CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Present endeavour seeks to examine agrarian relations in India in a historical evolutionary perspective. For that purpose a review of literature on the agrarian conditions in India to begin with in the medieval-period, during the British rule, and in independent India has been made; alongwith this agrarian relations in Uttar Pradesh during the British rule as well as after national Independence have also been examined. A study of agrarian relations has also been made on the basis of field work conducted in a village in the Western Uttar Pradesh. For that purpose an attempt has been made to identify the concepts of class and peasantry and then to understand the complexity of relationship between the two. In other words, it would be more appropriate to say that an attempt has been made to examine the relevance of "peasantry as a class" vis-a-vis others. Additionally certain other concepts like caste, social stratification, colonialism, underdevelopment hegemony, feudalism, capitalism, mode of production and social formation have been discussed in the thesis.
The present study analyzes the gaps as well as connections between micro and macro-studies on agrarian relations. While attempting such an analysis several important questions come up. One such important question is: whether different classes that represent contradictory interests in rural areas, solve these conflicts internally or they need some help from outside? In other words, whether internal contradictions of agrarian social structure are solved within it, or some external influences are exercised on the people. When we examine in detail, we find that although the contradictions are located within the agrarian social structure in various forms, the peasantry has not always been able to solve them internally. Theoretical constructions regarding peasantry have also reflected this dilemma.

Marx's well known and perhaps most quoted distinction between "class in itself" (which refers to peasantry) and "class for itself" (which is difficult for peasantry to achieve) has put "peasantry" as such a category in the production process, which is somehow and somewhere shorter than a class. It seems necessary to make it clear that Marx's notion of peasantry as a class is not so vague as it might appear at the initial stage. It is not vague because several attempts have been made to resolve this
crisis at the academic- as well as strategic levels by the Marxist scholars and politicians.

Among various such scholars, it is perhaps Bukharian who comes out with particular specifications regarding the question why peasants do not constitute a class. Another strong point of Bukharin's analysis is that class-conditions of peasantry are examined vis-a-vis other classes? In short, according to Bukharin peasants lack on two important counts in comparison to proletariat (which is a class in every sense of the term). In Bukharin's analysis peasantry lack: (a) freedom from private property, and (b) condition of union in production and common labour. This way of Bukharin's analysis is not much different from the one enunciated by Marx in his famous "preface", A contribution to the critique of Political Economy, but it is certainly an elaboration of it. As and when a concept like this meets empirical or even politico-strategic challenges, it generates criticism, debate, improvisation and modification. In the same way when an attempt is made to arrive at a framework which could wholly or partially explain the agrarian social structure in India over a time period, encounters several challenges. A historical account of the evolution of agrarian social structure in India moves along these lines.
While studying the evolution of agrarian relations in India, first, agrarian conditions of each period are taken into consideration and then its various social categories are identified as involved in the production process, and finally, it is seen how these (categories) comprise and are related to each other in the agrarian social structure. Throughout the thesis an inclination (or bias?) towards the structural-approach could easily be visualised. Yet another related preference is to identify and locate these categories independently as well as in relation to each other to find out their principal contradictions. The internal contradictions, sometimes appear in the form of conflicts among primordial categories at the micro level. Revolutions in the U.S.S.R. and China are its potent examples. It is argued further that there is a need to identify the principal contradiction at local or micro level and then to see how it gets resolved with the help of the outside forces. And any such identification of the outside forces requires the knowledge of a vast area, from where they originate and then operate. Gone are the days perhaps when F.G. Bailey had argued that in the villages of Orissa,

political forces passed off tangentially without entering into the arena of village life.

To make an analysis of the agrarian social structure in British India, specifically requires an understanding of the wider forces operating from outside. It has therefore been argued that instead of what happens in a village in northern or southern part of India, the more relevant question is about the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Colonialism has a history of its own. We have discussed rule of colonialism in the wider world context as well as in specific situations. However, the issues related to the process of underdevelopment need a careful analysis. The concept of 'capitalist underdevelopment' given by Andre Gunder Frank seems to be far more useful than the Marx's notions of capitalism and imperialism to understand process of social transformation in India. The concept of imperialism although was given by Marx, it was subsequently refined by Lenin.

Underdevelopment as a process is a result of the dialectics between a metropolis and its periphery. In other words, the developed world cannot be properly understood without knowing the underdevelopment of the rest of the world. Transfer of technology and other infrastructural aids to the third world countries are examples of the
relationship between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds. It is a relationship between the giver and the taker, the independent and the dependent. We have found that such a perspective helps in understanding the agrarian relations in India and particularly in the Western Uttar Pradesh.

Britishers introduced two different types of land tenure systems, namely, zamindari and ryotwari. In the former the tax collector was given the status of zamindar who acted as an intermediary between the peasants and the state. A careful analysis of the argument given in favour of zamindari system shows that the Zamindar was a person who possessed "skills" for managing land. Ideally a Zamindar was required to collect land revenue, use modern technology, develop new vistas of irrigation, increase production, flourish along the attached peasantry and finally deposit the land revenue with the British government.

But it soon became clear that he fell quite short of these expectations. He took no interest in the improvement of land, and above all the tax collected by him was exhorbitant. Peasantry was badly hit. In such a situation a whole hierarchy of intermediary groups
emerged. Ramakrishna Mukherjee mentions about 50 such subinfeudatory interests. The British colonialism destroyed the traditional artifacts, hence the pressure on land increased once again. Polarization in terms of the rich and the poor emerged distinctly. In other words social inequalities in the agrarian system presented a class-like situation.

Zamindari system was abolished after Independence. The question of land reforms was left to the state governments. The most significant changes since independence include weakening of the traditional social basis of power, abolition of zamindari system, ceiling on land holdings, and the rise of middle caste peasantry in socio-economic and power hierarchy.

Analysis of agrarian social structure in Uttar Pradesh forms the main part of our study. We have analysed the change in agrarian relations keeping in view the agrarian system during the British rule. Eastern and Western U.P. represented zamindari and ryotwari systems of land tenure, hence differences in agrarian relations between the two. Dominance of taluqdars and zamindars was the main feature of the Eastern U.P., whereas peasant proprietorship

was enjoyed by the peasants in the Western U.P. Peasants had direct access to the government. They were free to improve their lands and canel irrigation place them in better condition than their counterpart in the Eastern U.P.

After Independence the government of Uttar Pradesh along with other measures put ceiling on land holdings. Studies conducted by Daniel Throner and P.C. Joshi show that by and large throughout India land reform measures, specifically ceiling on land holdings have not been quite successful. Even during the British period of a tenant cultivated a piece of land continuously for twelve years, he could not be evicted even by the Zamindar. There was some land in the possession of zamindars under Khudkasht (self cultivation).

In Independent India there has been rise of the middle castes, peasants. Emergence of Kammars and Reddis in Andhra Pradesh, Jats, Yadavas and Kurmis in Uttar Pradesh, Kurmis and Ahirs in Bihar, Jats in Rajathan, Patidars in Gujrat have consolidated their economic position and have


entered in a significant way in arenas of political power. They have threatened the traditionally entrenched castes. Our study of a village in West U.P. shows that the middle castes' peasants have moved up in social hierarchy. Green revolution has benefitted mainly the already privileged peasants of the village.

Facts collected from Rankhandi village during 1985-88 would help us in the sharpening of our conceptual and analytical devices. It seems that the concept of caste has to be modified because of its changing character as it has lost most of its traditional attributes. The following points may be mentioned here:

(1) Caste exists today as a multifaceted phenomenon—possessing quite a large number of elements. In other words, caste has become much different in its contents and functions.

(2) Several elements of caste are such that in various ways they are interacting with the outside forces. Caste is now becoming weak and entering into adjustments with new emergent situations.

(3) Logically following from the above two points we can say that caste is not a social formation. Caste infers class and power also.
In western Uttar Pradesh high premium is placed on doing agricultural work. This has contributed to high productivity in the region as a whole. This sort of a view is cherished by all castes and groups. New technology, specifically tractor has been accepted by Brahmins, Rajputs and Muslims. Tractors and threshers are taken on hire. Education has also drawn young men closer from various castes. Education has opened up opportunities for jobs outside the village. Similarly business has attracted several people to go outside the village. Valmikis have gone to urban areas- many of them to Chandigarh for seeking government jobs.

Several Jatavas have started tailoring work in the village itself. Village-Chaupals and Ghers have become weak over a period of time. Nuclear family as a mode of living together is being preferred. Mass-media, specially television is increasingly becoming a part of village life. To sum up, it appears that not only "class" and "power" interact with "caste", but now there are many other social forces such as education and modern occupations, and this has to be taken note of. As stated earlier the middle caste peasant has emerged as a strong entity in Western Uttar Pradesh, and it is based upon two things: (1) his own land and adoption of new technology and (2) leasing in land for sharecropping.
C. Wright Mills notion of "sociological imagination" helps us in comprehending complexity of agrarian social relations as it is found today. We have attempted although tacitly, a critique of the economist's approach for the understanding of agrarian relations. The essentiality of the agrarian question in the wider perspective of political economy has been our central concern. Although Daniel Thorner based his study on certain sketchy empirical impressions and dealt with this question, but he has not gone far enough to find out how different processes of social transformation have been operating in rural India.

Our study seeks to examine the agrarian question in a historical perspective. There are three units of analysis: (1) National (India as a whole); (2) Regional (Uttar Pradesh); and (3) Village (Rankhandi). The purpose for selecting a village in Western Uttar Pradesh is to examine the social consequences of peasant proprietorship (ryotwari) in the post Independence period.


It is being realised that the essence of whatever is going on in the Western Uttar Pradesh in the terms of leadership, factional politics, agrarian change is mainly due to the system of peasant proprietorship. However, peasant proprietorship, if studied as a process rather than as a structural category, would provide a better understanding of agrarian relations. Apart from this a study of certain institutions also seems necessary. A reference to the institution of Chaupal (its emergence and decline) may not be out of the context.

A comprehensive review of village studies in India has helped in analysing the agrarian question in a proper perspective. Caste, class, education, migration and social mobility are some of the main themes in these studies.

Present study aims to fulfill the gap between macro- and micro studies on agrarian relations in India. The Plan of the thesis has been in such a way as it could meet the above said requirements. The main effort is to construct the agrarian class structure of India in different time periods. Our objective is to place the agrarian question in a proper perspective of time and space. The selection of different agrarian regions in different historical periods has the rationality of its own. For example during the British rule two main areas viz. where zamindari- and
ryotwari system of land tenures existed have been taken up for our study. For a detailed study Western Uttar Pradesh is taken up which exhibits a strong case for peasant proprietorship. Within Uttar Pradesh there were sharp differences between the Eastern and the Western parts. In Western Uttar Pradesh peasant proprietorship was quite strong during the British period. It has been found that in the areas of Punjab (now Punjab and Haryana) and the N.W.P. (now known as the Western Uttar Pradesh) facilities of canal irrigation were available during the British rule. Irrigation increased productivity, and therefore land became a valuable commodity and attractive source of earning. This led to more participation of people in agriculture. Hard work contributed towards more production and prosperity in the areas of Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. It has been maintained throughout the thesis that the agrarian question needs to be placed in a proper sociological perspective. As mentioned earlier also fieldwork in a village in the Western Uttar Pradesh was undertaken to test some of the ideas concerning the agrarian question. We have made use of both primary and secondary data. Secondary sources of data have helped us in analysis of agrarian relations during various periods of the Indian history. An effort has been made to study the nature of peasant proprietorship in an empirical situation. Peasant
proprietorship and agrarian relations have been studied in a village in the Western Uttar Pradesh where data were collected during 1985-88. Data from the village have been presented in the form of a case study. To collect the data an interview schedule was administered and 160 villagers were interviewed. Apart from interviewing 160 villagers an effort was made to take note of all other relevant informations. Group interviews were also conducted.

However, as every study is conducted under certain conditions, ours is also no exception and hence falls short of ideal expectations. Certain points have not been covered in our study. Firstly, commercialization of agriculture in certain parts of the country has not been analysed. Secondly, relationship between agriculture and industry in the Indian context does not form a part of this study. Our effort is to understand agrarian class structure in western Uttar Pradesh historically as well as contextually.