CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Agrarian relations play an important role in determining the political structure of a given society. Land is one of the most important constituents of the nature.\(^1\) It is the major source of livelihood. Land is considered as a means of production, a necessary material prerequisite for the process of labour.\(^2\) Due to this labour process the relations become possible between man and man. At the same time, in the history, land became the first and foremost condition for the emergence of private property, a cause of the division of society into antagonistic classes. Since class society comes into being, the struggle for land ownership has constituted its main and the most characteristic feature. The nature of ownership of land as the means of production determines the nature of agrarian production relationship, where peasantry as the productive force acquires a historical position as a class. Like many countries of the third world in Ethiopia too, land is the dominant factor in social life. The entire political dynamism is guided by the agrarian


structure where the land tenure system determines the class part of the nature of Ethiopian polity. As major Ethiopian economy is constituted of the landed production as the basic requirement of Ethiopian material life, the dynamics of politics moves around the changing land relationships. Almost every change in land relationship in Ethiopia has resulted in constitutional changes or change in political structure.

In this study, we will examine the impact of changes in agrarian relations on the socio-political structure of the Ethiopian society. These changes, we must note, are not linear. They are not in one to one relationship but are extremely complex. We will attempt to analyse these phenomena.

During the period of transition from one economic order to another, a lot of interlinked complexities appear which need the possible remedies to comprehend the prospects of agrarian development. In this course the role of political system becomes an important factor in deepening the crises or solving the problems.

Ethiopia is a country full of complexities and paradoxes. The general law of transformation from prefeudal to feudal structure in Ethiopia was same as in any other underdeveloped country. But because of its own specific characteristics like slavery, caravan trading and slave
trading systems, communal ownership of land, changing scenario of land ownership due to the migration of people to from north/south, Gabar system, etc., Ethiopian feudalism acquired its own unique form.

The Ethiopian feudal system with marginal changes during the last hundred years was brought to an end in 1975 after the overthrow of monarchic regime in 1974. The new regime by introducing far reaching changes in land relationship attempted to destroy economic bases of Ethiopian feudalism. The new regime proclaimed that it will introduce National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in order to establish a socialist society. Whether attainment of such a goal is theoretically possible or not can be understood by studying the historical stages of Ethiopia's political economy particularly agrarian relations.

We herein will study the problem from the point of changing productive forces and the nature of social relations from 1935 to 1980. In the process of studying the political economy we will also discuss the social crisis.

1. Political economy: Political economy is a science to understand the social relations that evolve between people in the process of production, distribution exchange and consumption of the material benefit.

2. Social Crisis: The concept, social crisis is used to understand the social situation and to ascertain the main elements of politics and the politics of change. The crisis is defined in structural terms which determines the existing socio-political system.
political forces\(^1\) (political classes) and radical transformation.\(^2\) We, in our proposed study, will attempt to vindicate the hypotheses that agrarian relations were intricately interwoven with the politico-legal structure of society. And that the economic structure of the society eventually determined the nature of political structure and that stagnation in the economic structure stagnated the political structure too. In case of Ethiopia we shall study the operations of the above stated theory and see whether due to the feudal economic structure, the political structure remained stagnant or not or whether changes in the agrarian relations brought changes in the political structures or changes in the political structure brought changes in the land relations.

The objectivity of conditions emerging from the womb of social crisis accelerate the political activities of

1. **Political forces**: Political force is defined in terms of emergence of consciousness among the social forces in course of struggle in shaping the organisations and the state. The nature and perspective of political forces depend on economic positions of social forces. The political force passes continuously through a process of unity and struggle in a consequent emerging situations. Gradually its nature and role appear apparent in the course of decisive movement in giving the shape to the state.

2. **Radical transformation**: Radical transformation is the product of evolution of social crisis (whereas political forces are the actors in social crisis) which culminates into a qualitatively new transformation as organic process of political development.
political forces particularly the classes seeking change or radical transformation. The nature of developmental process of any society creates same nature of crisis. The social crisis can be resolved in any one of the following ways, which depends on the capacity of political forces, either by using the coercive force against the political forces struggling for the radical transformation or by overthrowing the ruling political forces standing for maintaining the old social, economic and political order. In a process of struggle between the above said forces, the newly emerged radical forces require economic and political programme and perspective which necessitates the formation of an organisation or a political party having definite ideological and material goals. In such process there emerges a possibility of disagreement among the radical forces. And this may give rise to a chance for a conflict among them. Secondly, the radical transformation is countered by counter revolutionary forces with the assistance of ruling forces and foreign capitalists.

Conflicting elements inside the forces of transformation and the act of counter revolutionary forces lead to violence and terror which are resolved by the consistent efforts of radical forces. These efforts are mainly reflected in economic and political dimensions. While going through all these efforts, an organised guiding force
appears in the form of an organisation or a political party based on certain ideological perspective and programme involving various sections of the society and mass organisations. The task of party is determined by the very nature purpose and programme historically resolved in the process of struggle for the transformation. And the question of resolving the purpose is closely linked with the nature of representation of social forces and make up of organic structure of the party. Representing the forces of society party's functions sometimes create centralism against the basic principle of democratic centralism whose strength lies in the autonomy of its basic units. But that too is eventually resolved in the developmental process in accordance with the basic objects of radical transformation of society as a whole.

The proposed study tends to focus on a comparative evaluation of Ethiopian agrarian structure under the feudal or pre-capitalist (1935 to 1974) and post-feudal (1974 to 1980) regimes. In this process an account of the historical features and agro-political structure will also be examined. In the course of our study, the important variables that influence the changes in agrarian relations will be examined as well. The study would help us in working out the appropriate approach to the development in Ethiopia by applying the above parameters of agrarian change in the present day socialist-oriented agriculture.
The study will also examine the formation of agrarian economic forces and their internal contradictions in the period of 1935 to 1974. This period offers three major turning points in agro-political dynamics. The first turning point takes place when the question of the implementation of 1931 constitution came into picture. The process of enforcement of the constitution was stymied due to the Italian invasion in 1935. The Italians attempted to change the existing economic structure and introduce colonial economic system for exploitation of Ethiopia. The Italians, due to their defeat, could not carry out their economic and political plans. But the period (1935 to 1941) of Italian occupation created favourable conditions for the organisation of Ethiopian polity on the basis of strong central government. The motive of the change was to bring Ethiopia into the world economic system in order to make it able to face the challenges of external and internal forces. To attain this goal the Emperor Haile Selassie issued land proclamations in 1942 and 1944 to modernise Ethiopian economy and polity. Similarly, regulations regarding industrialization were changed to encourage expansion and invite foreign investors to set up new projects. The above changes, particularly Land Proclamations of 1942 and 1944, led to an agrarian crisis which culminated into a constitutional crisis. The economic incentives brought a small section of bourgeoisie into being which
demanded representation in legislative bodies. As a result of this the constitution of Ethiopia was changed in 1955 introducing new institutions with a considerable departure from 1931 Constitution (see Chapter VII of this thesis). The 1955 Constitution introduced parliamentary institutions in the form of Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

The second turning point can be listed during the period between 1955 and 1968 when the process of politicisation gained a momentum. Rise in the consciousness of the masses, their protest demonstrations, strikes, anti-feudal leaflets and abortive attempts of coup d'etat in 1960, were all signs of high degree of politicization. The political forces inside and outside the parliament, students upsurge, peasants revolts, service sector and industrial sector workers' strikes, the beginning of the formation of various trade unions and students' organisations appeared as the important developments in this period. Emperor came under pressure of new political forces. His move for the limited reforms in 1967 did not help to appease the criticality of the period. The situation demanded qualitative changes.

The third turning point of this period can be traced in the developments during 1969 to 1974. During this phase it became clear that feudalism could no more cope up with the changing circumstances. Crisis was further accentuated
by severe drought and terrible famine in some parts of Ethiopia. Continuing civil war in northern parts of Ethiopia created compelling reasons for change.

This phase evolves up with the collapse of imperial system. In the absence of any organized political group the motive-force for the collapse came from a section of the military, students, peasants, workers and petty-bourgeoisie. The old political system was uprooted and foundation of a new system was attempted by the military and civilian forces which assumed power under the aegis of Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) or Derque, as popularly known.

The last period (1974 to 1980) showed a revolutionary convergence of entire Ethiopian eco-political set up. Numerous conflicting ideas emerged to give direction to the newly emerging Ethiopia. The programme for National Democratic Revolution proposed by the PMAC became the guiding elements of political and economic changes. Agrarian reforms were given paramount importance and for its success the voluntary organisations of peasants and students were given the task of mass mobilization for implementing the reform programmes. Moreover, to achieve goals the mass organisations were set up on the various levels of society. At the national level, to implement policies based on socialist principles, a Marxist-Leninist party was founded. This took time till a broad based structure and a programme
of action became acceptable to the members of PMAC and various mass organizations which had been set up during the course of six years. The new changes were opposed by forces affected by the 1974 Revolution. They attempted to obstruct changes and slow down their pace. In the process of confrontation many people lost their lives. The opposing forces continue operating even today with a hope to return back to the old order and put an end to new changes.

This study proposes to analyse and examine the above-said three turning points in terms of contradictions and interactions in the old and new agrarian systems. This analysis would help us to understand the nature of Land Reforms and political changes in the Ethiopian society. We shall also examine how far transformations in agriculture are qualitative in nature. Through the study we will attempt to vindicate that whether economic structure of a society eventually determines the political structure or not.

Geographical and Resource Setting

Ethiopia is one of the oldest land of human settlement and civilization. The varied course of its historical development, from one phase or stage to another, provides a very rich civilization and culture giving insight into how human society has evolved on our planet. To understand ourselves, our society and its flowering, even a
A cursory observer of world history has to have a glimpse of the enriched contribution of Ethiopia, which occupies a unique position in the entire African continent.

Ethiopia is the oldest African State with a majestic panorama of nature and beauty. The word "Ethiopia" derives its origin from Greek - meant a "Land of people with sun-parched faces". This was the name, the Greeks and Romans gave to all the lands south of Egypt. Consequently it started acquiring many meanings in the eyes of researchers and an address to African people as a whole. It was first employed to refer to the darker-skinned people in general and the African in particular. It was used in literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as synonymous with Africa. Ethiopia's value and status in the eyes of the black enhanced by Biblical authority, especially the oft-quoted 68th Psalm: "the hath scattered the people that delight in war. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God." 3

These revolutionary words, which gave additional impetus and rationalisation for Ethiopia became a message

3. Ibid., p.10.
of hope, a standard slogan for Negro aspirations, and the passage was echoed and re-echoed in black nationalist literature.\(^1\) By the early 19th century at a time, when the Negro-anti-slavery movement was developing in America and West Indies, the term Ethiopian seemed to have become associated with the ideas of liberty and liberation.\(^2\) Thus, Ethiopia appears as a historical symbol of the people of Africa.

Ethiopia occupies a territory of 1,221,900 square kilometres and has a population of 33.7 million and has multinational, multilingual, multireligious and multiculturality characters. It is fashioned on conglomeration of widely divergent races and tribes, politically united within their boundaries only since beginning of 20th century. It is eighth largest country in Africa with the third largest population. "Ethiopian people are nearly as diverse and fragmented culturally, physically and linguistically as is the topography of the country they inhabit."\(^3\) The language and religion are primary determinants of social and cultural affinities. There are about 70 languages

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1. Ibid., p.10.


and 200 dialects spoken in Ethiopia. They are identified as belonging to four main language families i.e. Semitic, Cushitic or Hamitic, Nilotic and other unclassified groups.

Special features of main lingual groups of Ethiopia can also be observed in terms of religious distribution. The development of linguistic groups have also taken place due to interaction of religiously distributed lingual sections. There are some dialects which have emerged due to their isolation in geographic set up. All these phenomena have made Ethiopia a multilingual country which denotes the existence of various civilizations.

The total population of each religious groups comprises of 35 to 40 per cent belonging to Ethiopian Orthodox Coptic Christians, 40 to 45 per cent having faith in Islam, 15 per cent are animists - not having faith in any foreign religion, and 0.2 per cent are the Falasha (Jews). The ethnic groups in Ethiopia comprises of 19 per cent belonging to Amhara, 40 per cent to Oromo (Gala), 16 per cent to Tigre, 6 per cent to Somali, 6 per cent to Sidamo, 4 per cent to Shankalla, 2 per cent to Guarage, 1 per cent to Afar, 0.5 per cent to Agan, 0.2 per cent to Falasha and 4.8 per cent to others of the total population. 1

Ethiopia with 24 provinces and six autonomous regions is peculiarly situated in the Horn of Africa or North-East Africa. It borders North-West and West on Sudan, in the South on Somalia and Kenya and in the East on Somalia and Djibouti. In the North-East it touches the Red Sea. Ethiopia in its triangle expression contains various big plateaus (like Ras Dashan, 4,625 metres), great rift valley, lakes and rivers.

Ecologically the climate zones of Ethiopia are based primarily on elevation, though the use of the several zonal terms is not uniform throughout the country. Lands above 11,500 feet are called rich; they are of little use and the problems of atmosphere rarefaction is a permanently limiting one. The topography of Ethiopia has a decisive influence on rainfall and average temperature. With this introduction, Ethiopia appears to be a beautiful land in African geography.

Economically, it is generally accepted that Ethiopia is basically agrarian. The country's total area of which meadows and pasture covers 54 per cent, crop land 8 per cent, forests 7 per cent, and desert, waterland and built-up areas 31 per cent. In the early 1970s the area of cultivated land constituted of about 10.5 million hectare or 9.3% of the country's territory. Only 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the land suitable for cultivation is utilised in Ethiopia, which includes pastures. Land

cultivation as a whole is characterised by a still relatively low level of development in the commercial sector.\footnote{Georgi Galperin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 2, No. 1, p. 170.}
The share of the subsistence economy in the GDP in 1970 comprised 45 per cent, in 1973-74, 48 per cent and 52 per cent in 1977.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 170.}

According to the latest figures of the national revolutionary campaign for economic development which began its first stage in 1978, in 1980 agriculture had raised its share in Ethiopia's GNP by 5.6 per cent.\footnote{\textit{The Non-Aligned Countries} (Prague, 1982; London, 1982; Havana, 1982; Vietnam, 1982), p. 231.}

It is calculated that about 75 per cent of Ethiopia's total farming output is produced within the framework of a purely subsistence economy. Only 15 to 20 per cent of agriculture produce is marketed which is one of the lowest in Africa.

The cash crops cultivated exclusively for commercial consumption are cotton, coffee, oil seed plants etc., and purely subsistence consumption e.g. taro, yam, and some other plants.\footnote{George Galperin, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 169-70.}
The principal agricultural products are cereals including teff, which is an indigenous crop mainly grown in Ethiopia. Teff is the staple food in the central part of the country. Coffee accounts for approximately 70 per cent of Ethiopia's income from foreign trade. In 1977 production of the most important crops as reported by FAO were teff and other cereals 1,270,000 tons, barley 830,000 tons, wheat 529,000 tons, maize 1,150,000 tons, sugarcane 1,249,000 tons, vegetables 414,000 tons and coffee 175,000 tons.

In agricultural economy cattle play an important role which amounts 26,119,000 heads of cattle, 23,149,000 sheep and some 96,600 camels. Many other items come under the agrarian production which are not related directly with crop production.

Within the above agricultural scenario the Ethiopian agrarian mode of production engages 90 per cent of the Ethiopian population. The low standard of techniques of agricultural production has made Ethiopia a consistent sufferer. Natural calamities and negative eco-political and historical circumstances of the past have checked Ethiopian agrarian production. The government which came to power in 1974 has made a massive concerted efforts with massive campaign and land reforms to change to some

1. The Non-Aligned Countries, op. cit., p.8, No.1, p.231.
Map I.2: Principal Farming Areas

**Fig. 4. Principal Farming Areas**

extent the nature of agrarian production for higher output. They are trying to increase arable area for more production. The share of agrarian production in Gross Domestic Product has increased continuously after 1974. Prospects of better agrarian output brightened over the years and unemployed labour force has been involved on war footing. But till now these efforts have not been a complete success.

INDUSTRY AND MINING:

Industrial economy of Ethiopia contributes only 16 per cent of total gross product and provides employment to 3 per cent of the national work force. Major component of industrial sector is food processing. With 387 other industrial products, Textile comprises 11.3 per cent, leather and shoes 4.8 per cent, wood and paper 19.7 per cent, printing 4.8 per cent, chemical products 7 per cent, oil refining 0.2 per cent, non-metallic and glass products 4.8 per cent, metal and electrical products 6.5 per cent of industrial products.\footnote{Source 2 Table II, \textit{Manufacturing Industries 1977/78}, Georgi Galperin, \textit{op. cit.}, p.281.} Total number of industries in 1977-78 were 416 and only 66,100 workers were employed. In 1977-78 out of total 416 industries, only 162 industries were under the control of state owned sectors with 56,000 employees. Rest of the
Map I.3: Manufacturing Industry and Mining

254 industries, which employed 10,100, were in the hands of private sector. 1

Mining in Ethiopia is at its embryonic stage of development. Until the day, mining activities are limited mainly to various mineral prospecting, collecting and studying basic geological formation. Eleven per cent of the country's total area has been covered by large scale geological mapping which is best for mineral prospecting and exploration. Potential for gold, platinum, iron, manganese ore, quarry salt, copper, nickel, coal and other mineral deposits are reported.

Mining activity has concentrated mainly on Gold and Platinum at Adola and Yubedo respectively as well as other industrial minerals which account for only 0.3 per cent of the country's G.D.P. One of the major reasons of the sector's low contribution to the country's economy has been lack of appropriate emphasis on the development of the sector during pre-1974 period. Before 1974 most of the mining economy was in the hands of private companies which were, however, nationalised by the new regime.

Construction, tourism, and many other services comprise 34 per cent economy of Ethiopia.

Politically, Ethiopia has travelled through many phases—from Axumite Empire to Abyssinia to Ethiopia to

1. Ibid., p.281.
present day socialist Ethiopia. The feudal political system remained dominant till the 1974. Ethiopia languished in the period before 1974 under the cumbersome yoke of oppression and exploitation by an extremely backward feudal system. Feudalism has firmly entrenched itself in the economic, social and political system until the inception of Ethiopian revolution.

When European colonialism turned its face to Africa, from the sixteenth century onwards, Ethiopia also came under its viselike grip. In the 16th and 17th centuries, 1 Portugal, the foremost maritime power in Europe and the Turkish-Ottoman Empire, which dominated the inland trade in the North Africa and West Asia, endeavoured to occupy Ethiopia and competed with each other to control the Red Sea. Later on expanding imperialist countries like Britain, France and Italy made Ethiopia their target. After the Second World War the USA also started its penetration in the Ethiopian Economy.

During the course of colonial expansion and occupation the Ethiopian people checked colonial expansion and manifested their patriotism and love for freedom by offering exemplary resistance and sacrifice. They successfully fought and checked colonial expansion but failed to end

1. David C. Korten, Planned Change in Traditional Society, op. cit., p.22.
the feudal exploitation. All mass upsurges against feudal exploitation were unsuccessful until 1974 Revolution which marked the beginning of an end to this exploitative system.

In the whole process of political dynamics agrarian force played a crucial role. It is well-known that the agrarian economy remained the backbone of Ethiopian economy. As a result of this, the changing pattern of Ethiopian polity and its structure varied in accordance with the changes in agrarian economy.

The 1974 Revolution introduced far reaching changes in land tenure system which radically transformed the agrarian relations. It left a deep impact on the society and polity of Ethiopia.