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**FORMS OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND AND EVOLUTION
OF TENANCY RELATIONS IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD:
SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

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FORMS OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND AND EVOLUTION OF TENANCY
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The purpose of this study is to critically look at the theoretical categories used to characterise the nature of pre-colonial agrarian structure of India, in particular, rural land relations. On that basis, we would suggest alternative analytical and categories/pose the problem of agrarian transition in a way which seems to be more in line with recent evidence (particularly for the Mughal period) and lead to a more useful analysis (in the context of a study of the current situation) of changes in rural land relations in the colonial period, than alternative ones, notably, Marx's way of posing the problem of non-European agrarian societies (for the pre-capitalist epoch) in terms of transition from communal/public property to private/individual property. We shall suggest the need for putting the latter view in a proper historical perspective. In a subsequent paper, we would analyse data for a zamindari district of British India to partly illustrate the working out of the categories suggested.

I. Points of Departure

There has been so much of discussion about the nature of pre-capitalist agrarian structure in India that it may seem superfluous to talk about it again. But it seems to be important to look at the existing literature critically, in order to attempt a possible reinterpretation of the existing evidence; also because

much of the current discussion on agrarian transition seems to be vitiated by a kind of historical impressionism, by rigidly adhering to (or taking for granted) one of the two theoretical notions available for analysis, namely, Feudalism and Asiatic Mode of Production. There are some 'neutral' categories suggested as well, by those who find the above two notions unacceptable, namely, "medieval Indian economy"^{1/}, "free peasant production",^{2/} even "peasant ownership economy".^{3/}

Before looking at the views which suggest that there was a feudal epoch in Indian history, not essentially different from the kind encountered in Western Europe and Japan, it should be made clear that the following structural elements, in their totality, are taken to be the defining characteristics of feudalism, taking the Western European and Japanese varieties as the historical prototypes:

(1) Feudal form of property in land (noble property) and the manorial form of organisation of production (demesne-farming) corresponding to it;

(2) Fusion of economic and political power within the manor (the lord represents the "state", so to say, with military and judicial power), i.e., existence of a landowning nobility with political power;

(3) Decentralization of political power because of (2) above and because of the fact that the extraction of the surplus from

^{1/} Irfan Habib, "Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis", in Science and Human Progress: Essays in Honour of D.D. Dosambi (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1947), pp.34-38.

^{2/} Harbans Mukhia, "Was there Feudalism in Indian History?", mimeo, Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

^{3/} B.R. Grover, "Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India", IESHR, Vol.I, No.1, July-September, 1963, p.15.

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Kovalevsky posits a pre-feudal agrarian structure in which the basic and the most typical kind of property is communal landholding. There are five phases through which the original communal form develops:^{7/}

(1) First the tribal community with undivided property in land and agriculture in common;

(2) The tribal community disintegrates, depending upon the number of tribes, into a greater or smaller number of family communities. In the end the indivisibility of landed property and common cultivation of land disappear;

(3) The system of land shares or parcels is fixed by inheritance rights, i.e., the degree of kinship, and is therefore unequal. War, the founding of new settlements, etc., alter the composition of the tribe and thereby the size of the shares. The earlier inequality grows;

(4) Inequality is no longer based on the closeness of kinship to the same tribal chief but on effective possession as expressed in actual cultivation;

(5) System of more or less periodical redistribution of communalland, etc. Redistribution first affected on an equitable basis the house land (and the field adjacent to the dwelling), arable land and pasture. The consequent process turned into private property first the house land (and everything that went with it); later the arable land and pasture as well. From the old system of communal property only the following remained as survivals: the community land (i.e., woodland and waste as opposed to the land already turned into private property), and, furthermore, the joint

^{7/} Thorner, pp.377-378; Krader, pp.346-355.

family property, ~~but this family is also being reduced by the his-~~
 torical process more and more to the individual private family in
 the modern sense.

In short, ~~there is a transition from communal holding by~~
 kinsmen ("gentile" communes) to common holdings by villagers who
 were not necessarily kinsmen (i.e. village communes based on terri-
 torial co-habitants, rather than kinsmen) to joint, indivisible
 family property and, much later, individual land tenure.

Kovalevsky identifies two major forces tending to decompose
 communal tenures: (1) pressure from the tribal chiefs, who wanted to
 claim for themselves special rights of granting unoccupied lands to
 individuals or groups willing to bring them under cultivation; (2)
 pressure from the priestly caste, the Brahmans, who wanted gifts of
 land and its revenues for sustaining their religious activities, and
 the prevailing inalienability and indivisibility of village communal
 and family land was a real obstacle to such gifts.

According to Kovalevsky, a process of feudalisation was
 set in motion primarily from the eleventh century onwards mainly by
 the Muslim land policy of granting of iqtas, i.e., the practice of
 Sultans of assigning to individuals the rights to levy the revenue
 in particular territories on the condition that they furnish upon
 demand a stipulated number of troops. The iqta is equated by
 Kovalevsky with the benefice of Western Europe. Though meanwhile
 the village population continued to hold the land either communally
 or individually, in course of time, by a process of commendation,
 the allodial tenure of these free proprietors became feudal. This
 process, according to Kovalevsky, had two phases: the first, from

the 12th to the 15th c. (the "Turk" and "Afghan" conquests), and the second, under the Mughals, from the 16th to the 18th c.

Kovalevsky maintains that the essence of the feudalisation process from the 12th to the 15th c. was the effort of the holders of iqtas to make their prerogatives hereditary and independent of Sultan of Delhi's will, until, in the reign of Firus Shah (1351-1388), hereditability received legislative acknowledgement.

During the 15th c. and the first part of the 16th, there occurred weakening of the central authorities and the increased struggle for power by minor officials and holders of iqtas. Not only the system of "beneficial tenure" became entrenched, but there grew up alongside the system of leasing tax collection.

The Mughal rulers did not alter basically the land policy of their Muslim predecessors, and there was an increasing tendency towards subinfeudation and commendation and the hereditary nature of the benefices.

As can be seen from above, Kovalevsky had actually set for himself four criteria for judging what was feudal in India and what was not, namely, system of benefices, commendation, leasing of offices and patrimonial justice (private jurisdiction). He came to the conclusion that whereas the first three clearly existed in India under the Muslims, the fourth did not. But, importantly, Kovalevsky recognises the power of the central government in explaining the limited development of feudal relations and the persistence of 'free' peasant cultivation (rather than all-round serfdom) and popular, rather than feudal, justice: "While in the West the tenure

of land together with the exercise of supreme rights within the limits of individual communities and districts becomes in the end the property of the former benefice holders and local officials, whose offices become hereditary by law, in India towards the end of Muslim sovereignty this same result was achieved in only a few districts; in the others communal and individual property remained, as before, in the hands of the native holders, but the exercise of governmental functions was entrusted to officials appointed by the central administration.... India's process of feudalisation at the time of English conquest here was still far from complete..."^{8/}

Having thus found out the exact senses in which Kovalevsky suggested that feudalism was developing in India as well as his qualifications, the following points of criticism can be made on the basis of his own understanding.

It is doubtful whether iqtas can be interpreted as representing hereditary noble property, except perhaps those during the reign of Firuz Shah (1351-1388). This needs some elaboration in terms of a closer look at the social origin of the iqtadars and muqtis (the difference being the former were mere "troopers" whose holdings were small and the latter were great nobles charged with the administration of substantial tracts) and their position and duties vis-a-vis the king.^{9/}

During the early phase of the Delhi Sultanate, the Turkish Sultans assigned different regions as iqtas to their commanders, who were required to maintain themselves and their troops out of the

^{8/} Kovalevski, Ch.VI; cited in Thorner, p.288.

^{9/} We are mainly using W.H.Moreland, The Agrarian System of Moslem India, pp.218-219, 221 and Irfan Habib, "The Social Distribution of Landed Property in Pre-British India (A Historical Survey)", Enquiry, Winter, 1965, pp.46-52.

revenues of the iqtas. The iqta thus stood for a revenue assignment as well as an administrative unit and the muktis were also governors.

But here it is important to point out that the iqtas were constantly transferred from one person to another, making it illegitimate to interpret iqta to mean 'fief'.

As the administration of the Sultanate was consolidated under the Khaljis and the early Tughluqs (1290-1351), there was a much more frequent transfer of iqtas and the muktis were no longer in absolute control of the revenues of their iqtas. They had to submit accounts of their collection and expenditure (which were subject to audit by the king's revenue ministry) and to send the balances to the king's treasury. Along with increasing royal intervention, the khalisa, or lands whose revenues were reserved for the king's treasury, appears to have extended very greatly.

It is only with the accession of Sultan Firuz Tughluq in 1351 that we find a series of concessions being granted by the Sultan to his officers. Firstly, the jama or estimated revenue-income was fixed permanently, so that the assignees obtained all benefits of increase in actual revenue collection. While iqta transfers were still affected, they appear to have become rarer. The concessions of Firuz were continued by Lodis (1451-1526).

Now, even if we grant that a stable feudal nobility could consolidate itself during this period, it still remains to be explained how the Sultanate came to an end not long after that. It does not also seem to be clear how so much pressure could be brought to bear by a section of the ruling class on the royal power forcing the latter to make so many concessions.

In any case, the above developments in the nature of the iqta organisation appear to have been closely related to the changes in the social composition of the ruling class. In the first stage, it was a stable composition of royal slaves of nomad-Turkish origin and their families which led Moreland to wonder how one could think of such a nobility in terms of a feudal system: "...what we have is a royal household full of slaves, who could rise, by merit or favour, from servile duties to the charge of a province, or even of a kingdom - essentially a bureaucracy of the normal Asiatic 'system".^{10/} Under the Khaljis and early Tughluqs, a lot of new elements (e.g., Indian slaves, foreign immigrants, Hindus, etc.) were inducted into the ruling class, ousting the older, chiefly military elements.

From our point of view, on the basis of the above description, the following points need to be underlined: the feasibility of such sweeping changes in the composition of the ruling class can be said to reflect the essential nature of the iqta system: namely, the individual members of the ruling class had no claim whatsoever to any particular parcel of land or locality and they could be provided with, or deprived of, their income at the will of the king.

As regards Kovalevsky's views about the Mughal period, the researches of Professor Irfan Habib throw serious doubts on their validity. The nature of the jagir system shows that the jagirdars were purely revenue-assignees (much more than the iqta-holders were under the Sultanate). The jagir was never a fixed territorial unit and had no connection with the administrative units, sarkars and parganas. The latter units had their own officers, appointed by the

^{10/} Moreland, p.218.

Emperor and independent of the assignees. The official assumption was that the jagirdars or their agents could collect the land revenue only in accordance with the imperial regulations and levy only such other taxes as were authorised. And, more importantly, the Mughal court was deeply committed to the principle of periodic jagir-transfers as a means of preventing its officers from developing into local autonomous rulers. Moreover, the jagirdars never formed a closed body and there was constant recruitment from amongst Central Asian and Persian immigrants of aristocratic families, from Muslim martial clans, from among the Zamindar-Chiefs (specially Rajputs), from ruling groups in the annexed kingdoms, from the small intelligentsia and the financial services, etc. Thus, the body of jagirdars was extremely heterogeneous and contained elements from practically all regions of the Empire and large numbers of outsiders.^{11/}

Strictly speaking, in view of the above facts, it is difficult to look at the jagirdars as a landowning, hereditary, feudal nobility practising demesne-farming and wielding political power. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that there was juridical, generalised serfdom during the Mughal period, as distinct from the generalised / subordination of the producing classes to a superior political power. This is not to deny the fact that the jagirdars were the major appropriators of the peasants' surplus, but, as we shall see, appropriation of the surplus produced by the peasantry, by itself, cannot be an adequate criterion of 'landed property'.

Now we come to the view that feudalism was flourishing in India between 500 A.D. and 1000 A.D., which has been put forward by

^{11/} See Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1962 (we have used the typescript available at the CDS Library), chapter VII, and Habib (1965), pp.61-66.

many historians, but ~~the most formidable range of evidence has been~~ presented by Professor R.S.Sharma. The essential change which started off the process of feudalisation has been generally recognised as the practice of increasingly widespread land-grants mostly, though not exclusively, to Brahmanas, resulting in the disintegration of the state power: "the comprehensive competence based on centralised control, which was the hallmark of the Maurya state, gave way to decentralisation in the post-Maurya and Gupta periods."^{12/} Before proceeding further with Professor Sharma's evidence, it must be pointed out that the period 700 A.D. - 1200 A.D. has been termed 'feudal' by some historians naming thereby "little more than the decay in monarchical power and the appearance of 'feudatories' of various grades which marked the polity of the period"^{13/}, something which Professor Sharma also emphasises a great deal.

It is relevant here to counter this view which picks up an isolated element characterising the feudal system and the same phenomenon, observed in any socio-historical context, is used as characterising a feudal system, by pointing out that not all forms of decentralised polity provide a sufficient basis for feudal productive relations to emerge.

We have a very useful example of a decentralised polity without a feudal base in the notion of a 'segmentary' state structure worked out originally by Aidan Southall and applied to a concrete socio-economic formation, an East African society, the Alur.^{14/} This notion has been applied to the Chola state by Burton Stein,^{15/} who claims

^{12/} Sharma, p.5.

^{13/} Mazumdar, pp.1-41.

^{14/} Aidan Southall, Alur Society: A Study in Process and Types of Domination (Cambridge: W.Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1956).

^{15/} Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India (Delhi: Oxford Univ.Press, 1980), p.264 ff.

larger applicability of the concept to the medieval Indian period, with the exception of the Mughal state.

We shall summarise this useful concept as used by Stein, without necessarily agreeing with his appellation of "peasant state" as applied to the Chola agrarian order.

Aiming to counter the conventional view that the Chola state was a unitary, centralised state, the alternative type of state formation proposed is "...the pyramidally segmented type of state, so called because the smallest unit of political organisation - e.g., a section of a peasant village - was linked to ever more comprehensive units of political organisation of an ascending order (e.g., village, locality, supra-locality and kingdom) for various purposes, but that each unit stood in opposition to other, similar units (e.g., one section of a village as against another) for other purposes."^{16/}

The concept rests on a distinction between political authority (based on ritual sovereignty) and political control. This leads to an important "...distinction between pyramidal social structures and hierarchical power structures. In the former every legitimate kind of political authority and control can be found at all levels, but these operate upon a diminished constituency as one moves from level to level. In hierarchical power structures, different kinds of authority and control are appropriate to centres at different levels, and what makes the passage from one to another level is a particular bundle of executive authority and power. That which is 'reduced' in the 'reduced image' of pyramidal levels is the range of competence not

^{16/} ibid., pp.264-265.

the kind of political control."^{17/}

Coming back to Professor Sharma's evidence, a review of the same brings out the rather inconclusive nature of the evidence which forces him to make a number of qualifications in order to admit the crucial differences of Indian 'feudalism' from the European variety. The differences that are pointed out^{18/}: unlike Europe, in India the decentralisation of political power was not the result of fiefs; the foreign invasions did not play any appreciable part in the process of feudalisation, as was the case in Europe; the agraharas or villages granted to brahmanas bore some resemblance to manors, for in some cases the beneficiaries enjoyed the right of levying forced labour of all varieties on their tenants, but, importantly, there is little evidence to suggest that most peasants were indeed subject to such intermediaries; on the contrary, the number of free peasantry seems to have been far greater. Further, the process of subinfeudation was not so extensive in India as in Europe, so that the actual tillers of the soil maintained some kind of indirect connection with the central government, though epigraphic records for particular regions like Marwar, Gujarat, Orissa and Bengal contain references to transfer of individual peasants and labourers as part of grants of lands; in medieval Europe land was granted to the feudal barons for services rendered to the state, but this secular counterpart of benefices was rather of a limited character in India; finally, there is nothing conclusive known about the rights and obligations of the conquered feudatories known as samantas who appeared as feudal vassals from the sixth

^{17/} ibid., pp.272-273.

^{18/} Sharma, pp.74-76, 271.

century onwards, except that they had to furnish soldiers to their lords; further, vassals in India had to render to their lord mainly military and not administrative service as in Europe. A long list of qualifications indeed. Nevertheless, says Professor Sharma, "...the main characteristics of European feudalism, the self-sufficient economy buttressed by lack of commercial intercourse and the rise of landed intermediaries leading to the subservience of the peasantry, prevailed in India".^{19/}

Be that as it may, from our point of view, it is important to note here that there is no evidence to suggest that the various grantees possessed any right to alienate their respective rights: "Gupta grants from Bengal and Central India confer the right of enjoying the revenues from land in perpetuity on the grantee, but they do not authorise him to alienate or grant his rents or land to others".^{20/}

K.S.Shelvankar also adds too many qualifications to the Western notion of feudalism: "Indian feudalism remained fiscal and military in character, it was not manorial. There was in general none of the intermingling of peasant land with demesne land in a common village.... as marked the manorial system.... There was therefore nothing similar to the direct conflict between the manorial lord and the peasantry over the disposal and cultivation of the land and of labour services which agitated Europe from the 12th to the 13th centuries".^{21/}

He goes on to point out something which is of interest to us: namely, that none of the major conflicts in Indian history had for its object

^{19/} *ibid.*, p.271.

^{20/} *ibid.*, p.5.

^{21/} Shelvankar, pp.151-152.

the exercise of rights over the village. They were conflicts between overlords of various grades for the right or power to get a payment from the peasant, not to seize his land.

Finally, we have D.D.Kosambi's pioneering suggestion of two stages of Indian feudalism. He implicitly postulates a stage around the beginning of the Christian era, where closed peasant-village economy prevailed with practically no superior, landowning class or overlords, and only limited authority and exactions claimed by the king. Starting from such a pre-feudal social structure, there was a process of the king's alienation of his rights to subordinate chiefs which came to have direct relations with the peasantry, a process which Kosambi calls 'Feudalism from above'. He seems to think that it had reached an advanced stage of development during the period of the Guptas (4th c.- 5th c.) and a Harsha (7th c.). At a still later stage, a class of landowners was to develop within the village, between the state and the peasantry ('Feudalism from below').^{22/}

On the basis of his own evidence, there is one feature that was common to all grants: the recipients gained at most the rights the state would normally claim, i.e., they collected the taxes already fixed by usage. No portion of the tax was to be passed on to the state or any state official, but the donee had not the right to increase such taxes, nor any property rights over land and cattle. Referring to a sixth century Demodarpur plate, supposedly showing purchase of land from the state, Kosambi makes the point that "what had been bought was not the land, but the right to cultivate it in perpetuity without taxes....".^{23/}

^{22/} See Irfan Habib, Seminar 39: Past & Present, New Delhi, for a critique of these terms suggested in Kosambi, p.295.

^{23/} Kosambi, p.320.

After examining the whole range of evidence regarding the nature of rights in land in medieval India, he makes three points which are of interest to us, in the context of the notion of 'absolute private property in land' which we would suggest below: "In the first place, most of the actual cultivators had emerged from a tribal stage where land was only territory, while primitive slash-and-burn cultivation had made individual plots useless till the day of the plough and cattle-manure fertilization. Secondly, the holding of a field, even in the sense of mere right of cultivation was a privilege as well as proof of membership in a community. Loss of all land would not be possible unless the individual were expelled from the peasant sub-group, usually a jati caste. Finally, within a village community that produced virtually no commodities, land would have no purchaser, while uncleared waste or marginal land was still to be had for the cultivation.... This state of affairs continued almost to the end of the Mughal period, with local variations."^{24/}

These statements do not somehow square with the terms 'feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below' that are suggested, while at the same time bringing out certain salient features of medieval land rights: the conditions for the emergence of individual proprietary right in land were not present so that the so-called feudal landowners belonging to the second stage can be said to have only restricted 'ownership' rights; moreover, membership of a community was the condition for individual landholding and thus the latter could not exist without the former.

Of course, a possible interpretation of the above statements could be that Kosambi is suggesting that the Muslim rule in India established

^{24/} ibid., p.323.

an embryonic feudal class, but this never succeeded in seizing power over the whole territory, being oriented, Janus-like, to the despotism at the top and the village community down below, and thus caught between the two. This interpretation perhaps gains in significance when joined with Kovalovsky's rather similar observations (see page 8).

This leads us to examine the other major category used to describe the pre-capitalist/pre-colonial structure of agrarian relations in India, namely, the Asiatic mode of production - the ways in which the concept has been interpreted and applied and their validity.

The fullest development of the idea of Asiatic mode of production was undertaken by Marx in his Grundrisse^{25/}, under the heading "Pre-capitalist forms of production", besides passing references to it at other places, notably in his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. There has occurred a major revival of scientific discussion of the concept in the post-War period, mainly as an attempt to break out of the straitjacket of the "four stages" which all mankind was supposed to have necessarily passed through.

Before going over to the possible interpretations of the notion and the problems associated with their application to Indian history, the essential elements of the concept, as worked out by Marx and Engels, must be sympathetically understood. It has been suggested that the theory was worked out under the influence of three currents of thought: first, economists like John Stuart Mill and Richard Jones, whom Marx had studied or was studying in 1853, and who employed similar expressions; then, accounts of travels, memoirs and monographs devoted to Eastern countries, which Marx and Engels read at about this time; finally,

^{25/} Grundrisse (Harmondsworth: Penguin/MLB, 1974; reprinted), pp.471-514.

special studies they made of village communities in other parts of the world which led them to recognise the importance of this type of community in the countries of the East.^{26/}

The fundamental characteristics of the Asiatic mode of production as a working hypothesis can be said to be the following:

(1) It is characterized by the absence of private ownership of land;

(2) As a result, the village community retains an essential cohesive force which has withstood the bloodiest of conquests through the ages;

(3) This internal cohesion of the ancient village community is further increased by the close union of agriculture and crafts industry that exists in it;

(4) For reason of climatic aridity, however, the prosperity of agriculture in these regions requires impressive hydraulic works. This irrigation requires nearly everywhere a central authority to regulate it and to undertake large-scale works (which entails (1) above and thus state monopoly of land);

(5) For this reason, the state succeeds in concentrating the greater part of the social surplus product in its own hands, which causes the appearance of social strata maintained by this surplus and constituting the dominant power in society. The internal logic of a society of this kind works in favour of a very great degree of stability in basic production relations.^{27/}

^{26/} Ernest Mandel, The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp.120-121; See Krader, Introduction and Chapters I-V, for an extensive and absolutely brilliant analysis of the material and intellectual sources of the formation of the notion of Asiatic mode of production.

^{27/} ibid., pp.121-122.

There are two interpretations of the concept possible, in order to put it in a proper historical perspective: one is that "...the idea of an Asiatic mode of production is related not just to some 'primitive' Indian or Chinese society, lost in the mists of the past, but to Indian and Chinese society as they were when European industrial capital encountered them in the 18th c...."^{28/} This interpretation can be said to be consistent with the "four main socio-economic formations" (Asiatic society, slave-owning society, feudalism, capitalism which Marx lists in the Preface to his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy as describing analytical, and not necessarily chronological, stages.

This could also make it clear the larger purpose for which the concept was formulated: namely, to show up, negatively, the factors which in Europe have led, positively, to the flowering of capital and capitalism. In particular, it helps to clarify the nature of impact of trade on such Asiatic society, bringing out the general point that the "...disintegrating action [of trade] depends to a great extent on the nature of the productive communities between which it is carried on. Thus, it hardly disturbed the ancient communities of India, or Asiatic conditions in general."^{29/} Therefore, it is pointed out, though under the Ming dynasty China experienced - like India at the height of the Mughal period - an expansion of luxury production and private trade that brought the country to the threshold of manufacturing and commercial capitalism, "...it is the peculiar structure of the Asiatic mode of production that enables us to explain why this

^{28/} ibid., p.127; emphasis in the original.

^{29/} Grundrisse

threshold was not crossed."^{30/}

Before going over to the second possible interpretation of the concept, let us point out the difficulties in the above interpretation while applying it to the Indian situation. Now, for the Mughal period, there is no denying the fact that the bulk of the peasant's surplus was claimed for the king,^{31/} which really means satisfaction of the fifth characteristic of Asiatic mode of production described above. This is what must have led the contemporary European travellers to believe that the King was the sole owner of the soil in India. But there is no evidence to suggest that the king claimed any right to eject the peasant-occupant of the land so long as he continued to cultivate it; more correctly, such a right could not have been effectively exercised in a situation of relative abundance of land.^{32/} There was also the spectacle of the king buying particular plots of land from his subjects for his own use.^{33/}

^{30/} Mandel, p.124, who quotes (p.133) Guy Dhuquois, Le mode e production asiatique, who brings out the essential point well: "Trade sometimes crates a beginning of capitalism...but it is destined to satisfy the needs of the aristocrates and the soverion, who control the surplus product.... The towns appear as parasitic growths, living at the expense of the rural world and giving it hardly anything in return; they provide only a narrow basis for the development of urban trade and craft production. The financier works above all for the benefit of the 'depot'. The trader and financier find themselves in a setting which is from many points of view - economic, sociological, political, cultural - unfavourable to individual initiative of a new type.... Finally, the state, director of the whole of economic life, intervenes to supervise their activities. We see the dominant model continually absorbing those marginal activities". See also, Tapan Raychaudhuri, "The Asiatic Mode of Production and India's Foreign Trade in the 17th Century: A Theoretical Exercise", in Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C.Sarkar (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1972), for making the same point and for suggesting that the impact of trade was limited because of the limited development of property rights in land.

^{31/} Habib (1965), p.59; Shireen Moosvi, "Formulation of Land-revenue rates under Akbar", Indian Historical Review, Vol.IV, Part II, p.317.

^{32/} ibid.

^{33/} ibid.

Again, the key role attributed to hydraulic and other large-scale public works in the establishment of this mode of production was absent in Mughal India in particular - crop production being principally dependent on rainfall and the local wells and ponds of the villages.^{34/} Moreover, the weight of historical evidence suggests the absence of any form of communal tenure as far back as the early centuries of the Christian era.^{35/}

This brings us to the second possible interpretation: that the Asiatic mode of production constitutes one of the possible forms of transition from classless to class societies and that it contains the contradiction of this transition, i.e., the combination of communal relations of production with embryonic forms of the exploiting classes and of the State.^{36/}

In order to locate the problems in the above interpretation, we have to look more closely at Marx's analysis of "pre-capitalist forms of production". Marx distinguishes between "primary" and "second forms of societies which precede capitalism. Under the "primary" is included a wide array of tribal and other communities based on agriculture or animal husbandry in which the working individuals are themselves in one way or another the proprietors of the land which they use to produce their own subsistence. Slavery and serfdom, which develop subsequently and chiefly as the result of wars are designated

^{34/} See Irfan Habib, "An Examination of Wittfogel's Theory of 'Oriental Despotism'", Enquiry, no.6, 1963, pp.57-73; See also Habib (1962), p.345. This need not be a critique of the internal logic of the model itself, since the appearance of an hypertrophied despotic state is conditional on the need for large-scale hydraulic works. When these works are carried out in their essentials at the village level - as with the system of the qanats in Iran - despotism does not necessarily result (Mandel, p.135).

^{35/} We are summarising the evidence of Sharma, p.152 and Habib (1965), pp.

^{36/} See Maurice Godolier, "The Concept of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' and Marxist Models of Social Evolution", in David Seddon (ed) Relations of Production: Marxist Approaches to Economic Anthropology (London: Frank Cass, 1978); for a critique, see Mandel, pp.124-127.

as "secondary", ^{37/}

The primary forms are mankind's first settled communities and date back to the time when the spontaneously evolved tribal units gave up their original migratory existence. But, importantly, there are different types of primary forms which tribal communities have assumed under differing conditions, such as climate, geographical conditions, the natural make-up of the tribe, presence or absence of hostile neighbours, the effects of migration, etc., ^{38/} of which the "oriental" or "Asiatic" is only one. In this Asiatic form, the community is the real proprietor even though there may be individual (for a limited term, due to the practice of periodic redistribution of land); possession thus property exists only as communal property. "The individual as such is only the possessor of a particular part of it, hereditary or not, for any fraction of the property belongs to no member for himself but only as the direct part of the community." ^{39/}

In this case the individual appears as propertyless, or rather property appears to be mediated by a grant from the higher "unity" to the individual through the intermediary of the community to which he belongs - on this basis the surplus product of all the members of the community belongs to the higher unity i.e, the despotic ruler.

This Asiatic form of property is modified among the Slavs (no clear distinction is made between the two) and reaches a point of contradiction (i.e., to the moment of its transformation into a secondary form) in the case of two quite different kinds of communities of individual working proprietors typified on the one hand by the early Romans and on the other by the Germanic tribes.

^{37/} Eric Hobsbawm (ed.), Karl Marx: Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964), pp.88-89, 95, 100, etc.

^{38/} ibid., p.68

^{39/} ibid., p.75.

The differences with regard to property among the Asiatic, the Roman and the Germanic forms are best summarised in Marx's words: "...the real existence of the community is determined by the specific form of its ownership of the objective conditions of labour. The property mediated by its existence in a community may appear as communal property, which gives the individual only possession and no private property in the soil [the Asiatic form] or it may appear in the dual form of state and private property which coexist side by side, but in such a way as to make the former the precondition of the latter, so that only the citizen is and must be a private proprietor, while on the other hand his property qua citizen also has a separate existence [Rome]. Lastly, communal property may appear merely as a supplement to private property which in this case forms the basis; in this case the community has no existence except in the assembly of its members and in their association for common purposes [Germanic world] "40/

But there is a more important difference: it is maintained that of all these forms of collective ownership, that constituted by the Asiatic mode of production is the original form from which all others evolved and "the one that survives longest and most stubbornly." And herein lies the trouble. For one thing, although the Asiatic is said to be the original form, there is no attempt to trace the explicit line of development from it to other primitive community forms, i.e., a historical succession of early social forms^{42/} (though the main

40/ ibid., p.82; emphasis in the original.

41/ ibid., p.82.

42/ Though Marx, in his notes on Kovalevsky's book (see footnote 6), summarises the stages suggested by Kovalevsky, it is not clear whether he was expressing agreement with the scheme. If he did, it would mean that he was moving away from his former position that the original Asiatic commune was obstinately resistant to change; see Daniel Thorner, "Marx on India and the Asiatic Mode of Production", in Thorner, pp.377-379.

passageway from the primary to the secondary forms, through war, is indicated). Moreover, while on the one hand the Indian form of communal ownership as embodied in joint ownership and joint cultivation of the land by the entire village is taken to be the original form from which all others evolved, the very same characteristic features of the ancient Indian village plus the tight union of agriculture and handicrafts are said to provide the basis for the static, unchanging nature of Asiatic society! Obviously, the problem would not have presented itself had an attempt been made to specify the conditions under which the passage from the most original form to the Roman and Germanic forms did take place in history, and then point out how those very conditions were not present in the case of Asiatic societies.

In spite of the suggestion^{43/} that Marx was tending to abandon the notion of the absence of private property in India,^{44/} there is nothing to imply that later on he was attempting to formulate the problem of transition for non-European societies in any way different from that of transition from communal to private property in land, except that in his Notes on Indian History, he was rejecting his earlier, highly enthusiastic view that zamindari and raiyatwari tenures represented definite forms of private property in land.^{45/} It must be admitted that Marx was working on inadequate and oftentimes misleading evidence (particularly with reference to Indian history)

^{43/} See, for a recent attempt, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The Analysis of Pre-colonial Social Formation in Asia in the Writings of Karl Marx," Indian Historical Review, Vol.II, no.2, January 1976, pp.365-368.

^{44/} In any case, would not that amount to abandoning the idea of the Asiatic mode of production?

^{45/} Krader, p.388; See also Marx, Capital, Vol.I, Progress Publishers, pp.333-334.

which led to mistaken assumptions being made about the nature of Indian society: the above re-examination of the various forms of communal ownership suggests that the assumption of internal stability of "Asiatic" societies (right up to the colonial period) cannot even be theoretically sound.

Historically, the Asiatic form is, in our opinion, best treated as anterior to two processes of change in Indian history: one is a supra-village process of land-grants, revenue assignments, etc., which brought about certain qualitative changes in the nature of rights over land, and the other is an intra-village process of individualisation of peasant cultivation and possession (of a permanent nature, as the practice of periodic redistribution of land tends to fall into disuse over time) of land (here Kovalevsky's highly suggestive scheme can be put to test), and finally the inter-relations between the two processes, all of which must be recognised and conceptualised on their own basis.

II. Alternative Categories

It seems to us that a fruitful way of posing the problem is in terms of transition from one form of private property to another form of private property in land. The two analytical categories of private property may be called: (1) Conditional, (2) Absolute private property in land. Now, there are two fundamental conditions defining absolute private property, which are as follows:

(1) Unconditional right to alienate, where 'unconditional' is taken to mean:

- (a) the right of one private individual excludes a similar right of another individual (one holding a legally inferior interest) to alienate the same object of

~~property, say the same plot of land (or a part) of~~
which the latter individual is in possession, and

- (b) absence of any independent rules of alienation imposed from above, say, by the 'state' or any form of political power.

It should be evident that the fulfilment of the above right presupposes two things: that it is land itself that is being alienated and that there has developed a market in land itself in the 'larger economy' with its own presuppositions (commoditisation of the product, etc.).

The above right also serves to dissolve all forms of social exclusiveness (say, caste-based, noble lineage-based, etc.) of ownership of land and imparts to land a social mobility, so to say.

(2) Right to regulate occupancy and appropriate and revise "rent", i.e., to appropriate a given and rising surplus on the basis of a determinate social form of organisation of production.

The above implies and is implied by the condition that the absolute private property-holder in land has a complete right of eviction, which he either actually exercises or otherwise is able to change the existing terms and conditions of the contract with the direct producer to capture the (rising) surplus. This implication has two further presuppositions: First, a certain degree of demographic development, whereby land is no more relatively abundant (relative to labour availability), and second, the direct producer has no customary or legal right in land (and its (rising) surplus) whatsoever. Thus, these two together become the necessary and sufficient conditions for the right of eviction to be effectively exercised.

Some qualifications to the above point that the level of demographic development is a necessary condition for (2) above to be satisfied must immediately be added.

What we are suggesting is that a low level of demographic development, i.e., relative abundance of land with respect to labour, sets negative limits within which landowners on the one hand and the peasants on the other, can make possible choices, i.e., can respond to the situation in predictable ways. On the one hand, the landowners can attempt to tie down the peasantry to the land, on the basis of some form or other of political (state), military or judicial power, as under feudalism, or at least try to restrict the movement of the peasantry. The choices available to the peasantry are two, alternative to each other: one is migration, i.e., movement into inferior soils by reclaiming waste. It is here that the level of technology sets limits to possible extensive cultivation. The second choice - the one often exercised as the possible exercise of the first choice narrows down - is collective resistance to the payment of a (rising) rent. The latter partly depends on the historicity of land relations itself - to what extent such a collectivity actually obtains and to what extent are there social (e.g., caste) and economic divisions within the peasantry. In the case of such divisions, the nature of resistance would seem to depend on whether a stratum of the peasantry is to bear the increased demand for rent or more or less the whole, etc.

It should be pointed out here that absolute private property in land is different from capitalist private property not on the basis of the first condition described above, but on the basis of the second, which does not necessarily imply control over the process

of production, something which capitalist private property in land does. In other words, while capitalist private property in land implies absolute private property in land, the converse is not true.

Here we would like to add that the criterion of control over the process of production is the least we need in order to distinguish absolute private property from capitalist private property in land, i.e., something which does not exhaust the distinctions between the two forms.

The historical significance of the transition from conditional to absolute private property in land lies in the fact that this transition is the theoretical expression of the historical process through which the two fundamental conditions defining absolute private property in land are satisfied. And this transition is nothing but completion of the process of private monopoly of landownership and generalisation of property in all cultivable land.^{46/}

Now, conditional private property in land is defined negatively when only one of the conditions defining absolute private property is satisfied, but not both. We would like to give a few historical examples to illustrate the nature of conditional private property in land, some of which we have already referred to above; these examples should also help to bring out the significance of the above two conditions defining absolute private property in land.

Example 1

Numerous land grants to Brahmins during the Gupta period can

^{46/} The importance of this as an absolutely necessary historical condition - in a most abstract sense - for the emergence of industrial, as against agrarian, capitalism, needs to be kept in mind. Because, insofar as there is free access to a (relatively) plentiful supply of land, a stable labouring class cannot emerge. See Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p.286, for historical illustrations of the creation of absolute private property in land, primarily in colonised countries.

be regarded as a form of private property in land, but, as we have seen above, the grantees did not have a right to alienate. Moreover, it is not clear - though in some cases people alongwith land were granted - whether the grantees could claim from the peasants more than that which the king would normally claim determined by fixed usage.

Example 2

An examination of the nature of iqtas above showed that the iqtadars could not claim ownership over particular parcels of land or locality and that they could be provided with, or deprived of, their income at the will of the king, whereby the question of alienability of land itself does not arise. We need not go into the details again.

Example 3

The nature of property rights during the Mughal period, of the Crown, nobility (jagirdars) and the lower level 'aristocracy' (zamindars) on the one hand, and the peasantry, on the other, perhaps brings out what we mean by "conditional" private property in land.

There is no denying the fact that the Mughal Crown had a right over the disposal of the surplus produce, which was reflected in its right to create revenue-assignments; corresponding to this, the peasantry did not have a right over its entire produce.

But the Crown/nobility/aristocracy did not possess (could not exercise) the right of eviction of a peasantry so long as he was cultivating the land. Corresponding to the absence of a right of eviction, the peasant had a customary right of occupancy.

On the other hand, we find that the Crown and the nobility had the right to restrict the movement of the peasantry (evidently required, in the absence of the right to evict, in realising a given revenue demand and, more importantly, stepping up the same - as was actually done as the cost of palace establishment increased). Corresponding to this, the peasantry lacked the freedom of abandoning cultivation in any given locality, i.e., the right of free disposal.

Example 4

The case of revenue-grants (known as madad-i ma'ash grants) during the Mughal period, granted mostly to men of learning, religious devotees, persons of noble lineage, etc., is an interesting instance of conditional private property in land.

First, the grantee could never transfer or sell the land under his possession nor could he pass on to his heirs except in accordance with imperial order.

Second, the grant did not extinguish the right of the village headman (muqaddam), even when the grantee held the whole of the village, nor did it in any way affect the zamindari rights established over the village, nor could the madad-i ma'ash holder interfere with the occupancy rights of the peasants.

Thirdly, "...what was granted was the right to collect the land revenue and keep it...the grant, therefore, did not invest the grantee with any rights not claimed previously by the administration. He could not legitimately demand a larger amount of land revenue than was authorised...."^{47/}

^{47/} Habib (1962), p.400.

Example 5

Without going into the details, it may only be pointed out that the land rights in Vijayanagar society consisted only of income rights in land. Burton Stein, after examining the nayaka system, comes to the relevant conclusion that "...land rights do not pertain to dominion in land, but to 'property in share of income'".^{48/}

Example 6

Finally, we have some evidence of the nature of zamindari and other 'proprietary' rights in land for the immediately pre-colonial period (i.e., Maratha rule) from our region of study, gleaned from a few deeds of sale.

The examination of the deeds of sale of various grades of supra-village landholding interests, like that of a Choudhury's taluk (in 1760), portion of a taluk of willadiy kanungo (in 1724), a zamindari deed of sale (in 1800)^{49/}, etc., bring out a number of interesting features. Apart from the fact that all these sales were in liquidation of balances of the public assessment of revenue, there is absolutely no mention of the actual amount of land that is being sold: in the case of the zamindari sale, it is said to be the duffurry (office) of zamindari that is disposed of; in the other cases, the words "tusurroof malikaneh", or proprietary possession frequently occur. We are spared the mistake of calling that which is being sold in such cases as the ownership right in land itself, when we come across the following deed of sale of a Moquddumme, 'under' a talukdar:

^{48/} Stein, p.434.

^{49/} Appendix to Mr. Stirling's Minute on Tenures in Orissa, dated 10th October 1821, para.36, printed on an Appendix to A. Stirling, An Account (Geographical, Statistical and Historical) of Orissa Proper or Cuttack; reprinted. (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1824)



"I, who am Bynsee Sawant Singhar,moquddum of Mouzah Isaupore, under the talooks of Jugganathpersand, in the Sircar of Budruck: since I have hitherto held the moquddumme of the above mauza in full proprietary possession.... but am unable to pay the public revenue assessed thereon; therefore of my own free will, in full possession of my senses, I sell the moquddumme of the above mouza... (Dated 21st Ramzan 1178 Umlee)"^{50/}.

The implications of the above are best described by "Hurling, the translator of the above deed of sale, whom we quote (writing in 1822) in extenso: "The words 'tusurroof malikanoh'....are used as frequently by the selling moquddum in reference to what he sells, as by the talookdar, although avowedly subordinate to a superior holder of the latter description.... The words, I am persuaded should be understood as descriptive of the sort of tenure of the moquddum - one enjoyed by ancient prescriptive usage, constituting a title of right, and not one which is dependent on the will of another, and cannot be transferred.... It is evident that the interest of each moquddum in the village under him was greater than that of the talookdar of the division....although the talookdar having authority over and collecting his dues from a number of moquddums, checking their accounts, and having besides under his own management several pahikasht villages, was an officer of higher rank and more extended emoluments, an upper link in the chain of dependence... At all events, if we consider that the thing sold always was the actual village or villages, and not merely the right of managing with the

^{50/} ibid., para 44; emphasis ours.

advantages incidental thereto, and thence infer a property in the soil, we are brought to this dilemma that the talookdars and noquddums were constantly proprietors of the same subject matter.... Such a conclusion would be an absurdity, but there is none in considering them both to have possessed certain rights and official duties and emoluments in regard to the same land or villages".^{51/}

As against this, it is to be noted that the talookdars and noquddums did have a right of disposing small parcels of land free of rent comprised within their tenures; the ground sold was waste, unoccupied and unassessed, of the description "bunjur kharij jumna". In such deeds of sale, there is an explicit mention of the actual quantity of land that is being alienated. We quote one such deed of sale of ground by a noquddum:

"I, who am Bandoe Panda, son of Bykuntah Panda, noquddum of Mouzah Patpore, in Pergumah Assuressur Bisseo, Sircar of Cuttack, declare that in the full possession of my senses I have sold 1 beegah 17 ghoonts and 6 biswas of land bunzur kharij jumna.... Let the purchaser take possession of the ground and bring it into cultivation.... (Dated 1150 Unlee)^{52/}.

But, it must be noted that, "...whenever a large quantity was to be alienated, as one or two battees, we find the chowdrees and canoongoes of the pergumah standing forth in their joint capacity, with the addition sometimes of the noquddums, lending collectively their sanction to their alienation, and by this act evincing strongly

^{51/} ibid., para.46.

^{52/} ibid., para.44.

....the officiality of their tenure as the pergunnah superintendents and collectors."^{53/}

The above cautions us against any mechanical interpretation of the evidence of sale and purchase of zamindari right during the pre-colonial period - of which there are many - as signifying the emergence of proprietary right in land and unconditional right to alienate, in our sense. One example of such an interpretation seems to be by B.R.Grover when he says: "By the close of the 17th century, such zamindari rights (Rasun-i-zamindari) and obligations acquired proprietary and alienable character...."^{54/}, though understanding perfectly well that Rasun-i-zamindari meant customary charges in the shape of a small portion of the state share in the revenues of the villages in the zamindar's jurisdiction, and no more.

All in all, on a descriptive plane (on an analytical plane, it must be seen vis-a-vis absolute private property in land), it is possible to conceive of conditional private property in land as referring to a gradation of rights over land one on the top of another (typically based on individual peasant cultivation) and one important historical factor contributing to this must have been various modes of revenue-collecting arrangements introduced by successive state powers, mainly on the basis of political expediency.^{55/} The hereditary nature of offices under the Hindus must have helped to rigidify such arrangements, tending to harden them into permanent title.

^{53/} ibid., para.36.

^{54/} Grover, p.14.

^{55/} See S.Nurul Hassan, "The Position of the Zamindars in the Mughal Empire", IESHR, Vol.I, no.4, April-June 1964, pp.107-119: "...there emerged not only a variety of land rights but also a kind of pyramidal structure in agrarian relations wherein rights of various kinds were superimposed upon each other" (p.118).

Stirling grasped the historical nature of this well when he wrote: "In discussing the real nature of the rights and privileges of the zamindars, talookdars and muqudduns...it is much easier to say what they were not, than what they actually were. It is my decided opinion, that from the hereditary character pervading so remarkably all the institutions of the Hindoos, they at all times possessed an imperfect title of property in their offices.... They had the right of collecting the government revenue assessed on the land according to certain fixed rates or determined proportion of the crop settled by Raja Toorul Mull, whose general settlement was unquestionably the basis of all subsequent revenue management...."^{56/}

III. Tenancy Relations in the Colonial Period: Cuttack District (Temporarily-settled Portion), 1837-1927^{57/}

Having presented the historical examples of conditional private property in land in a more or less chronological order, we have now arrived at the zamindari right as created by colonial rule.

We are in a position to suggest that even if it is granted that the colonial rule attempted to create absolute private property in land on a generalised basis for the first time in Indian history, but, in the light of above considerations, it is impossible to believe that they could have done it overnight, by the stroke of a pen, as it were, through zamindari and raiyatwari tenures. By recognising a class of private individuals as absolute proprietors of the soil, the

^{56/} Sterling, para.59; emphasis ours.

^{57/} This section is best regarded as a set of tentative observations and interpretations, admittedly based on rather inadequate data-base, to be suitably modified as more pointed pieces of evidence are got hold of.

colonial state could at best have introduced an additional element of conflict, to be resolved over the whole of the colonial period.

On the other hand, if we posit a tightly-knit village community before the coming of the British, it becomes difficult to understand how an arbitrary set of private individuals could be so easily superimposed on such a community; thus, it seems more plausible to suggest that such a superimposition could be facilitated rather by an already differentiated agrarian society, on the basis of an appropriate alliance with the village-level dominant peasantry, i.e., by granting suitable concessions to the same.

Thus the question should not be posed in terms of the impact of British land settlement on the 'traditional' agrarian society, but in terms of a process of interaction between two structure of land tenures: village-level landholding and rent-collection structure, including different forms of organisation of production, elements of custom, etc. (call these the 'rent-tenure structure') and the supra-village revenue-collection structure created by British law (call it the British revenue-tenure structure', consisting of those directly engaged with the colonial state for the purpose of revenue-collection, the colonial state itself being an important element of this structure).

Then it is possible to conceive of four possible patterns of interaction^{58/}, in terms of long-term consequences, depending on particular circumstances (to be identified, as corresponding to each pattern of interaction), between the two structures of land tenures which we have analytically separated. First, the existing landholding

^{58/} See Ratnalekha Ray, Change in Bengal Agrarian Society (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979), p.109, 274 ff., from which the broad scheme has been adopted, with modifications.

village elites might be completely displaced by the new holders of zamindari title, who by long residence would convert the legal title into physical occupation of agricultural lands belonging to the former village elites. Second, powerful zamindars might succeed - by the introduction of periodical survey and regular bureaucratic management - in increasing and equalising assessment rates to such an extent that the surplus of the village elites would be wiped out reducing them to the economic level of ordinary raiyats, while they perhaps retain their political influence as village heads. (This need not be done by the new zamindars if the third possibility stated below is open). Third, the new zamindars might succeed in raising assessment rates (for in excess of the amount justified by the extension of cultivation) over inferior tenants by reaching an understanding with the village-level dominant peasantry that would enable the latter to retain their margin. But, in this case, in a conjuncture of rising surplus, the "alliance" may not be long-lasting nor peaceful.^{59/} And fourth, because of the fact that, under the revenue-collection arrangement of an earlier political power, the village-level dominant peasantry was vested with the responsibility of revenue-collection, whose members have benefited in a number of ways from holding the offices of revenue assessment and collection, including political influence over the rest of the rural population, coupled with the facts of absenteeism, rifts between co-sharing zamindars, scattered distribution of subdivided properties, etc., might so far weaken the local position of the new 'landlords' that the resident village landlords of peasant caste would raise their

^{59/} See Rajat and Ratna Ray, "Zamindars and Jotedars: a study of Rural Politics in Bengal", Modern Asian Studies, Vol.IX, no.1 (1975), pp.81-102, for showing how in Bengal in the latter half of the 19th c., such an "alliance" was breaking down.

margin by appropriating the bulk of the increases in the economic rent of land arising from rising prices, new cash crops, increasing demographic pressure, increasing value of output due to irrigation, clearance of forest, etc.

Then it follows that the third and fourth possibilities will be reinforced if there is considerable overlapping between the two structures of land tenures (which would, in turn, depend on the extent to which differentiation has occurred within the cultivating peasantry - on the existence of a privileged class of village-level landholders, paying a nominal rent, depending on the historicity of land relations); in particular, if the village-level dominant peasantry also happens to occupy (or attempts to do so by purchasing the newly created zamindari rights) a place, say, in the lower rung of the 'revenue-tenure structure', whereas the first and second possibilities will be reinforced in the absence of such an interpenetration of the two structures.

The particular course of development would also seem to depend on whether there was considerable reclaimable waste, possibility of commercial agriculture, or whether a relatively stagnant social surplus had to be shared out among different grades of landed interests.

Another contributing factor which could hasten (or retard) a particular line of development is the nature of intervention by the colonial state itself, the limits of which are of course set by its own interests (namely, maximum and timely collection of land revenue), within which the kind of pressures it is subject to by different groups of landed interests would suitably modify its form and extent of intervention.



Having set out our expectations, we will now analyse data generated by a concrete conjuncture. Anticipating the conclusion, it is that the third and fourth tendencies described above seem to be operating during two phases of our period for the region of our study. The details of the same will be presented in a forthcoming study.

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