Conclusion

I started with an enquiry into the circular logic of caste and class which define backwardness in agrarian systems. My hypothesis was that the depressed agrarian classes continue to belong to backward/lower castes. Conversely, the identity of the exploited agrarian classes continue to reveal a common pattern of exploitation - the vast majority of women, dalits, adivasis, muslims, most backward castes constitute the depressed agrarian classes and collectively characterize backwardness. The extent of backwardness prevalent in Indian agrarian systems and the historical/structural reasons were the object of my study.

The notion of identity which links the underclass to the deprived castes forms the edifice of the caste system. Unfree labour forms the material basis of exploitation which makes up the caste system. Apart from applying the principles of hierarchy and differentiation in the social domain, rules of governance through caste influence every dimension of the lives of the underclass – occupational status, rules of exchange, labour contracts (tenancy and others), debt repayments etc. The history of backwardness is inextricably linked to the history of the caste system. This is why, I studied the broader macro-structure of the caste system through history for which this work was primarily broken into two time frames i.e agrarian systems under the colonial state, and the post independence nation-state.

I have used the method of political economy to map the contours of backwardness in agrarian systems over time. In the chapter (On Backwardness), I studied the three approaches to backwardness – demographic (backward areas), as socially and educationally backward classes (which in the Indian context translates into an identity issue, i.e. backward castes) and agrarian backwardness. The first two approaches reveal the ‘opinion’ of the State about backwardness. These different approaches then form the
basis for backward area development and reservation policies. A careful study of governmental reports and documents however revealed the circularity of logic - backward areas are the ones which are inhabited by backward social groups or the converse, i.e. backward social groups reside in backward areas. The third approach is the Marxist systems approach which enquires into reasons for agrarian backwardness. Methodologically, the approach I have followed relied on this method of political economy.

There are three methodological approaches I have used in the course of my enquiry. The method of empirics is the first method, which relies on statistical evidence to understand backwardness. The second method I have used is the method of abstraction and finally the case study method, which I have used to highlight some complexities of backwardness. I studied governmental statistics (NSSO, Census etc.) to establish the overlap of caste and class which is a defining feature of backwardness in agrarian systems. I do not only use official statistics but also corroborate the secondary data with the primary data that I collected from my field visits. I consciously selected the Central Forest Region (consisting the states of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh) to study 'most backward areas' and communities in this country. My enquiry confirms the persistence of this caste-class overlap till date in large parts of this country - especially in the regions where I have done primary field work – Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. Apart from these, areas in Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat (areas which I have also visited), confirm this pattern. The primary data demonstrated the multi-dimensional deprivation faced by depressed agrarian classes/castes in backward areas. This confirms my hypothesis – depressed castes (and women within these castes) are also the depressed agrarian classes. This deprivation is faced in all spheres – social, educational, economic and political. I have focused in the chapter (on Backwardness) on using primary data to reveal such a pattern that prevails even today.

The question of power and the centrality of violence in it, assumes relevance in my work precisely because a political economic analysis of backwardness in Indian agrarian
systems would be incomplete without taking into account this lived reality in the life of the exploited. Therefore I have examined the perpetuation of violence against men, women and children of the depressed classes/castes by members of the dominant class (who are mostly the dominant castes and often represented in the organs of the state) is the other dimension which has been the object of my analysis. I studied the centrality of power in perpetuating backwardness in agrarian systems. To study power I have used the method of abstraction.

The theory of dialectics is the starting point in the method of abstraction. First, I studied the dialectical process inherent in agrarian systems using binary relations (relational and relativistic) to develop certain concepts. Concretely, I looked at the notion of unfree labour as a binary to free wage labour to understand the situation of labour in backward agrarian systems. In the third chapter (Unfree Labour), I established how at present, unfree labour relations an integral part of the process of capitalist restructuring in Indian agrarian systems. The emergence of the coercive class of labour contractors (thekedars) and the stability they provide to the capitalist system is established. Then, I demonstrated that unfree labour in Indian agrarian systems have a long history and form the structural basis of exploitation through the socially constructed categories of caste and gender. Most importantly, unfree labour helps in the extraction of surplus.

Modes of extraction (Chapter IV) is the main theoretical contribution of my thesis to the study of backward agrarian systems. This approach is an advancement from studying contradictions as binaries to the study of the triadic relations of extraction. Marx outlines a triadic relation in Capital Vol. III on Economic trinity where he discusses ground rent. Marx uses the categories capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wage to characterize exploitation and capital accumulation. Most Marxist methods and analysis on exploitation under capitalism tend to focus on the binary aspect of exploitation, e.g. free-unfree or capitalist-worker. What I have demonstrated is the process in which different modes of extraction interact with backwardness in agrarian systems. The discussion on modes of extractions led me to evolve the concept of patriarchal caste-feudalism. This triadic relation helped in clarifying the structural basis of such backwardness. The triad of
the zamindar-sahukar-sarkar and the zamindar-mahajan-thekedar helped in illustrating this theory further. Even with the absence of the state (the sarkar does not exist for certain backward areas except for the police force) there can be an axis of extraction. In this, thekedars play a crucial role. Thus, backwardness in agrarian systems is the resultant of the relationship between different extractors and the coexistence of different modes of extraction. The existence of castes affects the ruling agrarian structure in diverse ways. The co-existence of the structures of patriarchal caste-feudalism and capitalism thus makes the Indian variant of feudalism unique. The transition question (from feudalism to capitalism) becomes more complex because of this co-existence and backwardness is a direct result of the interlocked inequalities of caste-class-gender. Thus, social groups and their struggles for hegemony affect agrarian dynamism.

The chapter on modes of extraction helped in understanding the different mechanisms of surplus extraction. The system of castes in Indian agrarian structures binds the extractor and the exploited in a hierarchy of identities as well. This is what I have termed patriarchal caste-feudalism. Historically in zamindari areas the landlords have also been the dominant castes say bhumihars, brahmins, jats. Landless agricultural labour, small peasants have typically been the lower castes e.g. bhuyia, mushahars. Moneylenders in ryotwari areas have been the dominant patels, patwaris. Also the dominant groups have control over various arms of the state/sarkar say in district administration, block administration, forest officials, and police. My study revealed a pattern where dominant social groups retain their hegemony through the categories of class and caste. Thus, patriarchal caste-feudalism led me to study the mechanism through which these socially constructed categories perpetuate backwardness in agrarian systems.

To grasp the role of social groups, I used the concept of hegemony. The Gramscian frame of consent and coercion provided me with a useful framework to study social groups and the game for hegemony. The prisoners dilemma models that I used, demonstrate this clearly and clarifies this aspect. Norms evolve and are either maintained through coercion (where any deviation is ruthlessly punished) or through consent manufacturing (sanskritisation, internalisation). Simultaneously, intra-group maintenance
of rank and order buttress the coercive mechanism. In terms of the game-theoretic approach that I have used, confirming to caste rules often emerges as the Pure Strategy Nash Equilibrium. The existence of a Mixed Strategy Nash Equilibrium makes this model more realistic in the context of agrarian dynamism. The existence of such an equilibria would mean that any of the strategies (cooperate or defect, i.e. follow caste norms or deviate) could occur with equal probability. This explains why some caste rules remain unchanged over historical time (like endogamy as a necessary condition). Further, it also explains why some norms, e.g. varnashram dharm (caste obligatory labour or fixed occupation by birth) do not survive. If substantial benefits accrue by breaking caste norms, then caste norms might be broken.

I had argued in Chapter V, that hegemony of certain social groups in Indian agrarian systems crucially determine the contours of backwardness. Caste dominance in all possible spheres relies on the coercive power of the extractors. The mechanism of coercion and maintenance of rank and hierarchy was explained first. What makes a hegemonic system like patriarchal caste-feudalism survive, is the manufacturing of consent among the oppressed. The changing capitalist relations affect the balance of agrarian power. Previously dominated social groups might, due to exogenous reasons like the Abolition of Zamindari Act, the Permanent Settlement etc., rise to positions of dominance. Caste dominance requires hegemonic control of all spheres. Chapter V demonstrated conclusively that social groups and their struggle for hegemony are an intrinsic part of Indian agrarian systems and a persistent reason for its backwardness.

Issues in agrarian stagnation and dynamism (Chapter VI) dealt specifically with the role of markets and social groups in analysing class relations. Different modes of extraction helped in understanding the lack of agrarian dynamism or backwardness. The resistances to change in our agrarian systems seem to stem from the complex class relations which prevail in them. The major thrust of this chapter was that it showed that the ruling classes might be the significant barrier to agrarian dynamism. The relentless manipulation of institutions to suit class interest may be the most important reason for backwardness. In other words low levels of productivity is a direct result of the antagonisms embedded in
relations of production, not only between the exploiter and the exploited but also between the different classes of exploiters. Also, this framework allowed me to analyze the agrarian system where the landlords are not the only ones making investment decisions but a significant role is played by the moneylender. Whether the moneylender is a trader-lender or a agricultural-lender will then influence agrarian dynamism and we can see the effect in a bit more detail though this approach. The newer forms of forced commerce that I outlined in this chapter revealed the changing role of the State, although implicitly.

I analysed in Chapter VII, the role of the State in colonisation. Particularly, I analysed how the state brought about some major ruptures in the agrarian systems by preserving and altering agrarian relations. Through the case study of forests law and crime, I demonstrated the centrality of private property rights in capitalist accumulation. Special extraction zones then, are sites for such forceful extraction of surplus which marked the primitiveness of capitalist accumulation. The primitiveness of this accumulation should be understood more as a necessary part of capitalist accumulation, especially in resource rich areas of the country. The disciplines of criminology and anthropology helped in legitimising stereotypes which shaped colonial policy – e.g. criminal tribes. The various laws from land acquisition to police acts to forest acts helped in the centralisation of state power. The listing of castes and tribes for purposes of the Census set in motion the basis for the policies of recognition and reservation. Also, the structure of governance especially in backward areas or to tackle backwardness in general has its origins in colonialism – a structure which continues even in the post-colonial nation state.

I studied developmentalism and democracy in chapter VIII. The obtuse trajectory of developmentalism followed by independent India did not make a structural break with the process of colonization. On the contrary, I have demonstrated how historically marginalized groups still face structural exploitation as a result of such developmentalism. The only acceptable route which the marginalized groups can take is to represent themselves in the decision making process. The contour of representative democracy has put into motion a process where groups claim backward status to be recognized by the state. This recognition leads to representation (through the democratic
Conclusions

structure) so that these groups can put forward their own interests, probably for the first time in history. The policies of general redistribution (class based transfers) are not the preferred policy choices represented by the nature of developmentalism in India. Hence, the policy of recognition and reservation (caste based transfers) appears to be the structurally defined route taken by social groups to cross the Rubicon of backwardness.

Theoretical contributions:

I have further developed the concept of triadic class relations in agrarian systems and their role in backwardness. This is the main theoretical contribution in my work. Excessive reliance on eurocentric ideas and schematizations (by both Marxists and non-Marxists) has impeded the development of indigenous methods of studying agrarian systems. Agrarian class relations in India are enmeshed with caste and patriarchy and I have demonstrated how the intensity of operation of this triad (i.e. class-caste-gender) is the most significant reason for backwardness in agrarian systems. From studying exploitation as a binary relation (free-unfree), I examined the triadic relations of extraction in agrarian systems (e.g. landlord-moneylender-state or moneylender-contractor-state). The role of caste in maintaining ruling agrarian class hegemony is evident from the theory of patriarchal caste-feudalism. Power plays a crucial role in maintaining the triad of hegemony (gender-caste-class) in agrarian systems and thus in perpetuating backwardness. Chapter Four thus contains my main theoretical contribution to the method of studying agrarian systems.

Modes of extraction led me study capitalist restructuring in backward agrarian systems, which works through two mechanisms. One mechanism operates through perpetual debt-dependence as a mechanism of control over the peasantry, especially small peasants. Default in such situations leads to land alienation. The method of forced commerce relies on such a mechanism. The other mechanism is best described by the classical Marxist argument of reserve army of labour – capitalist restructuring of the labour process by depressing wages. The emergence of the contractor is crucial to this mechanism. The
necessity of unfree labour for this process was studied in chapter III. The aim of the method of forced commerce is to control marketing of products and thus operates in the sphere of exchange. The wage mechanism aims at control of the labour process in production and thus lies in the sphere of production. Surplus extraction and its realization involve both these mechanisms. I outlined the newer forms of forced commerce in cash crop areas which operate through production loans instead of consumption loans. This contributes further to the understanding of the debt mechanism in agriculture today. Also, I constructed an index of backwardness based on the theoretical insights which emerge from the modes of extraction approach.

So, How Robust is Backwardness?

The thesis demonstrates that the interlocked inequalities of caste-class-gender are the main determinants of backwardness. The persistence of such backwardness in agrarian systems may lead to claims of a 'frozen' pattern of exploitation. However, this would deny the role of change inherent in agrarian systems. I do not claim a frozen pattern but what modes of extraction definitely established the mutually reinforceable nature of the interlocked categories of caste, class and gender. It is this feature of Indian agrarian systems which make backwardness robust. A robust system can't be perturbed so easily and as my work has demonstrated - the history of agrarian systems in this country show a particular systemic resilience to change. The crucial aspect is the changing regimes of accumulation which might infuse an element of instability to such a system.

Capitalist accumulation brought about some major ruptures in the contours of backwardness and at the same time solidified some fault lines inherent in a heavily stratified agrarian structure like in India. Thus, backwardness in Indian agrarian systems acquires its robustness precisely from the coexistence of capitalist accumulation and the hegemonic structure of patriarchal caste-feudalism. The articulations of these different modes in the context of India's agrarian history have been at worst, symbiotic and at best, convergent. Also, the notion of identity which links the depressed agrarian classes to the backward castes forms the edifice of agrarian exploitation. Caste dominance necessitates
maintenance of hegemony in all spheres – economic, social, cultural and political. This makes backwardness in agrarian systems robust.

**Agrarian Change and Backwardness**

Robustness however does not imply a static/unchanging condition. Barriers to agrarian change are mounted by the dominant classes/castes to maintain their hegemony. However agrarian history is not one sided. Backwardness results from a history of exploitation but this does not imply a frozen pattern between the exploiters and the exploited. Thus, some barriers are broken and new ones have been created in their place. This is especially true if we are to see the histories of agrarian systems in this country. The existence of the caste system had led some early orientalists to claim that India had no sense of history before colonialism. Colonial narratives of agrarian history (the history ‘from above’ approach) relied on binaries and limited the scope for a nuanced understanding of backwardness in ‘underdeveloped’ agrarian systems. Thus, the binaries of primitive/modern, developed/underdeveloped inform the colonial states approach to the indigenous.

The post-colonial state instead of breaking away from such binaries carried forward the colonial approach. Backwardness thus, can seem to be as opposed to developed (the first approach of the Indian state) or backward castes as opposed to forward castes (the second approach of the Indian state). This reducing of complexities to binaries has impeded a comprehensive understanding of stratified societies like India. The triadic approach I developed, contributes to developing indigenous methods of studying agrarian systems.

The zamindar-sahukar-sarkar, the sahukar-sarkar-thekedar and the zamindar-mahajan-thekedar models of exploitation in Indian agrarian systems are explorations in this direction. Thus, the political economic study of backwardness established the vice-like grip of social groups, states and markets in agrarian systems as the principal barriers to agrarian change. The histories of agrarian change in India, reveal a process of formation of new dominant classes and changing equations of class power. Caste dominance in
Conclusion

Agrarian structures necessitates hegemony in all spheres, most necessarily the economic. Agrarian class power is based on exploitation. Backwardness, thus results from a history of exploitation. However every history of exploitation congeals a history of resistance. Therein, lies the way forward.