INTRODUCTION

Even after four decades of independence there are some communist parties and Marxist scholars who argue that India continues to be a semi-feudal state. A critical survey of their literature shows that such an analysis is mainly based on their interpretation of the question of mode of production in India. Features such as predominance of agriculture, backward relations of production, existence of tenancy, role of the money lenders and local merchants and slow growth rates are usually cited to prove that India is a semi-feudal state. They also point out predominance of castes and religion in India to strengthen their arguments. Before critically evaluating their analysis of the dialectical relationship between the base and superstructure, certain fundamental theoretical issues concerning Marxist theory of state need to be clarified.

Even if for a moment, one accepts that all the above cited features are visible in the base and superstructure, one may still question whether those features are enough to characterise any state as semi-feudal. Does Marxism fail to see the difference between the state and society? Can the Marxists reduce the study of nature of any state to the study of mode of production or to the ideological superstructure? Such questions need to be answered before making any attempt to reflect on semi-feudal or capitalist character of Indian State.
Though the state is seen as an inseparable part of the social formation, Marxism says that the state is a separate structure, relatively autonomous of other structures. It is true that the state gets influenced by different structures and social forces. Yet it has its own trajectory and independent timescale. Its nature cannot be reduced mechanically to economy or to ideology. After February Revolution, analyzing the nature of the Russian State, Lenin clearly writes that the class character of the state depends on the dominant classes that attained political power. In other words, Lenin did not consider full-fledged development of capitalism or ideology corresponding to Capitalism as necessary criterion for characterising Russia after February Revolution as Capitalist State. He knows that capitalist development in the era of imperialism basically remains uneven and sporadic. This unevenness expresses itself even in the development of particular structures in the capitalist social formation. Hence, in determining the nature of state, Lenin gave primacy to the class character of the ruling classes. Russian experience shows that the state can be a bourgeois state even if precapitalist modes of production and ideologies corresponding to them are not completely eradicated from the society.

At particular stage of historical development, many modes of production and many competing ideological forces may coexist for quite some time. In course of their interaction, changes in particular structures, when mediated by conscious human will, can influence changes in other structures as well. However such changes will not
take place in a mechanical way. Since each structure has its trajectory and independent time-scale, the momentum of changes varies from one structure to another. To speak in more concrete terms, economic and cultural changes need not immediately follow the changes in political power. When new exploiting class or classes attain political power, the old state machinery will be modified and perfected to stand up to the new tasks. The new state, thus formed, explores the objective possibilities for creating proper conditions for the development of economy and culture conducive to the interests of the ruling classes. To achieve its goals the state formulates the necessary economic, political and cultural policies. In this sense, appearance of a new state becomes essential condition for the total elimination of old modes of production and ideologies corresponding to them. To put in concrete forms, emergence of a proletarian state is a precondition for the development of perfect socialist economy and socialist ideology. Similarly the highest stage of development of capitalism is possible only when the capitalists succeed in capturing political power. It means total transformation of society in particular direction needs prior existence of the concerned state. Many a times, inability to understand the dialectical relationship between the state and society made many Indian Marxists assert that since capitalism did not fully develop to a stage where it can replace all pre-capitalist structures, Indian state cannot be a capitalist state. They generally forget that even if capitalist class could come to power, it may take quite sometime to make capitalist economy or the bourgeois ideology the dominant force of the given
society. Sometimes it is also quite possible that despite all its efforts, the objective conditions may not allow implementation of certain policies of the state. Only to the extent the state can overcome the challenges posed by other conflicting class interests, it succeeds in implementing the changes it aims to bring. One should understand the fact that failures in public policy may be due to the very nature of the state or due to objective limitations of the given historic epoch.

Failure to locate real factors influencing the dynamics of the state lead to vulgar reductionists interpretations of state.

With this theoretical understanding, an attempt is made in this chapter to reflect on following aspects related to the question of semi-feudalism in Indian state: 1) understanding the nature of social formation before a new state came into being after 1947; 2) identification of the classes which actually attained political power; 3) assessment of their interests and potentialities under the given objective conditions; 4) evaluation of the nature of economic changes that it sought to initiate in rural area; 5) examining whether the state could create political conditions conducive to economic development of the classes it represents and 6) comprehension of the overall impact that governmental policies could create on the mode of thinking of the masses.

While making a dialectical study of all these aspects we would analyse the role of different social forces and assess the options and limitations that various
structures open up or become obstacles to the policy changes initiated by the Indian state.

**WAS THERE FEUDALISM IN PRE-COLONIAL INDIA?**

One can come across many references to Indian society in different works of Marx and Engels. In their writings, they portrayed pre-colonial India as "stagnant", "unresisting" "vegetative" and "never changing" entity. To them, India had no history since Indian society did not split into antagonistic classes. India never witnessed feudalism due to certain peculiarities specific to desert lands of these areas. The state which took up the responsibility of providing irrigation facilities to the peasants actually acted as the collective landlord. The entire village communities were paying taxes directly to the state. Individually, peasant was not responsible to any particular feudal lord. Villages constituted the basic units of ancient Indian society. In words of Marx "These small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which continued to this day, are based on possession in common of the land. The constitution of these communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common and produce divided among the members". Such village societies characterised by simple division of labour and unity between agriculture and handicrafts, remained economically self-sufficient in all respects. Marx and Engels thought that the oriental despotism rested on the foundations of such isolated village communities.
Though Marx's view of Indian society was influenced by the Western sources, for long, his understanding of India was considered to be consistent with Indian reality. However, when Indian Marxist historians themselves began to explore the history of India, they started finding many evidences contradicting Marx and Engel's basic assumptions such as collective ownership of land and absence of intermediaries between the state and village communities. D.D. Kosambi who was the first Indian Marxist historian to make an independent study of ancient Indian history concluded that despite certain peculiarities, in India also there was some kind of feudalism which continued almost upto British intervention. Political decentralisation, low level of development of productive forces, production for self-consumption and "possession by a lord of judicial and quasi-judicial functions in relation to the dependent population" are some of the features common to India and Medieval Europe. The notable characteristics which, according to Kosambi, distinguish India from European feudalism were the existence of caste system, increase of slavery, absence of guilds and the lack of an organized church.

After D.D. Kosambi, Prof. R.S. Sharma threw some more light on structures and practices which resemble European feudalism. Though the practice of working in owner's land—a practice
typical of European feudalism was almost absent in India. R.S. Sharma argued that the Indian peasants were also subjected to some kind of forced labour. To him feudalism in India was "characterised by a class of landlords and by a class of subject peasantry, the two living in a predominantly agrarian economy marked by decline of trade and urbanism and by diastic reduction in metal currency. The superior state got its taxes collected and authority recognised by creating a number of inferior blocs or even states which generated the necessary social and ideological climate for this purpose." Such feudalism in R.S. Sharma's view, came to an end with Ghorian and Turkish attacks.

D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Romilla Thapar concentrated more on ancient Indian society. But Prof. Infn Habib took up the challenging task of exploring the medieval Indian economy. In fact his book, Agrarian systems of Mughal India, opened up new vistas for academic discourse. Though he was against characterising medieval Indian social formation as 'ASIATIC' or 'FEUDAL', Habib made it clear that in medieval India collective subjection of the villages was accompanied by individual subjection in varied forms existing principally through the framework of caste. Surplus product of the villages was not reaching the state directly as Marx would conceive. In fact there emerged a class of zamindars who acted
as administrative instruments for the realisation of the claims of the state. A part of the surplus product extracted from the villages was appropriated by these Zamindars. However, Habib objects to naming them as feudal lords, for, he thinks that the Zamindars were only state officials and that their actual powers, tenure and place of work were decided by the higher authority i.e., the state itself. Such position however does not forbid him from demolishing the myth of equalitarian social structure. Habib argued that population was far more stratified than what Marx appeared to have allowed for. Caste system consolidated social differentiation by creating an enormous rural proletariat in the shape of the untouchables. Opposing Marx and Engels Habib asserted that Indian history was also "one of exploitation and class contradictions generating cyclical movements which Marx had postulated for social evolution in general".

Accepting in the main, Irfan Habib's thesis, Dr. Harbans Mukhia introduced the concept of 'peasant economy'. He opposes characterising medieval economy as feudal on the plea that the so-called serfdom or forced labour were only legal restrictions imposed by the state to extract taxes from the peasants and that there was complete absence of extra-economic coercion at the level of production. To him medieval economy was characterised by high fertility of land, low subsistence needs of the peasants and peasant's freedom of control over the process of production.
In such economic system, the relations of exploitation were firmly based on appropriation of revenue and hence the conflict between the peasants and the state arose on the question of revenue so appropriated. Mukhia also argued that the peasantry was not an undifferentiated mass. Hence, despite his usage of the term, 'peasant economy' he opposes Burton Stein's description of Indian state as "peasant state." According to him, the state used to distribute the revenue collected from the peasants to different states of the ruling classes in accordance with the position it occupies in the hierarchy. As such there were classes and class conflicts even in pre-colonial India and medieval Indian society far from being static or stagnant would have undergone a transformation whether or not colonialism had intervened.

This is precisely the summary of the on-going debate on the mode of production, nature of classes and the character of the state in precolonial India. The studies that have come to light so far are not all-comprehensive. Still there are many aspects which need to be explored. For example, most of the historians cited above concentrated on the history of North India. Though Burton Stein and Karashima attempted to study South India, still there remains much to explore in Southern and North Eastern parts of India. In view of large size of the sub-continent, it would be premature to come to any precise
conclusions about the agrarian relations in India before British colonisation. However, with the limited information we have now, one may come to certain generalisations viz., 1) The village societies remained economically self-sufficient entities. 2) There was class differentiation within the villages and the peasants were under individual as well as collective subjection; 3) There appeared a class of Zamindars or intermediaries between the state and the peasants and they used to enjoy a share of the surplus from the villages 4) The peasants were subjected to certain restrictions - legal as well as economic, and 5) Production was carried on for self-consumption and only product excess of their needs used to enter the markets as commodities.

AGRAKIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLONIAL ERA:

In one sense, the emergence of British Rule on the Indian soil was a turning point in the transformation of the agrarian system. By destroying the self-sufficient village system, the British rule, as Marx would point out, initiated a social revolution everheard of in Asia. Though it is not correct to say that private property was completely absent in pre-colonial India, it should be admitted that it was the British which gave legal sanctity to the private property. In one sense the Britishers were not interested in bringing revolutionary changes in the rural areas. They only modified the already existing landed system to suit their own imperialist exploitation. For that, they introduced Zamindari
system - permanent as well as temporary - in certain areas and Ryotwari system in the rest of British India. Whereas 19% of the area under direct British rule was under the permanent Zamindari settlement, about 30% of the area was under temporary zamindari system. In the remaining 51% of the British India, ryotwari system was introduced.  

In Bengal, Bihar and certain parts of Orissa and North Madras, the British Raj introduced Zamindari system. Zamindars under Raj were not merely administrative representatives of the British governments in charge of collection of revenue. According to the personal law of proprietors, they had right to inherit, transfer or even partition the estates under their control. Subjected to certain conditions they had right to fix the revenue, secure revenue and enjoy profits of new cultivation. Since the Zamindars were expected to pay fixed sums to the British government, the zamindars used to exploit their peasants without any regard for their living conditions of the masses. Infact there were many kinds of tenancy relations in zamindari areas. Generally the tenants were expected to pay fixed rents. But in some places, as in Bengal and other Eastern parts, share-cropping was becoming a dominant form of tenure. Zamindars and Jotedars together exploited the peasants and tenants by squeezing considerable part of their share.
Thomas Munro first introduced the Ryotwari System in Madras Presidency. Later it gradually spread to different areas. In the areas under Ryotwari system, the peasants were directly responsible to the state. The state which collected taxes was expected to look after the needs of the peasants. However, in practice, the British Raj did very little to improve the lot of the peasantry. But for their own interests they encouraged commercialisation of agriculture. As a result, a class of peasants producing goods such as tea, tobacco and cotton for export market could emerge in different parts of the country. Almost up to the 1940s the government paid very little attention to the food crops. Except establishing Departments of Agriculture and various other research institutes at different levels and periodically making many recommendations for improving the fate of agriculture in India, the government did very little in practice to improve the fate of the rural masses. Due to lack of institutional support, indebtedness of small peasants increased. Money lenders, local merchants and big landlords began to dominate the village communities. As a result of commodification, a class of landowners with extensive interests in trading and transport activities emerged. They normally took up self-cultivation by employing the wage labourers. Even where tenancy existed, nature of tenancy was undergoing a significant change with the trend showing a marked shift towards share
The study of agrarian relations in colonial India would be incomplete without making a few observations on the state of agrarian relations in the Princely states, then surviving under British protection. The social relations in the Princely States which enjoyed considerable autonomy in internal matters, remained basically feudal in content. In many of these states there were big jagirdars who used to control fifty to hundred villages. System of 'Veth' and 'Begar' (forced labour) prevailed in almost all princely states. In some of the Rajputana States, there were many slave communities whose members could be bought and sold like any other commodities. In addition to personal labour to the immediate lords, the serfs were supposed to supply their bullock carts, fodder and milk—all free of cost. The peasants were subjected to severe exploitation. Almost 50% of the produce was recovered by the feudal lords or the State as rent. In addition to land tax, the peasants were expected to pay a number of other taxes. In view of such intense exploitation the peasants were not in a position to produce anything for profit.

This brief survey shows that the agrarian relations during the colonial era did not show any marked uniformity. Whereas different kinds of tenancy existed in Zamindari areas, in the
places under ryotwari system, self-cultivation with wage labourers started and share cropping was becoming the dominant form of tenancy. Social relations in the princely states however, remained predominantly feudal. The post-colonial Indian state had to deal with such diversified forms of agrarian relations in order to bring the desired changes in economy.

**POST-COLONIAL STATE AND TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL ECONOMY:**

The moment India's national bourgeoisie attained political power, the old semi-feudal and semi-colonial Indian state underwent a gradual transformation to give birth to a new nation state. The new state has nothing in common with autocratic princely states that survived up to 1947 under British paramountcy. So also post-colonial Indian state is very different from war lord-bureaucratic state of pre-revolutionary China. Infact abolition of Zamindari System, integration of princely states, introduction of liberal constitution and administrative reforms initiated in different branches of the state apparatus—all these measures virtually put an end to feudal political power in India. But the India's bourgeoisie was conscious of the fact that its political power continued to be feeble if the newly formed state failed to extend their power base in the village areas. To meet that goal it was necessary for the state to introduce certain changes in rural economy.
At the time of independence, the national bourgeoisie were forced to respond to the demands of the agricultural workers and tenants for radical transformation of the unequal rural economic structure. Telangana (in AP) and Tebhagha (in Bengal) revolts were clear indicators of popular protests against feudal system. The bourgeoisie understood that if they totally ignore the necessity of initiating reforms, they themselves would be thrown out of power. However the bourgeoisie knew that it could not implement radical reforms in view of the truce they made then with the landed aristocrats. Since some of the leading political personalities in the nationalist movement had rural elite background, even the Indian National Congress never preached any open confrontation with landed vested interests. As such, there was lack of political will among the policy makers to resort to any radical steps such as confiscation of land from all land lords and distribution of the same to the tenants and agricultural labourers. Thus on the eve of independence, Indian state was confronted with two contradictory pulls — one for total transformation of the rural economy and the other for almost total compromise with landed interests. In such a situation there was the necessity of devising an agricultural policy which would initiate such reforms which would satisfy partial social necessities and at the same time protect the interests of the land lords. Over and above these competing interests, the state had the responsibility of augmenting agricultural productivity so
that it would become self-reliant in food production.
Keeping these objectives in mind the government initiated many reforms in rural economy.

Along with integration of princely states which dispossessed the feudal lords of their hold over land, enactment of Zamin-dari abolition and Tenancy reforms Acts immediately after independence strengthened the foundations necessary for the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture. On the one hand, it could make lakhs of well-to-do tenants the actual owners of the land, on the other by dispossessing the absentee land owners of their monopoly over land but at the same time by adequately compensating them in return for the land taken over by the government, alternative was created for them to switch over to capitalist farming. Lakhs of small tenants thrown out by the land owners to evade tenancy acts joined the rural proletariat. Thus the very first phase of land reforms created conditions for the development of the capitalist land owners and rural proletariat, the two classes essential for capitalist agriculture.

Though development of capitalism in Indian agriculture is economically in the interests of the bourgeoisie, polarisation that such process of development initiated is politically dangerous to the system. So increasing proletarianisation of tenants and small peasants needs to be checked at some level.
Hence Indian state introduced land ceiling policy with a promise to distribute the excess land to the rural poor. Necessary laws were introduced in almost all states to fix limits to the possession of land. However, except in states like West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka, the government failed to implement the land ceiling acts vigorously. Either by taking advantage of the loop-holes in the laws or by collaborating with the bureaucracy, many big land owners could escape land ceilings. Even then, there was some progress in rationalisation of land holdings, in the sense that, despite the so-called benami transfers, the era of landed aristocrats who used to own hundreds and sometimes even thousands of acres of land almost came to an end. Some landless labourers and tenants-at-will indeed got benefited by the land redistribution policy. According to recent estimates nearly 2 million acres of land were distributed among the landless. Though there is a considerable gap between the land declared as surplus and the land actually taken over by the government, this act of redistribution of land could partially check proletarianisation.

**Green Revolution**

Beyond this level, Indian state cannot go far in the direction of structural changes. Infact, no bourgeoisie of this era of imperialism can implement the agrarian reforms such as land to
the tillers or equitable distribution of land. Yet state cannot ignore the necessity of positively responding to the food problem. In view of its inability to bring any structural changes beyond a certain level, Indian state started depending on technological transformation in agriculture. Over the years the Government of India invested substantially in irrigation projects. Allocation for various irrigation projects increased from Rs. 456 crores in the I plan to Rs. 10,258 crores in the Sixth Plan. Similarly enough attention is given to provide electricity to rural areas. In 1947, only 1500 villages had electricity supply. But by 1983, more than 3 lakh villages i.e., about 58% of villages in India are electrified. In the states like Punjab, Haryana, Tamilnadu and Kerala almost all villages are electrified. Percentage of utilisation of electricity in agriculture increased to 16.5% in 1982-93. Likewise the government invested substantially to establish fertiliser factories within the country. At present 66% of fertilisers demand is met by the domestic production. In addition many research institutes and laboratories are setup in different parts of the country to carry on research for development of agriculture production.

In one sense, all these changes gained momentum in the mid-sixties. As a response to the grim food crisis that adversely
affected Indian economy, in November 1965 the Food Ministry of the Government of India came out with the strategy of Green Revolution. By the end of 1965, the new strategy was put into practice in 114 villages specially chosen for experimenting intensive Agriculture Areas Programme (IAAP). The new strategy which called for combination and concentration of inputs like HYV seeds, fertilisers and machinery for cultivation. In course of time, the strategy gradually spread to many other irrigated areas. Area under HYV use increased from 1.89 million hectares in 1960-61 to 26.52 million hectares in 1982-83.\(^22\) Fertilizer consumption increased at an average rate of 17.1 percent. Consumption of chemical fertilizers increased from 0.69 lakh tonnes in 1950-51 to 55.16 lakh tonnes in 1980-81.\(^23\) Between 1951-52 and 1981-82 per hectare consumption increased from 0.5 kg to 33.5 kgs. During the same period number of tractors in use increased from 9000 to 73 lakhs that of oil engines from 2000 to 29 lakhs and electric pumps from 26000 to 40 lakhs.\(^24\) This strategy of Green Revolution was successful in making the nation self-reliant in food production. It can be seen from the fact that food grain production increased from 53.1 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 172 million tonnes in 1988-89. In fact after 1977-78, imports of food grains virtually come to an end.

**CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP OF LAND:**

The impact of Zamindari abolition, tenancy reforms, land ceilings and Green Revolution could be understood to an extent by examining the changes that they brought in land holdings.
From the above figures (Table-1) it can be understood that the number of holdings under marginal and small farmers actually increased from 71.23% in 1953-54 to 89.24% in 1980-81, though the area operated by them increased only by 10 percent. Conversely, number of medium holdings declined considerably but the area operated by them shows a small increase. Number of size holdings above 10 hectares shows a sharp decline from 4.22 percent to 0.02 percent. But they still retain hold over 22.8% of the operated area.

During the plan period, in the country as a whole, number of rural proletariat increased marginally. The agriculture workers account for about 30% percent of rural working force. In areas where Green Revolution strategy was implemented there was considerable proletarianisation. The Government itself is not keen on extending mechanisation beyond particular level since the ruling classes are very well aware of political consequences of such proletarianisation. Hence through their land distribution policy and anti-poverty programmes, the government seeks to check the discontentment of the rural poor by allocating a few acres of land. Notwithstanding the government efforts, subsistence marginal farmers accounting for 69.7% of the operational holdings but occupying only 12.16% of the operated area remain as the semi-proletarian strata—the reserve army of the proletariat.
**TABLE 1**

OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS AND AREA OPERATED BY MAJOR CLASSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Holdings Hectares</th>
<th>Operated Holdings 1953-54</th>
<th>Operated Holdings 1980-81</th>
<th>Area Operated 1953-54</th>
<th>Area Operated 1980-81</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal 0-1</td>
<td>56.15</td>
<td>69.69</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>12.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small 1-2</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>19.55</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>14.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi 2-4</td>
<td>14.19</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>18.56</td>
<td>21.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium 4-10</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>29.22</td>
<td>29.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 10</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>36.62</td>
<td>22.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **TOTAL:**             | 100                       | 100                       | 100                   | 100                   |

**Source:** NSS Reports & Agriculture Census
Those Marxist scholars who concluded India as semi-feudal state based their arguments mainly on their analysis of tenancy in Indian agriculture. Economists\textsuperscript{25} like Amit Bhaduri, Pradhan Prasad, Nirmal Chandra and Ranjit Sau who characterised mode of production in India as semi-feudal, showed the following features which they considered to be essential characteristics of semi-feudalism: existence of tenancy, dominance of usury capital, indebtedness of tenants and small peasants to the landlords or money lenders, lack of access to organized markets and merciless exploitation of the poor peasants and tenants-at-will. Citing those characteristics, a section of Indian communists also argue that mode of production in India is akin to the one that existed in China before revolution. Since Indian Marxists borrowed the concept of semi-feudalism from Mao-tse-Tung, one may first examine what he meant by semi-feudalism. When Mao referred Chinese society as feudal, he had in mind that China where much of the land was monopolised by the landlords, nobility and emperors and peasants who had little or no land were forced to work as serfs. For Mao, semi-feudalism is not a separate mode of production but essentially feudal relations of production in its transitory stage to capitalism. By semi-feudalism he meant that society where the foundations of self-
sufficient natural economy of feudal times have been destroyed but the exploitation of the peasantry by the land lord class which is the basis of the system of feudal exploitation not only remains intact but, linked as it is with the exploitation of comprador and usurer capital. Keeping aside the question of comprador and usurer capital for a moment, can any one claim that feudal lord-serf relations constitute the dominant feature of mode of production in the post-colonial India? Serfdom is almost absent in India. The so-called bonded labourers, who are normally cited to justify the existence of feudal relations in India do not constitute even 1% of the rural labour force. Absentee land lordism is now gradually being replaced by self-cultivation through hired labour.

Again, it is not the existence of tenancy as such, but it is nature of tenancy which is fundamental in determining the relations as feudal or capitalist. In India the area under tenant cultivation has come down from 31.7% in 1950-51 to 9.25% in 1971-72. Even if one may admit that there exists benami cultivation or unregistered tenancy, its decline over the years is unquestionable. Even where tenancy exists, share-cropping is emerging as predominant form of tenancy. Bardhan's survey showed that the nature of tenancy in 334 villages he surveyed in Northern and Eastern India remained predominantly share-cropping on 50:50 share basis. Wherever
share cropping came into practice, the land owners are showing increasing interest in the improvement of agriculture. Unlike the absentee landlords, the present day landowners are coming forward to bear a part of financial burden for the purchase of seeds, fertilisers and machinery. Landlord claims his share not only as the owner of land but also as the lender of capital. Both landlord and tenants together make decisions about production and marketing in many of the cases. A considerable part of the produce from these tenanted land is now reaching markets. This is in contradiction with feudal tenancy where production is carried on for self-consumption and not for market. Moreover, the practice of tying the tiller to the land is very negligible. Rudra and Bardhan correctly pointed out that the so-called attachment or semi-attachment conditions reflect more the employers concern for a dependable supply of labour at the right time, rather than extra-economic coercion associated with feudal relations.28. Bardhan also pointed out that landlord is not only source of credit to the peasants. Major source of income to the landlord comes from cultivation and not by money lending.

Share of non-institutional sector (includes landlords, money lenders and borrowers relatives) declined from 95% in 1952 to 60% in 1981-82. Between 1961-1971, share of agricultural money lenders among non-institutional lenders declined from 47% to 23%. In 1971 professional money lenders accounted for
14% and landlords for 8.6% of the total credit. Over the years with the emergence of banks as institutional sources of finance, the role of money lenders declined. Medium and large farmers do not borrow much from the money lenders. It is only marginal and small farmers who depend more on both money lenders and institutional sources. However there is no point in denying the fact that rural indebtedness is on the increase. But indebtedness as such is not a sufficient indicator of semi-feudalism. In fact indebtedness can exist even in capitalist countries. The peasants are indebted not only to money lenders and landlords but also to co-operatives and commercial banks. Recent agitations in different parts of the country to waive off the bank loans show the intensity of this new contradiction between the peasants and the banks.

Finally one may be allowed to point out another new trend emerging in agrarian relations. By the term tenancy, we were referring to the practice of big land owners giving their land—wholly or partly—to the small tenants or tenants-at-will. But in the early 70's itself P.C. Joshi observed reverse tenancy in Punjab and Haryana where small land owners started renting their land—not to poor tenants or landless labourers but to commercial farmers who need a large land holdings to use his machinery, profitably. Recent studies on Punjab endorsed this observation beyond doubt. Though there is considerable decline in pure tenant holdings, holdings of the owner-cum-tenants, rose by 97.5% the largest increase
being in the case of medium land holdings followed by large ones. Such a tenancy cannot be the indicators of feudalism or semi-feudalism in Indian agriculture.

Now one may look at other aspects of agricultural policy of the Government of India.

**BANKS AND RURAL CREDIT:**

We have already observed that institutions like banks and cooperatives emerged as important sources of rural credit supply. One may substantiate the claim with necessary figures. From the very beginning the post-colonial state in India was keen on extending bank facilities to the rural areas. It was with that purpose that the State Bank of India came into being replacing the old Imperial Bank. When the Government observed that the commercial banks failed to extend its branches to rural areas, the state nationalised 14 scheduled commercial banks with a promise to meet the credit requirements of the rural areas. Since then, bank network in the rural areas increased enormously. Number of the rural branches of the commercial banks increased from 1,832 in 1969 to 30,585 branches in December, 1987 (See Table II). Now rural branches account for 56.2% of the total branches and 14.5% of the total bank personnel. Total number of borrowed accounts increased from a few thousands in 1968 to 210 lakhs in 1984. Aggregate deposits of the rural branches of the commercial banks increased from Rs. 14.20 crores in June 1969 to Rs 6176 crores at the end of 1983. Almost 15% of the bank credit flows to meet rural
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Banks</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Semi-Urban</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. State Banks of India</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1969</td>
<td>3584</td>
<td>2053</td>
<td>1116</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>7429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. RBI's Subsidiaries</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1969</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>1119</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>3363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(38.8)</td>
<td>(33.3)</td>
<td>(17.2)</td>
<td>(10.7)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fourteen Nationalised</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>1465</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>4,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks</td>
<td>March, 1969</td>
<td>10157</td>
<td>4436</td>
<td>3966</td>
<td>3064</td>
<td>21623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(47.0)</td>
<td>(20.5)</td>
<td>(18.3)</td>
<td>(14.2)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(41.7)</td>
<td>(20.7)</td>
<td>(22.9)</td>
<td>(14.7)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Regional Rural Banks</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(92.3)</td>
<td>(6.7)</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
<td>(—)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other Scheduled</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>1,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Banks</td>
<td>March, 1969</td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td>(41.9)</td>
<td>(16.5)</td>
<td>(21.6)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>1434</td>
<td>1399</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>4,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(52.1)</td>
<td>(51.3)</td>
<td>(22.2)</td>
<td>(14.4)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>June, 1969</td>
<td>1,860</td>
<td>3,344</td>
<td>1,456</td>
<td>1,664</td>
<td>8,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1969</td>
<td>(22.3)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(17.8)</td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>29631</td>
<td>10,594</td>
<td>7,589</td>
<td>5,769</td>
<td>53,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 1986</td>
<td>(55.8)</td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td>(14.1)</td>
<td>(9.9)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

credit requirements. Banks credit to agriculture actually increased from Rs. 54 crores in 1969 to Rs. 13,127 crores in December, 1987. Despite considerable increase in commercial banks network, co-operatives still remain the dominant source of institutional credit. As on 30th June 1986, total number of primary agricultural co-operatives including farmers service societies and large-scale multipurpose societies stood at 92,430. Above them, there were 352 District Central Co-Operative banks and 29 State Co-Operative banks. In the recent years many Regional Rural Branches (RRBS) were started in many unbanked areas. As on 30th June, 1987, 196 RRBS with their 13,677 branches are operating in 362 districts. So far the RRBS mobilised Rs. 1,919 crores as deposits and lent Rs. 1,933 crores for various purposes to small and marginal farmers. Now almost 55% of advances from co-operative banks and 42% advances from commercial banks go to agriculture sector. When one remembers that in 1951-52 total credit from government and co-operatives to agriculture accounts for only 6.4% and that of commercial banks to 0.9%, what the banks have achieved now is indeed remarkable (See the Table II).

Establishment of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 1982 was another remarkable development in the field of rural credit. NABARD as an apex body pays attention to all the matters concerning policies, planning and operations in the field of rural credit. It provides financial assistance to co-operative banks, commercial banks and RRBS through refinancing
facilities. It is also entrusted with the responsibility of strengthening the credit delivery system and providing necessary training for the bank personnel. It coordinates the activities of the co-operative and commercial streams of credit.

PRICE DETERMINATION AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETING:

One of the important task undertaken by the Indian State immediately after independence was creation of a single central national market. Along with territorial integration, Indian state made all efforts to create market oriented economy where the production would be carried on for profit, not merely for self-consumption. Transport facilities are widened to link the rural areas with urban centres. According to recent estimates, about 65% of villages with population over 1500, 46% of villages with population between 1000-1500 and 21.7% of villages with population less than 1000 people were connected by all weather roads. Likewise market facilities are extended to see that the agriculture products can easily reach the markets. According to Indradeep Sinha during the last 30 years virtually the entire rural economy has been drawn into the vortex of money-commodity relationships and almost 100% of commercial crops and 40% to 60% of food crops are being brought into the market and sold as commodities. At present there are about 24000 village markets and over 414 larger markets situated at Tahsil headquarters or in large villages. In addition there are 2320 principal regulated markets and 3113 regulated submarkets in India. As a result of development of such well knit market mechanism now almost all important agricultural products - whether they be jute of Bengal,
tobacco in Andhra, Coconut of Kerala and sugarcane in Maharashtra become part of all-India market. Their production, prices and profits are not determined by the local conditions alone. Fate of the Indian peasants, especially those who are involved in production of cash crops has become increasingly dependent on vagaries of national and even international markets into which they themselves are well integrated.

Post-colonial States in India is increasingly interfering in this market mechanisms with a promise to regulate anarchy in the free market. State now intervenes in agricultural marketing through regulation of markets, establishment of warehouses, procurement of food grains, state trading in food as well as cash crops and strengthening of public distribution systems. Government organisations like Food Corporation of India, State Trading Corporation, District co-operative marketing societies and different warehousing Corporations have now come to decide the fate of millions of Indian peasants. In addition, Agricultural Price Commission (APC) set up to determine relative price structures of the basic agricultural products plays a key role in fixing the prices of all major agricultural products. Such a comprehensive intervention of state in all activities related to rural economy is only a post-colonial phenomenon.

At no time in history, Indian state had taken so many responsibilities to strengthen particular kind of development of rural economy conducive to the overall interests of the ruling classes in India.
RICH PEASANTS AS DOMINANT RURAL CLASS

Structural and technological changes initiated by the Indian state succeeded in creating necessary conditions for the development of a homogenous class of rich peasantry conscious of its class interests. In addition to pure capitalist farmers, this class includes landlords who have subsequently taken up capitalist farming and also rich tenants who acquired considerable land after the Zamindari abolition and tenancy reforms and took up intensive capitalist farming by using hired labour along with family labour. In a country where fertility of land differs from place to place, size of holdings alone cannot be a sufficient criterion for categorising rural classes. Hence no attempt is made in our analysis to create any artificial distinction between rich peasants and landlords merely on the basis of number of acres one owns. What makes us include groups having different origins in one class of rich peasants is the existence of certain characteristics common to all. They are:— 1) In the main, all of them involve in self-cultivation through hired labour; 2) Their primary source of income is extraction of surplus value, not family labour or rent; 3) Even where a part of the land is given for tenancy, the owners show increasing interest in production process, bears a part of the expenditure and extract surplus on share basis; 4) All of them use modern technology to the extent their own needs demand and 5) They produce mainly for markets, not for self-consumption alone.42.
Taking advantage of the infrastructural facilities provided by the State and Central Governments, the rich peasants appropriated considerable assets and outweighed the old absentee landlord class depending wholly on rent for its self-reproduction. Over the years the rich peasantry which is increasingly becoming conscious of its interests, started organising itself into powerful pressure groups. For long, they indirectly influenced the decision making at different administrative levels. But after the mid-sixties they openly came out in an organised form at national level to bring pressure upon the State and Central Governments to accede to their demands. Mention may be made here of Narayanaswamy's Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association (TNAA). Shetkari Sanghtana of Sharad Joshi and Bharatiya Kisan Union led by Mahendrasignh Tikait. Having attained dominant positions within the villages, the rich peasants developed capabilities to use such organisations to attract substantial members of the small and middle peasants. Class composition of those organisations made some writers believe that these organisations belonged to middle peasants or bullock capitalism. It may be true that sometimes even the middle peasants and to an extent even small peasants might have got benefits from these movements. But when one looks at their indifference to the problems of tenants and agricultural labourers takes note of their opposition to radical land reforms and examines their basic demands such as higher prices for agriculture commodities, unrestricted inter-state trading and reduction of tariffs on agricultural inputs one can assess the class nature of these organisations. Though the leaders sometimes argue that if their income increase they would give sufficient wages, at no point of time. 
real wages of the agricultural labourers kept pace with the incomes of the rich peasants. Higher prices for agricultural commodities benefit those sections which can produce considerable marketable surplus. In India 18% of the cultivating households own 61.2% of the total operated area and generates over 1/2 of the gross output and accounts for 2/3 rds of the marketable surplus.44 Only those people who can produce considerable marketable surplus can think of inter-state trading. Marginal and small farmers who contribute very little to marketable surplus and infact even purchase food grains attimes, will not really get benefited by demands such as higher prices or inter-state trading. Though certain demands like liberal credit facilities, tariff concessions and subsidies on irrigation, fertilizers and electricity are partly useful to the small and middle farmers also, it is actually the rich peasants who take maximum advantage of such public policies. It is actually the failure of the Indian leftist parties to mobilise agriculture labourers, tenants and small farmers and to attract even the middle peasants to their side which gave opportunity for the rich peasants to take the lead. Now by creating an ideology of unified peasantry and through solgans such as BHARAT Vs INDIA or AGRICULTURE Vs INDUSTRY, the rich peasants could mobilise even those sections whose interests are not compatible with those of rich peasants.45 Having realised that they have better things to grab from the system the rich peasantry attimes declare truce with other rural classes. However, general practice in all parts of the country showed that whenever agricultural labourers and small tenants led agitations against them for wage rise or for reduction of rents.
the rich peasants do not hesitate to put down such mass protests by using all their might.

**CHANGING RURAL POLITICAL SCENE:**

All the above mentioned changes in agrarian economy could not have taken place in the absence of certain modifications in the social and political structures of rural India. Development of capitalism in agriculture necessitates existence of political institutions conducive to such development. Being aware of it, Indian planner undertook systematic steps to introduce new administrative and political institutions in place of the old ones. In the traditional village setups one or a few families, merely on account of their caste status and monopoly over land could exercise absolute powers over the entire village community. But abolition of zamindari system, integration of Princely States, implementation of land reforms and introduction of liberal democratic government formed on the basis of universal adult franchise—all these changes could strike at the political power base of the traditional rural elite. While the community development programmes laid foundation to modern administrative structures, panchayat raj system introduced competitive politics in the traditional village system. Following Balwant Mehta's report, almost all states introduced two-tier or three tier system. Though politicians invoked Gandhi's name, Panchayat system that actually came into being had very little to do with utopian Gandhian principles. In the place of simple self-sufficient isolated village system that Gandhi dreamt of, there developed decentralised village units, well integrated within the centralised administrative and political structures. Appearance of different kinds co-operatives
in the villages and exposure of the villages to national or state level political parties could introduce new practices in the rural politics. Formal consent of the people became the basis of the new political power structures. With the gradual disappearance of feudal landlords having hundreds and thousands of acres of land under their control, owner-client relationship started disappearing. Mere social status and possession of land may not always guarantee political power, if they are not accompanied by people’s support.

In these conditions, group or coalition politics began to acquire new significances in rural political life. In a situation where numbers do matter, castes began to play new roles in public life. Though there exists class differentiation within each caste, economically dominant classes of every caste started using casteism as an ideology to mobilise their support base. The momentum created by these power politics politicised all castes. As a result, in place of traditional caste system based on hierarchy, there emerged a new framework where all castes are competing with one another for taking advantages of opportunities opened to them. In such competition, only those traditional upper class castes which could also mobilise support of other castes by using its economic and social status could retain their supremacy in village politics. Many of the backward castes members because of their numerical strength and also because of their acquisition of considerable amount of property, could become decisive actors in village politics. But Harijans and tribal people, despite their numerical strength could
not make any headway because of lack of social and economic status. Even legal provisions to include SCs and STs in Panchayats and cooperatives could not enhance their political status. These dialectics of rural power conflict show that without mobilising required number of people, mere possession of social and economic status may not bring many to political power. Conversely mere numbers without required social and economic status will have little bearing in the new village political system.

By making castes or coalition of castes in the villages as their power base, newly emerging rural leadership could make their way into higher political bodies. Infact, since the mid-sixties rural representatives in the state Legislatures and the Parliament are on the increase. All the members of parliament and Legislative Assemblies who have their political base in the rural areas could successfully pressurise the governments to take up certain programmes which are beneficial to the village community in general and to their own communities in particular. No political party ignores the fact that majority of the votes are concentrated in rural areas. Hence all governments take up necessary measures to appease the emerging rural leadership. Infact all State Governments avoid imposing income tax on agricultural incomes since they do not want to antagonise the rural elites. Even the Central Government gives enough subsidies and introduce many developmental programmes to attract the masses and leaders in the villages.
From the study of all these phenomena one can understand the
nature of political changes in rural areas and the extent of
integration of the villages into the national level politics.

Economic and political transformation that has taken place in
rural India since independence exercised considerable influence
on social and cultural aspects of Indian villages. Establishment
of many administrative and quasi-administrative bodies
for different developmental and service activities, improvement
of educational facilities, development of market mechanisms,
influence of mass media and increasing mobility which is made
possible by extension of transport facilities—all these have
impact on the values and attitudes of the village community.
Though casteism is far from disappearing, caste system is losing
its rigidity and is increasingly becoming dynamic to meet the
new challenges. Rationality of traditional hierarchical caste
system is very much questioned and the backward castes started
becoming competition. The very fact that the harijans and
tribals, despite their weaker status, began to organise them-
selves to fight social and economic inequalities clearly indi-
cate the fact that the hegemony of the traditional caste system
is now at stake. Similarly the joint family system which was
an important feature of traditional village societies is now
undergoing a change towards nuclear or small joint family system.
Commercialisation of agriculture and greater exposure to the city life started injecting competitive and acquisitive values. Profit motive and calculations based cash nexus permeates economic relations of all the developed villages.\textsuperscript{47} In the field of politics, panchayats and cooperatives have given birth to new rural leadership. Recent literature on rural leadership\textsuperscript{48} shows that though caste status and ownership of property continue to have social relevance, other factors such as education, exposure to urban areas and ability to get necessary things done from the higher-ups became determinant factors to become a successful leader. It is also said that unlike the traditional elites, the emerging leaders are middle or young aged, active, better educated, better informed and politically conscious persons. Under their leadership the so-called "idyllic, unchanging, isolated and natural village communities" are gradually getting integrated into the modern bourgeois social system.

However, it should be made very clear that while it is necessary to take note of changes that are taking place in social sphere, one should avoid exaggerating the extent of change. Despite many changes in the forms of caste system, domination of upper castes continue in most of the Indian villages. Constitutional prescriptions could not completely eradicate the practice of untouchability. Even now marriages take place within the castes. Religious and superstitions exercise considerable influence on the minds of the rural masses. Traditional jajmani
system and system of forced labour exist in certain corners. All these show that changes in cultural and ideological spheres have not kept pace with changes in economic and political spheres in Indian Society.

CONCLUSION:

In this chapter an attempt is made to examine the characterisation of modern India as a semi-feudal state. To strengthen their version of semi-feudalism, Marxists usually cite features such as existence of tenancy, backward forces of production, dominance of money lending and continuing significance of castes and religion in Indian society. Opposing such an analysis, at the very outset we argued that the state is a structure in itself and that it should not be reduced to economy or culture. By distinguishing the state from civil society, we have argued that the structure of Indian state underwent a gradual but a total transformation on the eve of independence to meet the needs of new ruling classes. It was precisely that new state which undertook the responsibility of transforming the rural India. A brief discussion of the debate over pre-colonial and colonial modes of production in India presented to make comparative analysis of the changes that have taken place in agrarian relations. While evaluating the debate on the mode of production, we made it clear that in post-colonial India self-cultivation with hired labour is becoming the dominant feature of Indian agrarian relations. Land under tenancy declined over the years.
Bonded labour cease to be a dominant phenomenon. In the place of feudal tenancy, method of share cropping where both land owners and tenants can take personal interest in production process, emerged as the dominant form of tenancy. Productive forces could develop to the extent the system permits. Prices of the basic agricultural commodities are now not determined according to local conditions. Credit and marketing facilities were improved considerably and the dominance of money lenders is gradually declining. A homogenous class of rich peasantry conscious of its interests started emerging as the most powerful class in rural India.

In the field of politics, it is argued that, abolition of zamindari system and integration of princely states virtually put an end to feudal political power in India. Since nearly 70% of the people reside in rural areas, introduction of universal adult franchise enhanced the prestige of the villages. Similarly, panchayats and cooperatives introduced competitive politics in the countryside. In the process of change, castes acquired new roles as pressure groups competing for power and status. A new set of leaders started emerging in rural India. These leaders could effectively integrate the villages at the state level and national level politics.
However in our analysis of social life of rural India we had to admit the limitations of state intervention. Though economic and political policies of the state could bring a certain amount of change in the values and attitudes of the villagers, it has to be admitted that many feudal values and practices continue to influence the lives of the rural masses to this day. Influence of such pre-capitalist ideological structures on modern political structures should be taken into consideration in understanding the social dynamics. But this should not lead to any hasty conclusions about the class character of the state. If existence of feudal social structures and practices were sufficient criterion for characterising the state as feudal, then many of the advanced capitalist nations and even socialist countries where superstitions, religious dogmas and ethnic problems still persist, should also be declared as feudal. It should be understood that changes in the ideological sphere will not keep pace with political and economic changes. It is because ideology or culture is relatively independent of politics and economy. Even if the state creates the conditions for the elimination of the old ideological system, without initiating continuous and conscious popular struggle at cultural and ideological fronts, old values and old practices will not disappear so easily. If feudal culture still dominates Indian social life,
it is due to the absence of cultural renaissance at the gross
root levels. Though Indian politicians mobilised people
against political rule of the imperialists and feudal lords,
ythey could not involve the masses to fight out the old beliefs
and practices. After independence, for their own political
reasons, the Indian bourgeoisie find it beneficial to perpetuate
feudal ideology to the extent it helps in retaining their hold
over the toiling masses. This is precisely the reason why
superstitions, caste differences and religious domination still
persist in independent India. These historic limitations
and political expediency should be taken into consideration
in the Marxist analysis of Indian state.
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22. Ibid, P. 58


24. Ibid., P. 258


41. See Kahlon, A.S. & Tyagi, D.S., Agricultural Price Policy

42. Our criteria for classifying peasantry is similar to Utsa Patnaik's classification. See Patnaik, Utsa, Peasant Class Differentiation, Oxford University Press.


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