CHAPTER 2

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The present study revolves round 'social ecology' and 'agrarian structure' in Bathipur in the Kosi Command area. Therefore, these two concepts and the perspective relevant for the present study have been elaborated in this chapter. The term 'ecology' seems to have almost as many meanings as there are ecologists. Ecology is one of the three major divisions of biology, the other two being morphology and physiology. The emphasis in morphology is on how organisms are made? In physiology, how they function? And in ecology, how they live? Ecology is a very simple term, a science that studies the interdependent, mutually reactive and inter-connected relationships between the organism and the environment on the one hand and among the organisms on the other hand.

The concept of ecology was originally formulated in 1869 by the German Zoologist Ernst Haeckel, to emphasize the relationship of living things. However, in this century, it was first adapted by Barker and Wright as early as in 1954 to understand the role of environmental
factors on human development. In the field of social sciences, it was adapted by geographers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and demographers. On realizing the importance of environmental variations, problems created by them and their impact on human settlement, quality of life, developmental problems, changes in fertility, mortality and morbidity, this concept acquired great importance during the 1980s.

2.1.1 Social Ecology

Social ecology emphasizes that the ecological crisis has its origins in social relations – in the way in which human beings have been organized into various economic and political institutions over the course of history. In this account, the very idea of dominating the natural world initially emerged with the social domination of human by human, that is, into hierarchies and exploitative classes. As the anthropological and historical records show, such domination – according to age, then gender, ethnicity, and race, as well as distinct economic classes – preceded and gave rise to the idea of dominating the biosphere. Social ecology adds that the mastery of some human social groups by others in early societies made it possible for
people even to conceive of mastering the natural world in the interests of social and finally class elites.

Social ecology is therefore opposed to all forms of hierarchy and domination, as well as to class exploitation and oppression. Even as we struggle to save the biosphere, it argues, we must strive to eliminate domination, be it in matters of race, gender, sexual identity, and class exploitation. But today the most immediate cause of the ecological crisis is the set of social relations known as capitalism. And the nation-state is essential to the system, constituting the apparatus by which capitalist societies maintain social control through a monopoly of the use of force and at the same time mollify social unease to a tolerable level by providing certain minimal social services.

Some ecological outlooks blame human beings generically for the ecological crisis, as if the species itself was tainted with some irreversible defect. By contrast, social ecology, as an expressly ecological humanism, sees human beings as the most differentiated and complex life-forms on the planet, without which neither consciousness nor freedom would exist. Potentially, at least, human
beings are the only possible source of an ethics of this planet, especially an ethics that calls for the preservation of the biosphere.

A social ecology first of all is ecology. There are strong communitarian implications in the very term ecology. Literally, it means the logos, the reflection on or study of the oikos, or household. Ecology, thus, calls upon us to begin to think of the entire planet as a kind of community of which we are members. It tells us that all of our policies and problems are in same "domestic" ones. While a social ecology sometimes loses its bearings as it focuses on specific social concerns, when it is consistent it always situates those concerns within the context of the earth household, whatever else it may study within that community. The dialectical approach of a social ecology requires social ecologists to consider the ecological dimensions of all "social" phenomena. There are no "non-ecological" social phenomena to consider apart from the ecological ones.

In some ways, the term "social" in "social ecology" is the more problematical one. There is a seeming paradox in the use of the term "social" for what is actually a strongly
communitarian tradition. Traditionally, the "social" realm has been counterposed to the "communal" one, as in Tonnies' famous distinction between society and community, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft. Yet this apparent self-contradiction may be a path to a deeper truth. A social ecology is a project of reclaiming the communitarian dimensions of the social, and it is therefore, appropriate that it seeks to recover the communal linguistic heritage of the very term itself. "Social" is derived from "socius" or "companion". A "society" is, thus, a relationship between companions – in a sense it is itself a household within the earth household.

The lineage of social ecology is often thought to originate in the mutualistic, communitarian ideas of the anarchist geographer Kropotkin. One can certainly not deny that despite Kropotkin's positivistic tendencies and his problematical conception of nature, he has an important relationship to social ecology. His ideas concerning mutual aid, political and economic decentralization, human-scaled production, communitarian value, and the history of democracy have all made important contributions to the tradition.
However, it is rooted much more deeply in the thought of another great anarchist thinker, the French geographer, Elisee Reclus. He has developed a far-ranging "social geography" that laid foundations of a social ecology, as it explored the history of the interaction between human society and the natural world, starting with the emergence of homo sapiens and extending to Reclus’ own era of urbanization, technological development, political and economic globalization, and embryonic international corporation.

Reclus envisioned humanity achieving a free, communitarian society in harmony with the natural world. His extensive historical studies trace the long record of experiments in cooperation, direct democracy and human freedom, from the ancient Greek polis, through Icelandic democracy, medieval free cities and independent Swiss cantons, to modern movements for social transformation and human emancipation. At the same time, he depicts the rise and development of the modern centralized state, concentrated capital and authoritarian ideologies. His sweeping historical account includes an extensive critique of both capitalism and authoritarian socialism from an
egalitarian and anti-authoritarian perspective, and an analysis of the destructive ecological effects of modern technology and industry allied with the power of capital and the state.

Many of the themes in Reclus' work, were developed further by the Scottish botanist and social thinker, Patrick Geddes, who described his work as "biosophy", the philosophy of the biosphere. Geddes focuses on the need to create decentralized communities in harmony with surrounding cultural and ecological regions and proposes the development of new technologies (neo-technics) that would foster humane, ecologically balanced communities. He envisions an organically developing cooperative society, based on the practice of mutual aid at the most basic social levels and spreading throughout society as these small communities voluntarily federate into larger associations. Geddes orients his work around the concepts of "Place, Work, and Folk", envisioning a process of incorporating the particularities of the natural regions, humane, skillful and creative modes of production and organically developing cooperative society, based on the practice of mutual aid at the most basic social levels and
spreading throughout society as these small communities voluntarily federate into larger associations. Geddes calls his approach a "sociography", or synthesis of sociological and geographical studies. He applies this approach in his idea of the detailed regional survey as a means of achieving community planning that is rooted in natural and cultural realities and grows out of them organically. He, thus, makes an important contribution to developing the empirical and bio-regional side of the social ecological tradition.

Many of Geddes' insights were later integrated into the expansive vision of society, nature and technology of his student, the American historian and social theorist Lewis Mumford, who is one of the most pivotal figures in the development of the social ecological tradition. Ramchandra Guha is certainly right when he states that "the range and richness of Mumford's thought mark him as the pioneer American social ecologists.

Most of the fundamental concepts attached to the term "social ecology" were borrowed from Mumford's much earlier ecological regionalism. The philosophical basis for Mumford's social analysis is what he calls an "organic"
view of reality a holistic and developmental approach he explicitly identifies as an "ecological" one. In accord with this outlook, he sees the evolution of human society as a continuation of a cosmic process of organic growth, emergence, and development. Yet he also sees human history as the scene of a counter-movement within society and nature, a growing process of mechanization.

Much like Reclus, before him, Mumford depicts history as a great struggle between freedom and oppression. In Mumford's interpretation of this drama, we find on one side, the forces of mechanization, power, domination, and division, and on the other hand, the impulse toward organism, creativity, love, and unification. The tragedy of history is the increasing ascendancy of mechanism, and the progressive destruction of our organic ties to nature and to one another. The dominant moment of history, he says, has been "one long retreat from the vitalities and creativities of a self-sustaining environment and a stimulating and balanced communal life. Mumford describes the first decisive step in this process is the creation in the ancient world of the Megamachine, in the form of regimented, mechanized massing of human labor-
power under hierarchical control to build the pyramids as an expression of despotic power. While the Megamachine in this primal barbaric form has persisted and evolved over history, it reemerges in the modern world in a much-more complex, technological manifestation, with vastly increased power, diverse political, economic and cultural expressions, and apparent imperviousness to human control or even comprehension. Mumford sees the results of this historical movement as the emergence of a new totalitarian order founded on technological domination, economic rationality and profit, and fueled by a culture of obsessive consumption. The results are a loss of authentic selfhood, the dissolution of organic community, and a disordered, destructive relationship to the natural world.

Mumford's vision of the process of reversing these historical tendencies is a social ecological one. Following Geddes and prefiguring bioregionalism, Mumford believes that the local community must be rooted in the natural and cultural realities of the region. Regionalism is not only an ecological concept, but also a political and cultural one, and is the crucial link between the most particular and local dimensions and the most universal
and global ones. “The rebuilding of regional cultures” Mumford says, “will give depth and maturity to the world culture that has likewise long been in the process of formation”. Mumford contends that an epochal process of personal and social transformation is necessary if the course of history is to be redirected towards a humane, ecological, life-affirming future. In this background, my village study of Bathipur may be looked upon as a village in the Mithila region of Bihar. Today, in India, ecology has become a major subject of study and found a conspicuous place in development planning on an interdisciplinary basis.

Ecology is the science of the mutual relationship of organisms to their environment, hence, ecological region. Human cultural environment stresses the mutual relationship of ‘people and place’ (as defined by geographers), of ‘people and people’ (as defined by sociologists). Without any qualification, the term environment is botanical in concept”.

“The word Ecology may be used as interchangeable with geographic environment and consequently ecological studies are often limited to the study of the direct effect of
environment on the material culture of the people with simple technologies. Social ecology is likewise concerned not only with direct response to environment where technology is unsophisticated, but also with the distribution and composition of groups necessary for the exploitation of natural resources, the indirect relationships which spring from these groupings and general conceptualization of the cosmos associated with the specific habitats".²

"Ecology is a study of the morphology of collective life in both its static and its dynamic aspects".³ Hawley has further elaborated and said that it is a study of the form and the development of the community in human population. However, from the ecological point of view, he went on to say that life is not an individual but an aggregate phenomenon.

"Human ecology deals with the spatial aspects of the symbiotic relations of human beings and human institutions".⁴

Ecological studies are extended to include modern urban studies, which are concerned with social
relationships of people in relation to the constraints and
the permissiveness of urban habitats, and in relation to
the environment or industry, its location, the limits it sets
to domestic and local relationships and the different types
of social links associated with various types of industrial
technological processes.  

India is one country, where least importance is given
to ecological considerations for the developments of
agriculture, industry, urbanization, utilization of land for
habitation and building of institutions. Consciousness of
social ecology is not a concern for many. There is no policy
to use land judiciously without affecting the ecosystem.
Wherever barren land exists, which can be used
economically and without destroying the ecosystem for
habitation, promoting growth centres and towns, we crowd
in and live around the limited fertile soil on river banks,
canals and even on forest land, which should have been
used for producing more agricultural goods because
availability of water is limited for expanding irrigation
facility. For instance, more than half of the forests have
been destroyed in Idukki and in the Wayanad districts for
human habitation instead of raising more cash crops for
improving the living standard. Rapid growth of population and increase in density constitute a major threat to the ecosystem in both developed and developing countries. When the population increases and the availability of habitable land become limited, people start encroaching upon forestland and start destroying it for their habitation. This process of deforestation has seriously affected the balance between human beings, flora and fauna in relation to the land. As a result of massive clearance of forests, which protected the ecosystem and provided normal rainfall, today the climate in Kerala has undergone drastic changes by way of reduction in rainfall and increase in temperature. The resultant consequences of human ecology are environmental degradation or deterioration. Its tremendous impact is well manifested on the life support system including air, water, land and energy.6

A conflict of interrelations between mankind and environment arose from the very start of social history due to the duality of human nature. On the one hand, man is inseparable from nature, having common biological basis with the entire animal and vegetable kingdom. On the
other hand, as distinctive from animals, he does not exist passively in nature but actively influences it, adapting it to his needs with the use of instruments of labour. Thus, man influences nature in the process of production of his means of living, not alone but joining hands with other people for common activities. This gives a collective character to the process of production and leads to the establishment of certain productive relations among people that manifest not only the mode of getting the means of living but also the mode of exchange and distribution of the produce.

The ecological problem is a multi-factorial phenomenon. It is not only the result of relations between nature and public production but also the result of influence of different circumstances of a ‘super-structural’ character such as politics, culture and a number of other factors with a degree of dialectical inter-relations between these factors changing due to precise natural and historical conditions.

First of all, even natural factors could not be taken as a passive element in the said interrelations. From the very beginning, nature was endowed with an ability of self-
regulation, a capacity to put up some kind of resistance to negative influence on the part of man. Besides, nature on its own part can actively influence social development, this influence being more perceptible — the weaker becomes the productive forces of a society. So, the condition of agriculture depends on the quality of the soil, availability of irrigation sources, the climatic peculiarities, the condition of industry, and partly on the lack or availability of particular mineral resources. Sometimes the influence of nature or of geographical conditions may be extremely negative.\(^7\)

From the view point of human ecology, population is a set of individuals in an interdependent system of activities (functions). From the human ecological point of view, “Population and organization (system) enter into the definitions of one another”.\(^8\)

Human-ecological orientation is primarily concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, the nature of the interdependence among these activities, the population involved in them, the technology used and the relationship of all these to the environment. Simple functions of the kind that
individuals can carry out are usually joined with other functions to more complex functions carried out by complex (higher-order) units, each requiring the services of two or more individuals. Complex units emerge when demand arises for outputs that cannot be produced by simpler units acting separately. Two broad classes of complex units are recognized in human ecology: corporate and categoric units. An assemblage of simple units that are functionally differentiated and symbiotically integrated constitute an organic-like or corporate unit. The family-household and the village are among the simplest corporate units. The label categoric unit is applied when the underlying interdependence is based on similarities of constituent units, guilds, clubs, and professional associations are examples.9

Since the 1980s, public awareness of environmental issues has become widespread throughout the western world. In the mainstream public debate, the relationship between nature and society seems fairly simple. Two autonomous spheres exist and it seems quite simple to investigate the relationship between them. Most discussions concern, on the one hand, the detrimental
effects of human activity upon nature and on the other, the social consequences of certain environmental changes.

There is an old, quite stable tendency in the history of society that can be empirically considered "ecological". Suffice it to mention farm production with its systems of irrigation and increasing the soil fertility, crop rotation, improvement of varieties of plants and breeds of animals. Man's allowance for and utilization of, ecological laws arose far back in antiquity. Prehistoric man already had empirical knowledge of ecological requirements in the quest for food and shelter. But he used ecological patterns without having either a clear concept of them as such or of the remote consequences of his interference with natural processes. The interaction of man and nature cannot be anything else than a relation of opposites with mutual unity and struggle. The man-nature relation because it is a relation of opposites, is a constant, irremovable factor in their interaction. In that sense, man and nature are incommensurate in relation to each other. Engels spoke of the necessity for such a development of society which would lead to 'the reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself'.

Marx advanced the thesis
that 'the nature which develops in human history is man's real nature'. Marx held that nature 'taken abstractly for itself, nature fixed in isolation from man is nothing for man'. It does not imply egoism of man towards nature. 'Making nature human', its 'humanizing' is not simply a need of social production. It is also the only possible mode of man's relation to the world around him; he can regard and perceive nature only through human eyes and human feelings. All ideals of relations with nature and all ideals of nature herself arising in minds and theoretical constructs are measured by human yardsticks.

Nehru built the dams (which he called the 'Modern Temples') and the fertilizer factories. It has been pointed out that in promoting larger dams, a number of myths have been perpetuating about their advantages overlooking the realities, which contract them. One of the myths is that the dams bring about a sharp rise in food production. The reality says that dams in most cases bring about a change in cropping pattern. The next is that dams lower the cost of food production. In reality, one of the results of this process is the penetration of fertilizer plants in large numbers and of the consequent chemical
input based agriculture. The myth of cheaper food production is shattered by the reality that this type of agriculture increases the cost of food production. Another myth is that dams are necessary medium to generate electricity for the rural community and its farmers. The reality is that most of the electricity generated by large dams is diverted to existing or newly built industrial units and urban centers.

To justify the dams, it has been argued that these are necessary to protect the environment, for example, by checking floods. Again, the reality is that large dam projects result in massive deforestation in the catchment area which leads to soil erosion and setting of silts in the reservoir. The construction of reservoir and canal system disturb it not destroy the water table or water sources, lead to serious water logging or salinity, or both.14

The history of the rise and development of civilization is linked with the environment and its transformation under the impact of man's activity with objects. In primitive time, man's practical activity with objects was insignificant compared with his biological consumptive activity. Only materials and instruments of labour given
by nature were involved in the material process. But through satisfaction of his elementary biological needs, primitive man widened his exchange with the environment which ultimately led to the rise of ecological contradictions.

In mediaeval times the mythological, philosophical approach to analysis of the relations between man and nature inherent in antiquity began to be replaced by a religio-philosophical doctrine; between man and nature, there appeared the 'Bible'. According to Judaic-Christian doctrine, God, having created the first man, made it impossible for 'things and creatures' to have any other purpose than service to man and his aims. An ecological interpretation is sometimes given in modern conditions to Biblical texts; the Biblical call to multiply and replenish the earth is treated by some writers as permission for unrestricted growth of population and a direct source and precursor of ecological contradictions.

In pre-Marxian philosophy, the interpretation of the subject/object relation had a number of contradictions: on the one hand, it developed the antique approach based on the idea of the unity of man and nature together with the
idea of counterpoising them; on the other hand, the concept of the unity of man and nature was fixed in the context both of materialist and idealist philosophy. And while the French materialists, say, when analyzing the relationship between man and the environment, based themselves on anthropological and ontological notions that got their logical completion in the anthropological principle (Feuerbach), the spokesman of German classical philosophy treated nature as a kind of rational synthesis (Kant) or a form of expression of the 'universal divine idea' (Hegel) uniting man and nature.

In the Marxian conception of the relation between society and nature, which rises above Hegel's 'historical realism', the basic category is labour which mediates, regulates and controls the exchange of matter between man and the physical environment. During production man is in a reciprocal relation with nature, because he acts on, and relies on the assistance of its forces.

Some Western theoreticians when analyzing the contribution of the founders of Marxism-Leninism to the theory of socio-ecological research find a certain identity in dialectical and ecological conceptions of the relations
between man and nature. But the Marxian conception of the relation of society and nature has not only revealed the sources of the crisis character of the present-day ecological situation and outlined the real ways of overcoming it, but has also substantiated the fundamental character of the ecological problem, linking its solution with realization of the idea of civilization's socio-economic and scientific and technical development.\(^\text{15}\) My village study of Bathipur may be viewed in this context.

**Man's Intervention in Natural Ecological Balance: Construction of Aswan High Dam in U.A.R.**

An important example of disruption of nature by man is of Aswan Dam in U.A.R. The entire economy of U.A.R. is tied to the ecology of river Nile. The river enters from the south carrying water, silt and nutrients from the Ethiopian high lands over 1500 miles. The Nile valley is the centre of agriculture and population in the Sahara desert, where population is largely dependent on agricultural production. The annual flooding was primarily beneficial as it restored soil, water supply and flushed salts from lower layer and kept the Nile valley one of the
most fertile land areas on earth in spite of continuous cultivation over thousands of years.

The Nile was dammed at several points. Aswan High Dam is the fourth in the series and created Nassar lake. No doubt, it added about a million acres to agricultural land but Aswan dam, which was intended to become a living monument to man’s ignorance of ecological effects of massive environmental intervention. The major consequences as given by Southwick in 1976 are:

i. There is no silt deposition during flood periods: all the silts go to lake, resulting in increased requirement of artificial fertilizers. Crop yields are coming down.

ii. The floodwater now does not flush the soil in delta and there is water logging.

iii. The silt free water below the dam flows faster and tends to reacquire normal silt load leading to erosion.

iv. The expansion of canal irrigation resulting in water logging has increased incidence of several diseases, e.g. malaria and schistosomiasis.
Evolution of a society has been subject of discussion of almost all social sciences right from the time of Morgan. Unfortunately these discussions have remained locked in the theoretical books on Anthropology. The new trend of theoretical discussions enters into the realism of Ecology in order to examine its role in changing the direction, gauging the speed and making the differences in social evolution through newer perspectives.

Man increases his knowledge of the biological environment on which his survival depends. His cultural accomplishments are cumulative. In each generation, he progresses towards a more secure system of supply. Man started dominating the organic community to which he sought adaptation. The extent of his role can be very well demonstrated by an incident in Africa. Contemporary hunter-gatherers in Africa were suddenly excluded from the forests where they had lived from prehistoric times because those forests were declared as Wild Life Research. This required radical adjustments in both plant and animal distribution to develop a new balance in the environment free of man. Man’s power of altering the environment can be quite drastic, but this power does not
cause any critical disequilibrium in the organic world till he takes to domestication of plant and animal.

Further, the role of favourable ecology including large tracts of fertile alluvial soil and navigable rivers are important. The Nile, Euphrates, Tigris and the Indus each recorded the rapid growth of culture on their banks, whereas the bank of Danube in Europe remained studded with strong tribal villages with chiefdoms until the metal users from farther east, took them over. The reasons for this, has to be sought in the fact that metal users were already invading Danubian tract through the Agean coasts when the Neolithic villages had started settling in Austrian Region. Yugoslavia and Hungary did see the rise of a strong agricultural society, but the impact of the arrival of powerfully organized pastoral groups from Ukarania was considerably felt by them. As a result of these complex interactions the subsequent developments in these regions could not be profession based.

Man has always tried to get the maximum out of his environment. With the onset of surplus economy, man had consciously or unconsciously tried to enter into the 'power proxy' system. The power made him make the majority
work and put their surplus at his disposal. This newly
developed power concept being limitless in extent could
always put tremendous stress on the dynamic equilibrium
of the environment. Primarily because of this need to
sustain power that man has long surpassed the potential
of his basic resources.

Ecological role in explaining human culture has been
pointed out by environmentalists from as early as the 19th
century. Their views, however, did not have a smooth go
for a long time until pre-historians started emphasizing
the role of ecology on more substantial ground.

Julian H. Steward, an anthropologist from Illinois,
developed his ecological concept for explaining cultures of
hunting bands. The concept was further to demonstrate
relationship of settlement patterns and ecology of the
western Pueblo. Finally, in his famous work entitled
"Theory of Culture Change", Steward tried to develop the
methodology for 'determining regularities of form, function
and process which recur cross culturally among societies
found in different cultural areas'. As against the unilinear
evolutionists, who postulated that all human societies
passed through similar developmental stages, Steward
proposed a multilinear evolution as the basic assumption. Alfred Kroeber, Lewis Morgan and Leslie White had earlier conceived of culture as a 'layered cake', technology being the bottom layer, social organisation in the middle and ideology forming the top layer. Steward added environment to the cake and also demonstrated how culture changed in the process of adaptation of the environment. Steward called the environment relevant to human culture as Cultural Ecology and further added that this phenomenon led to similar adaptation in other cultures with similar environment. The main thesis of Steward was that cultural ecological adaptations constituted a creative process and this, he used both as a research problem and also as a method of interpretation.

Human geographers have been studying population variation and ecological adaptability from as early as 1891 but their studies were not used for the analysis of culture analysis until the first half of 19th century. Population as a part of social environment has been examined by some anthropologists during recent years (Angel, Kroeber, Birdsell and Polgar). Fekri A. Hassan's work is accepted as one of the most
rewarding studies on population factors as part of cultural ecology. These studies successfully demonstrate how ecology and culture determine population size, its growth, or for that matter its density.

Bhattacharya⁶⁶ says that studies in agriculture basically refer to man-to-soil relationship which directly influences man-to-man relationship. Ecology has a significant role in the feasibility of intensification of agriculture and hence in the creation of a surplus. Increase of social complexity has an indirect relationship with ecology. Three primary variables, viz., population growth, intensification of subsistence and increase of social complexity are inter-related and have been changing each other in a triangular relationship ever since man adopted settled economy. Ecology is the circle, which encompasses the triangle with its three points lying on the circumstances. Technological status of the community is the radius of the circle. Any change in the population density will require changes in agricultural intensification and social complexity to keep the triangle an equilateral one. In other words, any change in these factors eventually requires a change in the culturally defined
ecological boundary which may be made possible only by changing technology to intensify control over a larger aspect of the environment. In case the community is incapable of doing so, migration occurs, and hence, another circle takes birth within a different ecology.

Netting\textsuperscript{27} summarizes available information on agricultural communities with a view to forming a cultural ecology of agriculture. He calls his summary the \textit{Agrarian Ecology}. His work demonstrates that the adoption of any given type of agriculture may not entirely be explained as a mere stage in evolution. It may as well be a conscious choice of a community depending on its social and ecological variables. The concept 'social ecology' described above has been of tremendous help in viewing it my study of Bathipur.

\textbf{2.1.2 Agrarian Social Structure}

Another concept in my study is 'agrarian social structure' which need elaboration. It is primarily an institutional frame-work of agriculture which includes the structural distribution of land holdings; the nature of land ownership; means and motives of production; mechanism
of agricultural marketing and financing; and the services provided. Variation in any of these constituent elements causes variation in this institutional framework.

Studies have considered the ownership of land holding so as to explain the changes in agrarian structure. Moreover this aspect has been of much economic and social significance in rural communities. In Indian social system, it is not only the economic aspect but also the basis of social stratification, power structure, family organization and belief systems.

In the study of agrarian social structure, the main concern is with patterns of inequality and conflict as these arise from the ownership, control and use of land. Although most of the sociologists have sought to understand rural India in the frame of reference provided by caste, it is equally important to examine the same reality in terms of the ownership, control and use of land.

The field of agrarian relations has been neglected by sociology and social anthropology in the recent phase of the development of these disciplines in India. It is not that there were no attempts by sociologists and social
anthropologists to study problems in this field in the past. But the research by scholars like RadhaKamal Mukherji\textsuperscript{28} and Ramkrishna Mukherji\textsuperscript{29} in the period before independence failed to generate a sustained interest in the subject.

There is highly differentiated nature of village communities in India. This differentiation has so far been viewed, at least by anthropologists, largely in terms of caste but there are other ways of viewing it. Very often the Indian village is clearly differentiated in terms of the ownership, control and use of land so that in addition to peasant proprietors, subsisting mainly by family labour, there are other social classes both above and below.

The problems centering round the management of land are of two kinds; those dealing with technological arrangements and those dealing with social arrangements. It is on this basis that the traditional concerns of anthropology with material culture on the one hand and social organisation on the other can be usefully combined in studies dealing with the utilization, control and ownership of land.\textsuperscript{30}
The ecological setting of Indian agriculture is highly variable. There are areas of heavy rainfall and areas with hardly any rainfall. There are irrigated and unirrigated areas. Again, there are flat deltaic areas and areas of undulating topography. The different regions show different patterns of diurnal and seasonal variation in humidity, temperature and sunlight. All these factors have a direct bearing on the kinds of crops that can be cultivated and the technology employed in their cultivation. There are obvious differences in both ecological conditions and technological arrangements between areas of wheat cultivation in north India and wet paddy cultivation in east and south India. To take one example, the important hydrological problems in the former are generally those of irrigation whereas in the latter there are often problems of both irrigation and drainage. There are other differences also between these areas: in population density, degrees of social inequality and rates of economic growth.

In a complex society such as India’s, there are different modes of productive organization. The social organization of production reflects a particular pattern of
work and a particular pattern of property rights. Broadly speaking, three main patterns of productive organization are found to exist. The first is based on family labour, the second on hired labour and the third on tenancy conceived in a broad sense.

Where production is organized on the basis of family labour not all members of the family do the same kind of work. Within the family, the sex-based division of labour may be quite different from one region to another and for different crops in the same region. The manner in which members of a family divide their tasks when they work on their own land may be different from what they do when they work as share croppers or someone else's land.

Tenancy and share cropping introduce relations between at least two different families, those of the landowner and of the tenant or sharecropper. The two sets of people are linked together by rights, duties and obligations which show a wide range of variation. Similarly, the relations between landowners and wage labourers may vary considerably.
A consideration of the different modes of productive organization leads to an important aspect of social stratification. For talking about production based on family labour, wage labour and tenancy, we are talking also about landlords, owner-cultivators, tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. These categories and their mutual relations constitute the heart of what may be described as the agrarian hierarchy. And this agrarian hierarchy is one of the most crucial features of India's rural social system.

The two major frameworks in use for the understanding of rural society in India relate to caste on the one hand and to class on the other. Caste has been the major preoccupation of social anthropologists and sociologists and class has been object of attention of agricultural economists. But caste and class represent different kinds of facts and that the concept of social stratification cannot be meaningfully applied to either. European sociologists often distinguish between classes and strata and some of them tend to define social class and social stratification in mutually exclusive terms. Thus, Dahrendorf observes:
“Class is always a category for purposes of the analysis of the dynamics of social conflict and its structural roots, and as such it has to be separated strictly from stratum as a category for purposes of describing hierarchical systems at a given point of times”.31

Louis Dumont, who has made great contribution to the understanding of caste has questioned its usefulness as a form of social stratification. He says

“If, like many contemporary sociologists, we were content with a label borrowed from our own societies, if we confined ourselves to considering the caste system as an extreme form of “social stratification”, we could indeed record some interesting observations, but we would by definition have excluded all possibility of enriching our fundamental conceptions...”32

Ossowski’s contribution to the subject has shown convincingly that more than one scheme may legitimately be used (and was in
fact used by Marx) for the understanding of class. For the rest, it can be said that caste and class in rural India share certain important properties in common and that can be meaningfully studied within a single framework.

The agrarian societies of south Asia are generally marked by great inequalities of wealth, power and status. Some authors have attributed such inequalities to the poverty of these nations. This social inequality has both a material and an ideological aspect. These two aspects reinforce each other to a considerable extent, although the social value placed on inequality is not determined by its material basis at every point or in every detail.

The most important material basis of inequality in these societies is the distribution of land. Myrdal has observed “Particularly in the South Asian rural setting, inequality is in fact mainly a question of land ownership – with which are associated leisure, enjoyment of status, and authority. Income differences are considered less significant”.34
Even for India it is not possible to give authentic figures for the ownership and distribution of land and for the other South Asian counties, the picture is even less clear. But certain facts are beyond question: there is small class of people who own or control much of the land; there is a numerically significant class of landless agricultural labourers; and tenancy relations of a bewildering variety are widely practised even if discouraged by the law.  

The hierarchical idiom plays an important part in all agrarian societies where considerations of status reach into virtually every sphere of life. The relations between 'lord' and 'peasant' are governed by certain fundamental orientations in which social inequality is accepted as one of the givens of the human conditions and not infrequently as something valued and desirable. Even agrarian societies have differed greatly in the extent to which they have legitimized social hierarchies and developed ideologies of inequality. Indian societies went further in this regard than perhaps any other society.  

The study of social class in rural India has not received the same direct attention that has been given to the analysis of caste in Indian society. There has hardly
been any attempt to develop a systematic theory of class in response to the large body of available empirical material describing the relations centering round the ownership of land.

In sociological sense, classes are the units in a system of relationships. As Daniel Thorner rightly observed, ‘In order to describe the relations among classes, we must agree on the nature of classes. Or, more correctly in order to describe the nature of the classes, we must set forth the relationships obtaining among them. The agrarian structure is, after all, not an external framework within which various classes function, but rather it is the sum total of the ways in which each group operates in relation to the other groups’.36

In other words, the study of class has to deal with two sets of problems which are problems of distribution and of interrelation; or, in Ossowski’s terminology, one has to distinguish between ‘composition’ and ‘structure’.37

Agrarian class relations have also been analysed by Marxists and they do not confine their interests to problems of distribution but, on the contrary, attach
primary significance to the nature of relations between classes. But for the majority of the Marxist writers, these relations are not objects of investigation: they are given by definition, as relations of conflict. The way in which they are defined is determined generally by a particular conception of the inherent contradiction between the techniques of production and the relations of production.

Karl Marx viewed society as a process, characterized by perpetual conflict. Though his notion of social structure is devoid of organic overtones, nevertheless, he viewed it as a 'complex whole' of interrelated and interdependent social institutions. The relations of production and means of production constitute "the economic structure" or "mode of production" is the real basis (infrastructure) on which is erected "superstructure" or (combination of law, polity, religion art, etc.). Any kind of change in infrastructure brings the change in super-structure.

Marx emphasized on processural and historical analysis of social structure. He argued that economic structure is sustained over a period of time unless it is shaken either by emerging means of production or by
inherent contradiction. Both of these forces help the class of "have-nots" to come out of "false consciousness" and start struggle for overthrowing existing economic structure. For Marx, the struggle (class struggle) is perpetual phenomenon unless contradictions are removed. It is the main source of bringing about change in society.  

Marx's reflections on Indian society are based on secondary sources of information. He thought in terms of Occidental and Oriental dichotomy as he distinguished between "Feudalism" and "Asiatic mode of production". In feudal Europe, for him, there were classes, class conflict and thus, radical changes. While in Asiatic mode of production, these phenomena did not exist. For, there was no private property and so no indigenous mechanism of social change. So these countries were dependent on the exogenous sources of change.  

Marx argued that India had a long past but no history, because he found the dynamic force of clash of interest absent in Hindu society. The Asiatic mode of production was seen by him embodied in age-old tiny village settlements, built around the self sustaining unity
of agriculture and craft manufacture that comprised the caste system.\textsuperscript{39}

According to Marx, the inflexible and isolated village community and ritually legitimized "occupational structure" made Indian social structure rigid. In such a "social structure", traditions and superstitions restrained human mind and human labour became stagnated and undignified. Thus, for Marx, village community and caste system were the decisive impediments to Indian progress and power.

In agrarian social structure, who owns how much land and what use, he makes of it to control or provide for others are important questions for those who live by agriculture. This question becomes central in a society where land is highly concentrated among some and in short supply among others. Most people are aware that wealth, power and privilege are associated with land-ownership. Further, landowners and the landless often have different interests. The system of groups and categories centering round the ownership and use of land is neither simple nor uniform throughout the country.
Thorner has suggested a threefold division of the agricultural population into Malik (proprietor), kisan (working peasant) and mazdur (labourer).^40

Historically, the concept of class has been closely associated with the institution of property, although it has been defined independently of property, in terms of conflict.^41 Defining class in terms of the ownership, control and use of property helps us to identify some of the important features of those societies in which land is a fundamental basis of social cleavage. To develop an adequate understanding of agrarian relations in India, we must first come to terms with the complexities as they exist in particular social fields. For no general theory of social classes can as yet tell exactly what to expect within a given historical and institutional setting.

Indian agrarian society represents the extremes of privilege and deprivation. Caste has been particularly important in the social system centering round agricultural production especially the control and use of land.^42 Because of its highly structured character, changes in the caste system are often easier to identify than in other hierarchical systems. The dissolution of
caste provides crucial evidence regarding the nature and direction of change.

The objective basis of the traditional hierarchy lay in the unequal distribution of a number of factors, the most important among these being property and income. In agrarian societies, in general, the ownership and control of land constitute the immediate sources of economic power. In a traditional rural economy, the landowners not only have higher incomes than the landless but the traditional ties of dominance and dependence enable the former to control lives of the latter in a multitude of ways. Within India itself, there was enormous diversity in the extent of concentration of land and in the relations between landowners on the one hand and tenants and agricultural labourers on the other. The land reform has been designed to bring about some uniformity in tenurial conditions at least within each state of India but the distinction between landowners and the landless continues to be important everywhere.

In some parts of India, particularly in the eastern and southern regions, sharecropping is not uncommon even after land reforms and the class of landless labourers
might sometimes constitute as much as a third of the village population. Thorner had the following observations to make after the abolition of feudal estates: 'At the top are the bhumihaps, below them the sirdars, and still further down the asamis. At the bottom of the heap, remain the mass of sharecroppers and landless labourers.'

Beteille is of the view that in large parts of India, the landowner continues to be known as malik or manib. These words denote ‘owner’ or ‘master’ and by tradition, the malik has mastery not only over the land but also over the men who work on it. The relations of tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers to their malik continue to be governed in many areas by the traditional marks of deference. One important feature of the traditional hierarchy based on land ownership was the inverse relationship of the latter with the performance of labour, in particular manual labour. Large landowners could afford to abstain from manual labour. Inequalities in the distribution of land are closely related to inequalities of income. In addition to inequalities of wealth and status, the rural social system is also characterized
by inequalities in power and authority. By and large the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers continue to be at the bottom of the power hierarchy.

Inequalities of property, income privilege and power may be cumulative or dispersed. The characteristic feature of agrarian societies is that these elements tend to be cumulative in them, creating thereby a powerful ideological basis for the recognition of social inequality as part of the natural order. In a system of cumulative inequalities, privilege, property and power are combined in the same individuals and the socially underprivileged are also economically and politically deprived. In societies of the other kind—which have dispersed rather than cumulative inequalities— the boundaries between strata are less sharp and social mobility is more frequent and widespread. However, there is some evidence of the decline of social inequality both as a pattern of organization and as a system of values although the evidence is not equally clear everywhere.  

In the nineteenth century and earlier, there was very little buying and selling of land in the Indian village. Title to land was acquired either by a family or a group of
families clearing an area for cultivation and settling on it, or by royal grants made usually to members of the upper castes and their families. In this way, it tended to remain frozen within the dominant caste in the village. Members of other castes were not easily able to acquire these rights since land was rarely on the market and inheritance was virtually the only mode of acquiring it.

The economic changes introduced by British rule brought land into the market although transfers of land did not take place on large scale everywhere. In those areas where land transfers were frequent, the social composition of the village landowners changed a great deal within a few decades.

The growing dissociation between caste and land ownership and the social differentiation of the local land owning group can be best illustrated by considering the case of Tanjore district in South India. In this district, there were many villages, locally described as agraharams, which were dominated by communities of land owing Brahmins. These communities lived in a separate part of the village, enjoyed the privileges of both caste and land ownership and constituted the traditional village elite.
Since the start of the century, many Brahmins had left the village and sold their land, sometimes to their former non-Brahmin tenants. The *agraharams* have become depleted and the present landowners, including non-Brahmins as well as Brahmins are in many ways less cohesive and less exclusive than those of the past. Beteille has shown similar change in many areas where the local landowners belonged to particular non-cultivating castes such as Brahmins and kayasths.\textsuperscript{47}

Even when lend transfers did take place, the social composition of the land owning groups was not significantly altered. Thus, marked changes in the actual association between caste and land ownership at the village level remained confined to particular areas. But with the introduction of adult franchise and of village councils, land ownership and traditional status have ceased to be the only bases of power in the village. With the changes in the political system, attitudes have also been changing. But power has rarely gone to the landless people. What has happened is that the cultivating landowners have gained somewhat at the expense of the non-cultivating owners.
Large land estates were a characteristic feature of the zamindari areas, particularly U.P., Bihar and Bengal. The zamindari system was in many ways a creation of British rule. During its regime of roughly a hundred and fifty years, the zamindari system created an elaborate hierarchy of rights in the land and corresponding hierarchy of social groups. There were not only big and small zamindars but different degrees of sub-infeudation. The hierarchy of zamindars was based on a complex set of social and historical factors and it did not always correspond to the caste hierarchy although the big zamindars, particularly in east U.P., Bihar and east Bengal, tended to be predominantly upper caste. Given the extremes of inequality involved in landlord-tenant relations, much emphasis was placed on land reforms in India almost immediately after the independence. The first phase of land reform was concerned with the abolition of the zamindari system. The main objective of this was to eliminate 'intermediary' interests and to bring 'cultivators' into direct relationship with the state. But the zamindari abolition did not and could not create a socially homogeneous class of cultivators nor did it do away with sharecropping and other forms of tenancy.
However, the land reforms did bring some changes by creating a less hierarchical agrarian structure. The zamindars, who had occupied a position of unchallenged supremacy in the economic, political and cultural life of rural India, remained no longer in that position. The change in status from zamindar to ‘capitalist farmer’ was forced by legal and economic circumstances with massive reduction in the size of estates, the only way in which some landowners could remain economically viable was by taking a more direct interest in agriculture.

The relationship between landowner and agricultural labourers will remain an important one throughout the country for many years to come. Given the high pressure of population on the land and its low rate of transfer to industry, there is little likelihood of any radial change in the social and economic situation of agricultural labourers in most parts of the country. The land reforms hardly touched them and their chances of developing an effective organization for collective bargaining also appear to be slender. However, Beteille suggests two important conditions under which the economic and social position of agricultural labourers may be improved. The first, is
through an increase in the demand for labour outside of agriculture as happened in Ludhiana and other district in the Punjab. The second is by means of a powerful organization of agricultural labourers with the support of a political party as happened in Tanjore district.

It is argued that in India, the older system of inequalities based on caste is being replaced by a class system not only in cities but also in rural areas. Even though the social hierarchy has become more amorphous as a consequence of the developmental measures, it is still possible to identify both its top and its bottom.

The agrarian system evolved during the British regime in India was based either on the zamindari or the Ryotwari type of land settlements; the mahalwari system was another variety of land system but it closely resembled the zamindari pattern of settlement, and the difference was mainly in the mode of revenue assessment on the land. All the three systems generated more or less a similar agrarian class structure in the villages. The zamindari system had the zamindars, tenants and agricultural labourers as the main agrarian classes. The ryotwari system consisted of two types of peasants: the
ryot-landlord and the ryot-peasants. The agrarian class structure everywhere in India had a feudal character; the zamindars were tax gatherers and non-cultivating owners of land, the tenants were the real cultivators often without security of land tenure and the agricultural labourers in most parts of the country had the status of bonds-men and hereditary attached labourers. With the support of the British colonial power, this highly exploitative system continued to persist despite frequent peasant unrests and movements.

Most formulations of class are either 'interactional' or 'attributional' or mixed ones. The interactional formulations in most cases have a Marxist theoretical frame. Daniel Thorner uses the term 'malik', 'money-lender', and 'mazdur' for the chief agrarian classes.

'Bourgeoisie', 'capitalist-type landowners', 'rich peasants', 'landless or land-poor peasantry' and 'agricultural labourers' are the class categories mentioned by Kotovsky in his analysis of agrarian classes in India. Gadgil mentions two important classes in the countryside, 'the substantial landlord' and 'trade-money-lender', who according to him, dominate over the rural economic
system and exploit the cultivators\$52. An important feature of all these class categories is their emphasis on the processes of class interaction, dependence-independence and conflict.

The attributional class categories used for the analysis of agrarian classes in India are of two types; first, those that use households or holdings as units for classification, and secondly, those where regions, states or size of holdings, etc. are bases for classification. Most classifications used from the census records are of this type (S.C. Gupta\$53, K. Ghosh\$54, S.M. Shah\$55, and U.Mehta\$56). Another from is found in the measurement of ‘construction ratios’ of holdings for various regions to demonstrate inequalities in the distribution of land holdings. The concentration ratio ranges from zero to one; it is zero when all holdings are equally distributed in size and it is one when all holdings are concentrated into one hand only.

The significant trends of agrarian class structure in India following the ‘interactional’ methods are: (1) that there is a wide gap between land-reform ideology and actual measures introduced for land reforms.
Consequently, socialist transformation in the class structure of the villages has not taken place; (2) this lag could partly be explained by the class character of the Indian political and administrative elites, who are resistant to the needed radical reforms; (3) the existing land-reforms have initiated a process by which the security of tenure and economic prosperity of the rich peasantry has increased but condition of the small peasants both in respect of economic level and tenurial stability has deteriorated; (4) the feudalistic and customary types of tenancy have declined and it has been replaced by a capitalistic form of lease-labour or wage labour agrarian system; (5) a new class of rich middle-stratum of peasantry has come into being and not all of them are from among the ex-zamindars; (6) the class inequalities between the top and the bottom levels of the classes have increased rather than decreased; (7) the benefits of land-reforms have so far not gone as much to the agricultural workers or even as to ex-zamindars as to the emergent middle peasantry; (8) as a result of these contradictions in the agrarian class structure, the tensions in the rural social system have increased; and (9) the sociological process dominant in the current class
transformations in the villages involves ‘embourgeoisement’ of some and ‘proletarianization’ of many social strata\textsuperscript{57}.

The process of class mobility and transformation following the agrarian reforms and other measures has been described by sociologists. The rise of middle-class peasantry into new landlords in parts of the country is described as ‘embourgeoisement’ of these social strata. K.L. Sharma studying six villages in Rajasthan from the viewpoint of changes in social stratification has found that in some villages, not only the agricultural labourers but quite a few of the ex-landlords have slided down in class-status, almost to the extent of what he calls the state of ‘proletarianization’. As opposed to this, the neo rich peasantry has replaced the older landlords emerging as the new rural bourgeoisie\textsuperscript{58}.

Using a mobility model for analysing the changing class position in villages, Beteille observes that as opposed to the past summation of the class, caste and power elements of statuses in the same group, there are now signs of these attributes being dispersed among different groups in a non-cumulative fashion. It is not
unusual for a member from the upper caste to have a lower class status today. The change from ‘cumulative’ to ‘dispersed’ inequalities represents an important element in the changing social stratification.

Matin has studied the changing agrarian relations, which is based on historical analysis with specific reference to the Gondwara circle and Pranpur in Raj Darbhanga in Mithila, Bihar. Gondwara is located in the old Purnea district in Bihar. Historical data for the Gondwara circle and a village study of Pranpur constitute the main body of his study. For analytical purposes, he has divided his study into two phases. Phase I covers the period before the Zamindari abolition, i.e. 1950 dealing especially with the first half of the twentieth century. The emphasis is on the Gondwara circle, one of the 20 circles of raj Darbhanga, in Mithila. The sources for this phase are archival as well as secondary. Phase II covers the second half of the twentieth century, especially after the Zamindari abolition with greater emphasis on a village study in Pranpur. Pranpur was one of the 5244 villages in the Gondwara circle under the control of the raj Darbhanga. Since the 1970s and 1980s social scientists
including sociologists and social anthropologists, have articulated their interest in studying agrarian social classes and the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture. Within this discussion, there has been a high degree of disagreement on the question of how to identify agrarian classes. Almost all of them agree that identification of agrarian social classes is a complex task.

The purpose of Matin’s study is three fold. First, to examine the problems faced in identifying agrarian social classes. In an examination of changing agrarian relations and emerging agrarian classes, the task of identifying agrarian classes remains central. The second purpose of his study is that it examines the issue involved in the efficiency and inefficiency of sharecropping. There is a widespread view that sharecropping is an inefficient form of contract for cultivation. But, on the contrary, Cheung has advocated in favour of the efficiency of sharecropping. Thirdly, the antagonism between the owners of the means of production and non-owners must have been crucial in some societies. However, in the case of Mithila, bureaucracy in the form of raj amlas (‘raj’ means a principality, a kingdom and ‘amlas’ means agent, retainer
of land) has played a crucial role, in mediating the conflicts between the raj Darbhanga and raiyat and various types of tenants at the time of agrarian crises in the first half of the twentieth century.

Utsa Patnaik defines agrarian social classes mainly on the basis of labour exploitation in her E-criterion model. The E-Criterion model has been developed basically to identify peasant differentiation at an empirical level. The debate on peasant differentiation goes back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This model is interesting but has limitations. Patnaik points out that the process of peasant differentiation in India is neither similar to Russia, as discussed by Lenin, nor similar to China, as understood by Mao. The reality is that the Indian situation approximates some of the problems of Russia and some of the problems of China. This synthesis (applicable in India) has been explained at the theoretical level of (a) labour-exploitation (prevalent in Russia) and (b) rent-exploitation (prevalent in China) at the time of the revolutions in each respective country. This E-criterion model therefore synthesizes both of the elements appropriate to the Indian situation. It has been noted that
the E-criterion model is not the most accurate one for studying class status. Patnaik\textsuperscript{62} claims that it is a closer approximation and is a more accurate single index of class status than any used so far.

The existing concentration of the means of production implies that the peasantry is highly differentiated economically into more or less distinct classes. The size of holding by itself is not sufficient to indicate class status accurately at the empirical level. Other factors are also relevant: the size and composition of the family, the cropping pattern, the intensity of cultivation and the level of technique at which labour is combined with the other existing means of production. All these would affect and be affected by differences in the organization of holding.

Therefore, size of holding as an index is not satisfactory. However, she suggests that while no single index can capture class status with accuracy, the use of outside labour relative to the use of family labour, would be the most reliable single index for categorizing the peasantry\textsuperscript{63}.  

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Explaining why labour exploitation is the most reliable single index for categorizing the peasantry, she mentions first those who concentrate the means of production in their hands, rely on exploiting the labour of others while those with little or no means of production oblige to work for others with some exceptions. Secondly, the intensity of cultivation and level of technique are reflected in the total quantum of labour used.

She observes that this model itself is an approximate index of class status: because neither exploitation in product and credit markets, nor the fact of non-agricultural sources of income is taken into account\(^6\).

She further observes that the E-criterion is designed to bring out the fact that different classes within the peasantry necessarily enter into relations with each others in the production process, either through direct hiring in and hiring out of labour or through the renting-in and renting-out of land and the exact position of an individual in the system of production relations depends primarily upon his initial resources position.
The poor peasants and labourers are obliged to work for others and the 'others' who appropriate their labour are the rich peasants, capitalists and landlords.

However, there are some limitations of this model in grasping the complexities of agrarian social classes especially in the Indian context. Caste and cultural ethos are quite important in any class analysis of Indian agrarian studies. Thus, agrarian social classes are not only based on labour exploitation. Caste and cultural ethos also play a significant role in the formation of social classes.

Matin has shown that Mithila has experienced a greater degree of inequality in terms of land ownership before the Zamindari abolition. This continues even after, Zamindari abolition in Bihar. Zamindari abolition and subsequent land reforms Acts have not reduced the disparity between the 'landowners' and the 'landless'. Zamindari abolition did not end inequality in land ownership, its nature changed. Pranpur even shows a picture of greater inequality at the village level in the 1980s than the district and the province. However, there
is shifting trend in land ownership evident. This change is generating conflict between caste groups.

Matin has tried to show that the peculiar ecological conditions of Purnea might have been the reason for unique land tenures, like gutchbandi. Gutch was a tenure under which each tenant was at liberty to undertake the cultivation of land as much as he could cultivate. The land, which he, thus, took possession of, came to be denominated as gutch. The area under it was called gutchbandi and its holder was known as a gutchdar. This tenure was prevalent in an area where density of population was low.

It is also clear that high castes were less in number than the non-high castes in the district under his study. However, the former controlled the larger area of land.

During the period before Zamindari abolition the history of raj Darbhanga clearly shows that tremendous amount of land was concentrated in high castes. It also shows that within high castes, one family controlled substantial areas of land. It is also clear that land ownership in the district was under the control of mainly
half a dozen families. This pattern of land control and land ownership inequality has slightly declined after the abolition of zamindari.

Rent was the predominant form of appropriation of surplus from the real producers. It is also noticed that revenue rent ratio was at its peak at the time of permanent settlement. It gradually declined by the 1920s and 1930s.

There are eighteen castes in Pranpur. These castes have been grouped into three categories of Forward, Backward and Scheduled castes for analytical purposes. Land groups have been categorized into six. Change is noticed in the caste background of the landowners. During the period before Zamindari abolition, high castes (forward) were predominantly the landowners. But during the period following the zamindari abolition, backward castes have started replacing them.

The various case studies reflect the complexities of agrarian relations and also suggest the unusual significance of indebtedness of poor and middle peasants. Most of them inherit debt and are perpetuated by
unfavourable circumstances like bad crops or social practices like shradh-dowry, etc.

Patnaik’s model has greater relevance for the period after the zamindari abolition. However, even, during this phase, the picture emerging from Pranpur raises doubts about the appropriateness of her model in studying the peasant differentiation in Mithila. Labour-exploitation (in terms of family labour in relation to hired labour) is a crucial one in the E-criterion model. But caste background undermines this scheme. In Pranpur, this model was inadequate in capturing the complex realities of agrarian classes. Pranpur undermined the significance of exploitation in terms of family labour in relation to hired labour exploitation. Forward versus backward castes and the intermediary role of the scheduled castes was more important in explaining the peasant differentiation process than labour exploitation. Family labour in relation to hired labour is meaningful only when relations of production were determined by merely economic considerations but non-economic considerations also determined the relations of production. Brahmin middle or poor peasants, in spite of pressing need for manual labour, at the time of
peak season, avoided engaging into manual labour. On the contrary, even rich peasants not belonging to high caste did not have inhibitions in engaging in manual labour.

Ownership of land alone did not shape the agrarian social classes. Land control and managerial classes like the *raj amlas* also played an important role. Tenure holders constituted equally an important component of class. However, they were not the owners of land. Thus, ownership was not a crucial criterion either in social class formation or in vanguarding the class interest. Other than this group of agrarian social classes (intermediaries), there was another important agrarian social class, which constituted part of the *raj* Darbhanga bureaucracy, locally known as *raj amlas*. Like intermediaries, *raj amlas* were not the owners of land, but they controlled enormous amount of power in managing the *raj*.

The question of how inequality in land ownership has affected the development of capitalism in agriculture needs further examination in explaining the fact that in spite of infrastructural facilities being available to *raj* Darbhanga in Gondwara *Zirat* (land held by landlord in which no other rights can accrue) center, the *raj* did not
opt for capitalist farming beyond a certain point. It is intriguing because the net profit in farming was even more than renting. It is evident from the above discussion that agrarian social structure is a highly complex concept. It entails a discussion on caste and class. In the light of the above discussion, I have used the concept 'agrarian social structure' in Bathipur in terms of caste and class as well as exploiter and exploited. This will become apparent from chapter 5 on village study.
References


12. Ibid. p. 345.


15. Ibid. pp. 193-197.


63. Ibid. p. A-84.

64. Ibid. p. A-94.