CHAPTER - III

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO AGRARIAN STRUCTURE
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After the Mutiny (1857), there was deep and widespread dissatisfaction among different classes of Indian society which were adversely affected by the impact of British policies, specially land and revenue policies. So in the post-Mutiny period of the British rule, agrarian problems ceased to be the main focus of enquiry by the British rulers. The Mutiny marked an end to the British sponsored change and innovation in the Indian institutional structure. It marked the beginning of a new era of maintenance of status quo in the institutional structure, specially the property structure. Henceforth, the aim of British policy was to explore prospects of growth and development within the given institutional framework. This also restricted the scope of enquiry to such selected aspects as did not lead towards a sharp critique of British policies. The study of agrarian structure was relegated to the background in all important enquiries and was treated as a problem of agricultural backwardness. The Report of the 'Royal Commission of Agriculture' (1928) was also not directed to make recommendations regarding the existing systems of landownership and tenancy or of assessment of land revenue and irrigation changes (Baden-Powell, 1974).

Any insight into the agrarian structure which was available from official sources in the later period was, thus, a by-product of enquiries and investigations into other aspects
of agricultural problem. If some light was thrown on the agrarian relationships it was because of the close inter-relation of the agricultural economy with the agrarian structure. The official reports of the Commissions of Finance (1898, 1901) of the Deccan Riots (1876), of the Bengal Land Revenue (1938), of the Censuses of India and of the Provincial Censuses (1881), Punjab Board of Economic Enquiry, the Central and Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee (1929), and Gazetteers and Settlement Reports, etc., contained a wealth of data and rich insights on various aspects of the agrarian structure in different regions of India.

Early agrarian sociology does not offer this type of material in sufficient quantity or quality. It is mostly based on historical speculation or it attempts to restructure evolutionary stages through comparisons which are not always found to be valid. From a structural point of view, these studies lack factual information with regard to the structure of the villages. Sometimes, they are prompted by erroneous ideas such as the idea of self-sufficient village community and the unilinear evolution of the Indian village social structure, etc., which are often not corroborated by facts. In India, such studies abound in the constructions of B.H. Baden-Powell and Sumner Henry Maine and others.

Evolutionary Approach

(a) Baden-Powell and Sumner Maine's approaches

Primary interest of both the authors were seen in 'the
original nature of rights on land in India'. Their discussions were concentrated on the following basic themes: Who exercised control over land, who cultivated the land, what was the pattern of distribution of the produce, the evolution of community ownership of land into individual ownership of land, and the emergence of overlordship in agrarian structure, etc.

Henry's thesis of community ownership of land was based on comparisons of Teutonic and Indian village community (Maine, 1975: 107). In his research, he had largely relied on the records of bureaucrats. To determine the evolution of community ownership into private ownership, he has put forward his assumption that it emerged through a gradual process. It was his speculation that the growing sense of personal rights and ambitions has had a great role to play in this matter. And, in his view, a tendency in almost all offices to become hereditary has been another very important obstacle in the harmonious exercise of control over land by the village community (Maine, 1975: 134-135).

Baden-Powell's views are consistently similar to that of Maine's evolutionary approach, however, he has based his findings more on factual information than that of Henry. And his analysis is closer to reality than Maine's. For example, the existence of Rajput proprietary bodies as a result of the clan movement and single aristocratic adventurers are factual evidence of the creation of overlordship (Baden-Powell, 1974: 28-72).
Analysis of the agrarian structure in terms of deprivation and conflict cannot be made through the arguments presented by Maine and Baden-Powell. They candidly offer the ready reference that it was not the British who introduced the fact of landlordship in the Indian agrarian system, they only accelerated the process which already existed.

Some of their findings are not appropriate and consistent with the available historical evidence. The prevalence of the communal rights on land are not adequately justified by the claim that various strata of rural society shared the produce. The communalistic type of ownership in regard to the property right in land is not correspondence to the oldest Indian agrarian records.

According to Jaimani, land belongs to all alike. It is implied that right on land was individual as well as communal. Agricultural production was the earning of wealth by means of applying labour. Labour would have been the main qualification for an individual to become the landowner. It belongs to all alike in the sense that whoever will exert himself will be the owner of the soil. Thus, the woodlands must have been owned by all alike. And everyone must have had equal right to exert his labour on it to make it arable (Sen, 1962).

The historical studies of agrarian society are based more on structural evidence. These are based on logical arguments and comparisons more or less corroborated by factual data. As a result, they do not attempt to provide much information about the early agrarian setting for which data are not available.
Analytical studies of agrarian structure began much later with the writings contributed by historians, economists and sociologists. Historians with Marxist orientations particularly, dealt with the structural aspects of the agrarian system in terms of deprivation and conflict. We find evidence to this effect in the writings of Irfan Habib, Bhowani Sen and others.

(b) Irfan Habib's approach

Habib accepts the thesis of the evolutionary development of the agrarian structure, but he rejects the views of Baden-Powell and Maine on the 'origin of communal rights in land'. He suggests that the village community was a name for the corporate body formed by villagers for their collective actions, other than production organisation. "The peasant's right to the land was always his individual right" (Habib, 1963: 123).

Habib's studies are more logical and supplied factual information. He has exactly observed the various aspects of the agrarian structure in the historical perspective. He takes up the evolutionary approach to almost all dimensions of agrarian society, in respect of their origin and development (Habib, 1963: 159). His socio-structural analysis of the agrarian system corresponds with the Marxian evolutionary approach.

The zamindari right in land and its allied attributes have not abruptly/ushered in as viewed by Habib, but must have been created through evolution by social forces operating from time to time (Habib, 1963: 159). He putsforth his view that
under the circumstances, the village headman, who was previously meant to collect the state revenue, used considerable power over the village and acquired certain rights similar to those of the zamindar. Gradually, he was authorised to allot the woodlands of the village (Habib, 1963: 133).

According to Habib 'zamindar' is a Persian word means the holder of land, probably came into being in India as early as the 14th century (Habib, 1963: 138). 'Milkiyat', another term found in the 17th century documents, gives a similar meaning. Milkiyat carried a sense in Muslim law similar to that of 'proprietor'. In his view, the emergence of the Muslim rule and the rise of the right of zamindari occurred simultaneously (Habib, 1963: 129-133). The Muslim kings granted the right of zamindari to the loyalist and recognised as well. This process of forcible creation of landlordship continued down to the time of the Mughals. Heritage, grant, gift, sale, physical force appeared to be the main basis of creating and retaining the zamindari rights (Habib, 1963: 129-133). However, zamindari did not signify the proprietary right over land. It had a claim to the produce of the soil.

According to Habib, there was hardly any scope for exploitation in earlier times, when land belonged to the peasant and the peasant belonged to the land (Habib, 1963: 115). There was no separate class of 'landless labourers'. In times of need, people following occupations other than agriculture were engaged as labourers, particularly the low
caste people, i.e., Chamars and Dhanaks. They could never aspire for the status of a peasant, holding or cultivating land of their own (Habib, 1963: 122). Throughout the history of agrarian structure, we find that the people of the depressed classes were considered to be the reservoir of agricultural labour force. Marx has perhaps this kind of idea of servitude in mind, when he speaks of the Indian community as contaminated by slavery. Even today, the huge base of the agrarian society comprises of the people of the depressed class.

Habib has observed the evolutionary nature of agrarian exploitation as well. Previously, the peasant had to spare a specific part of the produce in the name of tax for the state, and that was also in return for the protection and justice which the kind imparted to his subjects (Habib, 1963: 11). Habib has referred to the monopoly of higher castes in ancient agrarian structure (Habib, 1963: 160). The pattern of land ownership in itself was unbalanced. In early feudalism, in addition to the king's share, the zamindar laid his own claim to the produce on account of ownership. But that was very nominal. However, it was the beginning of the peasant exploitation through the system of intermediaries.

Gradually with the introduction of jagirdari system by the Mughals, feudalism came into its full swing. The claim of the landlord in addition to the state revenue, became quite vivid. The jagirdars were indifferent to agricultural improvements, led inexorably to reckless exploitation of the peasantry. Transferable Jagir created a tendency of
rack-renting. It reached its apex when the peasants were compelled to sell even their children and wives to pay the rent. This extreme misappropriation of the agricultural produce caused "the rich in their great superfluity and the utter subjection and poverty of the common people (Habib, 1963: 320-322).

(c) Bhowani Sen's approach

Sen is another exponent of the Marxian variety who agrees to the concept of the evolutionary development of the Indian agrarian system. However, he slightly differs from others, as he assumed that in the pre-historic times, land was the common property of the village, though cultivation was not common since the Vedic period (Sen, 1962: 37).

He traced the origin and development of feudalism in the Gupta Dynasty but he maintained that it was unlike that of medieval Europe (Sen, 1962: 38). Marx has observed that the lack of freedom on the part of the direct producer takes on a variety of forms. During the so-called Dark Ages, a particular relationship of dependence developed between the landlords and the direct producers. In ancient times, the vassal received a share of the goods produced as his tribute. Marx called it the 'tribute form' of feudalism. The village community collected the tribute from individual farmers and paid it to the feudal lords (Sen, 1962: 44).

Sen also holds the same view as Habib, that the specific features of Indian feudalism did not suddenly spring up. They arose out of certain general features peculiar to ancient
India. It has developed through the course of epochs, but not find a firm footing until the Middle Ages. Under Muslim rule, it shed its primitive characteristics. At this stage, in some respects, it resembled western feudalism. Its immediate predecessor was, perhaps, some sort of slavery in India (Sen, 1962: 47). A new feudalism was introduced by the British in total disregard of the peasants' traditional rights. For the first time in history, the Indian agrarian structure lost its traditional social background. Land became a commodity (Sen, 1962: 57-58).

In close conformity with the Marxian assumption, Sen observed the disintegration of peasantry into various classes. It is the first symptom of capitalist development. Capital has started increasing. We observed the growth of agricultural labour and the process of expropriation of peasantry by big landowners and moneylenders. The Indian agrarian system has already witnessed the features of feudalism, the exploitative nature of the agrarian usury system, rack-renting, inferior tenancy, unbalanced division of produce. The class of non-cultivating owners not at all interested in improvements in agriculture, unequal exchange between peasantry and merchants and consequently the alienation and pauperization of the peasantry and the consequent gradual depression of agriculture. Sen maintains that the Indian agrarian system has already entered the phase of capitalism, but it is unaccompanied by a radical change in the technique of production and partial disintegration of the peasantry (about two-thirds of
agricultural workers by self-operating farms, most of whom are share-croppers and tenants-at-will in disguise).

These above studies have a Marxian complexion. They have raised issues of deprivation and conflict because they tried to trace the agrarian class structure as a framework for the understanding of the reality of rural society.

Theoretically, these historical studies are more sound, as they are based for their findings on recorded facts and historical evidence. Even then, not all of such findings combine historical evidence with sociological inferences, drawn from more intensive observation of the rural social structure.

Studies of the socio-structural trend of the Indian agrarian system began much later in Indian sociology, specially through the writings of contemporary sociologists such as A.R. Desai, P.C. Joshi, Andre Beteille, Dhanagre, and others.

**Historical-Materialistic Approach**

**(a) A.R. Desai's approach**

Desai has applied the method of historical materialism to understand the phenomenon of social transformation. He has applied this method to the study of the Indian agrarian system. He has analysed the contemporary agrarian problems through the historical perspective (Desai, 1976: 20). The contemporary phenomena of agrarian deprivation and conflict has been explained by his materialistic concept of the history of the agrarian structure. He has interpreted the phenomenon of social transformation of the society in terms of a dialectical
approach on the basis of economic and historical data and the sociological findings. Since he has analysed the problems of rural social deprivation and the class conflict. His findings had a great utility in understanding the reality of the present agrarian situation through empirical observation because of his analysis of the problems that the structure of the agrarian system as well as the social structure of the rural society as such has been caused by agricultural development. Thus, it is basically a socio-structural problem.

According to Desai, the structure of deprivation has been affected by the structure of agrarian system and agrarian social structure. According to his own findings, in pre-British India, the agrarian structure was very simple. The peasantry owned and cultivated the land. Almost there was absence of ownership of land in the form of private property. Under the Mughals attempts in this direction did not affect the existing nature of land relations. Under this pattern of land relations, there has been almost no evidence of agrarian deprivation except in respect of the size of the landholdings. Since there was plenty of scope to become owner-cultivators, the sense of deprivation in respect of unequal distribution of land itself would not have arisen at all (Desai, 1976: 8-10).

Under the British rule in India, revolutionary changes in the rural setting have been brought about by the introduction of private property in the form of land. The agrarian structure was radically affected. The Britishers have altered, the entire agrarian structure in the land relations and in the relations of
production (Desai, 1976: 38). According to Desai, under the pressure of the new techno-economic relations created by the contemporary circumstances, the agrarian population was divided into various socio-economic groups, e.g., serfs, zamindars, tenants, peasant proprietors, landless labourers, share-croppers, and others.

Desai is of the view that the partiality in nature of the agrarian structure is biased, then it leads to deprivation. In India, it operates unevenly in favour of one class at the cost of the other, creating a sense of deprivation. It is generally accepted that the phenomenon of deprivation in agrarian system operates at various levels of the agrarian structure. It may be implicit in the pattern of landownership, utilization of scarce agricultural resource materials and the pattern of distribution of produce, etc.

In the opinion of Desai, the Government's agrarian policy based on the postulates of a mixed economy aggravates the major contradictions of agrarian society. It keeps the entire agrarian sector as a private enterprise. It strengthens the upper stratum to the disadvantage of the lower strata. It thereby creates a situation of greater tension and collision, and higher and higher harmonies and progressive growth of toiling section of rural society (Desai, 1961: 86).

In Desai's opinion, the agrarian structure has remained almost the same as it was before, or if there has been any change, that is the shift in economic axis, e.g., from feudal
hands to capitalist hands. Therefore, the question of elimination of the phenomenon of deprivation does not arise at all. However, the pattern of agrarian deprivation has undergone changes in the wake of post-independence agrarian reforms. Desai believes that deprivation has two major dimensions—economic and social. He reports that there is no structural change in respect of rural social deprivation. However, legislative compulsion and educative propaganda have caused a decline in the operation of social customs. It is a formal change, not a change of heart, which results from enlightened education, which is yet far from being achieved. In this respect, almost no change is discernible (Desai, 1961: 89).

Desai adopts the dialectical approach in understanding the present inequalities and conflicts. He opines that, there should be shift from capitalist to socialist.

(b) D.C. Joshi’s approach

He has studied the socio-structural changes in post-independence era of agrarian developmental programmes. He has not only chosen the agrarian class structure as the framework of his analysis of the phenomenon of agrarian deprivation and class conflict as its consequence, and has also seen very minutely the changes in the mode or production in agriculture and in the form of agrarian class structure (Joshi, 1969: 85).

He has related economic data with that of sociological inference. He has very minutely found out the weakness of the developmental schemes, which usually generating the elements of deprivation in an agrarian system. He clearly states that,
during the post-independence period, the present agrarian deprivations have cropped up from the very nature of agrarian planning, ranging from programmes of abolition of the zamindari to the provision of credit facilities and of modern farm technology (Joshi, 1975: 82). In other words, in the post-independence period, the agrarian deprivations have been emerging from the government's developmental schemes.

Joshi is of the view that considerably the agrarian developmental programme has not benefitted the people on the lower strata of rural society. Practically, they have not uplifted the poor to the desired level of development.

According to him, the different developmental programme and technological advancement have undoubtedly accelerated the pace of capitalistic mode of production on one hand and the elements causing obstacles in its fast growth. Indian agricultural economy has been divided into various sectors—capitalist, peasant owner-cultivator and tenant-sharecropping sectors, etc. However, they are not mutually exclusive categories (Joshi, 1970).

Growing disparity, the gap between 'agricultural growth and justice, between the programme and its implementation' have caused agrarian tension in the rural society (Joshi, 1970: 30). The process of tension has been more intensified as a result of the lag between changing farm technology and the provisions of peasant security.
Land reform measures like the abolition of zamindari, ceiling on land holdings and other tenurial reforms have not provided security to the people on the lower rungs of agrarian society and kept them in the clutches of poverty and made the rich, richer (Joshi, 1975).

In view of the prevailing circumstances, Joshi is of the opinion that the economic polarisation in the rural sector has become sharp enough, hence, some basic change in the agrarian system in favour of the poor landless workers is required (Joshi, 1966: 172). In the absence of such programmes to be undertaken by the government, the agrarian uprisings may become more violent and widespread hereafter (Joshi, 1971: 140).

According to Joshi, the present state of agrarian affairs has made the phenomenon of deprivation distinct, and disturbed the old traditional pattern of the permanent patron-client relationship between various agrarian classes. He has also pointed out the side-effects of the unbalanced developmental programmes on the agrarian social situations. It has vehemently affected the structure of relationships of the various agrarian classes (Joshi, 1975).

Joshi holds the view that the emerging agrarian circumstances have undoubtedly mitigated the significance of the old traditional feudal classes and they have encouraged the intermediate castes to come into prominence in land relations as well as in the power structure and as a result, perpetuation of imbalance in the rural sector started emerging. The
programmes of change were initiated against the land, credit and power monopoly of the traditionally dominant classes - the landlords, moneylenders and traders (Joshi, 1970).

Joshi's study highlights the fact that traditional pattern of relations among various agrarian categories such as the landlord and the tenant, the landowners and the landless laborers have undergone a change due to problem of insecurity caused by growing economic polarization. This situation was aggravated by modern technological development which resulted in that polarization.

(c) Daniel Thorner's approach

Daniel Thorner, a scholar of Marxist approach, has studied the agrarian structure and forms of agrarian class conflict. He has adopted dialectical approach to study the contemporary agrarian situations. He classified agrarian population in the economic perspective and consequently pointed out the realities of agrarian situation and provided a challenge to re-orient investigations for more empirical studies.

He has directly taken up the questions of ownership, control and use of landed property by different categories of rural people and has not given much significance to the heterogeneity of the caste hierarchy while explaining the problems of agrarian society. In fact, he understands the process of stratification discernible in the agrarian structure in the framework of concrete operations related to land. He
appears to be interested in understanding the pattern through which various categories of people are associated with land and also the pattern of sharing of produce by them.

Thorner's classification of agrarian population into three broad categories viz., Malik, Kisan and Mazdoor, based on the amount of actual labour contributed to the production process and the pattern of sharing the produce, is closer to the Marxian approach (Thorner, 1976: 30).

Again, following the Marxian approach, he divides the agrarian society into two classes. One who owns land but does not participate in the actual operation of the production process and gets the major share of the produce. The other who does not own any land but contributes labour to the production and gets minor share. The former one excessively exploits the latter and thus agrarian problems emerge. Marxists envisaged the pre-capitalist stage of the mode of production (Thorner, 1976: 40).

Land reforms could not be properly implemented in the right perspective due to vested interests of the feudal and biased agrarian policy and hence the lot of agrarian masses could not be ameliorated a bit (Thorner, 1976).

The Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Action Committee (UPZAC) was biased in the sense that it made provision for retaining the cultivating right of zamindars almost as such. With the implementation of abolition of zamindari eviction of tenants on one hand and zamindars area of seer and khudkasht on the other hand increased.
Thorner recommended to redistribute the income of land in such a way that the tiller should get the lion's share of it. Thus, the existing gap between the landowner and the tenant may be reduced.

Thorner observed that a major change is most likely to come into being among the peasantry under the protection of legal and moral awakening. He writes, "The Indian rural scene, as I read it, is ready to yield to any sustained pressure for change". All sections of rural society are either hopeful or fearful of change (Thorner, 1976).

Thorner visualises that feudalism is still surviving despite enormous changes in rural India. Though the feudals vehemently resist to retain their previous position, yet they cannot survive by depriving the masses of their due share of land. He expects that egalitarian relations would prevail on agrarian scene.

Structural-Functional Approach

Through the structural functional approach Andre Beteille has analysed the relationship between deprivation and the resultant agrarian tensions under the framework of agrarian class structure. He classified agrarian population within the confine of the hierarchial structure of the caste system.

Beteille has analysed the Indian agrarian socio-structural changes in the functional perspective. According to him, the sociological perspective is essentially relational. First of all, the existing groups should be identified and then their relationships in terms of a series of socially defined
rights and obligations be examined. Thus, it draws our attention on the relationship between the principles and the practices of social life (Beteille, 1974: 35).

Beteille hold views that conflict is not necessarily created due to deprivation and inequality. This has been proved by sociological researches. Unequal relations in the agrarian system have been legitimized by the structure of hierarchial framework of values of the caste system. The political components had awakened the lower classes that started superseding the obligations of the upper classes (Beteille, 1974: 112-113). It is the structural change in the agrarian social setting which now makes inequality more discernible and less tolerable (Beteille, 1974: 143).

Beteille's stand in respect to the emerging agrarian structure is functional from several points of view. He has outlined the basic structural features emerging in rural India (Beteille, 1974: 169). And he opines that it is a shift from one system to another, i.e., from a hierarchial system to a system of stratification.

He has observed the following changes in various components of rural society, increase in the impersonal as opposed to personal order (Beteille, 1974: 104), fading away the conceptual framework of the caste system and increasing popularity of the agrarian class structure.

Beteille has named the emerging an ambidextrous class "gentlemen farmer" in the rural setting. They are skilled in
manipulating both the new bureaucratic rules and the traditional personal contacts.

According to Beteille, caste and agrarian class are two different levels of realities having their own characteristic modes of organization and their own pattern of values (Beteille, 1974: 94). However, they are closely corresponding with each other (Beteille, 1974: 143). The studies of these two modalities can properly explain the pattern of inequality prevailing in rural India.

During the post-independence period, both the caste system and the agrarian system have undergone a fast change. Uniformity is enormously wanting in both of them. There is situation of uncertainty and conflict. It has caused chaos in the existing rural social structure (Beteille, 1974: 169). However, the emerging social order in rural India is not creating a new hierarchial order. When labourers and landowners confront each other in the political areas, they are considered to be contenders for power rather than a particular strata in hierarchial order (Beteille, 1974: 161).

According to Beteille, the structural changes in the socio-cultural components of the rural setting have enabled the poor villagers to perceive deprivation. In fact, unlike Marxian exponents, he has not adopted the economic framework for analysing the present agrarian situation.

The following viewpoint of Beteille shows his system analysis and his functional approach to the study of Indian
agrarian structure. "I shall confine myself to three inter-related systems, although their mutual relations are not always easy to perceive. At the broadest level, there is the agrarian social system comprising of a variety of classes and communities, and their mutual relations". Furthermore, Kisan Sabha may be viewed as having a particular structure of roles and a specified organisation of activities. Finally, the political party, closely related to the Kisan Sabha, and plays an important part in providing its leadership and formulating its programme of activities (Beteille, 1974: 112).

The sociological study of the Indian agrarian situation has developed in stages. In this context the socio-structural studies of the agrarian setting come into being later. The agrarian studies using the framework of the 'class structure' and its empirical analysis have evolved more recently, especially in post-independent India. The structural changes in the system of land relations and also in the mode of production in agriculture have been the major focus of sociological investigation.

Thus, new agrarian situations have been created by the challenges posed by land reforms and other political changes. This motivated the social researches to provide re-orientations to their approaches to understand these processes. Consequently, numerous studies regarding different aspects of agrarian society, either based on primary or secondary data, appeared during this period.
The problems regarding the agrarian setting, following by introduction of land reforms in the first decade were of quite different nature in comparison to those of pre-independence years. The agrarian situation of the 1960's has inspired more sociological investigation as it has been significant from several points of view. The land reform measures and the agrarian developmental programmes had started transforming the rural social structure. The introduction of new farm technology has been another important variable in this direction, which brought about basic changes in the mode of production in agriculture and agrarian relations.

From amongst the various approaches to agrarian studies, we regard the structural-functional approach to be relatively more viable in understanding the changing agrarian relations. However, rural communities in Haryana have been vibrant and it is not possible to understand these from this point of view. Similarly, identification of persistent group is not feasible under the forces of Green Revolution, land reforms, political awareness and rapid industrialization. Under these circumstances, it was considered proper to adopt exploratory design to discern changes in relationships.