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AGRARIAN QUESTION IN INDIA

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Introduction

The question of the characterisation of the mode or modes of production appropriate to the analysis of the economy and society of India has been much debated in the last decade. It represents one specific instance of the wider problem of comprehending the phenomena of 'development' and 'underdevelopment', and of understanding the dynamics of capitalism as a world system whilst also grasping the internal specificity of its parts, with which the protagonists of dependency and underdevelopment theory and their critics are engaged. These are focussed around the relations of capitalist development in the 'metropolitan' centres of capitalism, and in the 'periphery' - the former colonies or semicolonies of imperialist and neo-imperialist powers. Putting it perhaps most simply: does capital reproduce itself in the same forms in the periphery as in the centre? Can capitalism promote 'development'? In other words can capitalism reproduce in Asia, Africa and Latin America that expansion of the productive capacity of human labour which it carried out in Europe, North America and Japan?

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One school of thought (Baran, Frank) has held that the accumulation of capital in the metropolitan centres has necessarily involved the 'underdevelopment' of the periphery through the transfer of surplus appropriated from it; others (e.g. Laclau) have adhered more closely to Luxemburg's thesis of the role of colonies in rescuing capital from the problems of realising surplus value; while another line (e.g. Kay) seeks to explain capitalist underdevelopment in terms of the particular character of merchant capital. But some Marxists (e.g. Warren) as well as some bourgeois theorists have been unable to accept the whole thesis of capitalist underdevelopment and have emphasised the emancipating effects of the expansion of capitalism in colonial territories, and the possibility of independent capitalist development within them.

With these basic questions of the 'emancipating' or the 'blocking' effects of the development of capitalism in former colonies there is associated the problem of the relations between processes of change which are 'internal' to a particular social formation, and its external linkages, and the problem of the relations between the sphere of production and that of circulation. It has been a common criticism of the version of dependency theory associated with Frank in particular, that it places too much emphasis on the determination of production by exchange relations, and on the determination of 'internal' changes by 'external' linkages. (These criticisms appear in R.L.Harris's discussion of the agrarian question in Latin America, 1978; and they are discussed by Gunder Frank in his Dependent Accumulation, 1978, Chapter 1). A further aspect of these debates has been the difference between those like Frank, who have argued that changes in any part of the world must be explained within the context of the processes of capitalist accumulation as a world system; and those on the other hand who have emphasised the analysis of different

modes of production internal to different parts of the world, and their 'articulation' with the capitalist mode of production (e.g. Meillassoux, Rey; and see Foster-Carter, 1978; Taylor, 1979; Wolpe, ed., 1980). For the first group of writers other modes of production are seen as having been reconstituted by capital - so that their inner workings are of little account. This is a view for which some support can be found in Marx's own writings (as for example in The Communist Manifesto). The critics of this approach, however, also draw their inspiration from Marx - especially from Capital. They argue that as capitalism expands it does not necessarily destroy other modes of production but may become 'linked' with them. The idea of 'linkage' here is not of simple connection, but of the interpenetration of the social practices of capitalism and of other modes of production: "This articulation of one practice with another is governed both by the reproductive requirements of the capitalist mode and by the restrictions placed on this articulation either by the limitations within which the penetrated instance can operate, as set by the non-capitalist mode, or by the continued reproduction of elements of the non-capitalist mode" (Taylor, 1979, 227). Taylor's explanation of the meaning of articulation carries implications of struggle between conflicting classes. Some of the exponents of the theory, however, have seen the relationship between capitalism and other modes simply in functionalist terms, and the persistence of precapitalist forms has been 'explained' in terms of the functional requirements of capital (for cheap labour, or cheap raw materials for example).

These differences are not simply matters of academic hair-splitting, because they relate quite crucially to decisions concerning political strategy. The argument that the dominant mode of production in former colonies is 'feudal' has been used to justify the CP policy of supporting

supposedly 'progressive' national bourgeoisies; while an analysis of India as a 'semi-colonial, semi-feudal' state underlay the Naxalite strategy of armed struggle. The debate over the mode of production in India is intimately concerned with these political questions, and it reflects the problems which have been experienced in practice, in distinguishing agrarian classes and in determining the correct political programme (see Cleaver, 1976, for one interpretation of the politics of different theoretical shifts; and Booth, 1975, on the political implications of Frank's work).

As we proceed we will examine the relations of different contributions to the Indian debate with these broader theoretical and political questions, and attempt to point up comparisons and contrasts with the literature on Latin America and Africa.

The opening rounds: Search for 'capitalist farmers'

The Indian debate took off with criticisms by Utsa Patnaik of Ashok Rudra's attempts to test the proposition that by the late 1960s a class of capitalist farmers had emerged in the agriculturally most progressive state of Punjab, (though S.C. Gupta had sought to establish the existence of a class of agrarian capitalists almost a decade earlier). Rudra and his associates carried out a sample survey of big farmers in Punjab and then attempted to isolate the 'capitalists' from the sample by testing the strength of the association between five variables: (i) cash outlays on wages per acre; (ii) percentage of the total produce marketed; (iii) value of modern capital equipment per acre; (iv) cash profits per acre; (v) value of output per acre. Arguing that capitalist farmers would be expected to show high values for each of these variables, Rudra sought to establish whether there was a positive association between them amongst the 261 big farmers in his sample. Finding no

significant association (except between the last two variables), he concluded that no category of capitalist farmers could be said to exist.

Patnaik criticised both Rudra's method and its underlying assumptions. She argued that Rudra's tests were only appropriate to the hypothesis that the capitalist transformation of agriculture was just about complete, and she insisted that the development of capitalism must be looked at rather as an historical process. Since capitalist agriculture develops from within the pre-existing non-capitalist structure, we should not necessarily expect to find a class of 'pure' capitalists in the context of Indian agriculture. The crucial question was not as Rudra had stated it, but rather one of tendency - so that it was necessary to ask: "In what sense was the agrarian economy in the colonial period just prior to and at Independence, non-capitalist?... (and) .. in what sense is there a tendency towards capitalist development today which was not present earlier?" (Patnaik, 1971a, A-124). Patnaik argued therefore that Rudra's approach was essentially static, whereas the question was one of dynamics.

Given this basic criticism of Rudra's assumptions, Patnaik also criticised his statistical formulations (see 1971a, A-127-29) and his empiricist definitions of class which led him to search for discontinuities in variables relating to farm economics, grouped by farm size (see Patnaik, 1971b). Patnaik argued that the Marxian definition of class is in terms of production relations - "the conditions of ownership of the means of production, of employment of labour, and appropriation of the product" - though she also proposed an empirical method for defining peasant classes using data on labour exploitation (1971b, A-191-92; developed further in Patnaik, 1976, 1980).

Patnaik's criticisms established the ground of debate not on the narrowly defined empirical question taken up by Rudra, but rather on the long term trends of development of the Indian economy and of its mode or modes of production. Of greater significance therefore, than Patnaik's presentation of the results of her own survey of capitalist farmers (in her 1971a) was the sketch that she gave of the colonial and post-colonial economy of India - which opened up the (so-called) "mode of production debate" proper.

Patnaik's model: the distinct transitional structure of the Indian economy

Patnaik insists, as we have seen, that the development of capitalism must be looked at as an historical process and that therefore "some understanding of the (post-) colonial agrarian structure is absolutely essential to an understanding of what is taking place today" (1971a, A-123). Her own conception of that agrarian structure is in terms of "a complex interaction of developing capitalism with pre-capitalist organisations" (1971a, A-127). But it is most important to note that Patnaik's notion of this 'developing capitalism' is not an evolutionary one. She states categorically that "ex-colonial countries like India are characterised precisely by a limited and distorted development of capitalism which does not revolutionise the mode of production" (1971a, A-124), and that "to recognise and analyse the reality of limited capitalist development which is taking place today is very different from putting forward the thesis that anything like a successful capitalist transformation of Indian agriculture is at all possible. On the contrary it is necessary to analyse the nature of capitalist development now taking place precisely to identify its limits...." (1971a, A-130). There are similarities between Patnaik's position, and the idea of a 'blocked transition' or of 'distorted capitalist development' and with Kay's broader and much more theoretical analysis

(1975). Patnaik, like Kay, emphasises the role of 'antediluvian' forms of merchant and usurious capital.

Patnaik's conception of the structure of 'distorted' capitalist development in agriculture begins with "The unique feature about the Indian agrarian structure as it had evolved in the colonial period just prior to Independence... (namely) ... the existence and growth of a large force of full-time agricultural labourers", who by 1931 are estimated to have made up more than 30 per cent of the work force engaged in agriculture (1971a, A-124). In Patnaik's view, it would be misleading to see in this large force of landless labourers a class of 'free' wage labourers in the sense intended by Marx, for it came into existence as a result of pauperisation under the impact of imperialism - "in particular under the combination of a rigid demand for revenue by the State and increasing vulnerability to fluctuations in world prices as commercialisation grew" (1971a, A-124). There was no parallel growth of industry at a pace fast enough to absorb the 'proletariat' so created (because of imperialist policies), and so, although the wage labourers were free "in so far as they are not generally tied to particular pieces of land... in the absence of alternative job opportunities they are effectively tied to agriculture as a main source of livelihood". The result is that "the totally unorganised nature of the destitute labour force combined with a vast underemployed reserve army ensures that wages are wholly demand determined"¹ and in practice barely enough for subsistence. The big landowner does not employ free wage labour for profit; he maximises the returns from destitute labour tied to agriculture and forced to accept bare subsistence wages" (1971a, A-124; my emphasis JH)².

1. For a contrary view concerning the recent period at least, see D.Lal "Agricultural growth, real wages and the rural poor in India", EPW 26th June, 1976.

2. Patnaik's last point here is echoed by Prasad, in his conception of 'semi-feudalism' (Prasad, 1974). The Soviet scholar Rastyannikov has proposed an argument comparable with Patnaik's, though he also suggests that the agricultural labour force is much more internally differentiated than Patnaik's account suggests

For Patnaik, further, wage labour is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of capitalism. This leads to the heart of her argument and to the crux of her debate with Paresh Chattopadhyay and others, which is the view that the establishment of commodity production in which labour power is itself a commodity is not a sufficient criterion of capitalism, for accumulation through the appropriation and reinvestment of surplus value is not necessarily implied by these conditions (see also Lin, 1980, for similar statement):

"The characteristic of the capitalist is not merely appropriation of surplus-value generated by the wage labour he employs, but also accumulation and reinvestment of surplus value in order to generate more surplus value.... It is this crucial characteristic which dominant landholders have lacked, by and large, in the colonial period. High rates of surplus value were generated on the basis of destitute labour: but very rarely did it find its way back into agricultural investment, into capital intensification. The commonest avenues of surplus utilisation remained the precapitalist ones of money lending, trade, and purchase of land to let out to tenants... The reason was simply the high rates of return available on the traditional avenues of investment, given a mass of pauperised peasants prepared to pay hunger rents for small bits of land and usurious rates of interest on loans."

(Patnaik, 1971a, A-126)

Following Marx's analysis of merchant capital in Volume III of Capital Patnaik argues that:

"generalised commodity production, within the specific conditions created in India by imperialism did not... imply the automatic development of capitalist relations of production in agriculture. It led to an inordinate development of capital in the sphere of exchange, to a prolonged

(Rastyannikov, 1976). The problem of the proletarianization of the rural population has also been debated, though on somewhat different lines, in Latin America (see Harris, 1978).

disintegration of the precapitalist mode without its reconstitution on a capitalist basis"

(Patnaik, 1972, A-149).

It is noteworthy that while in her first paper Patnaik thought that "the post-Independence period, particularly from the mid-1950s onwards, marks a definite break with earlier trends" (1971a, A-126), in later writing she became much less sanguine about the decisiveness of this break. In 1976 she wrote that "despite the growth of capitalist production the 'moment' of development, the principal contradiction, has not altered.... the very fact that genuine land reforms have not taken place, and therefore landlordism on the one hand and a mass of pauperised poor peasants on the other, exist, implies that there are definite limits to the further development of the capitalist tendency" (1976, A-98).

In sum, the characteristics of the transitional structure of colonial agriculture are these:

(i) The agrarian structure is based on private poverty. Bourgeois property rights were introduced into India by the British, but not bourgeois relations of production.¹ Patnaik finds in the disjuncture between the actual relations of production in Indian agriculture, and the institutions of bourgeois property, an important base which allowed the antediluvian forms of capital to thrive (1972, A-145-47). (This point about the possibility of a 'disjuncture' is one focus of debate with Chattopadhyay.)

(ii) Production for the market is substantially developed. ("The colonial period saw a growing commercialisation of agriculture and greater regional specialisation"; 1971a, A-126.) Much

1. Note that some recent historical research seriously qualifies the generalisation that bourgeois property rights really obtained in British India: see Baker, forthcoming.

of this market production came, however, from petty commodity producers operating with family labour and it "merely served to increase the latter's ever growing subordination to traders' and moneylenders' capital" (1972, A-146) - i.e., without the penetration of capital into production.

(iii) The class structure includes regional and local variations on the following:

- I (a) big landowners leasing land to tenants
- (b) dominant landholders operating land on the basis of hired labourⁱ
- II rich peasants employing wage labour but also supplying family labourⁱⁱ
- III petty producers including middle peasantsⁱⁱⁱ and poor peasants^{iv}
 - X include
 - X share-croppers &
 - X poor tenants
- IV landless labourers

- Notes:
- i - The choice between these modes of operation, leasing or operating on the basis of hired labour is a purely contingent, reversible decision, taken on the basis of current circumstances.
 - ii - Big landowners, dominant landholders and rich peasants may all tend to become capitalist farmers, if they intensify capital on their land.
 - iii - Middle peasants are those who may both hire-in and hire-out labour, but do so to a smaller extent than they work on their own land;
 - iv - while poor peasants - or the semi-proletariat - are those who work for others to as great or a greater extent than they work on their own land. All such petty producers include sharecroppers and other poor tenants of big landowners.

(iv) There is a large pauperised force of landless labour, which is not 'free' but destitute and dependent (as explained above). One of the conditions of existence of this force of dependent labour is the very limited development of

modern industry in India, under the influence of imperialism.

- (v) Following from these features of the colonial economy - given the pauperisation of the peasantry and the low level of industrial development - the expansion of the home market for agricultural products was slow and there was little stimulus to capitalist production (1971a, A-124). The rates of reinvestment of surplus in agricultural production were very low, agricultural technology remained backward, and the 'antediluvian' forms of capital grew, feeding off the pauperised peasantry and petty producers, to the exclusion of the penetration of capital into agricultural production itself (see discussion above and points (i) and (ii) here). There was thus a tendency to dissolution of precapitalist forms without their reconstitution on the basis of capital (e.g. 1972, A-148).
- (vi) Rates of exploitation were high, whether in the form of high land rents ('hunger rents'), high interest rates, or high trading profits (see point (ii) above).

The dynamics of this agrarian structure were (and to the extent that this structure still survives, 'are') based fundamentally on the concentration of land ownership and the marginalisation of the mass ^{of} rural people - tendencies which were powerfully assisted by the introduction of the system of private property and the British legal system (which, for example, protected the interests of money-lenders), and by the high level of revenue demanded by the colonial state. This stimulated the commercialisation of agricultural production and helped to bring about its increasing incorporation into world markets, and its vulnerability to them. The dynamics of the structure further rest upon the lack of industrial development, and more generally upon the lack of "an integrated development of capitalist production relations and generalised commodity production, out of the internal contradictions of its precapitalist mode. Whatever the possibility which might have existed for such an independent integrated development, it was made historically

irrelevant by imperialism. We find that generalised commodity production was imposed from the outside in the process of imperialist exploitation...." (1972, A-148). We will examine this last point in more detail below, but it is important to note here the contrast that Patnaik draws between the development of capitalist relations of production from within a precapitalist mode, and the imposition of capitalist exchange relations. (Foster-Carter comments upon this distinction also in the work of P P. Rey; Foster-Carter, 1978, p.64ff.)

Patnaik hesitates to define the production relations of colonial agriculture, though she expresses her dissatisfaction with existing formulations ranging from 'precapitalist' to 'semi-feudal' (1972, A-148). In her more recent work in which she re-examines post-colonial developments, she clearly identifies the persistence of precapitalist ground rent as the principal barrier to capitalist production. The idea of 'blocked transition' might again be deduced from her exposition.

Chattopadhyay's critique: The 'logic' of capitalist Development

There is a good deal of common ground between Utsa Patnaik and her chief critic Parash Chattopadhyay. They certainly share an insistence upon the need to study the economy in terms of historical process and they share a conception of a combination of capitalist and precapitalist forms of production (ch. Chattopadhyay: "The rate of capital accumulation was undoubtedly slow, even very slow. This was bound to be the case if we remember that the change was taking place in an environment dominated on the whole by precapitalist relations, as shown in the widespread prevalence of parasitic landlordism, usury, sharecropping (etc.)"; 1972b, A-191). But as this statement suggests,

the two writers differ fundamentally in their interpretation of the tendency of development and whereas Patnaik explicitly denies the existence of an evolutionary trend in such 'capitalist' development as has taken place in India, Chattopadhyay shows much greater faith in the 'historic mission' of capitalism. He writes that capitalism exists wherever its 'essential' features - generalised commodity production with labour power itself a commodity - are found, though it may be found at various stages of development: "It has a process of development over period, short or long, at a pace, slow or rapid, depending among other things, on the strength and complexity of the social formation in the midst of which it is born and which it tries to supplant.... it coexists with other social formations and ... is affected by them (and affects them in its turn). But capitalism is everywhere the same in so far as it has the same basic (or essential) features...." (1972b A-187) (we may note in this quotation from Chattopadhyay the unrigorous use of terms which characterises much of the Indian debate. Here he uses the term 'social formation' where elsewhere he would refer to 'mode of production'.) Chattopadhyay follows up this statement with a lengthy extract from Lenin which reflects a strongly teleological conception of the development of capitalism - one in which the process of subordination of precapitalist relations of production by merchant and usurers' capital 'grows into' industrial capitalism. For Chattopadhyay then, capitalist development was already a reality in India during the British period, and in his writing there is a clearly teleological conception of the development (in spite of his inweighings against Patnaik on precisely these grounds. He suggests that for her "History is always evolutionary, always unidirectional"; 1972b, A-189. Yet this remark might be applied more appropriately to Chattopadhyay himself).

Chattopadhyay begins his own substantive discussion with interpretations of farm management studies from which

the supposed 'inverse relationship' between farm size and yield has been derived. His argument is that the celebrated 'efficiency' of the small farmers, which the farm management surveys have been held to show, is the result of the poverty of the petty producers, and their subordination to capital. Patnaik does not disagree with this argument (see point (ii) in the list of 'characteristics' above), but Chattopadhyay's construction of it is different. He argues that in this case "production is only formally not capitalist, in the absence of wage labour", and he thus anticipates the view later propounded by Jairus Banaji and others (see below) that 'peasant' or 'petty commodity producers' may be disguised proletarians from whom surplus value is appropriated by capital. For Patnaik the labour process itself must be clearly capitalist.

Chattopadhyay's view ties up directly with the core of his argument against Patnaik, which is that capitalism exists wherever "the higher stage of commodity production where labour power itself becomes a commodity (Lenin)", is reached. Where this condition is fulfilled, says Chattopadhyay, then accumulation and the reinvestment of surplus value is necessarily implied, and he believes that Patnaik is quite wrong to state them as separate and necessary conditions of capitalist production. He suggests that the confuses the appearance of a higher stage of capitalist development, where technology is more advanced and the organic composition of capital is higher, for capitalism itself.

Chattopadhyay's other points of criticism are these:

- (i) The pauperised and proletarianised masses of colonial India represented an industrial reserve army.
- (ii) Patnaik is wrong to argue that landless agricultural labourers were/are not 'free' in so far as they are 'tied' to agriculture: "If the rural labourers in

India did not possess any other commodity but their labour power and if they were not tied to particular employers, in that case they, we submit, fulfil Marx's condition. They might be tied to agriculture in the same way as the industrial wage-labourers are 'tied' to industry, but that is immaterial in so far as the rise of capitalism in the countryside is concerned" (1972a, A-45).

- (iii) Patnaik's suggestion, following Mandel, that 'bourgeois property relations' may be distinguished from 'capitalist relations of production' is "absolutely invalid in any context.... Elementary Marxism teaches us that the term 'property relations' is simply the juridical expression of the term 'production relations' both are equivalent terms" (1972a, A-45).

Considerations of space unfortunately preclude much comment on these points. Patnaik's counter to the first is an expression of incredulity at the idea that the vast mass of pauperised peasantry can be considered to have been created and maintained "by India's own miniscule manufacturing sector as some kind of necessary condition for its smooth functioning" (1972, A-149) - a view which has parallels in the "marginalisation" thesis of some Latin American writers (see Harris, 1978, on 'Surplus Population'). The second point is a most important one. Patnaik's view that landless labourers cannot be considered to be truly 'free' so long as they are bound in dependency relations through their poverty, numbers and lack of alternative employment opportunities, seems to misrepresent Marx, who says nothing about the availability of employment (etc.) in defining 'free' labour. As Alavi points out, Patnaik leaves herself in a contradictory position, for if the situation of the rural labourer is as she describes it, how does he become a 'free wage labourer' when he goes to work for a 'capitalist' farmer? Alavi's own

argument, is that "both the 'unfree labourer' of Patnaik's Dominant Landlords as well as the 'free' labourer of the capitalist farmer in fact share a common condition, namely that of dependence...." (Alavi, 1975, 177). Further, we may note the recent documentation by Corrigan of the importance of 'unfree' labour to the capitalist system, which leads him to question 'free' labour as a component of the capitalist mode of production (Corrigan, 1977). It would appear to be impossible, therefore, to define capitalism as a distinctive mode of production in terms of the existence of a class of wage labourers alone (cf. the observations of Banaji, 1972; and Sau, 1973). The importance which the problem has assumed in the debate illustrates particularly well a tendency which has run right through it, to concentrate narrowly upon 'the relations of production' without considering the whole structure in which the process of production is embedded.

On the third point of criticism made by Chattopadhyay, Banaji's comment that he adopts an excessively formalistic line seems fair (Banaji, 1973, 679).

In spite of these differences, there is a large amount of agreement between Patnaik and Chattopadhyay on one level, for both can be understood as arguing that 'there was capitalism, but also precapitalist forms' in the agrarian economy of colonial India, and it is this point which provides part of the base for Alavi's elaboration of the concept of a 'colonial mode of production'. Patnaik's conception is of a distinctive transitional structure - or perhaps, of 'blocked transitions'; while Chattopadhyay finds that "As a matter of fact the British preserved as well as destroyed the conditions of India's precapitalist economy, accelerated as well as retarded the development of capitalism in India" (1972b, A-189).

Patnaik and Chattopadhyay and their critics: Discussion

The critics of the two principal protagonists in the debate (Ram, 1972; Frank, 1973; Sau, 1973; Banaji, 1972 and 1973; and Alavi, 1975) differ from one another on some points but they show strong convergence around these fundamental criticisms: firstly, that Patnaik and Chattopadhyay emphasise elements and not the totality of the mode of production, and secondly that they - especially Patnaik - tend to collapse the concept of mode of production into 'relations of production' and the concept of 'relations of production' into empirically observed 'relations of exploitation'. It is shown that the two protagonists tend variously to equate sharecropping with feudalism and wage labour with capitalism (on which see my observations above); while Frank's main thrust is that Patnaik fails to grasp that the relevant totality is capitalism as a world system.

The heart of the debate hinges around the question of whether or not the existence of generalised commodity production in which labour power is itself a commodity constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions of existence of the capitalist mode of production. For Chattopadhyay, following Lenin's reading of Capital Volume II, these conditions necessarily imply appropriation of surplus value and accumulation, while for Patnaik they do not. Patnaik explains her position by referring to Volume III of Capital, in which Marx discusses the distinctive features of capitalism as a mode of production in these terms: "Capitalist production is distinguished from the outset by two characteristic features. First, it produces products as commodities ... the labourer himself comes forward merely as a seller of commodities, and thus as a free wage-labourer.... The second distinctive feature of the capitalist mode of production is the production of surplus value as the direct aim and determining motive of production" (Patnaik, 1972,

A-148, citing Marx). Patnaik suggests that Chattopadhyay's position is a dogmatic one, and one which uses Marxism as a model and not as method. She argues that Chattopadhyay may be right in terms of the strict logic of Marxian theory, but asks whether there isn't also a question of the concrete reality of colonial India. Lin (1980) adopts a position like Patnaik's (but see also Chattopadhyay's reply in his 'Afterword', 1980).

Patnaik goes on to argue that in the European context where capitalist relations of production emerged out of the internal contradictions of feudalism, accompanied by generalised commodity production - or in other words in the context of an integrated process of capitalist development - the first condition did indeed imply the second. Lenin's statement, quoted by Chattopadhyay, was made with reference to the European experience so that he did not need to specify the second condition. But Patnaik's point is that India did not experience this kind of integrated development of capitalist relations of production and generalised commodity production, for the latter was imposed from the outside in the process of imperialist exploitation.¹ In these specific conditions generalised commodity production did not imply the automatic development of capitalist relations of production in agriculture but led only to "an inordinate development of capital in the sphere of exchange" (1972, A-149). This development of the antediluvian forms of capital was (is) causally linked with the pauperisation of the mass of rural producers and to the stagnation of Indian agriculture (in the manner outlined above). Capital did not generally penetrate into agricultural production itself, and Patnaik argues that we "cannot take use of wage-labour to be a sufficient condition for identifying the capitalist farm under (these) specific historical conditions..."

1. See also Lin's discussion of the differences between 'integrated' and 'combined' development (1980, p 524 H.)

(1972, A-148). For these reasons Patnaik is reluctant to speak of any real structural change and of the development of the capitalist mode of production in colonial India.

Frank is crushingly critical of the last point of Patnaik's, arguing that Patnaik effectively identifies the mode of production with the farm: "UP looks for the criterion of the mode of production on the individual farm!" (Frank, 1973, 36). He suggests that this leads her to misunderstand what she herself so clearly sees - namely that extended reproduction and accumulation was taking place, but for the benefit of the bourgeoisie in Britain: "wage labour in Indian agriculture went with the accumulation of colonial super-profits by the bourgeoisie in Britain... rather than indicating capitalist production relations in Indian agriculture itself" (1972, A-149).

There is little doubt that Frank and Banaji correctly identify the tendency in Patnaik's writing towards identification of empirically observed relations of exploitation with the concept of mode of production, and thus to collapse that concept. The point has been substantially developed in later contributions to the Indian debate (Alavi, 1975; Banaji 1977b) and in other contexts (see Bernstein, 1977; Cowen, n.d., writing with reference to East Africa; Ennew et al., 1977, in reviewing the 'classic' texts on the agrarian question; and Roseberry, 1978, writing about the Venezuelan Andes). These studies show how apparently 'independent' small producers may produce surplus value for capitalists and the conditions of their production thus become dependent upon capital. In such circumstances, all these writers ask whether it can possibly make any sense at all to continue talking as if the concept of a mode of production independent of capital could be set up.

Patnaik ~~herself~~ appears to have been uncertain and equivocal throughout the initial phase of the debate,

suggesting in some places that India was (is) characterised by distorted capitalist development ("ex-colonial countries like India are characterised precisely by a limited and distorted development of capitalism which does not revolutionise the mode of production" op cit), while stating elsewhere that in spite of the existence of wage labour (etc.) the mode of production cannot be described as 'capitalist' or for that matter as 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal'. Her uncertainty probably relates to a much more general confusion concerning the scope of the concept of mode of production, which we will discuss below.

But if Patnaik was wrong in confusing relations of exploitation and mode of production and wrong to deny the reality of capitalist development (where indeed she does deny its reality!), equally she was right to have insisted upon the specificity of the economic structures and processes within the Indian social formation, and to have opposed the evolutionism which colours Chattopadhyay's line. This would, after all, seem to deny the reality of the actual development of agriculture in Western Europe, which has not taken the form indicated by the 'logic' of capitalism, as Lenin at one time thought it would (see Djurfeldt, 1977; Vergopoulos, 1978). Further, Patnaik's analysis of the agrarian structure of colonial India carries conviction, given the level at which it is pitched; and the major attributes of the structure as she defines it are not denied by any of the contributors to the Indian debate. It is the strong sense of the specificity of social formations that have undergone colonial domination which Alavi shares with Patnaik in his attempt to constitute the concept of the colonial mode of production; and which we find too in the work of Jairus Banaji who also advanced a concept of a colonial mode (1972), and who in criticising Chattopadhyay commented upon "the absence of a theory of colonialism" in his work (1973a). Banaji's earlier contributions to

the Indian debate (1972, 1973a), and associated papers (1973b), attempt indeed to identify distinct modes of reproduction of capitalism in the colonies (e.g., 1973a, 681ff.)

We will turn to the attempt to resolve the Indian debate in the concept of a colonial mode of production in a moment, but it will be useful first to take note of another outcome of the debate - the elaboration of a concept of 'semi-feudalism'.

Outcome: Indian agriculture as predominantly precapitalist.
The theory of semi-feudalism.

Perhaps the clearest exposition of the theory of semi-feudalism is that by Amit Bhaduri. For him the basic features of semi-feudalism are: "(1) an extensive non-legalised sharecropping system; (2) perpetual indebtedness of the small tenants; (3) (rural exploiters)...operating both as landowners and lenders to the small tenants; (4) ...tenants having incomplete access to the market" (1973). Bhaduri developed his concept of semi-feudalism with reference to an area in West Bengal in which 'rural exploiters' frequently combine the roles of landlord, moneylender and merchant, and appropriate surplus from the landless or semi-landless kisans in the form of rents, usurious interest and speculative trading profits. As landowners they give out land to the landless for share-cropping; because of their poverty these tenants require loans for production and for consumption purposes, and these are supplied by the landowners; the rates of interest that the tenants pay are high and they are required to repay them at harvest time when prices are low, so that the landowners are able to procure a very large proportion of the market surplus and to make speculative trading profits in addition to appropriating surplus directly through rents and usury. Bhaduri's model purports to show

that in such a situation the development of the forces of production will be constrained because landowners will resist productive innovations - since these, assuming that the shares paid remained constant, could allow the tenants to escape from debt bondage. Thus, unless the innovation were greatly to increase rents, the landowners 'losses' from reduced interest payments and perhaps lost trading profits, would outweigh any possible benefits to them. (Clearly this model involves assumptions concerning the relative stability of the tenants' consumption levels as well.) Bhaduri concludes therefore that "...semi-feudal relations (i.e. relations of acute dependence between landowners and the direct producers - JH) act as fetters on the release of the productive forces".

This point is also argued by Prasad (1974) who assumes that "the direct producers are trapped in a circle of ever-growing debt as a result of their inability to repay earlier debts. This usury is less an independent source of income for the landlord and more a means of enforcing a personal bondage relation on the labourer. Such bondage is a source of political power to the landlord and enables him to enforce a set of unequal exchanges on the labourer which provide him with material gains. It would be in the interests of big landowners to prevent rapid economic development, because that would make it possible for the semi-proletariat to free itself from bondage" (Schoer, 1977, 17).

Although they have been subjected to extensive criticism, these views have been found intrinsically persuasive, even by some of their critics (who include especially Ghose and Saith, 1976; Newberry, 1974; and Schoer, 1977). Bhaduri's model has been criticised firstly on the empirical grounds that the conditions which he assumes are not typical of most of Bengal agriculture, let alone Indian agriculture as a whole, and that there is a good deal of contrary evidence concerning innovation adoption, as well as evidence

of a tendency for landowners to evict sharecroppers in order to take up profitable innovations. Secondly, the internal logic of the model has been criticised; and thirdly, it has been criticised on the grounds that the political power of the landlords does not necessarily rest on the debt bondage of their tenants alone, and that their political power is often such that they may simply shift the terms of the sharecropping contract in order to perpetuate indebtedness. There has also been a good deal of discussion of the actual extent of indebtedness amongst the poor peasantry (e.g., Rudra, 1975; Kurup, 1977). Yet in spite of such criticisms the idea that agrarian production relations remain precapitalist and are well described as 'semi-feudal' persists. Utsa Patnaik's recent paper (1976) provides additional support for it, even though she changes the mode of the argument in doing so.

Patnaik argues that it is generally accepted that at the time of Independence Indian agriculture was characterised by landlordism, in the sense that a very large share of the cultivated area was concentrated in the hands of big landowners. She suggests that since that time there has been a tendency for the growth of capitalist production in agriculture (as a result of government intervention and technical innovation), but that this development has remained narrow-based because of the continuing prevalence of landlordism. Patnaik argues that the 'moment' of development, or the principal contradiction, is not capitalist but remains that between the landlords and the peasantry, and that high levels of precapitalist ground rent constitute a barrier to capitalist production. These high levels of ground rent persist because of the monopoly of landed rent and the great extent of landlessness, so that the "rents... reflect not the peasant's high productivity but his near destitute status; and the development of capitalist production only makes sense therefore, if it is associated with technical

innovations which significantly raise the potential surplus per unit of land area". The 'new technology' of the 'green revolution' was such a technology at least in the wheat growing areas of the north, where the capitalist tendency has been most pronounced. But "we can expect to find a levelling off and even a decline of productive investment, once the potential of a given complex of technical changes has been realised. The accumulated surpluses of the emerging capitalists will revert to usurious moneylending, speculative trade etc...." (1976, A-100), because the level of precapitalist rent will tend to rise (even though with a lag), and because the capitalist tendency itself increases land concentration - thus fuelling the conditions for landlordism. Sau (1976) puts forward a similar argument, with some empirical evidence in support, though his specific conclusions are that it is "rigidity of the land market and the reactionary role of usury (which) are inhibiting capitalist transformation of Indian agriculture". (Our own empirical study in northern Tamil Nadu provides some evidence in support of this explanation; though our construction upon it differs from Sau's; Harriss, 1981.)

The processes postulated by Patnaik and by Sau are somewhat different, but the thrust of their arguments is in line with the concept of semi-feudalism, in so far as it is based on the fundamental premise of land concentration with its concomitant mass of 'dependent' landless and poor peasantry. Another aspect of the argument on semi-feudalism concerns the character of the agricultural labour force. One statement of the view that a large section of agricultural labourers is not a proletariat but a dependent, pauperised mass, is by Rastyannikov (1976; and see below), who also argues however that there is a small section with the character of capitalist wage labour. A more extreme statement is by Chandra, who states the "... the-
sis of pauperisation of the rural masses within an unchanged system of production relations, namely, semifeudalism" (1979, p.7).

It is very widely accepted view therefore, that the relations of production in Indian agriculture remain pre-capitalist. It is not suggested however, that the incorporation of India within the capitalist world system under colonialism had no effect at all, but rather that the effect was to reinforce those relations. It is time then, for us to examine the problem of 'articulation' of modes of production, which these arguments seem to pose.

It is striking, in comparison with the Latin American literature, that none of the contributors to the Indian debate has specified a concept of the 'articulation' of feudalism or another non-capitalist mode of production with capitalism (like Laclau and others who insist on the reality of 'feudalism' in Latin America), and that none of them has specifically proposed a concept of a peasant mode of production (or of simple commodity production or petty commodity production). This has been proposed by Bartra for Mexico (see Harris, 1978, 3). Bartra has been criticised for confusing a form of production - or a process of production which is not in itself capitalist, but which may be determined by interventions of capital - with a mode. It is held that the 'mode of production' should be a 'completive entity', or self-reproducing. Bernstein suggests that: "...formulations of a peasant or simple commodity mode of production...ultimately come down to relations within the unit of production (the household) and its mode of economic calculation (as a unit of simple reproduction). At best these formulations may elaborate the nature of simple commodity production as a form of production but cannot satisfy questions concerning the relations of production through which it is constituted..."(1977, 68). We will return again to these arguments; but for the moment we will examine Alavi's intervention in the mode of production debate, which stemmed, in part, from criticism of the whole concept of 'articulation'.

Resolution?: The concept of a colonial mode of production

Alavi's formulation of the concept of a colonial mode of production starts off from his insistence, in criticising Patnaik and Chattopadhyay, that modes of production cannot simply coexist within a social formation, but must necessarily be in a state of contradiction with one another. The key theoretical premise underlying his work is that the forms in which the relations between exploiters and producers are given to us, must not be confused with the concepts of modes of production. We must start therefore with Alavi's conception of 'mode of production'. For him 'mode of production' is a concept of a structure ("a complex unity"/"a dialectical unity") which does not refer to particular societies but which connotes the structural properties (underlying, organising principles) of actually existing, historically determined societal entities - or 'social formations' - and which is constituted by their relations and forces of production. Alavi avoids the analytical dichotomy of 'base' (he refers to it as 'structure' - perhaps rather misleadingly) and 'superstructure', in what has rightly been called 'the layer cake' approach of vulgar materialism. The 'layer cake' approach leads to the erroneous suggestion that it is possible to deduce the rest of the structure of reproductive totality from the process of material production alone. In Alavi's conception it is accepted that the logic of the material process of social reproduction is defined by the social relations of production but at a given stage of development of the forces of production. The term 'the forces of production' refers to the resources and tools which are used, according to different technologies and involving various forms of cooperation between individuals, in the process of production; while 'the social relations of production' refer not to the technical division of labour, but rather to the mode of appropriation of surplus labour and the specific form of

social distribution of the means of production associated with it. The relationship between the forces and relations of production is thus essentially an internal one, for 'cooperating people' are a necessary part of the forces of production, and the forms of their cooperation are not really separable from the relations of production (refer Sayer, 1975 and 1979 (introduction), for an exposition of this point). The relationship between the forces and relations of production is thus complex and dynamic. The forces of agricultural production for example, are not 'given' but rather are continuously created by men. This includes even 'environmental conditions', which reflect the continuous interaction of men with the environment over a long period. The forces of production cannot then be the constant base of a mode of production because they are themselves a continuous result of the total reproductive process. They cannot be said therefore, absolutely to determine the relations of production, although particular relations of production do presuppose a particular level of development of the forces of production. It is in this sense that Kay has written: "On the one hand material production determines the social relations within which it takes place; on the other these social relations determine material production no less forcibly. We must accept this complexity and work with it (Kay, 1975, 24).

Given his basic conception of the mode of production as a structure, Alavi argues that any given mode is expressed at economic, political and ideological levels in forms that together constitute the necessary conditions for its existence; and these, as a whole, are necessarily different from those of any other mode. Alavi goes on to suggest that if, in a concrete social formation the conditions of existence of one mode of production are present - that is to say that the classes of the social formation and its economic, political and ideological structures are constituted in accordance with

that mode of production - the conditions of existence of another cannot also be present, except in conflict with those of the first. The logic of this argument is not readily apparent¹. But for Alavi it is axiomatic that different modes of production cannot co-exist within a single social formation. He argues, then, that the development of one mode of production necessarily entails conflict with, and eventually the dissolution of the other. The mode of production of a social formation defines class relations and the lines of class struggle within it. In a concrete social formation which is undergoing change in which the conditions of existence of another mode of production are being realised, the development of these conditions, and the dissolution of the conditions of existence of the old mode, will be expressed "in the thrust of political conflict and the nature of the class struggle" (Alavi, 1975, 171). Alavi's point of contention with reference to the mode of production debate is that "None of the participants in the debate have demonstrated that there is any conflict between the rural 'capitalist' class and the 'feudal' landlords, if they can be structurally distinguished at all" (1975, 172). Hence his theoretical scepticism about the possibility of 'coexistence' of modes of production, and his empirically based doubts about its reality in India.

Alavi is critical therefore of views like that of Laclau's in his famous critique of Gunder Frank (1971), which suggest that capitalism may not only coexist with

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1. Reference may be made on this point to Wolpe's discussion of the work of Hindess and Hirst. Wolpe says that for these two writers "...there is a necessary contradiction between the conditions of existence of one mode of production and any other mode such that the coexistence of modes in a single social formation is impossible". Wolpe goes on: "Why this should be the case is not only unexplained but also appears to contradict the central contention (of Hindess and Hirst's book) that the conditions of existence of a mode of production cannot be derived from the concept of that mode..." (1980, 22).

Precapitalist modes of production but also buttress them. And in so far as the idea of 'articulation' of modes of production implies a kind of functional coexistence, Alavi rejects it altogether. His (structuralist) conception of 'mode of production' leads him to warn against the misleading nature of the forms of relationships (the same elements, or the same symbols etc., have a quite different significance in different structures) - so that "the essential nature and significance" of what appears to be a 'precapitalist structure' may have undergone quite revolutionary transformation: "That is why it is wrong to describe colonial economies to be those in which precapitalist relations 'coexist' with capitalist relations. Such relations, transformed by the colonial impact are no longer 'precapitalist' (etc.)..." (1975, 182). For Alavi it no longer makes any sense to conceive of them in terms of 'precapitalist modes of production', when their dynamics - central to which is the mode of appropriation of surplus in its relationship with production - are now constituted by capital.

Alavi's discussion does not do justice to the conception of 'articulation' in Rey's work however,¹ for Rey specifies articulation as a process in time and as such "essentially a reformulation and specification of transition" (Foster-Carter, 1978, 56). As Foster-Carter points out, for Rey 'articulation' specifies the nature of contradiction, rather than negating it as ^{Alavi} suggests, because the concept of 'articulation' specifies a process - "a combat between two modes with the confrontations and alliances which such a combat implies: confrontations and alliances essentially between the classes which these modes of production define" (Foster-Carter, 1978, 56). The statement seems remarkably

1. Rey's work was inaccessible to Alavi at the time at which he wrote his 'colonial mode' paper.

reminiscent of Alavi. Rey's periodisation of the process of articulation distinguishes:

- (i) an initial link in the sphere of exchange where interaction with capitalism reinforces the pre-capitalist mode (i.e. intensifies earlier forms of oppression and exploitation? - JH)
- (ii) a phase in which capitalism 'takes root', subordinating the precapitalist mode(s) but still making use of it; and
- (iii) a stage not yet reached in the Third World, in which the precapitalist mode has totally disappeared, even in agriculture.

Arguably, this periodisation offers greater precision than Alavi's formulation. As Foster-Carter puts it, Rey's original insight (though surely it was Marx's in the first place?) is that "Capitalism can never immediately and totally eliminate the preceding modes of production, nor above all, the relations of exploitation which characterise those modes...." (Foster-Carter, 1978, 59).

Given his view that modes of production cannot simply coexist in a social formation, Alavi's response to the Indian mode of production debate is to ask: If there was 'capitalism and something else' in the Indian colonial economy, then what was this 'something else'? Was it 'feudalism' as the protagonists in the debate seem to suggest? And if there were distinct modes of production as they imply, which mode was dominant? He proceeds to examine the characteristics of the Indian social formation under colonialism, and he finds that they cannot be understood in terms of a concept of feudal mode of production because:

- (i) Land was a commodity which could be transacted within the framework of bourgeois law. Alavi

notes that "in pre-British India land was a possession held by virtue of the force at the command of the local lord, rather than property held under bourgeois law" (1975, 185).

He explains very clearly in a later paper:

"The main impact of the change brought about by the colonial dispensation was the elimination of petty sovereignties of chiefs and zamindars who ruled land, as much as they owned it. Thus the "fusion of economic and political power at the point of production", that we identified as a structural condition of feudalism, the power of the landlord over the peasant, was dissolved and was reconstituted in the form of bourgeois landed property, under the authority of the colonial state which marked a separation of economic and political power"¹ (Alavi, 1979, 24).

- (ii) There was therefore 'free' labour in this sense: "that access of the exploiting classes to the surplus produced by the peasant depended no longer on the exercise and organisation of direct coercive force but on the institution of property rights by the colonial regime and the concomitant dispossession of the peasant, so that in place of direct physical coercion he was now subjected to the economic coercion experienced by the dispossessed who had to turn to the landlord for access to their means of livelihood and to whom therefore they sold their labour power" (Alavi, 1979, 25). In these circumstances the degree of dependence and the level of oppression experienced by the mass of the peasantry often increased.

1. Recent research on South India calls this commonly accepted view of the colonial impact into question; see Baker, forthcoming.

(iii) There was generalised commodity production, even though it was internally disarticulated (i.e., "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"; 1975, 187. There was no longer the localised production and appropriation characteristic of the feudal mode of production.

(iv) Finally, there was extended reproduction rather than the simple reproduction of the feudal mode even though it was 'deformed' because of its relations with the imperial centre, as surplus value extracted from the colony went to support accumulation of capital at the centre.

Thus, Alavi argues that the conditions of existence of the feudal mode of production were not realised in the social formation of colonial India (though he believes that they were present in India during the Mughal period - a contentious point which deserves to be considered together with the case for an 'Asiatic mode of production'); while the conditions of existence of the capitalist mode were there, albeit in a particular form which differed from those of the metropolitan centres. His general conclusion is that "the global expansion of capitalism has not brought about the emergence in the colonies of a structure of capitalism homologous to that in the metropolitan countries but, rather, a structurally differentiated kind of capitalism" (1978, 20). It is for this reason that he believes that the Indian social formation can best be understood in terms of the concept of a distinct colonial mode of production, which is not however, 'a complete unity', but a capitalist mode of production. It is not therefore a concept of a mode of production which exists in contradiction with the capitalist mode, but a concept appropriate to a hierarchically and structurally differentiated part of world capitalism. It is a structure

within a structure. It is a moot point as to whether Alavi does not depart from his own concept of structure in putting forward this formulation, for if he believes as he appears to, that the basic dynamics of the social formation are those of capitalist mode of production, does not the problem of the specific forms of those dynamics refer to a different, more concrete level of analysis? But while we must note this problem, Alavi's is still a valuable attempt to conceptualise the specificity of a social formation in terms of its insertion into world capitalism, and without resorting to the kind of blanket statements made by some of the early exponents of the 'world system' view.

What is perhaps least clear from Alavi's analysis is whether or not he sees the colonial mode as a transitional mode of production, and whether he thinks that there can be or will be a transition from the colonial mode to the capitalist mode of production. Presumably his position is that the active struggle must be to transform the conditions of the colonial mode of production in order to bring about a socialist transformation - and that transformation will not be brought about by pursuing the fiction of the 'un-completed bourgeois revolution' in the colonies.

We may further compare Alavi's position with Rey's. Rey refers to the 'homoficence' of capitalism (or 'the doing the same thing'/'having the same effects' of capitalism). Capital does not change, but its actual effects are different according to its varieties of articulations with other modes of production. This seems to me to be closely comparable with Alavi's formulation, which is of "a single mode of production inserted into several social formations" (1975, 191). Alavi's colonial mode might be seen as corresponding with Rey's phase 2 of neo-colonialism, in which "other modes now exist 'on the basis' of capitalism

and ~~are~~ modified accordingly" (Bradby). Perhaps the nub of both writers' concerns is the distinction between the internal development of the capitalist mode of production from within the feudal mode (as in the case of the classic transition), and the development of capitalism in the context of other modes of production where capitalism has been imposed from outside the social formation. (For Rey indeed, violence is a necessary component of all articulations except in that of capitalism with feudalism.)

Jairus Banaji also proposed a concept of a colonial mode of production, though he has since withdrawn it. We turn now to his criticisms of Alavi, and attempt to trace the development of his thought.

Benaji: the 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour into capital

Jairus Banaji's early interventions in the mode of production debate (1972, 1973a) and a more wide-ranging paper written at about the same time (1973b) were concerned with a theory of colonialism, and he devoted some effort to distinguishing different forms of the colonial modes of production. Unlike Alavi, Banaji saw these as being non-capitalist modes, but created by the pressures of accumulation in "the metropolis": "the colonial modes of production transmitted to the colonies the pressures of the accumulation process in the metropolis without unleashing any corresponding expansion of the forces of production" (1972, 2498). They exist then as "subordinate elements of a complex international structure" (1973a, 679); and his conception of them at this time was in terms of the articulation of modes of production, in a manner reminiscent of Rey's: "any process of primitive accumulation implies an articulation of modes of production. The early phases of the process of expanded reproduction derive their dynamism

from certain relations between a nascent capitalist mode and an established capitalist or precapitalist mode of production. Historically the dominant form of these relations was the subordination of precapitalist modes of production, though it would be wrong to see in this a simple process of outright destruction for the latter was only one of the historical forms of the former...." (1973b, 396).

There are strong parallels with Banaji's early conception of different colonial modes of production in the work of some Latin American writers, and perhaps especially with that of C.S. Cardoso (e.g., 1975). Cardoso argues that precapitalist modes of production cannot be universal and that the concepts of precapitalist modes advanced by Marx and Engels were based on the specific historical experience of the European-Mediterranean region. The modes of production of Latin America are the products of the specific history of Latin America and their definition and the analysis of their dynamics depends on study of the colonial relationship as well as of the internal structures of the colonial socio-economic formations.

In Banaji's intervention in the Indian mode of production debate, he was adamant that the trends identified by Chattopadhyay were not indicative of the development of capitalism "but of the intensity of colonial exploitation"; and he went on to argue that "Rural semi-proletarianisation was emphatically not the product of an expanding agricultural capitalism but, in the last instance, of the specific mode of domination experienced by the colonial and semi-colonial countries, as Utsa Patnaik has argued...." (1973a, 682). There clearly are continuities between statements of this kind and some of Banaji's later positions, but it is a matter for debate as to whether he has not moved to a position which entails a more evolutionary view of peripheral capitalism.

The main weight of Banaji's criticism of Alavi's concept of colonial mode of production is that it is a 'forced abstraction'. Alavi shares a conception of capitalism as a world system with Frank - and it is to this that Banaji directs his criticism: "In its most general sense (the) process of expanding commodity-economy (in India in the 19th century) was identical with the process of the country's progressively tighter integration into world commodity circuits. Alavi builds his case for a 'colonial mode of production' on this general determination.... (there is a forced abstraction here because)... in correctly grasping the general determination of this process, it fails to grasp the specific mechanisms through which capital, as an epoch-making mode of production, actually asserts its domination on a world scale" (1975, 1889). His point here may be compared with Leys' criticism of dependency theory: that it does not actually explain why underdevelopment goes on (Leys, 1976, passim). Banaji finds the concept of the colonial mode attractive in so far as it emphasises the specificity of the production relations of colonial India, but he argues that it is inadequate because "it constitutes itself as a mode of production by a process of metaphysical subsumption - subsumption of all the specific social forms that prevailed in the economy of colonial India" (1975, 1892). A further reason for criticising the concept of the colonial mode is that it leaves as problematic developments such as those of the period since Independence. Banaji refers to Alavi's statements concerning "the rise of the capitalist farmer in the sixties" and suggests that his account of this is largely voluntaristic: "Since there is no basis within the limits of his forced abstraction for deducing the evolution of capitalist relations in agriculture" (1975, 1892), he can only explain it as being the result of interventions by the Ford Foundation. Here Banaji seriously misrepresents Alavi's argument. It is also unclear here as to what he means by "forced abstraction".

Banaji gives a more extended discussion of his critique of dependency theoryⁱⁿ a review of Frank's later work (Banaji, 1980). Here he explains why he believes that the idea of 'world capitalism' involves 'forced abstraction' - or a certain formalism - by paraphrasing Hegel.

Everything is subordinated "...to the absolute idea (here Frank's world capitalism) which thus gives the appearance of being traceable in everything. But if we take a closer look at this expansion of content, it turns out that it has not been achieved through one and the same principle (the law of transformation into capitalist relations) acquiring various forms, but it is the shapeless repetition of one and the same idea (world capitalism, domination, dependency etc.) which is applied in a purely external way to a range of material and which obtains the tedious and fictitious appearance of diversity. The idea... in fact always remains where it started if its development consists in nothing other than such a repetition of the same formula (Banaji, 1980, 517).

Banaji points to confusions and logical contradictions in Frank's later work, which according to Banaji arise particularly from the way in which Frank himself reifies forms of exploitation as substantive and independent 'relations of production'. Banaji's review may be compared with critiques of the earlier work of Gunder Frank, and of 'dependency theory' in general which attack its emphasis on external influences and neglect of the internal dynamics of social formations (see Harris, 1978, on the work of Castaneda and Hatt). The critics of the theory of 'underdevelopment', like Laclau, have often resorted to some kind of articulation theory, but Banaji has developed a distinctive line of his own.

Banaji's own argument is that "As a whole tradition of Marxists understood, from Marx himself to the Bolsheviks who drafted the early theses of the Comintern, capital expands on a world scale by first reproducing itself in relatively backward, primitive, distorted forms characterised by Marx as 'intermediate', as a 'renewal' of the old modes of production on its own foundation, and then in the further course of its development uprooting these forms. The two parts of this proposition form the clue to the history of India in the last two hundred years...." (1975, 1889). 1889). There is a degree of continuity with his earlier statements concerning the articulation of modes of production, but we see here a new suggestion of an evolutionary process of development of capitalism. The 'two parts' of the proposition have later been explained by Banaji (1977) with reference to the distinction made by Marx (a major source is the unedited chapter of Capital, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production"), between the 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour into capital. Both forms imply the extortion of surplus labour as surplus value though in the case of 'formal' subsumption this is in the form of absolute surplus value, and in the case of 'real' subsumption it is relative surplus value, that is appropriated. Formal subsumption implies a labour process that is technologically continuous with earlier modes of labour, whereas real subsumption entails the suspension of previously existing labour processes, and a labour process that is 'specifically capitalist' (i.e., it involves technical change, increasing organic composition of capital). But in the case of formal subsumption, even though the labour process retains its earlier 'precapitalist' forms it has for Marx "the general form of every capitalist process of production in so far as it implies (i) extortion of surplus labour in the form of surplus value and (ii) the intervention of capital as 'the immediate owner of the production process'" (1977, 1376). The most important difference is that with formal

subsumption, "we have the whole of capitalist production without its advantages, the development of the social forms of labour and of the productivity of labour to which they give rise" (Marx, Theories of Surplus Value; quoted in Banaji, 1977, 1390).

These points are expounded in the course of Banaji's substantive analysis of the Deccan peasantry in the later 19th century.¹ There was a considerable expansion of commodity production in the Deccan which was mediated through the interventions of 'monied capitalists' (who included big farmers, traders and moneylenders - with the three roles frequently combined in one person). Large numbers of small peasant household producers became dependent upon advances of money from these 'monied capitalists' for the reproduction of part of their means of production (seeds, bullocks) and of their labour power (family subsistence) in systems of forward purchasing: "Over time...(creditors)...came to establish control over (the) reproduction process (of the household farm) from one cycle to the next. Elements of the production process would be 'advanced' to the peasant either in money-form or directly in material form, and the peasant would then surrender the whole of his crop by way of 'interest' payments...." (1977, 1387). Here there is an appearance of a simple transaction between sellers and buyers belonging to the sphere of circulation, which (according to Banaji) has deceived other writers such as Patnaik. Banaji's argument is that in these cases the money advanced does not represent simply a means of purchase, because where advances reconstitute the process of production by enabling the reproduction of labour power (i.e. the peasant's subsistence) and the reproduction of his means of production (seed, bullocks), they represent the commodity capital of the capitalist who has made them. The capital which he advances at the beginning of the production cycle is expanded to include surplus

1. The region of the Deccan extends over the major part of Peninsula India. Banaji's work refers to part of Western India.

value, though in this case "the producer pays the capitalist his surplus labour in the form of interest" (Banaji, 1977, 1390, quoting Marx). Here, although the labour process remains 'pre-' or 'non-' capitalist because it remains the province of the small peasant producer, the process is nonetheless controlled by the capitalist. Thus Banaji argues that the relations of production are capitalist, and capital extorts surplus labour in the form of surplus value, even where the labour process itself remains external to capital. A classic instance of this is to be found in Lenin's analysis of the pottery industry around Moscow, from which Banaji quotes at length. The industry had been characterised by the Narodniks as a 'purely domestic industry', but it was shown by Lenin to be "crude serf form of exploitation" - under the control of capital for all that. Lenin's view was that capital intensified the existing, backward forms of exploitation, but that while "these forms remain 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal' in character...the relations of production acquire a bourgeois character" (Banaji, 1977b, 8).

Banaji's criticism of the 'semi-feudalism' thesis of Bhaduri and Patnaik is that it confuses: "...the capitalist command over the process of production with the specifically capitalist form of the labour process" (1977, 1399). Bhaduri treats particular 'relations of exploitation' as 'relations of production', while Patnaik mistakes the relationship between merchants and producers for a simple transaction, in the manner just described.

It is on these grounds that others (e.g. Roseberry, 1978; and Bernstein, 1977 - though both of them with qualifications), have argued that so-called 'peasants' should often be considered to be 'disguised proletarians' because they occupy a structural position which is that of the proletariat

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1. Roseberry, for example, shows that whereas the characteristic movement of merchant capital is M-C-M', the actual movement of capital in the Venezuelan Andes in his study, is M-C-C'-M', which is the movement of industrial capital. This comes about "...because the producer, identified with the means of production, does not completely control them and must turn to a merchant/usurer who is taking control over production. In this manner the merchant (as merchant and usurer) imitates the industrial capitalist" (1978, 9).

Both this formulation and Banaji's suggestion that the circumstances of the Deccan peasantry correspond with Marx's concept of the 'formal' subsumption of labour into capital seem questionable in view of some of Marx's own statements. As Banaji says, following the distinction made by Marx in the Unedited Chapter of Capital (recently published in English for the first time: Marx, 1976):

the extortion of surplus-labour as surplus-value is not sufficient to constitute (the formal subordination of labour into capital)...a monied capitalist (e.g. a merchant, moneylender) may dominate the small producer on a capitalist basis, he may, in other words, extort surplus-value from him, without standing out as the "immediate owner of the process of production". In this case his domination will be based on control of only portions of the means of subsistence and production of the small producer [and this constitutes only a pre-formal subordination of labour into capital, such as Marx describes with explicit reference to India in the Unedited Chapter: Marx, 1976, 1023¹/₇ (Banaji, 1977, 1376) 1376).

1. Marx writes: "The distinctive character of the formal subsumption of labour under capital appears at its sharpest if we compare it to situations in which capital is to be found in certain specific subordinate functions, but where it has not emerged as the direct purchaser of labour and as the immediate owner of the process of production, and where in consequence it has not yet succeeded in becoming the dominant force, capable of determining the form of society as a whole. In India, for example, the capital of the usurer advances raw materials or tools or even both to the immediate producer in the form of money. The exorbitant interest which it attracts...is just another name for surplus value. It transforms its money into capital by extorting unpaid labour, surplus value from the immediate producer. But it does not intervene in the process of production itself, which proceeds in its traditional fashion...in part it thrives on the withering away of this mode of production, in part it is a means to make it whither away...But here we have not yet reached the stage of formal subsumption of labour under capital. A further example is merchant's capital...

contd...

For Marx 'formal subsumption of labour into capital' required the separation of the direct producer from the means of production; and he seems to have had in mind particularly the stage of manufacture. Banaji, however, having made the distinction between 'pre-formal' and 'formal' subsumption in the passage we have cited, immediately proceeds to slide over it by arguing that "...such a system, a 'pre-formal' subordination of labour to capital, would tend to lead in the vast majority of cases to the system of formal subordination - i.e., over time, the monied capitalist would gain control over the entire means of subsistence and production of this enterprise" (1977, 1376). While this ^{may} be plausible, it surely begs the question. Its plausibility is derived finally from an historicist view of a necessary process of capitalist development.

Banaji's case for arguing that the relations between a large number of household producers and the monied capitalists constituted a state of 'formal subsumption' in the nineteenth century Deccan, rests primarily on the documentary evidence that many producers "parted with all their crop" to the capitalists (e.g. 1977, 1389). The evidence is slender as a base for Banaji's claim that here the direct producers effectively had been separated from their means of production, so as to have been formally subsumed under capital; and his whole argument gains force from his earlier assertion that there isn't, after all, all that much difference between 'pre-formal' and 'formal' subsumption (1977, 1376). But the difference is most important, for so long as producers do

^{exercise some} (etc.)... It is this form that provides the soil from which modern capitalism has grown and here and there it still forms the transition to capitalism proper. (But) here too we find no formal subsumption of labour under capital..." (1976, 1023). The final statement in this passage reminds us of those sections of Capital in which Marx states that the predominance of merchant's or usurer's capital "excludes the capitalist mode of production" (Vol.I; 1976, p.645); and that the development of merchant capital "is incapable by itself of promoting and explaining the transition from one mode of production to another...(etc.)" (Vol.III; 1959, 327-8).

exercise some degree of independent control of the means of production of their livelihoods, then it is very doubtful whether Marx's labour theory of value can be applied (see Bernstein, 1977, paragraph 51, 72; and a more extended discussion in Williams, 1980).

Banaji goes on to discuss the differentiation of the Deccan peasantry, and the uses to which the 'capitalists' put the surplus value which they appropriated. He finds that there was a tendency towards concentration of land ownership, and concludes that "it is possible to see that much of the 'investment behaviour' of big moneylenders and big peasants related to an accumulation and concentration of capital, but within the specific limits imposed by labour processes continuous with those of the small-production economy" (1977, 1394). These 'limits' are those of 'backward' or 'intermediate' capitalism, and it is not clear from Banaji's account how these limits are overcome.

Banaji's general argument is that this form of capitalist domination, characterised by "small commodity production on the foundations of small-scale merchant money-lending capitalism... became the predominant form of social production in colonial India..." (1975, 1889), though there was also some development of petty-bourgeois peasant capitalism and of the speculative commercial capitalism of export agencies based in Bombay and Calcutta. Banaji holds that this conception of 'intermediate' or 'backward' capitalism provides a better framework from which to explain later developments than the concept of a colonial mode of production. Rather than resorting to the "voluntaristic" explanation which he ascribes to Alavi, Banaji explains the developments of the sixties in terms of the acceleration of a secular trend: "already within the framework of the small-scale merchant moneylending capitalism of colonial India, rooted in peasant commodity production, a basis had emerged for the evolution of a more entrenched and ramified

petty-bourgeois capitalism.... In creating the conditions for a deeper penetration of capital into production in modified and more advanced forms, Independence merely accelerated a secular trend...." (1975, 1892). This statement begs the question, however, of how the 'limits' of the labour processes of the small production economy to which he refers in his work on the Deccan, are overcome. Can Banaji explain how the constraints imposed by the persistence of precapitalist ground rent (about which he says nothing, except to deny the possibility of its existence), are overcome? There are both theoretical and empirical objections to Banaji's statement in the work of Patnaik (1976) and of Sau (1976), and in my own work on North Arcot district (Harriss, 1981). All these analyses emphasise the persistence of the 'limits' to capitalist development imposed by the small production economy, and Banaji sweeps any explanation of the transcending of those limits under the blanket of what here appears to be a teleological conception of capitalist development.

For his earlier conception of 'colonial mode(s) of production' which are specifically non-capitalist Banaji has substituted a conception of capitalist development coloured by historicism. We must note, however, that Banaji has tried to establish a distinct theoretical line, critically opposed both to the 'world capitalism' views of dependency theorists and to the concept of the articulation of modes of production. His position (stated most fully in his 1977b) begins with observations on the meanings of German words used by Marx and which have all been translated into English as 'mode of production'. Banaji shows that Marx ascribed two meanings to produktionsweise (mode of production) and that one of them was indistinguishable from 'labour process' (arbeitsprozess), while the other has the sense of 'epoch of production' or 'historical organisation of production' (see Banaji, 1977b, 4-5). He then argues

at length that 'forms of exploitation' (such as 'wage labour') do not define 'epochs of production': "As modes of production are only a definite totality of historical laws of motion, relations of production thus become a function of the given mode of production. The character of any definite type of production relation is, in short, impossible to determine until the laws of motion are themselves determined" (1977b, 10). It follows that the crucial part of Banaji's argument concerns the way in which he constitutes the concept of an epoch of production (or 'a definite totality of historical laws of motion'). Wolpe points out that:

"For Banaji, first the laws of motion must be formulated and only then can the mode of exploitation be understood and only then can the 'relations of production' be defined. The mode of exploitation is, presumably, to be conceived of as an element of the relations of production, although Banaji does not state this explicitly. On the other hand, the 'relations of production' 'express and realise' the laws of motion and in the CMP (capitalist mode of production) the relations of production refer to 'value production'. The distinction between relations of production and the laws of motion is therefore by no means clear. Be that as it may, is it possible to construct the laws of motion of a mode of production prior to the formulation of the relations of production or the mode of exploitation as Banaji claims to do?" (Wolpe, 1980, 31).

Wolpe's conclusion is that there are logical contradictions in Banaji's argument arising from the difficulty that "...he wishes to formulate the laws of motion without specifying the particular relations in terms of which these laws are to be constructed" (1980, 31). Further, Wolpe shows that although Banaji explicitly rejects the idea of articulation because of its inherent 'dualism', he in fact ends up by re-stating the dualist thesis "...in the clearest possible terms" (1980, 32).

Finally, then, it appears that the idea of 'a totality of historical laws of motion' in Banaji's work has precisely the metaphysical quality which he himself criticises in the work of others.

Rudra: dissolution of the Debate and back to 'class relations'

A recent contribution has come from Rudra (1978), who argues that the concept of mode of production should be avoided, because it has become confused through being defined in such a variety of ways. He suggests that "Given the same body of facts different scholars describe different modes as dominant and there is no means of disproving anybody as there are no agreed criteria for determining dominance among modes" (1978, 917); and he further points to the difficulties that arise because of the uncertainty that exists over the domain of a 'mode' of production', which some define in relation to the nation state and others (like Frank) in relation to the whole world. Does it make any sense at all, Rudra asks, to talk in terms which suggest that there may be one mode of production in Indian agriculture, and another in Indian industry?¹ For political practice, he asserts, it is the analysis of class relations which is important - given his understanding of the concept of class, which is that "only such social groups constitute classes as are subject to contradictions of interests arising from the way they are related to the means of production" (1978, 916). He proceeds to examine rural class relations in India, arguing that there are only two such antagonistic classes, the 'big landowners' and the 'agricultural labourers'.

Although Rudra claims to reject the concept of mode of

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1. Though Rudra is perfectly justified in arguing that the concept of 'mode of production' has become obscured by a variety of definitions (see Wolpe, 1930 for a precise statement of this problem), this does not mean that the concept can be dispensed with. He himself proceeds to employ an implicit concept of 'mode of production'.

production, he actually proceeds by examining the features of capitalist and of feudal relations of production and tacitly concedes that the forms of class relations have to be interpreted in relation to the totality of an economic system. His analysis recalls Alavi's for example, when he argues that none of the elements which are so often thought to be characteristic of 'feudal' relations of production - share-cropping tenancy, the existence of usury, 'dependent' labour - is necessarily incompatible with capitalist relations of production. Equally he rejects the view that the existence of formally 'free' labour necessarily implies reinvestment of surplus to give rise to a continued process of accumulation of capital (etc.), and the idea that there are certain necessary 'laws' (the so-called 'Kautsky-Lenin Laws') determining the forms and processes of the development of capitalism in agriculture. Here his arguments appear to be well-founded in view of the history of European agriculture, which as we have said, has not conformed with certain of Lenin's ideas concerning the paths of development of agricultural capitalism (see Djurfeldt, 1977; and Vergopoulos, 1978). His conclusion is to doubt the existence of any single mode of production in Indian agriculture. He rejects the idea that the relations of production are 'semi-feudal', pointing out that "this theory says nothing about the class character of those farmers who are neither tenants nor landlords, but cultivate land with family labour" (1978, 998), and he disputes the view of Bhaduri and others that 'semi-feudal' relations of production constrain the expansion of the forces of production: "Where we differ from the semi-feudalists like Bhaduri, Prasad, Chandra or Sau, is that we do not believe that any channel of investment is being left unutilised for other channels being more lucrative" (1978 footnote 3, 1004). Rudra argues that in empirical reality one cannot find clearly distinguished classes with on the one hand 'capitalist' and on the other 'feudal' orientations. One can discover farmers with these different tendencies -

"But they do not have any contradictions between them" (1978, 999; and cf. Alavi, cited above). There are different forms of appropriation of surplus in the Indian countryside, but "the exploiters in these different activities constitute a single class.... a single class with some unevenly developed characteristics of capitalist relations and some unevenly decaying pervasive persistence of various traits of feudal relations. It is a hybrid class: part feudal, part capitalist...." (1978, 999).

Against Alavi's insistence on the necessary contradiction of modes of production Rudra argues therefore, for non-contradictory co-existence of 'feudal' and 'capitalist' traits, combined in a single class of big landowners (because the basis for their capacity to exploit through a variety of channels is provided by land ownership). His analysis compares closely with Utsa Patnaik's on this point, for she too, it will be remembered, argues that the principal contradiction in Indian agriculture remains that between 'landlords and peasantry', and that the relations of production are neither 'capitalist' nor 'feudal'. Where the two writers differ most strongly, is that Patnaik emphasises the persistence of constraints on the development of capitalism. While Rudra is decidedly equivocal on the whole question of trends. This is perhaps the weakest part of his entire argument, for he claims that "The development of the forces of production may be expected to give rise to aggravation of the contradictions between (the two antagonistic) classes" (1978, 1001) - and yet his account gives us no indication of how such development may come about. His reference to class struggle as "the motive force for any changes in his agrarian structure" remains somewhat metaphysical in the absence of analysis of the dynamics of the social formation (see also Bardhan, 1979, for criticism of this aspect of Rudra's work).

For Rudra the only class which exists in antagonistic contradiction with the big landowners is that of the agricultural labourers; and the remainder of the social groups in the countryside do not constitute classes at all because of "the diffused nature of the contradictions affecting (them)....It is the concentrated and clearly defined nature of contradictions of the members of the two social groups defined that makes us treat them as classes....Contradictions between members of these two classes and people working in agriculture but not belonging to either of these two classes are of a subsidiary nature" (1978, 1001). For Rudra therefore, the concept of a class of 'middle peasants' is not valid (a point which has been criticised on empirical grounds by Bardhan, 1979, who uses Rudra's own survey data to refute his argument). The important political conclusion which Rudra draws from his analysis is that the idea of a necessary struggle against 'feudal elements' is utterly misleading. We return to this argument below, where we consider Rudra's effort to dissolve the mode of production debate in the context of the other contributions. His argument is undoubtedly refreshing because of his attempt to cut through to the political implications of the debate - and his paper reflects a more general tendency to 'get back to class struggle' in discussions of theories about development and underdevelopment. (See Leys, 1976, for example, commenting on 'underdevelopment and dependency theory'.) But the question remains as to whether class relations can be understood without the concept of mode of production, and without some analysis of the dynamics of the social formation.

A 'Dual Mode of Production'?

Latterly Sharat Lin has intervened in the debate and has tried to establish the concept of a 'dual mode of production'. He suggests that this is most appropriate to the analysis of the Indian social formation, which is characterised by what he refers to as 'combined development' -

for it exhibits "...rather a complex assemblage of pre-capitalist forms of production, indigenous capitalism and imperialism". He starts then, with a 'common sense' empirical proposition about the character of the economy and society of India, and the development of his argument rests above all on the observation that the relations of production in Indian agriculture are very frequently 'mixed', at the level of the individual economic agent. Perhaps most striking is the widespread evidence showing that sellers of labour power may themselves also purchase labour power from other workers. It is this observation of mixed relations which takes Lin to the crux of his argument, which he expresses figuratively like this: that the whole 'mode of production debate' has missed the point because it amounts to "...a futile attempt to classify a mule as either a donkey or a horse". His proposition is built up from the notion of a specific 'colonial mode of production', for he argues that while there are elements of distinct modes of production in India: "The preponderance of evidence for mixed relations shows that the two primary modes (precapitalist and capitalist) interpenetrate and integrate their relations, generating not two independent modes, but effectively a single mode with a dual character having, at once, both accomodating and conflicting internal dynamics. This is what we have termed the 'dual mode of production'" (1980, 527).

It seems that in Lin's view the 'dual mode' is expressed at the political level in a prolonged sharing of power by two historically opposed ruling classes (the 'semi-feudal' landowners; and the bourgeoisie). He specifies the reasons for this as: the consolidation of the semi-feudal hierarchy under colonial rule; the spatial restriction of the development of capitalist relations of production; social inertia brought about by the sheer size of the social formation; the emergence of transitional structures (it is not explained

what this means); and cultural factors. Just as the idea of a 'dual mode of production' appears to be an elaboration of that of a 'colonial mode of production' so there are certain shades of Alavi's theory of the post-colonial state in this political analysis (Alavi, 1972). This impression is extended in Lin's discussion of the relationships of the indigenous bourgeoisie and the imperialist bourgeoisie; though it is confused by Lin's reference to 'semi-feudal' landowners. The use of this terminology, however appears to be inconsistent with the remainder of Lin's argument.

Lin says that the concept of a dual mode of production is an attempt to go beyond the colonial mode of production thesis in explaining the dynamics of the Indian social formation; and that the explanation of 'dynamics' depends on establishing which is the dominant 'pole' of the dual mode. So he, like others before him, turns to the question of the dominant trend within Indian economy and society. It is here that the limitations of his argument become clearly apparent for his analysis amounts to little more than the assertion, weakly based on empirical observation, that "...an unmistakable trend towards the displacement of precapitalist relations with capitalist relations is taking place- however, uneven, indecisive and at times, faltering; that trend may be". Chattopadhyay's early historicism reasserts itself here; but more significant, the whole discussion seems to give the lie to the concept of a 'dual mode' which now appears to be only a verbal device. Lin goes on to modify his statement concerning the trend of capitalist development, by talking of the blocking of transition, and referring to the persistence of small property and small-scale production. Finally Lin does not tell us any more about the 'dynamics' of the Indian social formation than could be deduced, anyway, from his characterisation of it in terms of 'combined development!.

The mixture of theoretical abstraction and of fairly casual empiricism in Lin's paper does not seem to carry our understanding of the processes and struggles which determine the changes taking place in Indian society, any further forward.

SUMMING UP: (I) MAJOR THEMES

Though it is possible to identify important differences between the positions of the various contributors to the Indian debate, on close examination their arguments form a kaleidoscope of interlocking shades. For purposes of exposition it seems possible to distinguish these major positions.

- (i) Indian agriculture/the Indian economy as a whole is 'capitalist', by virtue of its incorporation into the world capitalist system and its role in the processes of accumulation on a world scale (A.G. Frank). Alternatively, though relatedly, it is 'capitalist', though it is still at an early stage of capitalist development (this is now Banaji's position). This view is also there in some of Chattopadhyay's earlier statements; though he also qualified this position by referring to the co-existence of capitalism "with other social formations" (etc). Now he has clarified his position thus: "Regarding the relation between capitalism and the earlier modes of production which it tries to supplant we subscribe entirely to the basic Marxist position on this question. According to this position the dual role of capitalism regarding pre-capitalism - that is, not only the latter's destruction but also its preservation - is a universal phenomenon and not confined to what is usually considered as 'colonies' or 'semi-colonies'" (Chattopadhyay, 1980, p.). This carries clear implications of a concept of articulation. Banaji suggests that there are implications of a theory of articulation in Frank's more recent work also (Banaji, 1980, 517).

(ii) Indian agriculture is not 'capitalist' because the relations of production are not capitalist, but 'semi-feudal' (A. Bhaduri, P. Prasad) or because the relations of production are 'mixed', reflecting a 'dual mode of production' - Sharat Lin⁷.

(iii) Close to this are the arguments of Utsa Patnaik and Ashok Rudra (who have in curious way moved past each other since the beginning of the debate, for Patnaik now denies the existence of agrarian capitalism more strongly than Rudra!) For these writers Indian agriculture is neither clearly capitalist nor feudal. Both agree that there have been tendencies of capitalist development, especially in the last thirty years, but Patnaik in particular argues that these tendencies have been held back by the continued prevalence of precapitalist ground rent, underlain by 'monopolistic' control of land and the concomitant pauperisation of the mass of rural dwellers. These are also the structural conditions for the continuing dominance of antediluvian forms of capital. Rudra, though he explicitly rejects the semi-feudalism thesis, identifies "a hybrid class: part capitalist, part feudal" of big landowners who constitute a single class of rural exploiters. He is quite indefinite as to the dynamics of the economy, rejecting Patnaik's suggestions concerning the constraints upon the development of capitalism, whilst also denying that there is any clear trend of capitalistic development. Sau (1976) takes a view which is rather similar to Patnaik's, and documents the 'chocking off' of intensification of capital in agricultural production.

Patnaik appears to take a position which is at least close to the idea of 'distorted' capitalist

development, or of 'blocked transition', and to show connections with the thesis of capitalist underdevelopment put forward by Kay (1975). With her attention to the process of production and the nature of class struggle Utsa Patnaik seems to have moved in the direction of critics of underdevelopment and dependency theory (UDT) like Brenner (1977) and Leys (1976) who argue for more detailed and more specific analyses of class formation and class struggles, as against the general perspectives of UDT with its emphasis upon exchange relations (though Leys at least recognises the past importance of UDT in criticising and transcending bourgeois theories of development).

- (iv) Indian agriculture and the Indian social formation as a whole is structured by a colonial mode of production, which is a capitalist mode, but with a character different from that of metropolitan centres of capitalism, and which is determined by the subordinate position of the colonial social formations in relation to these centres (Hamza Alavi).

This view shares some perspectives with the conception of dependent underdevelopment in the writings of Gunder Frank and others. Alavi also developed his concept of a colonial mode of production as a critical response to what he perceived as the begged question of 'articulation' of modes of production in the work both of the protagonists of the first line that we have distinguished (e.g. Parash Chattopadhyay), and of the second (e.g. Patnaik). Alavi argues that within a concrete social formation structures conceptualised in terms of two distinct modes of production cannot

simply coexist, but must necessarily be in a state of contradiction with one another; and since he (like Rudra) can find no evidence for the class struggle which should embody such a contradiction, he denies that the Indian social formation can be understood in terms of the concept of 'articulation'. He is thus led to propose the concept of a mode of production which is essentially capitalist but with distinctive features resulting from the position of the colony in the hierarchical structure of world capitalism.

Banaji retains a view which is quite close to that of the colonial mode, even though he polemicises against Alavi and Frank. We have seen that he writes with reference to the 19th century Deccan that "the specific forms of capitalist production that evolved... composed a subordinate and transitional system within the bourgeois mode of production in its world extension" - which seems hardly distinguishable from Alavi's view - though he believes that Frank and Alavi fail to analyse "the concrete processes by which capitalist relations evolved in the various parts of the world economy (and simply dissolve them) into the abstract identity of world capitalism" (1977, 1400). Banaji's approach to the analysis of these 'concrete processes' emphasises the domination and control of direct processes of production by merchant/usurer's capital in particular. He differs from Utsa Patnaik both because he conceives of merchant/usurer's capital intervening in production - and thereby 'imitating' industrial capital - whereas Patnaik sees it as operating only in the sphere of circulation; and because he argues that merchant/usurer's capital is a means of exploitation independent of landed property. Banaji's line has

been found fruitful in other studies of peasants (e.g. Roseberry, 1978 cited above; Bernstein, 1977; Cowen, n.d. and see also discussions of the work of Beaucage, Paré and others in Latin America, in Harris, 1978), in contexts in which it has been found difficult to define a process of production which is not in itself capitalist, as a separate 'mode of production' articulated with capitalism.

Outside the sphere of the Indian debate a point of view which recalls both Banaji's and Alavi's is put forward by Kitching (1977) with regard to Kenya. He shows that it is possible to conceptualise neither 'the capitalist mode of production in Kenya' nor any 'precapitalist' modes, and he is thus led to formulate a concept of 'the world capitalist mode of production' and then to examine its forms of penetration of Kenyan production (cf. Alavi's view that the capitalist mode of production is inserted into several social formations).

- (v) The last position is one which has not been argued specifically within the Indian debate, but which appears in both the Latin American and the African debates. This is the idea of the articulation of modes of production, in which the basic notion is that of the articulation (i.e., 'linkage': but see Post, 1978, 17-19, for a discussion of the meanings of this term) of precapitalist modes of production with expanding capitalism, in such a way that they while being changed, are also consolidated and not destroyed (Bettelheim's 'conservation/dissolution' formulation). We have seen earlier how Alavi has criticised this conception, and yet how close his own arguments are to those of a leading exponent of articulation - P.-P. Rey. The conception of articulation as 'conservation/dissolution' owes a good

deal to Luxemburg's thesis that accumulation of capital depends upon non-capitalist social strata and forms of social organisation both at the stage of so-called primitive accumulation (the accumulation of commercial and finance capital prior to the development of the capitalist mode of production), and later to rescue it from the problems of realising surplus value (and that this explains imperialist expansion). The concept has been found particularly fruitful in studies of 'underdevelopment' in Africa, and Cliffe for example, in a review article on 'Rural Political Economy of Africa' (1976) structures his argument in these terms:

"Our argument has been basically that the continued existence in rural Africa of precapitalist elements in the social formation is at once the measure of the continent's underdevelopment and also its cause and its continually reproduced results.... The different modes of production may have been modified, restructured, torn apart even, but for the most part have not evolved into a capitalist form. The transformations that have occurred have stalled, essentially because the wider international system has wanted the societies to be a source of primitive accumulation, not of extended reproduction...." (1976, 125).

In view of the insistence of a section of the Indian left upon the fact of the persistence of feudalism it is perhaps surprising that the concept of articulation has not been explored more explicitly in the Indian context (at least until a recent article by Gail Omvedt (1980a). It is also striking, as we observed earlier, that the idea of the articulation of a peasant or petty producer mode of production with capital has not been explored as it has elsewhere.

The idea of articulation has the strength that it does propose ways of explaining why 'underdevelopment' occurs - though not so much in the kind of

functionalist version implied in Cliffe's statement, as in the conceptualisation of articulation in terms of class conflict. The concept of the colonial mode of production seems to remain, by comparison, at the level of description.

(II) THE DEBATE AND POLITICS

The debate about the relations of production in Indian agriculture, and the characterisation of the mode (or modes) of production which is appropriate to the analysis of the Indian social formation has a direct and fundamental political relevance. It is not a coincidence that it was initiated at a time when the emergence of the CPI(ML) caused bitter debates on the Left in India; and also the time when important changes in agriculture had begun to become apparent. A democratic political programme must be based on some analysis of the causes of poverty and oppression amongst working people and upon an understanding of class relationships within the country. Rudra has tried to argue that the analysis of 'class relations' is the task which should have priority, but we saw that an attempt to undertake this analysis without reference to the processes of reproduction of a society is liable to be confused by appearances. It is doubtful whether class relations can be adequately identified and understood without a concept of the mode of production. Whether the concept of mode of production employed in the Indian debate is adequate to this task is another question - to which we will return in the final section of this paper. For the moment our point is that the debate has important political ramifications, and that it may be judged by the extent to which it does actually clarify issues such as that of the identification of agrarian classes and class contradictions. We will first review certain of the positions of the major left parties, and then examine the implications of some of the arguments in the debate that we have reviewed.

The differences in the programmes and the tactics of the three major communist parties in India derive from contrasting understandings of the character and extent of capitalist development in the country, and, related to these, their different analyses of the nature of the State. Both of the major communist parties argue that there has been a substantial and at least partly independent development of capitalism within India, and even within agriculture (the CPI at one time argued that Congress agrarian reforms had broken the back of feudalism). The parties differ, however, in their assessments of how independent and of how far advanced this capitalist development is - which influence their understandings of the State and hence of strategy. The CPI holds that "The State in India is the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence. This class rule has strong links with the landlords. These factors give rise to reactionary pulls on state power". The implications of this analysis are that the duty of the working class and the communist movement is to oppose the "reactionary pulls", but not to overthrow the State. The CPI(M), however, argues that "The present Indian State is the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and the landlord, led by the big bourgeoisie who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development". The CPI(M), therefore, is much less sanguine about the extent to which the bourgeois democratic revolution has progressed, or can progress, in India, and about the degree of independence of the capitalist development that has occurred in the country. The big bourgeoisie leads the State, but it both compromises with foreign capital and depends upon an alliance with 'landlords' in its control of the State. The CPI(M) position is that there is no possibility of forming a strategic united front with the big bourgeoisie, and the implication is that "...it is absolutely essential to replace the present bourgeois-landlord State... by a State of peoples' democracy led

by the working class". Finally, the CPI(ML) has an altogether different analysis predicated upon the view that only a very restricted kind of comprador capitalist development has occurred. Following Mao Tse-tung's analysis of China¹ the Marxist-Leninists argue that India is a 'semi-colonial' semi-feudal country' and that the Indian State is the State of big landlords and comprador-bureaucrat capitalists. The principal contradiction, according to this formation, is that between feudalism and the great mass of the people; and the main force of the democratic revolution - which can only be achieved by armed rebellion - must be the peasant mass.

Different understandings of the agrarian problem and of class relations in the countryside are associated with these different analyses of the State. In its Political Resolution adopted in 1978 the CPI(M) emphasised "the need for peasant unity, not the old unity based on middle and rich peasants, but the unity of the agricultural labourers, poor, middle and rich peasants, based on agricultural labourers and poor peasants" - in opposition to the landlords (by implication 'landlords' with both capitalist and 'feudal' aspects). The Programme adopted at the Seventh Congress in 1964 argues the case more fully, making the point that "...our peasantry is not an homogeneous category (and) that capitalism has made decisive inroads into it and brought about definite classification among them". It goes on: "The agricultural labourers and poor peasants who constitute 70 per cent of the rural households and are subject to ruthless exploitation by landlords...will be basic allies of the working class"; and it suggests that because the middle peasants too are subject to landlord domination and the depredations of usurious capital, they will be reliable allies of the democratic front. The case of the rich peasantry is less clear out,

1. Mao's analysis is in The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party written by Mao and others in 1939; Selected Works Volume II (various editions).

for the fact that they hire agricultural labour means that there is hostility between the rich peasantry who "aspire to join the ranks of capitalist landlords", and labour. Nonetheless, the Programme argues that because the rich peasants "...come up often against the oppressive policies pursued by the bourgeois-landlord government (by and large) they can also...be brought into the democratic front/^{based} on the alliance of the working class, agricultural labour and the poor peasantry/^{and} retained as allies in the people's democratic revolution" (Programme adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), 1964, paragraphs. 102 & 103).

For the CPI too, it is said that "The main tactic of establishing peasant unity is to rely firmly on agricultural labourers and poor peasants, to unite solidly with middle peasants and to try to win over rich peasants in order to liberate the peasantry from the exploitation of feudalism, imperialism and monopoly capital in alliance with the working class" (Party Life, Journal of the Communist Party of India, 7th August 1978, p.6). The same document goes on, however, rather to confuse the position of the rich peasants when it argues "The present agrarian situation in India is characterised by sharpened conflict between the landlord-kulak-usurer-merchant combine on the one side and the mass of agricultural labourers and poor and middle peasantry on the other".

Given the line of the CPI(ML) that the principal contradiction in the State is that between feudalism and the great mass of the people, the party conceives of its task as being to organise landless labourers, poor peasants and the exploited middle peasants against their oppressors - the landlords. The 'rich peasantry' are sometimes bracketed with 'the landlords' - though Mao's analysis on which much of the M-L position is modelled argues that "...we should not regard the rich peasants as belonging to the same class as

the landlords and should not prematurely adopt a policy of liquidating the rich peasantry" (Selected Works, Volume II, Foreign Languages Press 1965, 323).

Summarising, therefore, there appear to be three understandings of the principal class contradiction in the Indian countryside, and hence of the tasks for the communist movement:

- (i) The principal contradiction is that between feudal or 'semi-feudal' landlords and the mass of the peasantry and agricultural labourers. A 'rich peasantry' may or may not be distinguished, and it may or may not be considered as belonging to the same class as the landlords.
- (ii) This is a position rather like Lenin's, when he observed in 1901 that in the Russian countryside "...two kinds of class antagonism exist side by side; first, antagonism between the rural workers and employers, and the second, between the peasantry as a whole and the landlord class as a whole. The first antagonism is developing and becoming more acute; the second to a considerable degree belongs to the past. And yet in spite of this, it is the second antagonism that has the most vital and most practical significance for Russian Social-Democrats at the present time" (Lenin,). From an analysis like this is derived the objective of forming an alliance of the whole peasantry, based on the labourers and the poor peasantry, against landlords.
- (iii) This position holds that the first antagonism distinguished by Lenin has by now become the primary contradiction in the Indian countryside; and that the political task is now to organise agricultural labour against the employers.

These statements may be treated as hypotheses about agrarian class relations and the identification of agrarian classes, and if so, they suggest the following questions as subjects for theoretically informed empirical analysis:

- (i) What is the character of 'landlordism' in (different parts of) India? Is it possible to distinguish 'capitalist' and 'feudal' landlords? Is it possible, and is it important to distinguish 'rich peasants' from 'landlords'?
- (ii) What is the character of agricultural labour in (different parts of) India? Is it a 'pauperised mass', characterised by social relations of 'dependence' upon (generally higher caste) farmer-employers? Is its character heterogeneous? Or can it be considered to be an agricultural proletariat?
- (iii) Should a class of 'poor peasants' be distinguished from that of agricultural labour? What is the character of the class of 'middle peasants'? (Here it may be useful to note that the identification of 'rich', 'middle' and 'poor' peasants, more or less according to the schemes of Lenin and Mao is often taken as being axiomatic; although in practice many of those who have begun in this way finally suggest schemes of class differentiation which variously aggregate and disaggregate this trinity. In principle, at least, it is perfectly possible to conceive of a peasantry - in the sense of household producers, owning some of their means of production, producing for their own subsistence and for the market, and both hiring labour in and out - which is internally differentiated, but which constitutes a class in itself, and which may be distinguished from landlords (feudal or capitalist) on the one hand, and from agricultural labour on the other).

Although the papers in the Indian debate do quite clearly address themselves to these questions, on the whole they do so only at a rather general level; and there is a tendency towards a rather misleading holism. Sweeping general statements to the effect that India is, or is not, in some fundamental sense, 'capitalist', in the end do not have much to say about the concrete relationships of agrarian classes, or even about the relationships of agrarian and other classes in the State.

In the first place Rudra's and his co-authors' 'demonstration' that there were no capitalist farmers even in Punjab, would appear to have lent some weight to the analysis of the CPI(ML). Utsa Patnaik's rebuttal, equally, might appear to have restated and to have strengthened the CPI(M) position. In fact it was quite strongly attacked from a CPI(M) position (by N.Ram) because of Patnaik's failure to conceptualise capital as a relation; and her hesitation in characterising the relations of production, may have given an impression of sympathy with the M-L line. In her more recent work Patnaik appears to have come closer to a Leninist position. Lenin, in the early 1900s, qualified the argument he had set out in The Development of Capitalism in Russia, partly in accordance with his assessment of the strategic demands of the time, and he held that "...in 1902 and 1905 a serf-like peasantry were in revolt against their feudal masters (so that, accordingly) Russia began imperceptibly to regress in his writings to an earlier stage of development" (Kingston-Mann, 1980, 131). So it was that while he clearly identified two class antagonisms he argued that the antagonism between the peasantry as a whole and the landlords as a whole, remained the most vital one. Patnaik, also, having argued for the existence of capitalist agriculture, rather rapidly proceeded to qualify her statement; and in her more recent writing she has come to emphasise the persistence both of a peasantry and of forms of landlordism relating to the persistence of precapitalist ground rent, albeit in a context in which there has been some

development of capitalism (Patnaik, 1976). She argues that the principal contradiction in India today remains as it was at Independence, between landlords and peasantry.

There are certain similarities - in appearance at least - between the later work of Rudra and that of Patnaik. Rudra now specifically rejects a thesis of semi-feudalism: "we do not believe that any channel of investment is being left unutilised for other channels being more lucrative (etc.)". He seems now to concede that there has been a development of capitalism, but not in line with the so-called 'Kautsky-Lenin' laws (though these 'laws' are more of an invention of N.K. Chandra's than of Kautsky or Lenin). Rather are there "some unevenly developed characteristics of capitalist relations and some unevenly decaying persistence of ...feudal relations" - and a hybrid landlord class "part feudal, part capitalist". The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) entitled Tasks on the Kisan Front (first published in 1967) also speaks of "...a new type of landlordism which combines in itself both the features of capitalism as well as feudalism". There appear to be common points in Rudra's recent statement and in the analysis of the CPI(M). Where they differ, though, is over the implications of this analysis. Rudra writes:

"Political strategists thinking on Marxian lines have tended to postulate ...the existence of two dominant classes, one feudal and one capitalist; and...(have) postulated antagonistic contradictions between these two assumed classes...The political line that follows has been to support the assumed capitalist forces against the assumed feudal forces. (But)....if our thesis be correct...this political line means rallying the rest of the peasantry in support of this ethereal capitalist class against this phantom feudal class (which) makes impossible any viable, sustainable class struggle...The line of political action which would follow from our thesis is one of struggle by the

1. See Chandra, 1974; and then Sau, 1976. For a concise and clear discussion of Lenin's and Kautsky's work on the development of capitalism in agriculture, which refutes the Chandra-Sau notion that Lenin and Kautsky believed themselves to have established 'laws' see Shah, 1980.

class of big landowners, without making any reservation on account of some members of the ruling class revealing more capitalistic traits than some others" (1978, 1003).

His reference to "political strategists thinking on Marxian lines" cannot be applied accurately to the CPI(M), though it might have been to the CPI, at least in an earlier phase. Where Rudra is most strongly at variance with the CPI(M) is in his suggestion that the principal contradiction is between the class of agricultural labourers and the class of 'big landowners'. To ignore the mass of the peasantry may be heroic, but is it sensible? Consider instead the statement by the CPI(M) (in Tasks on the Kisan Front, 10).

for the rural wage worker "His struggle for better wages is inseparably linked with the struggle for the abolition of landlordism and land to the tiller, because no appreciable improvement in the way of securing better wages is possible without breaking the land monopoly and drastically reducing the huge numbers of the pauperised peasant army"

(This helps to explain the strategy of trying to forge an alliance between agricultural labourers and the peasantry)

An underlying postulate here is that the rural wage-labourer "...can be more correctly described as a pauperised peasant, (he/she) is neither really a free wage labourer in the strict economic sense of the term, nor is an overwhelming majority of them able to secure even a subsistence wage for their work" (Tasks on the Kisan Front, 10).

Reference may also be made on this point to the work of the Soviet scholar, Rastyannikov. In his analysis of "Social Types of Hired Labourers in the Indian Countryside (1950s-1960s)" (1976) Rastyannikov argues that we should reflect upon the heterogeneity of the category of agricultural labourers: "By and large in Indian agriculture, the

process of formation of wage labour as a category of the capitalist mode of production is at an early stage" (1976, 73); and "...the hired labour drawn into the agrarian structures functioning on the basis of simple reproduction evidently cannot be regarded as wage labour in the political economy sense of the word (i.e. as labour producing surplus value for the sake of its further growth). The hired labourers bringing their labour force into these structures are a type of agrarian protoproletariat....(they are paupers in the fullest and absolute meaning of the word)" (1976, 69). The mass of agricultural labourers constitutes "...a conglomerate of lower social groups", therefore, with the result that their demands may be varied. But because "groups belonging to precapitalist (including intermediate) structures predominate in this conglomerate" their important demands include the demand for land as well as for higher wages. There clearly are analytical and practical problems with Rastyannikov's argument, and it is also important to note that he, like the CPI(M) Resolution Tasks on the Kisan Front refers to a period pre-dating the agricultural developments associated with the so-called 'green revolution' in the later 1960s and 1970s. It is for this reason, primarily, that the arguments of Rastyannikov and of the CPI(M) Resolution have been dismissed recently by Gail Omvedt (1980b). Yet there is reason to doubt that this issue can be settled adequately by using macro-level statistics derived from surveys, on an all-India basis and it seems to us that the questions raised by Rastyannikov and the CPI(M) Resolution cannot easily be dismissed.¹

It is instructive here, to consider closely comparable themes in the Latin American literature. The work of Roger Bartra in Mexico suggests that "the medium and small peasantry

1. The difficulties inhering in attempts to use census and survey data for the measurement of trends in the agricultural labour force are discussed, for example, by Chandra (1979).

tend to assume a petty-bourgeois class position (and that) it is only among the growing numbers of agricultural workers, semi-proletarian peasants and pauperised peasants, that the basis exists for a revolutionary class alliance with the urban poor" (Harris, 1978, p.20). There are shades here, of Rudra's argument concerning the principal class contradiction in the Indian countryside. And we find that Bartra's position "has stirred up a good deal of controversy amongst the left in Mexico". From Harris's account of the literature it appears that others have argued that there are important differences in forms of consciousness and of struggle between different strata of the agricultural work force:

"Teran argues that the essentially peasant character of the social consciousness of the rural population is primarily due to the uncertainty of wage-earning employment under the present conditions of dependent capitalist development in Latin America...(and)...

Paré reminds the Left that the militant involvement of the rural masses in revolutionary movements has almost always been around their demand for land rather than their interests as wage-earners....These facts by themselves are an important argument against stereotypical thinking in which the demand for land is considered reactionary and petty-bourgeois and the condition of being dependent upon wage earning employment is assumed to indicate proletarian class consciousness" (Harris, 1978, 22,23).

The same argument might well extended to Rudra's latest contribution to the Indian debate.

Alavi's contribution to the debate is in some respects a development of his earlier work on the theory of the post-colonial state (1972). Alavi argues that the State is dominated by an alliance between three classes: the indigenous bourgeoisie, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the 'landowning classes' - a formulation which does not seem to be far from

that of the CPI(M). In Alavi's view the 'landowning classes' are not necessarily distinctly 'feudal' or 'capitalist', and he argues also that the condition of agricultural labour is not that of a true proletariat, but is characterised by 'dependence'. He says "...the situation of the rural wage labourer is little different from that of the sharecropper... and the situation of both stands in marked contrast to that of the urban proletariat" (1975, 178). He argues finally that in present circumstances "There is no conflict between the urban and rural bourgeoisie on the one hand, and the landowners on the other.....Nor is there a conflict in which the wage labourers (the 'rural proletariat'?) are aligned differently from the other subordinate classes in the countryside namely the sharecroppers and the small-holding 'middle peasants'" (1975, 190). There is a vagueness in these statements, certainly in relation to the questions which we formulated earlier. Is it really the case that there is no conflict in which wage labourers are aligned differently from the other subordinate classes? Why are 'sharecroppers' referred to specifically? What is the significance of the distinction that is made between 'rural bourgeoisie' and 'landowners'?

A reading of Alavi's work, together with the CPI(M) Resolution, suggests the need for more substantive analysis of the nature of 'landlordism' in post 'green revolution' circumstances, and of the characterisation of the 'rich peasantry' and their relations with the rest of the peasantry as well as of the character of agricultural labour. It is doubtful whether the statement: "The surplus value the new type landlord and the well-to-do peasant is garnering today is determined mainly by virtue of their title to those lands, rather than as returns on the invested capital in farming as such" (Tasks on the Kisan Front, p.9; emphasis added) is internally consistent with the thrust of the Resolution as a whole. It is even more doubtful whether it holds in the present circumstances. This is a point that we made, arising

from empirical research in northern Tamil Nadu (Harriss, 1981). Our argument may be compared with that of Djurfeldt and Lindberg (1975), reporting on a field study of an area not far away and conducted only four years earlier. These two authors adhere quite closely to the argument of the CPI(M) Resolution. That such different conclusions should arise from field studies is not necessarily surprising, given the diversity of conditions that exists even within the same regions of the country. But they do strongly suggest a need for the mass movement seriously to analyse the character of landlordism, and of the demands and nature of rural wage labour, in the context of a study of capitalist development in different areas. This is a task which must involve the movement itself and cannot be left to academics working in isolation. There is a need also carefully to reconsider the theoretical analysis of land holding monopoly in the present circumstances (some suggestions were made by Patnaik, 1976, though see also criticism by Schoer, 1977; see also work on the inter-linkages of markets in rural areas, stimulated by Bhaduri and Bharadwaj's work; Bharadwaj, 1974; and for example, Bardhan and Rudra, 1978).¹

Jairus Banaji's most recent and most explicit contributions to the Indian debates might seem to deal with the kinds of problems we have just referred to, and he would perhaps argue that the fact they have been posed at all indicates that we have fallen into the same kind of empiricist errors that he (Banaji) attacks in the work of Patnaik and

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1. Our analysis of agrarian structure in part of northern Tamil Nadu (Harriss, 1981) showed that a distinct class of 'landlords' hardly (if at all) exists, and has probably not been of much importance for a considerable period. We concluded, therefore, that in this specific area the strategy of trying to form an alliance based on agricultural labour and poor peasantry but hopefully including also the 'rich peasantry', against 'landlords', is probably incorrect. We continue to hold to this position, and the conclusions drawn from it, so far as the particular area is concerned; but we recognise the possibility that elsewhere the principal contradictions may be between landlords and peasantry. Against Omvedt's generalisations (1980b) we would urge the kind of study referred to in this paragraph; and we would emphasise also the importance of such concrete analysis as against the rather abstracted theorising of the Indian debate.

Bhaduri. Banaji, after all, has tried to show how the command of capital over the process of production is often confused with the specifically capitalist form of the labour process; and his analysis leads him to declare unequivocally that "In the countryside the struggle against capitalist forms of exploitation has already begun, and it is therefore vitally important that this struggle be conducted with a clear understanding of its own character - on the basis of a programme for the abolition of the system of wage slavery against which the struggle is directed" (1977, p.1401). Now there is no doubt that Banaji has performed an important service in bringing into focus Marx's distinction between the formal and the real subsumption of labour into capital. But the problem with Banaji's own analysis, certainly from the point of view of its practical implications, is pointed up by an empirical study stimulated by Banaji's work. This is in the work of Roseberry (1978) who analysed the mode of production in the Venezuelan Andes, and who, as we saw, reached conclusions like those of Banaji for the 19th century Deccan. Roseberry argues that 'peasants' act as direct producers within the a capitalist mode of production, though one in which the merchant-usurer imitates the industrial capitalist. Roseberry, having shown that the direct producers occupy a structural position like that of proletarians, goes on to examine historically the concrete position and role of the peasantry. He concludes that:

"A simple abstraction of mode of production might lead us to see peasants and proletarians occupying similar structural positions in a dichotomous class model. In this sense they would be paid a concealed wage in their interaction with merchants. Peasants, then, would be proletarians. A more concrete analysis, however, suggests that they occupy and perceive different structural positions...(etc.)" (Roseberry, 1978, p.15).

This case suggests the possibility that Banaji's analysis of structural relationships is at best a starting point - and that for purposes of political analysis much more must be known about the concrete circumstances of peasant production. It also points to a reductionism in Banaji's analysis: the ideologies of the peasantry are ignored.

Finally, there is our argument, proposed earlier in our criticism of Banaji's work, that he has actually fudged the distinction made by Marx and which Banaji himself describes as that between 'pre-formal' and 'formal' subordination of labour into capital. We referred to the difficulties of establishing whether capital has in fact acquired complete control of the cycle of reproduction of the unit of production, and observed that for so long as producers do exercise a degree of independent control of the means of production of their livelihoods (as was the case in part of northern Tamil Nadu in the mid-1970s; Harriss, 1981) the operation of the law of value in relation to peasant production is problematical (Bernstein, 1977, p.72; and Williams, 1980). This partly explains Bernstein's reluctance, in the end, to describe peasants as 'wage-labour equivalents' except in "a relative sense that limits the subjugation and real subsumption of household labour by capital to the extent that the producers are not fully expropriated, nor dependent for their reproduction on the sale of labour power through the wage form" (1977, p.73)¹. Bernstein is led to argue that "There can be no uniform 'model' of class action by peasants.." and to speak of "the dangers of facile generalisation". Banaji's generalisations are not 'facile', but they are abstractions which rely in the end of an idea of "a definite totality of historical laws of motion", which is no less metaphysical than the idea of 'world capitalism' for which he criticises Gunder Frank.

1. Bernstein's hesitation is examined by Boesen, who finally restates a concept of a peasant mode of production (Boesen, 1980).

The general conclusion that we have reached is that while the contributions to the Indian debate do have important political implications, they leave more problems than they have solved. On one point alone does there appear to be some unanimity, and this is that a 'feudal' mode of production does not predominate in India. To go beyond this rather limited conclusion, and to come up with more satisfactory answers to the kinds of questions that we posed, arising from different conceptions of the principal contradiction in the Indian countryside, it is necessary to go much further than these papers have done with historical analysis of class relations, and in the identification of agrarian classes. But we have already raised the question as to whether it is possible to understand the past and present course of class formation and class struggles without reference to a concept of mode of production. We are led to ask, therefore, whether modes of production have been appropriately conceptualised in the Indian debate. Our final task here is to examine the concept of 'mode of production' as it has been employed in the Indian debates and elsewhere.

(III) : CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS OF THE DEBATE: AND ALTERNATIVE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

A problem which runs right through the Indian debate concerns the definition and the scope of the concept of mode of production. As Rudra points out, what sense does it make to argue as though a mode of production can be identified in Indian agriculture without reference to the economy as a whole? And is the domain of a mode of production the world (as it is for Frank in the case of the capitalist mode), or is it the nation state, or some other social entity? Is it a sensible use of the term to speak, as some have done, of an "Andean mode of production", for example, or of distinct modes of production in different Andean valleys? In the Indian debate problems of definition

have arisen perhaps most centrally over the question of whether a process of production itself must be clearly 'penetrated' and 'taken over' by capital in order for it to be sensible to speak of the 'capitalist mode of production'. Allied to this there is the question of whether or not it can be correct to define as a separate mode of production a structure in the conditions of existence of which capital intervenes. Does a concept of the 'articulation' of different modes of production make sense, therefore? Underlying most of these problems is the question to which we referred in our discussion of Banaji: that of the relationship between an economic unit or an enterprise and 'the social totality of enterprises'.

An important question in this context concerns the analysis of circulation and exchange in relation to the analysis of production. Criticism of the dependency paradigm, based on the argument that it concentrates on 'external' determination and on exchange and fails adequately to analyse 'internal' determinants of change, has led to a narrow insistence on the primacy of production (this even marks Brenner's fine critique; 1977). Yet it is surely absurd, particularly when considering capitalism as a mode of production to attempt to treat production and circulation in isolation from one another? As Kitching points out "...in the specifically capitalist mode of production, the process of circulation and especially the two circuits of money and commodities are an integral part of the process of production and of expanded reproduction ...capitalist production presupposes the circulation of money, commodities and labour..." (1977, 62). The fetishism of mode of production analysis in the recent past has detracted from an appreciation of the necessary relationships of production and circulation. In his criticism of this tendency Friedman has gone so far as to reject altogether the notion of mode of production as a basic framework for explanation and would replace it with the idea of a reproductive totality: "We should like to

maintain relations of exploitation, appropriation plus relations of realisation, circulation plus forces of production as the significant theoretical totality" (1976, 16).

In examining this proposition and the questions provoked by the Indian debate we will comment briefly upon some of the more important alternative directions which have been proposed in recent writing.

(i) One thrust would actually sweep away the questions which we raised concerning the concept of mode of production, by arguing that the most appropriate focus is on the process of accumulation on a world scale. Frank, Amin and Wallerstein are the leading proponents of this approach. Frank's earlier formulation of dependency theory has been developed, partly in response to criticisms, in two books which were originally drafted ten years ago, but were published in English only in 1978. He describes his aim as being "...to transcend the 'dependence' approach without abandoning it or the focus on underdevelopment" (1978, xiii), by analysing "...the production and exchange relations of dependence within the world process of accumulation" (1978, xi). His position now is that "...without denying or neglecting the importance of detailed analysis that others make of the transformation of productive relations in Europe in the past or in other parts of the world more recently, I argue that their analysis as part of a single world-wide process of capital accumulation also requires more attention" (1978a, 255). There can be no doubt of the validity and the value of attempting to understand the economy of the world as a whole, or of analysing the parts in relation to that whole. But the question remains as to whether the analysis of class relations and the 'internal' dynamics of any part of the whole can be coped with satisfactorily by means of the approach which Frank advocates alone. The last passage which we quoted would appear to suggest that Frank himself now concedes that it does not

(while continuing to maintain that the 'world system' view must always be kept in focus). (We noted certain criticisms of Frank in our discussion of Banaji. Apart from Laclau's critique of Frank's early work (Laclau, 1971) see also Leys (1976), Brenner (1977) and Banaji (1980).

(ii) Another approach, which has one point of departure in criticism of theories founded upon the idea of 'world capital', is that advocated by Banaji. Banaji's own focus is now upon the specific forms and processes of the 'formal' subsumption of labour under capital, drawing on his reading of Marx's own account of the ways in which capitalism develops. This approach is also found in important and insightful work by Bernstein (1977, 1979) and Cowen (n.d., and 1980) on Africa, and in the work of various authors in Latin America (reviewed by Harris, 1978). This approach has held out the prospect of providing a suitable theoretical framework for analysing peasant production (or that of other petty producers and artisans) in particular. It has appeared to a number of writers to resolve many of the problems that are left when it is understood that the polarisation of peasant classes is not axiomatically necessary and that peasant production may survive even in advanced capitalist economies, and yet the notion of an independent 'peasant economy' (such as in Chayanov's conception) is held to be untenable. In this approach, then, the conceptual problems within the Indian debate are resolved by positing a conception of capitalism as a mode of production existing on a world scale, but articulating within itself, in a variety of specific ways, various forms of 'labour process' or 'forms of production' (see Foster-Carter, 1978; 76).

We have already suggested several criticisms of this approach, at least in Banaji's hands, and as it has been applied in his analysis of the 19th century Deccan, for its teleological assertions and for the logical problems inherent within it.

(iii) The other approach which we will consider is the suggestion that societies may be analysed in terms of the 'articulation' of different modes of production. We noted that (at least until Omvedt's recent paper, 1980a) this mode of analysis has not been applied explicitly in the Indian literature. We also referred to Alavi's criticisms of the idea of articulation, but pointed out both that we could see no reason why it should be taken as axiomatic that modes of production cannot coexist, at least for a time; and that his criticisms did not seem apposite in relation to P-P. Rey's development of the idea, in which the emphasis is on articulation as a process of class struggle. We think that this approach has perhaps been rejected too hastily because it has been identified solely with the 'functionalist' version of it (to which we referred in our Introduction). The concept of 'articulation' has been advanced by Wolpe's recent discussion of it (1980). He admits to weaknesses and logical problems in the conceptualisation of 'articulation' hitherto, and suggests that these difficulties - and problems with alternative approaches like that of Banaji - may be resolved if we distinguish between 'restricted' and 'extended' concepts of mode of production. The literature has been confused because different authors have defined the concept of mode of production differently, but a distinction can be made between two broad usages. In the first the concept is restricted to the definition of relations of production and forces of production (as in Hindess and Hirst's concept of "...an articulated combination of relations and forces of production"; 1975, 10-11) and "...it does not include a specification of the mechanisms of reproduction or the laws of motion of the 'economy' as a whole which is held to be constituted and defined by or on the basis of determinate relations and forces of production" (Wolpe, 1980, 7). In the second, the 'extended' concept "...to the contrary, the definition of the relations and forces of production provides only the essential foundation upon which the mechanisms of reproduction and the laws of motion are formulated, and the mode

of production is held to be constituted by the combination of the relations and forces of production together with the mechanisms of reproduction or laws of motion derived from those relations and forces of production" (Wolpe, 1980, 7). A specific connection is suggested, conceptually, between enterprises and between the relations-forces of production and the conditions of their existence and reproduction. Wolpe's criticisms of other contemporary Marxist writers, and notably of Hindess and Hirst, show the logical contradictions which are inherent within their argument that the conditions of existence of relations of production cannot be derived from the concept of the relations.

The distinction between the two different concepts of mode of production is the foundation of an attempt to reformulate the theory of 'articulation'. Wolpe suggests that a social formation may be understood as "...constituted by the co-existence of and inter-relation between a dominant extended mode and subordinate restricted modes". The 'laws of motion' - the reproductive processes of the social formation - are those of the extended mode, and the reproduction of the relations and forces of production of the restricted mode(s) depends upon the laws of motion of the extended mode: "...this means...that there is no necessary connection between the reproduction of enterprises organised in terms of determinate relations and forces of production and the existence of the laws of motion 'belonging' to those relations and forces. Thus, it is possible, on the one hand, that capitalist enterprises might arise within a social formation in which feudal laws of motion are operative and, on the other hand, it is equally possible... that the effect of capitalist laws of motion might be to displace those of the feudal economy without destroying feudal relations and forces of production under which the enterprises are organised..(etc.)" (Wolpe, 1980, 39)¹. Wolpe

1. This is not to say that enterprises organised by different relations of production are not affected by the laws of motion of the social formation, or that the continued existence of these enterprises has no effect upon the laws of motion themselves. (See Wolpe, 1980, 40).

maintains that this formulation of 'articulation' does not suggest that precapitalist enterprises persist simply because they are 'functional' for capital: "The persistence must be analysed as the effect of the struggle of agents organised under differentiated relations and forces of production. The relations of articulation are themselves relations of struggle and may have the consequence of disintegrating rather than maintaining the precapitalist modes - thus, if control of the capitalist market, which has become a moment in the reproduction of feudal enterprises in a particular social formation, is such as to enable merchant capital to exercise a powerful influence over the labour process of feudal peasants, then this may have disintegrative effects upon the feudal relations and forces of production..." (Wolpe, 1980, 40-41).

This formulation seems to us to suggest a way of analysing the reproduction of a capitalist economy and the reproduction of units of production organised according to precapitalist relations and forces of production, in terms of their relationships with one another, without resorting to teleological notions such as those we detected in Banaji's approach. It is one way in which the relationships between capital and a peasantry which cannot be demonstrated to be formally subsumed under capital, might be understood¹; and it suggests that in the context of India the concept of a peasant mode of production might well be examined again.

The extended concept of mode of production is of value because of its emphasis upon reproductive processes, and because it brings circulation and distribution into focus, in their relationship with the relations and processes of

1. We have argued elsewhere that a large fraction of the peasantry in northern Tamil Nadu cannot be demonstrated to be formally subsumed under capital (Harriss, 1981)

production. The employment of this concept of mode of production and this approach to 'articulation' would, it seems to us, overcome the problems of definition and scope which we have encountered in the Indian debate. It appears to us also to avoid the problems of historicism, and to imply an emphasis upon the historical method. This is the last aspect of the Indian debate to which we must refer.

It is a striking feature of the contributions to the Indian debate that while they are concerned with history, they mostly include very little historical analysis. Different authors refer to historical facts, certainly, but rather to support or to illustrate their theoretical arguments than actually to subject them to analysis, and there is a resort to some stereotyped ideas (to a few of which we have referred, in passing). It is probably the case that the debate has been influenced, though largely indirectly, by an Althusserian conception of mode of production, which entails the explanation of all social phenomena as the effects of structural determinations. The quite extreme rationalism of the Althusserian approach means that historical, empirical analysis can yield no surprises, bring about no changes in our understandings, and gives no purpose to the study of history except the provision of illustration; while social actors are seen merely as the bearers of structurally determined forces. (For sustained criticism of Althusserian Marxism see Sayer, 1979, Williams, 1979; and with particular reference to theories about development, Mouzelis, 1980).

In some other recent work on problems at issue in the Indian debate a strong trend of reaction against this influence is apparent (see for example, Bernstein, 1977, 1979), and it is explicitly stated in Banaji's work (1977b). Yet Banaji's theoretical approach contains its own teleology, as we have discussed. His analysis of the development of capitalism in terms of the distinction between 'formal' and

'real' subsumption of labour leads to the conclusion that labour processes which have not yet been taken over directly by capital are nonetheless 'capitalist' because they are controlled by capital and absolute surplus value is appropriated through them. We have acknowledged the powerful insights in this conception; but it also contains logical problems concerning the relationships between enterprises and the laws of motion of the mode of production. One result is that: "To argue...that once established as dominant inside a social formation the capitalist mode of production automatically transforms all productive relations into capitalist relations of production is not only suggestive of an expressive totality but is also to misconceive the point. It is one thing to argue that precapitalist relations of production may be transformed into capitalist relations; it is quite another to assume that this is both an inevitable and necessary effect of the CMP" (Wolpe, 1980, 41). In the end Banaji's work does contain within itself an expressive totality¹, and teleology.

Criticism of teleological and historicist conceptions of Marxism does not imply a rejection of the theorisation of problems in favour of simple empiricism, but the restoration of historical, empirical analysis to the place occupied by purely structural conceptions of causality. The argument is most clearly put by Sayer in his expositions of Marx's method (1975, 1979). He shows the importance in

1. The suggestion of an 'expressive totality' in Banaji's work is apparent in an exposition of his approach by Mihir Shah (1980). Shah argues that the 'tendencies or laws' which define the mode of production can be discerned by examining the 'economic calculus' and activity of the enterprises existing within the mode, but that to understand their significance they must be precisely located within the mode. Then we are told that "The Dynamic of the mode of production is, finally, a product of the operation and interaction of the totality of the enterprises within it" p.49). This, to say the least, is extraordinarily vague, and it does not help us to understand how enterprises are related together. Is there not a metaphysical quality about this? Wolpe's formulations are more precise.

Marxian analysis both of the critique of the phenomenal forms that we experience to enable us to establish "what conditions must prevail for the experience grasped by phenomenal categories to be possible" (1975, 785) (for Marxism does not take empirical categories for granted), and of historical analysis (which is logically secondary to the critique). He writes: "The critique is a structural, or, better still, relational analysis. It allows us to ascertain the conditions of existence of particular kinds of experiences, but it tells us nothing at all about how these conditions originally came about. It is not in other words a causal analysis. It merely reveals internal relations: those 'conditions and relations' of particular modes of production.... The critique then cannot yield causal statements, but is a prerequisite of the kind of historical analysis which can. Both types of analysis are complementary and both are basic to Marxism" (1975, 789-90; emphasis mine - JH).

For our last words on this debate it seems appropriate to cite the last published statements of Daniel Thorner:

"I am for solid, fresh, creative analytical work tied tightly to solid fieldwork in villages by the analysts themselves.....Going further, I must confess that I become more and more wary of all-India generalisations. Only after we come to know better the major regional variations can we hope to build up a more satisfactory all-India picture" (Thorner, 1980, 387).

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