India and the Colonial Mode of Production

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Neither the concept or 'feudalism' in India (during the period of direct colonial domination) nor the contemporary phenomenon of rural 'capitalism', it is argued here, can be grasped theoretically in all its implications except specifically in the context of the worldwide structure of imperialism into which it is articulated.

A consideration of this fact leads towards a conception of a colonial mode of production and the structural specificity that distinguishes it from both feudalism and capitalism in the metropolis.

IMPORTANT issues have been raised by Indian Marxist agricultural economists in the debate on the 'Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture.' That debate is taking place in the context of the far-reaching changes which 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 surfacing contradictions in rural class relations (as well as in the economy as a whole), to move beyond the limits of justification or condemnation, and to analyse and assess the nature and significance of the structural changes that have taken place.

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. G. 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 at theoretical propositions that have been advanced in those contexts; there is, however, a surprising omission of any reference to the Chinese experience or theoretical contributions.

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We would like to emphasise that, 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 the Indian agrarian economy by Imperialism and industrial development since Independence, as well as in the context of 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, this 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 basis throw much light on the major shifts in agricultural development policy which took place at the end of the fifties. A brief review of that background is necessary to understand the problems under discussion.

Before Independence, 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 other elements as the Muslim middle classes who provided the backbone of the Muslim League which eventually secured the State of Pakistan, the rising elements of the un touchable 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 a professional middle class background and 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, by themselves ineffective against the British Raj, 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 Gandhi and others. Jawaharlal Nehru was among the founder members and was 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, and designating the landlords as '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 which infused many of the Congress leaders and cadres with a populist ideology; among them was Jawaharlal 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 thus developed an anti-landlord rhetoric and were committed to radical policies vis-a-vis rural society, especially to carrying out land reform.

The story of land reform in India is one of a progressive attenuation of radical commitments, embodying the populist ideology which was then being proclaimed by the Congress and which demanded the restoration of land to the tiller and the abolition of all intermediaries between the cultivators 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; and this, 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 elaborate the details here.

In the early post-independence strategy of agricultural development, land reform was to be complemented by Community Development and the National Extension Service in order to build the rural infrastructure and 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." That earlier strategy was, in fact, 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, did not, however, bear out the optimistic expectations.

The commitment to rural development expressed an economic need, and in the light of the 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 in July 1956 to China to study Agrarian Co-operatives and Agricultural Planning. 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 co-operatives . . . (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 co-operatives presupposes a mediumum 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. . . . 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 among Congressmen greatly strengthened moves in that direction immediately after Independence. There was a more basic concern felt by two of the dominant classes in the Indian political system, viz., 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 explaining and celebrating the small peasant economy.

It was, however, soon realised that the assumption on which the small peasant strategy was based, did not exist. Although intensive use of family labour resulted in higher productivity per acre in the case of the small peasant, he lacked the resources and capability to make a radical advance in agricultural techniques which might raise productivity. Moreover, the small holder with his tiny holdings could not market more than a very small proportion of his produce; consequently, a given increase in productivity in his case brought about a comparatively smaller increase in the marketable surplus. The bourgeoisie were not concerned primarily with an increase in productivity (of the small farmer and the consequent improvement in his well-being). Their concern was primarily with 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 rural society, and made a transition through mutual aid teams and co-operatives, etc, to a radical reorganisation of rural society and economy. It was this reorganisation that brought in its wake major leaps in progress and increases in productivity — and it was the increases in the marketable surplus that sustained socialist construction in the towns. It was soon realised that a reversion to a small peasant economy in India, even if it could be achieved, would be a dead-end solution. Nor were the subordinate classes in India to be led to a path of revolutionary transformation of society.

Soon, therefore, there was disenchantment with the small peasant strategy of agricultural development. Perhaps a most important factor in the ensuing reversal of the populist strategy and, most significantly, in the shaping of the later strategy, was the re-alignment of class forces in the post-colonial State as it crystallised in the fifties. This 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) as well as the indigenous 'feudal' class which was closely aligned with the colonial regime. That gave rise to a myth — propagated among others by Barrington Moore in his well-known work 10 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 actually conferred a new political role on the rural power-holders, the landlords, who dominated the factional alignments in the villages.

The Congress leadership, in the context of the electoral contest, forged new links with these local-level power-holders; and this reversed the earlier antagonistic relationships. For the local-level power-holders 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'; 11 another who has produced a major work on the Congress Party 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." 12 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 partly, by the links between the Indian bourgeoisie and the Soviet Union, which had affected 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 13 by American experts, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, which recommended a major shift in policy — away from the populist participatory concepts of Community Development and towards 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'. 14 The scheme also emphasised the criterion of profitability of the big farm, as an enterprise, as preferable to 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 to the rich farmers and landlords. They were now to have fertiliser, new seed, pumps 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 which provides the background to the rise of the 'capitalist farmer' in the sixties, that 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. 15 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 share-croppers. Many peasants who owned very small holdings and who were previously able to get by because they were able to lease-in some additional land, were now no longer able to do so; their farm economy was no longer viable on the basis of the insufficient amounts of land which they possessed, and they were forced to sell the little land they owned. There was a general pauperisation of large sections of the rural population in the midst of an enormous increase in the prosperity of a few big landholders.

There was, secondly, a contradictory
impact on the demand for labour — which has probably contributed a great deal to generating 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, with the large increases in yields in the cropped area (helped by irrigation), the *seasonal* demand for labour multiplied. While there was thus a break in the ties of dependence between the landlords and their full-time dependents, the tenants, more than ever before the landlords and rich peasants were now dependent on casual labour at harvest time, on men who owed no long-term obligations to the landlords. The bargaining power of labour increased greatly because of the considerably enhanced demand for casual labour and because the time factor is absolutely critical at harvest time. The landowners cannot afford to waste time when 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 income 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 income 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 has actually declined in absolute terms. Likewise, the eviction of sharecropping tenants has pauperised large sections of the labouring poor in 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'. The following data underline Gupta's principal findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop Year 1953-54</th>
<th>Size of Holdings</th>
<th>Percentage of Percentage of Holdings Owned (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 5 acres</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>74.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 10 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gupta shows that, not unsurprisingly, the distribution of other farm assets was likewise distributed in similar unequal proportions. Less predictably, tenanted land too 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. As a result of the low per cent 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 had no more than 20 per cent of the rented area though they were far more numerous.

Gupta classified farmers in a 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 per cent 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 per cent to 7 per cent 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 per cent of their output. Such farms account for about 18 per cent of the operational holdings but their share of the marketable surplus is greater than this. They rely on hired labour for between a-third to a-half of their labour requirements. 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 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 made up first of 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 secondly of the post-war availability of a variety of new inputs which 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. This refers, on the one hand, to the application of new inputs that signify 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 five times, that of diesel and electric pump sets five times, and tube wells 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 within various regions there are pockets 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; but this is still quite a modest number considering the size of the Indian agrarian economy. Indeed, the change in chemical and biological technology accompanied by tube well 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, since 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 which directly affect 'relations of production', we might consider the elements of mechanical technology which are geared to increase 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 tube wells, 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 have to be seen, however, in the context of the overall area 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 attributed to the 'Green Revolution'. As we have noticed, the 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 foodgrains also, barring the single peak year of 1971."

Likewise, the data relating to changes in 'relations of production' must also 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 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 landholder 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 were 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 per cent 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 we have inadequate data.

The Punjab is generally acknowledged as one of the principal regions where capitalist farming has advanced more than elsewhere. In 1969-70, Ashok Rudra and his colleagues set about examining the situation in the Punjab to determine whether the agrarian economy has made a decisive transition from feudalism to capitalism. They came up with the answer that it is indeed central to Marx's theoretical conceptualisation of the 'feudal mode of production.' Two principal criteria: (i) a priori criteria but must be measured in the field, both with regard to its magnitude and its direction. For that, so we have inadequate data.

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sician, as well as growth of population, of countries of Western Europe. Eastern Europe one would suggest, was there-
by 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".22 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 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 the 'feudal mode of production', constructed with reference to the historical reality of Western Europe, was not a concept that could encompass the structural specificity of the colonial mode of production.

Frank emphasises that: "the feudal system is a closed system, or one weekly linked with the world beyond.... But this closure — and (he 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 'Tautilist' or 'American' capitalism are but sectors of this single world-embracing system."21 Frank can be faulted for this statement, insofar as it suggests a conceptual conflation of several different classes into a single one, viz, 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 fractions 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, viz, 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 'intermediality of imperialism in the structure of the colony, a conception that goes far beyond the concept 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 differentiation (an aspect emphasised by Amin) and reintegration under imperialist hegemony.

Whereas Frank focuses on the assimilation and subordination of the colonial agrarian economy in a worldwide capitalist system, Laclau focuses on the relationships within the productive enterprise, viz, 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 the Latin American agrarian economy, apart from the haciendas. These, one would argue, cannot be grasped with 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."23

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.24 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, therefore, be explained 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 — viz, that of the incorporation of the Brazilian agrarian economy in a world imperialist 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, co-existing 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 with 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 'co-existence'. 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 Italianism, 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. 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, viz, 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 ascendency and the other in disintegration, within a single social formation.

'We cannot postulate here a contradiction between colonial feudalism and metropolitan capitalism, for it is precisely the latter which generates and supports the former. The specific structural features of the 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 them) 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 together within the framework of the colonial mode of production 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'.

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 Uttam 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 per cent 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 per cent. 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)." 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." 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 it 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' which 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 maintained the basis of Marxist analysis 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 Narochnik conceptions of the 'revolutionary' role of the communal peasantry. However, we find that Lenin soon abandoned the sharp distinction that he had initially drawn 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. We would reiterate the view that both the 'independent' labour of the "Menshevik view" and the 'free' labour of the capitalist farmers in fact share a common condition — viz., the freedom on the one hand of the employer 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 specific 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 in so far as the rise of capitalism in the countryside is concerned."

The central criterion on which Patnaik bases her distinction between the contemporary 'capitalist' mode of production in Indian agriculture and the contemporary 'capitalist' 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 narrower 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 form of production. 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?" 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 "we cannot take wage-labour to be sufficient condition for identifying the capitalist form [Frank's emphasis] under the specific historical conditions we have outlined," Frank writes: "So new UP [Utsa Patnaik] has specified the economic formation with which she is concerned: the FARM! And not accidentally so."

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 the 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." That leaves several problems unresolved: (i) Would she postulate co-existence 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 antagonism), 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. She writes: "India... never saw an inte-
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." 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 problems 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." 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 Gunner 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. She 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, namely 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 focused on direct forms of exploitation of labour in the Indian agrarian economy — viz, 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 in the next part of this paper.

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' 'superstructures' 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 if any conception of the 'mode of production' which is promised 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
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of generalised commodity production relations. Such relationships, transform economies as those in which pre-capitalist appropriation, whereas in a 'social formation' in Marxist analysis is, that mode of production is a theoretical construct which 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 with 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, it has obscured fundamental transformations 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 as those in which pre-capitalist relationships 'co-exist' with capitalist relations. Such relationships, transformed by the colonial impact are no longer 'pre-capitalist'. In India, 'share-cropping' on land has thus been equated with 'feudal', just as in Latin America the apparently servile relationships of the hacienda have also been defined as 'feudal'. But in neither case do they retain, apart from their superficial form, the essential nature of the 'feudal' relationships. This is one of the central problems that must be clarified (as also the corresponding problem of the so-called 'co-existence' of the feudal and the capitalist modes of production in a colonial structure).

A decisive factor which underlies pre-capitalist modes of production — including the feudal mode of production — is that they are subject to the limitations of exploiting land and forces of nature on a low level of technology without the benefit of the enormous increases in man's power over nature 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 to 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 the 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 encapulation 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 simple reproduction, but of a deformed nature that characterises the colonial mode. This is so 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 export, 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 co-existed — 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 Western capitalism rather than Eastern serfdom that generated it. I have already suggested, therefore, that we may regard this as a system of proto-colonial mode of production rather than as a pure form of feudal mode of production. In the Third World generalised commodity production is also precisely created by and as 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, 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 embed-
Anderson speaks of this as the "par- 
reignty was constitutive of the whole 
vertical allocation downwards, at each 
power made it a complex polity. 

The correspondence between production relations 
and power was at the base, in the hands 
of the local lords. The dialectic be-

tionship that is at issue and needs to 
examined carefully.

As essential as aspect of the feudal 
mode of production, corresponding to 
its localised production and localised 
appropriation, is its localised structure of 
power. Feudal kingdoms were pre-
carious alliances; their true locus of 
power was at the base, in the hands of 
the local lords. The dialectic be-
tween the central authority and local 
power made it a complex polity. 
Anderson speaks of this as the "par-
celisation of sovereignty". He writes: "Political sovereignty was never focused 
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, in-
tegrated. This parcelisation of sove-
ignty was constitutive of the whole feudal mode of production." But the 

colonial regime subordinated the power 
of the local lords, under its own struc-
ture 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 some 
time ago that the bourgeois revolu-
tion in the colonies was already accom-
plished 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 dominance. 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 im-
perialist bourgeoisie.

In the light of that outline of the 
main criteria of a feudal mode of pro-
duction, 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 posses-
sion 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 autho-

local power in the feudal 
kings of Europe, the Mogul 
Emperors made attempts — though 
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 'zap', in the body corporate of a 
bhaichara (association) village, or in 
the person of the zamindar, the closest 
approximation to the Roman poter 
families. Thus the Indian view of land 
was also political." Land was not yet 
a commodity which it was to become 
under the colonial institutional struc-
ture.

Land, in fact, was not yet the most 
valued resource in pre-British India, 
for there was an abundance of it rela-
tive to the number of people available 
to extract the fruits of the unyielding 
earth. The truly precious possession 
was labour. The labourer had, there-
fore, 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 any more 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."

Over the heads of the culti-

vators stood a hierarchy of parasitic 
and powerful 'intermediaries' constitut-
ing a pyramid not unlike that in Euro-

pean 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 Mogul is the pro-

rietor of every acre of land in the 
kingsdom". 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 Eric Stokes has 
pointed out, had the advantage of legi-

tising the claims of the colonial 
power to a large share of the surplus 
from Indian agriculture, for it had step-

ped into the shoes of the Mughal 
Emperor. The colonial (regime in 
India had a big stake in the direct ex-
traction 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 impor-
tant 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 1973, by virtue of which 

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we colonial State was to receive 90 per cent of the rent from the land, and, however, had now become a commodity that could be transacted within the framework of bourgeois society.

The land which was not in private hands was deemed to be Crown and appropriated by the State. No longer could the over-exploited peasant even think of escaping from is 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 (sharecropping), its essential substance was transformed. It was no longer based on direct coercion. It was based on the economic laws of capitalist society and the economic necessities that it imposes upon those who are deprived access to the means of production by the institution of private property.

Furthermore, the colonial regime transformed the feudal mode of production in a more 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 products were to be imported. The Indian economy was disarticulated and subsidised 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. 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 again 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 destruction 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 per cent 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. 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, besides 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 smallholder class too is integrated into the colonial mode of production; for, it is a valued supplier of cheap labour; it fulfills 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. First 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 co-existence, 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 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 the 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 the 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. This 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, viz, the sharecroppers and the smallholding 'middle peasants'. The alignments are structural alignments and conflicts of the colonial mode of production, not those of the feudal and capitalist modes.

So far, our discussion has focused 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 which 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 the concept 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. First, 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 duality 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 duality 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
The 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 relate 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., the 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, was set into motion. Conditions for the development of indigenous capital were ready. That 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 nature of the contradictions between indigenous capital and imperialism.

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 of it being the policies that led eventually to Chiang Kai-shek's successful counter-revolution in China in 1927. This issue is central to the current 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 big Indian bourgeoisie and imperialist bourgeoisie 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 bourgeoisie in the form of technological collaboration. That analysis was the framework of an empirical study by Kidron that ratified it. Our conclusion was that in the post-colonial situation, there is a new basis of subordination of the big indigenous capital by metropolitan capital, and within that hierarchical relationship, there is a convergence of interests between the big Indian bourgeoisie and the imperialist bourgeoisie, a basis which is radically different from that which determined the subordination of the 'comprador' bourgeoisie to the imperialist bourgeoisie on the colonial situation when some contradictions between the rising Indian bourgeoisie and imperialism came to the surface. That is central to a consideration of the post-colonial mode of production and the basis of the post-colonial State.'
observes 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
1. 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:
   - Ashok Rudra 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Reply', EPW VI (45) November 6, 1971. (This is a rejoinder to Patnaik).
   - Utsa Patnaik, "Capitalist Development in Agriculture: A Further Comment", EPW (RA) VI(52) December 25, 1971 (This is a reply to Rudra).
   - Utsa Patnaik, "On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply", EPW (RA) VII (40) September 30, 1972 (This is a reply to Chattopadhay).
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 land of India", Wolf Ladejinsky "Land Ceilings and Land Reform", EPW Annual Number VII 11, 5-7 February 1972.
5. 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 middle class Brahman Chatto-
11. 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. "in aspects of Indian Agriculture", in Economic Weekly, 13th Annual Number, February 1962.
19. The debate has been surveyed with lucidity by my colleague Doug McEachern in an unpublished paper on "The Mode of Production in India".
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.  

26 None of the participants in the Indian debate on the mode of production, nor Laclau, take into consideration the problem '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", including twice, in Vol I as well as Vol II.  


29 Loc cit.  


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 mollified. 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.  


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 focuses 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.  


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.  


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, "Zamindars 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 Guna "A Rule of Property for Bengal", 1963.  

47 For the concept of 'internal disarticulation' of colonial economies, cf. Samir Amin, "Accumulation on a World Scale" 1974, passim.  


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