production that is inserted into several social formations (of the imperialist centres as well as the colony) and which therefore cannot be fully conceptualised except as a part of the larger whole. In that light we recognise and, indeed emphasise, that the structural formation that we designate as a 'colonial mode of production' does not constitute a self-contained entity; that is not perhaps the conventional use of the term 'mode of production'. We modify the use of that term when we use it in this way. Insofar as it is possible however to specify the structural coherence, though not complete unity, of the 'colonial mode of production', we do not violate the conventional usage. The search for an alternative terminology may be a profitable semantic enterprise. But that is hardly crucial. Given the precise sense in which we use the term, we would suggest that the 'colonial mode of production' is a valid and satisfactory term for the theoretical concept that we are examining here.

The second set of questions relates to the implications for the colonial mode of production of the class alignments and contradictions that inhere in it, with regard to the growth of indigenous capitalism in the field of industrial production, as well as its incorporation and penetration by metropolitan capital i.e. its subordination to imperialism. The imperialist bourgeoisie, as we have pointed out, carried through the bourgeois revolution in the colonies. It created a bourgeois state and bourgeois legal and institutional framework to **complement** the penetration, at the structural level, by metropolitan capital, of the colonial economy. By virtue of the transformation also of the feudal relations on the land into capitalist relations, the colonial mode of production, which is a *capitalist* mode of production, was set in motion. Conditions for the development of indigenous capital were ready. That development poses two sets of questions. One is that of the effects of indigenous capitalist development on the internal disarticulation of the colonial economy. The second set of questions concerns the mode of its insertion into the structure of imperialism and the contradictions between the indigenous and the imperialist bourgeoisie.

To take up the latter question first, it will be recalled that in India, as in some other countries, indigenous capitalism had made sufficient progress



already by the end of the First World War, for Lenin and his colleagues to engage in a debate about the role of the so-called 'national bourgeoisie' at the Second Congress of the Communist International in **1920**. Speculative propositions that were advanced in that early debate have been invoked, from time to time, to justify opportunist and unprincipled collaborationist policies imposed on socialist movements; one of the earliest and most disastrous examples being the 'alliance' that led eventually to Chiang Kai Shek's successful counter-revolution in China in **1927**. That issue **is** now central to the contemporary debate in the Indian Communist movement. We will not pursue it here except to point out the implications of our own analysis that lead to the view that a new kind of structural dependence between the Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialist bourgeoisies has been developing, in the context of a changing pattern of industrial development, especially (for the big bourgeoisie) in the field of research-intensive industries. We discussed this in **1964** in an article on 'Imperialism, Old and New', showing a structural change in the pattern of foreign investments in India between **1911** and **1956** and the new basis of the relationship between the big Indian and the foreign bourgeoisies, in the form of technological collaboration. That theoretical analysis was the framework of an extended empirical study, by Kidron, that ratified it. Our conclusion was that in the *post-colonial* situation there is a structurally different basis of subordination of (big) indigenous capital by imperialism and that within an hierarchical relationship, there is a convergence of interests between the two; a basis that is radically different from that which determined the subordination of the 'comprador' bourgeoisie in the *colonial* situation when some contradictions between the rising Indian bourgeoisie, emerging from that background, and imperialism, came to the surface. The new structural basis of imperialist subordination is central to a consideration of the post-colonial mode of production and the basis of the post-colonial state.<sup>48</sup>

The other aspect of indigenous capitalist development bears directly on our conception of the colonial mode of production for which we had specified the conditions of (i) deformed generalised commodity production, inasmuch as the colonial economy is internally disarticulated and the circuit of commodity exchange is completed only via the imperialist centre, and (ii) a deformed extended reproduction inasmuch as the surplus value is realised by and through metropolitan capital accumulation. The indigenous capitalist development has promoted the manufacture of a wide range of commodities, especially consumption goods, in India. That has altered, though partially, the pattern of generalised commodity production, that is now internalised to a greater degree so that the internal disarticulation of the Indian economy is, to that extent, ameliorated. The external dependence is increasingly in the field of capital goods and research intensive technology, and not with regard to industrial commodities in

general as before. Secondly, as a consequence of the indigenous capitalist development an increasing proportion of surplus value is appropriated internally, by the indigenous capitalist class. By that token the deformed pattern of extended reproduction, via the metropolitan bourgeoisie and metropolitan capital accumulation, is partially modified; the process of extended reproduction is more internalised. These structural differences distance the *post-colonial mode of production* from the colonial mode. This structural distinction is crucial for a consideration of the post-colonial state. The distinction between the 'colonial' and the 'post-colonial' status is not established at the political level alone. In India, it might be argued, there is by and large, some degree of correspondence in time between the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial mode of production and the achievement of political independence. The same can hardly be said of most countries of Africa which have only achieved political independence. On the other hand, in the case of Latin American countries which have been subjected to indirect colonial rule, the post-colonial phase can and must be identified at the level of the structural changes that distance, for example, Brazil or Mexico from some of the wholly dependent Central American Republics. The 'Dependence' theory obscures such differences. We would suggest that the concept of the colonial mode of production and that of the post-colonial mode need to be explored in these other contexts also, to lead us towards an adequate conceptualisation of the structure of the contemporary capitalist world.

## NOTES

- Most of the contributions have appeared in the quarterly supplements *Review of Agriculture* (RA) of the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW). The main contributions include:  
*Ashoka Rudra, A. Majid and B.D. Talib*, 'Big Farmers of the Punjab', EPW (RA) IV(39), Sept. 27, 1969 and IV(52) Dec. 27, 1969.  
*Ashoka Rudra* 'In Search of the Capitalist Farmer', EPW(RA) (26) June 27, 1970.  
*Ashoka Rudra* 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Reply' EPW VI(45) Nov. 6 1971. (This is a rejoinder to Patnaik.)  
*Utsa Patnaik* 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Note', EPW(RA) VI(39) Sept. 25 1971.  
*Utsa Patnaik* 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Further Comment', EPW(RA) VI(52) Dec. 25 1971. (This is a reply to Rudra.)  
*Utsa Patnaik* 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', EPW(RA) VII(40), Sept. 30 1972. (This is a reply to Chattopadhyay.)  
*Utsa Patnaik*, 'Capitalism in Agriculture' *Social Scientist* (in two parts) No. 2, Sept. 1972 and No. 3 Oct. 1972.  
*Pares Chatteropadhyay*, 'On the Question of the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Preliminary Note', EPW(RA) VII(13) March 25 1972.  
*Pares Chatteropadhyay*, 'Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: An Anti-Kritik', EPW(RA) VII Dec. 1972. (Reply to Patnaik.)

**Jairus Banajee**, 'For a Theory of Colonial Modes of Production' EPW VII(52) Dec. 23 1972.

**Ranjit Sau**, 'On the Essence of Manifestation of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture', EPW(RA) VIII(3), March 31 1973.

2. Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* 1967.

Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', *New Left Review* 67, May-June 1971.

3. The overall result of the 'Land Reform' was summed by Ladejinsky recently; he wrote: 'Summing up for India as a whole, by the end of 1970, the "declared surplus" was only 2.4 million acres and the "Area Distributed" just half of that or 0.3 of one per cent of the total cultivated land of India', Wolf Ladejinsky 'Land Ceilings and Land Reform', EPW Annual Number VII, 5-7 Feb. 1972.

There have been numerous detailed studies of land reform legislation and implementation in different states, one of the best of them being that for Bombay state by V.M. Dandekar and G.J. Khudanpur, *The Working of the Bombay Tenancy Act 1948* Poona 1957; cf. also Daniel Thorner's well known lectures: *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, New Delhi 1956.

The issue of class alignments in this context is examined with great clarity by Suhas Chattopadhyay who writes: 'An all-out attack to smash the feudal and semi-feudal fetters on the land relations were necessary for the fulfilment of this (*declared Congress*) aim. But the land reforms were deliberately not directed towards this goal because the ruling bourgeoisie was not ready to sacrifice its class alliance with the landlords.' Suhas Chattopadhyay 'On the Class Nature of Land Reforms in India since Independence', *Social Scientist* November 1973 p. 21.

4. **Jawaherlal Nehru on Community Development**, Government of India 1958, p. 35.

5. The Programme Evaluation Organisation of the Planning Commission issued a series of *Annual Evaluation Repmts on the Working of Community Projects and N.E.S. Blocks* which all substantiate this picture.

Government of India, Planning Commission *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrarian Cooperatives*, New Delhi 1957 and also *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agricultural Planning and Techniques*, New Delhi 1956.

7. *Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrarian Cooperatives*, p. 150.

8. Daniel Thorner, 'Context for Cooperatives in Rural India' *Economic Weekly*, 13th Annual Number February 1962. Cf. also his *Agricultural Cooperatives in India*, London 1962.

A.K. Sen, having examined such studies for six regions of India came to the conclusion that the critical factor that explained higher productivity on the 'small farms' was not the size of the farm but, rather, differences between family-labour based farms and wage-labour based farms, the former being more productive. Cf. 'An Aspect of Indian Agriculture', in *Economic Weekly*, 13th Annual Number February 1962.

10. Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, London 1967. Chapter VI.

11. F.G. Bailey, *Politics and Social Change—Orissa in 1959*, London 1963.

12. Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress*, Chicago 1967, pp. 154-5.

13. Government of India, Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, *Report on India's Food Crisis and*

*Steps to Meet It*, New Delhi, 1959.

14. J.W. Mellor, *et. al. Developing Rural India*, Ithaca 1968, p. 83.
15. The analytical and critical bibliographical essay by T.J. Byres, where he lists 104 items is still the best guide to the main body of that literature cf. T.J. Byres, 'The Dialectic of India's Green Revolution', *South Asian Review*, Vol. 5 No. 2 January 1972. The important contributions published since that article was written include (i) Francine Frankel, *India's Green Revolution—Economic Gains and Political Costs*, Princeton 1971, (ii) Harry M. Cleaver *et. al.* 'The Contradictions of the Green Revolution', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 24 June 1972 pp. 80-128, (iii) Hari Sharma, 'The Green Revolution in India' in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, 1973. Also see the numerous contributions in the quarterly 'Review of Agriculture' in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay.
16. 'Structural Causes of the Economic Crisis'. A report by the Economic Research Unit of the Indian Statistical Institute, *Economic and Political Weekly*, X(3) Jan. 18 1975.
17. S.N. Jodha, 'A Case of the Process of Tractorisation', *Economic and Political Weekly* Review of Agriculture, IX(52) Dec. 28 1974.
18. Utsa Patnaik, 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Note', *op. cit.* Rudra answered her criticism in that article in his: 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Reply', *op. cit.*, Patnaik clarified the issues further in 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: Further Comment' *op. cit.*
19. The debate has been surveyed with lucidity by my colleague Doug. McEachern in an unpublished paper on 'The Mode of Production in India'.
20. A. Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, 1967 Ch. IV.  
Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', *New Left Review* 67 May-June 1971.
21. Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 1974, p. 258.
22. A. Gunder Frank, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40.
23. Ernesto Laclau, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
24. My position on this point differs from that of Banajee (who also proposes a concept of a 'colonial mode of production' in the essay referred to above which fruitfully opens up several issues). Banajee considers Eastern European serfdom as a 'pure form' of feudalism, his criterion being the form of the relationship between the cultivator and his direct exploiter, in this case serfdom. That view conflicts with Banajee's own rather more fruitful insight, namely that such forms may vary within a given mode of production. In my view that criterion is too narrow for a theoretical conceptualisation of a mode of production. I would consider localised production and localised appropriation and simple reproduction to be crucial for a definition of a feudal mode of production, and unlike Banajee, I would take the view that generalised commodity production is incompatible with the feudal mode of production. Laclau also refers to the East European 'second serfdom' and Banajee's views are clearly influenced very greatly by Laclau.
25. E. Laclau, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
26. None of the participants in the Indian debate on the mode of production nor Laclau, take into consideration the problem of 'Contradiction' between modes of production, issues about which are discussed in Mao Tse Tung's article 'On Contradictions' in *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung* (included twice, in Vol. I as well as Vol. II).
27. Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, 1974.
28. Utsa Patnaik, 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Note', *op. cit.*, p. A-124.

29. **Loc. cit.**

30. **Cf.** Hamza Alavi 'Peasants and Revolution', *Socialist Register* 1965 reprinted in *Les Temps Modernes* No. 306, January 1972 ('Paysans et revolution') and in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, 1973.

31. Hamza Alavi 'Rural Bases of Political Power in South Asia', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, IV(4).1974. In this connection we would refer to Lenin's seminal work on 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia' in which he examines the development of capitalism in the Russian countryside and the emergence of a rural proletariat. However his early over-optimistic propositions about the role of the **rural** proletariat in the revolution were soon modified. This has been examined in the context of the Bolshevik revolutionary **struggle** in my article on 'Peasants and Revolution' first published in *Socialist Register* 1965 and reprinted variously, including in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, 1973.

32. Paresh Chattopadhyay, 'On the Question of the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Preliminary Note', *op. cit.*, p. A-45.

33. Utsa Patnaik, 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', *op. cit.*, p. A-148.

34. A Gunder Frank, 'On "Feudal" Modes, Models and Methods of Escaping Capitalist Reality', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. VIII No. 1 January 6, 1973, pp. 36-7.

35. Utsa Patnaik, 'Capitalism in Agriculture', *Social Scientist* 2, Sept. 1972, p. 16.

36. Patnaik writes: 'The theoretically unsatisfactory nature of some of the Marxist analyses to date lies firstly in their treatment of agriculture as an isolated sector in itself, not explicitly related to the rest of the economy'

**loc. cit.** But her own analysis does not take us very far in that direction. Apart from a reference to the fact that there was little industrial development in the colonial period, her analysis focusses almost exclusively on the agrarian economy.

37. Utsa Patnaik, 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', *op. cit.*, p. A-149.

38. Paresh Chattopadhyay, 'Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: An Anti-Kritik', *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

39. **Jairus Banajee**, 'For a Theory of Colonial Mode of Production', *Economic and Political Weekly*, VII(52) December 23 1972, p. 2499.

40. **Samir Amin**, *Accumulation on a World Scale*, 1974, *passim*

41. Utsa Patnaik, 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', *op. cit.*, p. A-146.

42. Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 1974, p. 148.

43. **Cf.** Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies', *New Left Review* 74 July-Aug. 1972; reprinted in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, 1973; 'L'Etat dans les Sociétés post-coloniales', *Les Temps Modernes* No. 314-315, Sept.-Oct. 1972.

44. Quoted in Walter Neale, 'Land is to Rule' in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.) *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* 1969, p. 7.

45. S. Nural Hassan, 'Zemindars under the Mughals', in Frykenberg (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 28; Also cf. S. Nural Hassan *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India* 1973; and Irfan Habib's classic work *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* 1963.

46. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* 1959. The ideological debate amongst the **colonial** rulers is brilliantly examined by **Ranajit Guha** *A Rule of Property for Bengal* 1963.

For the concept of 'internal disarticulation' of colonial economies, cf. Samir

- Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* 1974, passim.
48. Hamza Alavi, 'Imperialism, Old and New' *Socialist Register* 1964 ('le Nouvel Imperialisme', *Les Temps Modernes* 219-220 Aug.-Sept. 1964); Hamza Alavi, 'Indian Capitalism and Foreign Imperialism' Review of M. Kidron, *Foreign Investments in India* 1966) in *New Left Review* 37 May-June 1966; and Hamza Alavi 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies', *New Left Review* 74 July-Aug. 1972 ('L'Etat dans les sociétés post-coloniales', *Les Temps Modernes* 314-315 Sept.-Oct. 1972) reprinted also in Kathleen Gough and Hari Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, 1973.