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# Social Stratification in an Orissa Village

Jaganath Pathy

*Capitalism in Indian agriculture has been examined by a number of Marxist scholars in recent years. This paper discusses the subject in the light of material from an Orissa village, collected during 1974-75 as part of a larger study of the political structure of the village.*

*The author begins by reviewing the main features of the different modes of production in agriculture, as formulated by various scholars. The material on the land and credit systems of the village under study is then discussed. Finally, the particular mode of production operative in the village is considered.*

CAPITALISM in agriculture has been examined by a number of Marxist scholars in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Ashok Rudra and his colleagues led the way in India by approaching this issue with rich quantitative material, and concluded that capitalist farming had not appeared in Indian agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Their findings have provoked several others. Rudra has been attacked for being ahistorical, classifying farmers as capitalist and non-capitalist, instead of locating the trends in terms of capitalistic features.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Rudra's findings do find considerable support in the literature.<sup>4</sup>

The present paper seeks to consider the above controversy in the light of material from an Orissa village, collected as part of a larger study of political structure, at both macro and micro levels, during 1974-75. Recognising the inadequacy of the village as a unit for analysing agrarian relations,<sup>5</sup> our analysis often extends beyond the village. Further, the data tend to be qualitative, precluding rigorous statistical operations.

We begin with the main features of the various modes of production in agriculture — as formulated by various scholars. Then follows the material on the land and credit system in the village. Finally, we consider the particular mode of production operative in the village.

Let us begin with the concept of feudalism. Feudalism refers to a historically conditioned socio-economic formation, wherein the production relations are based on the feudal lord's ownership of the means of production, primarily land. In this system "an obligation is laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfil certain economic demands of an overlord, whether these demands take the form of services to be performed or of dues to be paid in money or kind".<sup>6</sup> And, the relation between the owners and the serfs is predo-

minantly socio-political, and conceals the economic contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

With the breakdown of the self-sufficient subsistence economy and the growth of the commodity economy, feudal relations tend to change as they are replaced by the capitalist mode of production. During this transformation there may be a transitional phase,<sup>8</sup> which may be called semi-feudal or pre-capitalist. In this phase, the working population is exploited through land and lending. This is said to be the main feature of 'semi-feudalism'. Bhaduri writes:

The semi-feudal landowner uses two modes of exploitation for extracting from the tenant — he exploits the tenant through his traditional property right on land as well as through usury and the economic basis of semi-feudalism is the combined operation of these two modes of exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, in studying West Bengal villages, he narrates the main features of semi-feudal agriculture:

... the existing relations of production have more in common with classical feudalism of the master serf type than with industrial capitalism. The four prominent features of this type of agriculture are: (a) sharecropping, (b) perpetual indebtedness of the small tenants, (c) concentration of two modes of exploitation namely usury and land ownership, in the hands of same economic class, (d) lack of accessibility for the small tenant to the market.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, Bettelheim argues that, though in today's agriculture in India, the classic Marxian categories of feudalism do not apply, there is enough evidence to note the decline of feudalism, and the new situation may be called semi-feudalism:

Typical of the situation is the absence of a labour market in a large part of the rural sector; the personal subservience of the immediate producer to the landowner; the excessive importance of land-rent; the underdeveloped marketing system, resulting in little social division of labour, a low rate of accumulation, and the use of produce mainly to

satisfy immediate needs.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, the emergence of capitalism in agriculture is marked by a shift to wage labour and simultaneous accumulation and reinvestment of the surplus.<sup>12</sup> For Rudra, a capitalist farmer will tend to (a) cultivate his land himself rather than lease it out; (b) use hired labour in much greater proportion than family labour; (c) use farm machinery; (d) market an important share of produce; and (e) organise his production to yield a high rate of return on his investments.<sup>13</sup> Besides, there will be increasing concentration of the means of production and thereby a development of the productive forces.<sup>14</sup> The agricultural wage labourers, too, will be increasingly free and unattached to the means of production.<sup>15</sup>

Having surveyed the different modes of production in agriculture — feudal, semi-feudal, and capitalist — we move now to the information collected from the Orissa village.

Talapatna — the village studied — is a settlement under Dharakota Panchayat Samiti, in the Ganjam district of Orissa. During the Mughal Period, the entire area of the Panchayat Samiti was in one of the 'Northern Sirkars'. Consequently, there developed a powerful Zamindari system here, underpinned by the law of primogeniture. In 1802-3, the Permanent Land Settlement Act was introduced in the area, entrusting the collection of revenue to the powerful Zamindar.<sup>16</sup>

Much later, in 1898, the village of Talapatna came into existence, founded by the Zamindar who provided agricultural and residential land to the settlers. These tenants were obliged to pay half the produce to the Zamindar besides providing various forms of unpaid labour (Bethi), upon demand by the Zamindar's family. All the inputs and the labour necessary in production were the responsibility of the tenants. A few settlers of the artisan castes were obliged to provide certain

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF CASTES IN TALAPATNA (1900-1974)<sup>18</sup>

Local Castes (equivalents)	Number of Households in 1900	Number of Households in 1974
Brahmana (Brahmin)	1	0
Karan (Kshatriya)	3	2
Tanti (Weaver)	9	3
Gauda (Milkman)	5	5
Gudia (Sweetmaker)	0	1
Khandayat (Odiya)	6	5
Keota (Fisherman)	0	1
Dhoba (Washerman)	0	3
Khadal	50	52
Total	74	72

Source: Relevant records from the officials of the Zamindar and interview with the village elders.

tools and products (such as home-made cloth), and to perform other services as required by the Zamindar. Still others were employed by the Zamindar for looking after cattle (9 households), gardening (2 households), watchman duties (3 households), and religious functions (1 household).

By the beginning of the century, there were 74 households in the village. Today, it has 320 people in 72 households. That is, the number of households has remained more or less unchanged. The population did grow, but meanwhile in the beginning of the 1950s — the time of the Orissa Estate Abolition Act of 1951<sup>17</sup> — several artisans and upper-caste households, who were employed by the Zamindar and had no land or very meagre land, left the village. On the other hand, the strength of the lower and exterior castes has shown rather an increase over the period (Table 1).

Initially, the land was with the Zamindar. But in course of time, whenever he was pleased with some settler, he used to give him Patta land (the land over which record of right exist). Accordingly, a few got land, but most did not. The total cultivated land in the village is 148 acres.

In 1974, the village had an average of 2 acres of cultivated land per family. But ownership is highly concentrated. Only 17 families (23.6 per cent) have their own land, totalling 56 acres. While of the remaining 92 acres of village land, the Zamindar owns 63 acres, his ex-manager (diwan) who lives in a village 25 miles away 25 acres, and a small merchant of another village 4 acres. The Zamindar had about 735 acres of land in 18 villages — out of

which, to avoid the land laws, he transferred 300 acres to a temple which he had constructed in 1966. The diwan has 40 acres of land, including the land in Talapatna. We notice the distribution pattern to be very unequal. Only 7.4 per cent of the village land is left for 90.6 per cent of the households. Mention may be made that, in the calculation, we are not including the land owned by the three outside landowners from other villages — Table 2.

Though the pattern of land distribution broadly coincides with the caste hierarchy, there are exceptions too. While, among the 'high castes', 12 families are landless, among the 'low castes' 13 families do have land (Table 4).

At the same time, almost half of the unsurveyed cultivable land of the village remains waste under the categories of pasture, mango groves, cremation ground, and fear of the spirits. Recently, two owner-tenants cultivated 3 acres from an abandoned cremation ground, but the yield was unsatisfactory, so this year the cultivation of that ground has been discontinued.

In Talapatna, less than 10 acres, belonging to the Zamindar and lying close to the river, are irrigated; cultivation elsewhere depends on the rain. There are two types of dry land — paddy land and the other land (Padar) used for cultivating ragi, grams, pulses, etc. Besides, the backyard land (Bari) is used for seasonal vegetables, lettuces, etc. This type of land is attached to houses and is neither saleable separately from the house nor is rented. Hence we exclude bari land from our consideration.

In the village, a little more than 90

per cent of the cultivated land is used for paddy cultivation. And in the rest, crops like horsegram, red gram, til, mustard, etc, are harvested. However, a rough estimate suggests that the yield per acre of land is small, ranging between 300 and 400 kg of paddy (after deducting the seed).

#### CLASSES IN THE VILLAGE

In Talapatna, 70 households (91.3 per cent of the population) — including the Zamindar, his ex-manager, and the merchant — have agriculture as the main source of living. These may be grouped conveniently as follows:<sup>19</sup>

##### (1) Landlords:

Those who possess land, but do not engage in labour, and live exclusively by exploitation of the peasants, are here called landlords.

The village has three landlord families. The Zamindar popularly known as 'Raja Saheb', does not work in his field. Of his land, 63 acres are cultivated by 17 sharecroppers. The tenancy system is such that an aging tenant goes to the Zamindar and asks him to give the land to his son(s) for sharecropping. If the son is too young to undertake cultivation of the land, his father's brother or father's brother's son may cultivate it till the son(s) can do the job. This might suggest that the right to lease land is hereditary; however, in practice, the tenants can be evicted any time according to the whim of the Zamindar. Actually, within the past 15 years, two tenants were evicted and two others did not get the leased-in land because they had not attained maturity at the time of their father's death. The threat of eviction keeps the tenant loyal to the landowner on all issues — including electo-

TABLE 2: PATTERN OF LANDOWNERSHIP IN TALAPATNA

Land Category (in acres)	Households			Owned Acreage		
	Number	Per Cent	Cumulative Percentage	Acres	Per Cent	Cumulative Percentage
Landless	55	73.3	73.3	—	—	—
Upto ½	4	5.3	78.6	1.5	1.0	1.0
> ½ — 1	6	8.0	86.6	4.5	3.0	4.0
> 1 — 2	2	2.7	89.3	2.5	1.7	5.7
> 2 — 3	1	1.3	90.6	2.5	1.7	7.4
> 3 — 5	3	4.0	94.6	11.0	7.4	14.8
> 5 — 10	1	1.3	95.9	8.0	5.4	20.2
> 10 — 20	—	—	—	—	—	—
> 20 — 30	2	2.7	98.6	55.0	37.2	57.4
> 30	1	1.3	99.9	63.0	42.6	100.0
Total :	75	99.9		148.0	100.0	

TABLE 3: CASTEWISE DISTRIBUTION OF LAND IN TALAPATNA

Castes (in equivalents)	Households			Owned Acreage		
	Number	Per Cent	Cumulative Percentage	Acres	Per Cent	Cumulative Percentage
Brahmin	1	1.3	1.3	25	16.9	16.9
Kshatriya	3	4.0	5.3	93	62.8	79.7
Weaver	3	4.0	9.3	—	—	—
Milkman	5	6.6	15.9	—	—	—
Goldsmith	1	1.3	17.2	4	2.7	82.4
Sweetmaker	1	1.3	18.5	—	—	—
Odiya	5	6.6	25.1	11	7.4	89.8
Fisherman	1	1.3	26.4	1	0.7	90.5
Washerman	3	4.0	30.4	1.5	1.0	91.7
Khadal	52	69.3	99.7	12.5	8.4	99.9
Total	75	99.7		148.0	99.9	

ral support. At the same time, the Zamindar, because of his capacity to replace tenants, can easily ignore the legislative dicta.<sup>20</sup>

The tenants are responsible for irrigating and maintaining the land; but, for large-scale operations, the Zamindar provides the inputs, though the total labour is entirely that of the tenants. The tenants bear the cost of threshing and hulling the paddy. They have to pay for seed and local manure, but half the cost of the chemical fertiliser is paid by the Zamindar. In the case of other landlords, the cost of local manure is also divided equally between owner and tenant. It is said that the Zamindar is generally not in favour of using much fertiliser (on the land) nor is he interested in new varieties of paddy or in other crops. Only last year he allowed two of his tenants to cultivate sugarcane on five acres of wet land. In this patch of land, the total working capital was provided by the Zamindar and the total labour by the tenants. Here the tenants receive approximately 30 per cent of the produce; however, last year, both the tenants' shares were taken by Zamindar as part payment of their earlier debt to him. Excluding this land, in all other land, the tenant's share is 3 units for paddy, and for greengram and blackgram 2:3. But for crops like ragi, redgram, mustard, til, gingelly, etc, the share is 1:1.

In addition to the above cropsharing, the tenants have several unpaid labour obligations, which not only tie the tenant to a particular landlord but also reduce the productive use of labour. To note a few such obligations:

- (a) During feasts at the Zamindar's house, the wives of the tenants have to work there for days together; in return, they get cooked food to eat at their homes — definitely more in quantity than one adult's single meal but

- lacking in various special dishes served to the Zamindar's guests.
- (b) Every year, the tenants have to re-thatch the cattle-sheds and the kitchen of the Zamindar by their combined labour and also with their straw and fibre — the Zamindar provides bamboo or wood required for the purpose. Usually the work requires one whole day of combined labour. The tenants get a meal on any day convenient to the Zamindar.
- (c) Every tenant, irrespective of the amount of land he sharecrops, had to give the Zamindar annually a cart-load of wood for use as fuel. For the past two years, however, this obligation has been reduced, so that approximately 2.5 tenants have to provide one cart-load collectively every year. This is broadly due to the reduced needs of this fuel and its need for political support at elections.
- (d) The Zamindar or his relatives and office bearers can call anybody at any time to send a message or goods to nearby villages.
- (e) Besides the compulsory labour, there is optional unpaid labour like sweeping the front yard of the house of the Zamindar, cleaning his cowshed, grazing and bathing cattle, etc.

Regardless of age, villagers call the Zamindar father (Bapa). His paternalism finds expression in several forms. Every year, the village has a big festival for the village deity. Though it is organised by the village elders, they discuss with the Zamindar about programme and expenditure. He provides over half the expenditure, and initially joins the worship; but during the entertainment he leaves the place. This shows that his absence is needed for the villagers to make merry. Similarly, the Zamindar's wife, or mother, would give any villager some food or a torn piece of clothing upon request.

At times, the disputes concerning partition of land among brothers, marriage cases, and cases of elopement are referred to him, and his decision

is always final. In one case, a man insisted on remarrying while his first wife was alive, in defiance of the Zamindar's decision. He was removed from the sharecropping and so, he had to leave the village. Even inter-village disputes may be referred to the Zamindar. But now, due to ill health, he avoids several cases.

The Zamindar deals with his tenants through two subordinates. First, is the Diwan, employed in 1969 to look after the land of the Zamindar. Not only the tenants but also the farm labourers are afraid of him — his baseless scoldings, and his frequent beatings for petty irregularities on the part of the working people. Next to him, is the chief sharecropper, a trusted person in the house of the Zamindar, who has the maximum amount of leased-in land as a single tenant. Several sorts of grievances of the tenants are conveyed to the Zamindar through him.

The second landlord, who lives 25 miles away, used to be the Diwan until 1968. He leased out his 25 acres to seven tenants. One of them has leased in a little land from the Zamindar also. In contrast to leases from the Zamindar, there is no right here of 'hereditary tenancy'. Eviction is frequent. Within five years, seven tenants were evicted, and this year three are taken in. However, four tenants have been continuing for the last six years. The shares are similar to those for the Zamindar, but unpaid labour is much restricted by tradition, physical distance, and frequent evictions.

The third landlord is a small entrepreneur of the goldsmith caste. He got his 4 acres by lending to small landowners. In 1974-75 two acres were given on fixed rent in cash (Gutta). The amount was fixed for Rs 175 per acre, but since the value of the harvest, per acre, was less than Rs 230 (at prices prevailing in the harvest season), he reduced his due by Rs 25 per acre. The other two acres are also given on fixed rent in kind (Dhulia Sanja). Here again, he gave a concession to his tenant. He has two tenants in all. Though they are not obliged to render him personal service, sometimes they do so voluntarily.

In the above tenancy systems (Gutta and Dhulia Sanja), the tenants bear all the risk; and, given the unreliability of the monsoon, the tenants often fail to meet their dues — and so have to send a member of the family to work for the landowner just for food. In nearby villages, such cases are very common. Several informants said that this system

of tenancy has recently become more common.

(2) *Rich Peasants*:

A rich peasant is one who has independent holdings and works in fields with the help of farm workers, while sometimes leasing out a portion of his holding.

In Talapatna, there are two rich peasant households. The richer among the two owns 30 compact acres. The head of this household was once a primary school teacher, without any land. Somehow, the present Zamindar's father was pleased with him and gave him the land. His son a trained Gram Sevak, looks after the field. He is the only son, so his father did not allow him to go for higher studies or employment. He gives hospitality to any official who comes to the village. A very orthodox Hindu, he spends more than five hours a day in worship and chanting of 'mantras'.

Out of his 30 acres, he cultivates only 7 acres with the help of two farm servants (Halia) and his tenants' unpaid labour. The remaining land is given for sharecropping to seven tenants. Besides, out of the seven self-cultivated acres, two are cultivated by his tenants' labour. In this system (Bethi Uthana), the tenants do not get anything in return for their labour other than occasional meals. But, here, the total input and a portion (usually half) of labour during transplantation and harvesting is provided by the rich peasant. This is a recent phenomenon. Almost every year, he replaces one or two of his tenants and also changes the field from one to another.

In 1972, persuaded by his son, the rich peasant purchased a water pump. But the very next year, he sold it because of its expensive repair, and considered it less useful for the maintenance of his status. He said, "See, the Raja Saheb does not have it — how is he living? Further, what is the gain from this machine? At least, in my life time, I do not want such artificial tools..." It is observed that though his economic position does not allow him to follow the life-style of the Zamindar, he tries to act like one.

The rich peasant engages his domestic servants in his self-cultivated field, puts his tenants to do household chores — like gardening, selling coconuts from his 25 trees in the market, cleaning cattleshed, grazing cattle, household repairs, etc. One of his domestic servants receives his daily food and his dress annually. He has to work for

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF CASTES BY LANDOWNERSHIP

Land (in acres)	Name of Castes	Number of Households	Total
Landless	Kshatriya	1	55
	Weaver	3	
	Milkman	5	
	Sweetmaker	1	
	Odiya	3	
	Washerman	3	
Upto 1	Khadal	41	10
	Odiya	1	
	Fisherman	1	
> 1 - 3	Khadal	8	3
	Odiya	1	
	Washerman	1	
> 3 - 5	Khadal	1	3
	Goldsmith	1	
	Khadal	2	
> 5 - 10	Odiya	1	1
> 20	Brahmin	1	3
	Kshatriya	2	
Total		75	75

five years to repay his earlier debts. The other one works a few hours a day, depending on the need of the family, and is paid annually a fixed amount of crop after harvest.

This is the most powerful household in the village after the Zamindar's. He gets support from his tenants, several farm labourers, and others. This faction is allied with the Congress, and the other one with the Swatantra Party. This rich farmer's hold in the village is gradually increasing, because of his greater involvement in the affairs of the people and his ability to get things done for the people through the officials. His being a staunch religious man also adds to his strength.

The second rich peasant owns 8 acres of land. He cultivates 6 acres himself, with the help of two servants of his caste. These two servants are paid monthly in paddy, and farm workers are hired on daily wages. Only two acres are given for sharecropping to two tenants (2:3 share). The tenants have fewer obligations to him. His other income comes from his 30 goats.

(3) *Middle Peasants*:

In this class, are peasants who own land but neither exploit others nor sell their own labour. Their income, in a normal year, is sufficient to give them an independent living in the village.

Only one household of an exterior caste owns four acres of land. The family members work in the field. But, at peak seasons, they hire labour. He is well known for not drinking liquor, a habit common among his castemen. He is influential in settling disputes

not only of his caste but of his village, at large. He is also the ward member of the Gram Panchayat. He is politically conscious and is an active member of CPI (Marxist). In 1974, through his caste council, he united all small peasants, tenants, and agricultural labourers, to fight against selling the village produce in the outside market before meeting the needs of the villagers. From his experience, he argued that, in the initial stage, it is better to put forth such demands through caste councils than through class organisations.<sup>21</sup>

Another four households can be put in this class. They own more than 1.5 acres of land each. But, since that is insufficient for their living, they lease in a little land individually from different landlords. However, their main source of income is from their own land. All of them are relatively conscious politically.

(4) *Small Peasants*:

The land these peasants own is too little for subsistence. Hence they do either sharecropping or farm labour in addition to cultivation of own land.

In Talapatna, there are 10 households with small holdings. Their distribution cuts across caste identity. Eight of the small peasants are also tenants. The other two cultivate as partners (Bhaguali) where input, labour, and produce are equally shared among the partners.

Again, 22 landless households make their living from leased-in land. On the whole, 34 tenants (Bhagachashi) cultivate 79 per cent of the total village land. Leased-in land for the middle

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF LEASED-IN LAND

Class	(per class)				
	Households		Acres Leased in		Average Lease-in per Household (acres)
	Number	Per Cent	Acres	Per Cent	
Middle peasant cum tenant	4	11.8	21.5	18.4	5.4
Small peasant cum tenant	8	23.5	29.0	24.8	3.6
Pure tenant	22	64.7	66.5	56.8	3.0
Total	34	100.0	117.0	100.0	

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF LEASED-IN LAND

Leased-in Land	Households	Acres of Land Leased-in
Upto 1 acre	1	0.5
> 1- 2 acres	2	3.5
> 2- 3 "	7	18.0
> 3- 4 "	20	72.5
> 4- 5 "	3	14.0
> 5- 8 "	—	—
> 8-11 "	1	8.5
Total	34	117.0

peasant is higher than both the small peasant and the pure sharecroppers (Table 5). And, about 59 per cent of the sharecroppers cultivate land in the range of 3 to 4 acres (Table 6). Clearly, the landlords have leased out land to a large number of tenants. This probably helps consolidate their political power, while increasing their share through the small tenants intensive labour. If the land was given to fewer tenants, the tenants' share would have been more, and they would not have depended on the landlords for consumption loans. Thus, the practice of usury would have been weak, resulting in a weak bond between landlord and tenant. And in course of time, it might have helped investment of capital for productive purposes. I shall return to this soon.

Talapatna contains 25 ploughs. The sharecroppers have 20.5 ploughs in all. Yet, 10 of them are without ploughs and 7 others have only 'half a plough' each. Hence, 10 tenants depend on the landlords' cattle, while three hire the plough, and the other four manage with the help of their relatives, preferably brothers or the father-in-law. The tenants, who use the cattle of the landlord provide straw and grass for the cattle and also do some extra unpaid work. Out of the five bullock-carts in the village, three belong to owner-tenants.

And, since paddy cultivation can not be solely undertaken by family labour, traditionally the sharecroppers hire la-

bour — at least during transplantation and harvest. Furthermore, any Khadal tenants leasing-in over three acres exchange their labour among themselves. This reduces the wage burden. For such exchange of labour, the worker is given only one meal.

Among sharecroppers, the status of a person depends on (1) amount of leased-in land, (2) source of the lease — a lease with the Zamindar being the most prestigious, and (3) his own caste. In 1971, when the tenants of the absentee landlord-diwan asked for a larger share, he took the help of his upper-caste tenants and suppressed the move. Still other evidence shows that, in a normal situation, uniting the tenants and labourers along class lines is difficult, mainly because of their class interests being fragmented by their allegiance to the caste and its associated hierarchy and value system. But, in times of trouble, there have been at least three occasions in the village, when they got united cutting across the caste barriers.<sup>23</sup> It is nevertheless essential to locate the political, social, and cultural variables which inhibit the development of class consciousness.

##### (5) Farm Workers:

A farm worker is one whose living is derived solely from selling his labour power in agriculture and other allied activities.

Twenty-seven households, constituting 36 per cent of the semi-employed and unemployed section of the village, belong to this category. Their distri-

bution is also found in all the castes. They fall into two major categories: (a) labourers in permanent bondage (Halia) and (b) labourers relatively free (Mulia).

The Halias are confined to the exterior castes only. They are attached to the landlords and rich peasants, mainly due to indebtedness. Only three of them are employed on the basis of monthly pay in kind, the rest work for food while repaying their debt. In practice, they are no more than serfs.

The normal wage rate for a male labourer is Rs 2.50, for roughly 8 hours of work per day — this includes an increase of 50 paise during the last year when the price of paddy doubled. For a female farm worker, the increase during the same period was from Rs 1.50 to Rs 1.75. But 75 per cent of the wage is given in kind. For harvesting ragi, the labourer gets approximately one-tenth of his cutting, and for grams he gets a flat rate. The wage rate shows considerable variation during the peak seasons. The Zamindar pays for his domestic work less than the regular wage rate.

Although the farm labourers constitute as much as 36 per cent of the village, at the peak of the agricultural season, there remains an acute shortage of labour owing to the nature of paddy cultivation, which needs heavy labour for specific periods. Besides, several upper castemen, more particularly women — whose economic position is below that of the small peasants or tenants — do not work in the field. Further, the farm labourers do not remain in Talapatna alone, they go to other nearby villages. However, employment is constricted to a few months in the year. During the rest of the year, the labourers subsist on collecting and selling forest produce. The forest appears to be the second main source of subsistence for them. It may be worth noting that, especially in the lean months, kinsmen or castemen are preferred as employees.

Further, given the persistent land ownership structure and the methods of cultivation, production remains stagnant. Hence the 'surplus population' in relation to the tasks at hand; hence the insecurity of tenancy on whatever land is available.<sup>24</sup>

Socially, since the majority of farm labourers belong to the untouchable castes, they constitute the major section of the oppressed. It is said that they drink and spend money in gambling. Their women have low standards of 'morality'. Cases of elopement and even signs of prostitution are found

in this category of people alone.

Only one man in Talapatna is a mine-labourer. He gets employment for eight months in the year but lives better than the village workers do. Whenever he is in the village, he goes to work in the fields of others. Besides, there are 12 more migrant workers to the Assam Tea Gardens and the Dhenkanal mines (Orissa). They are not the heads of their households. Relatively speaking, they are more conscious of their rights because of their trade union experience.

(6) *Business* :

Talapatna has three traders in all: a goldsmith (i.e., the landlord already referred to), a grocer, and a hawker of stationery. Both the grocer and the hawker of stationery and their family-members work as farm labourers during the peak seasons.

(7) *Others* :

In Talapatna, one family lives by weaving and can be characterised as a small entrepreneur. Two persons are blind and depend for their living upon gifts from relatives and others.

More than 85 per cent of the population subsist on a mere 63 kg of paddy and ragi per person, per year, while the upper 15 per cent subsist on an average 210 kg per unit. The disparity is found from a sample of 11 households, covering all the different classes. They manage with other substitutes — such as horsegram, leaves, roots, tubers, and forest mango, etc. Most of them, however, occasionally spend money on drinking to relax after tiresome labour or during festivals. Most of them have one small dhoti or big towel or lungi, and several women have cotton sarees stitched up at several places.

In this situation, the agricultural labourers and the small tenants are forced to depend on loans for consumption. Talapatna has 5 creditors — all the landlords and all the rich peasants — and 50 debtors. The loans are usually in kind. Twenty-one households have taken paddy on loan, eleven both staple and cash, while eighteen others have borrowed only in cash.

Interestingly, 25 tenants are indebted to their own landlords — who are also called Sahukars, meaning money-lenders. Four more tenants are indebted to merchants and other landlords. On the whole, about 85 per cent of the tenants and 65 per cent of the agricultural labourers are indebted. In all cases, either directly or indirectly, the debt is extended against some security or other. In 16 cases,

TABLE 7 : CLASS DISTRIBUTION IN TALAPATNA

Class	Households	
	Number	Per Cent
Landlord	3	4.0
Rich peasant	2	2.7
Middle peasant and tenants (1+4)	5	6.7
Poor peasants and tenants (2+8)	10	13.3
Sharecropper	22	29.3
Farm, forest and mine labour (12+15+1)	28	37.3
Business	2	2.7
Others	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

TABLE 8 : PURPOSE OF LOAN IN TALAPATNA

Purpose of Loan	Percentage of the Total Debt	
Cultivation expenditure	7.0	15.6
Purchase of plough	4.2	
Construction of house	3.2	
Business	1.2	
Food and other personal requirements	45.4	81.1
Social and ceremonial needs	31.2	
To repay the debt	4.5	
Others	3.3	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0

it is against gold and utensils; in 8 cases against land; in one case against trade, while in 25 cases — that is, half of all the cases — the debt is attached to the sharecropping arrangement.

Though there are variations, the rate of interest on staple is normally 60 per cent till the next harvest. By another system, the debtor may repay twice the quantity of paddy borrowed in any year. In recent years, this second system has been giving way to the first one. The interest on cash varies from 30 to 45 per cent per annum. Most such loans are used for food and for ceremonies, and only a little (15.6 per cent) is used for productive purposes (Table 8). Sometimes, the landlords extend consumption loans to their tenants at a lower rate of interest, and they would do so even when these debtors have no further assets to offer as security. The tenant, cultivating a small parcel of land with his backward instruments, has to pay the rising land rent and to remain perpetually indebted to the landlords. The insecure tenancy, the credit nexus, and the traditional feudal culture combine to yield strong 'bonds' between the landlords and their tenants.

Often, as a token of gratitude the indebted households, present important forest products like honey, edible roots and tubers, fungi, berries and also fish for the grant of the loan. Sometimes, they go for casual labour or work as farm domestic servants to pay the debt. Here they are paid less than the wage rate of the village.

The landlords are not only the rentiers and the usurers, they are also traders in crops. This trade is carried out through the debt repaid by the tenants at harvest time in staples and cash crops (oilseeds and pulses), and their own surplus is sold chiefly when the market prices increase considerably. In 1974-75, the landlords sold approximately 10 per cent of the paddy collected at harvest time, while at the same time 25 per cent of the tenants' share was sold out (from a sample of 11 tenants). Actually, after paying a portion of the debt, the remaining crop is inadequate to meet the tenants' minimum subsistence. In the lean months, he goes again to the landlord, who provides paddy at the ruling market price at the time and collects it back at the harvest-value of the crop. Obviously, a high rate of interest is thus charged, keeping the tenant in perpetual indebtedness. Further, he is not allowed to enter into the *product-market* while he is forced to enter into the *exchange-market*.

The economic surplus extracted through land, interest bearing capital, and exchange market, is used in conspicuous and wasteful consumption, such as construction of big comfortable houses and in arranging feasts. The big landlords have not yet felt the need to transform the surplus into productive capital. Furthermore, the combined profit from money-lending and renting land is judged to be greater than that likely from the development of agricultural produce.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to wasteful consumption,

the Zamindar spends money to acquire control over elective positions in the Panchayat Samiti and the Assembly Constituency. In 1959, the second brother of the family was the Sarpanch of Dharakota Gram Panchayat, having been unanimously elected. In 1962, he was chairman of the Dharakota Panchayat Samiti. In the 1967 and 1971 Assembly elections, he was elected with the ticket of the Swatantra Party, and was twice Deputy Minister in charge of Gram Panchayat, Community Development, and Agriculture. In the 1974 Assembly elections, he had followed the well known strategy of mobilisation through traditional obligations including the existing owner-tenant relations plus the creditor-debtor relations. He moved the constituency with his mother, Rani Saheba. Villagers were often seen offering garlands and tributes in honour of their visit. The distribution of money and drink by him was very little compared to that by the Congress candidate, a big industrialist of the state. He had profound control in the Panchayat Samitis. But, for the first time, he was defeated. His defeat reveals that there is not necessarily strong relation between the institution of the Panchayat and the Assembly votings. A note may also be made of the role of the CPI (Marxist) in the success of the Congress. In 1973, the party for the first time organised its base in this area. It could mobilise several hundred peasants. But many people thought that CPI(M)'s hold was not a possible alternative in the election; hence they voted for the Congress. Further, out of the big four political visitors during 1974 elections, the meeting of H. K. Konar and P. D. Dasgupta of CPI(M) were more attended than those of R. N. Singh (Swatantra) and Y. B. Chavan (Congress).

Anyway, this was not the first defeat of the family. In the 1957 Assembly elections, the first son of the house was also defeated, when the estate was a part of Aska Constituency — which has a long-standing history of peasant movements and is not influenced by the Zamindari system. Notwithstanding the two defeats of the family, it is noticeable that to a large extent, there is personalisation of economy and of political power.

In Talapatna, we find the primordial forms of slavery and intensive share-cropping, combined with frequent fear of eviction, perpetual indebtedness of the peasantry to the landlords for consumption loans, forcible restriction of the peasantry from the capital market, predominance of exchange economy seasonal farm labour, and poor deve-

lopment of commodity economy and of the productive forces. In other words, the village is a semi-feudal one.

As is known, social progress means that the relations of production and forces of production conform with each other, and that this conformity develops the productive forces, which ultimately open the door for further social progress. But, in this case, the relations of production stand as the primary obstacle to the release of productive forces which historically demands a change in the relations of production. However, whether this situation would bring about fundamental changes in agrarian relations, can not be said simply on the basis of the available information on a single village.

### Notes

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- 1 See, for example, the debate on the Transition from feudalism to capitalism in *Science and Society*, between Spring 1950 to Fall 1953.
- 2 A Rudra, 'In Search of the Capitalist Farmer', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1970, Volume V, Number 26, p 85.
- 3 The main critiques of Rudra's methods are; U Patnaik, 'Capitalist Development in Agriculture?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 25, 1971; and, 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', *Ibid*, September 30, 1972; see also; P. Chattopadhyay, 'On the Question of the Mode of Production in Agriculture: A Preliminary Note', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 25, 1972.
- 4 Among others, see, C Bettelheim, "India Independent" (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), and A Bhaduri, 'A Study in Agricultural Backwardness under Semi-Feudalism', *Economic Journal*, March 1973. See also, Pradhan H Prasad 'Reactionary Role of Usurer's Capital in Rural India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume IX, Numbers 32, 33 and 34, August 1974, pp 1305-1308; and Nirmal K Chandra, 'Farm Efficiency Under Semi-Feudalism: A Critique of Marginalist Theories and Some Marxist Formulations' *ibid*, pp 1309-1332.
- 5 Among others, see, A Beteille, "Studies in Agrarian Social Structure" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), where he writes that the agrarian structure of the village can not be understood "by considering only the internal structure of the village. Those, who represented the top of the hierar-

- chy, ... had their hands in a number of villages without necessarily residing in any", (p 74).
- 6 M Dobb, "Studies in the Development of Capitalism" (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946), p 35.
- 7 I Me'sza'rs, "Marx's Theory of Alienation" (Merlin Press, 1970, pp 100-150).
- 8 See the debate in *Science and Society*, *op cit*.
- 9 A Bhaduri, 'An Analysis of Semi-Feudalism in East Indian Agriculture', *Frontier*, Volume 6, Numbers 25-27, September 29, 1973, p 12, emphasis his.
- 10 A Bhaduri, "A Study in Agricultural Backwardness Under Semi-Feudalism" *op cit*, pp 120-121.
- 11 C Bettelheim, "India Independent", *op cit*, p 23.
- 12 U Patnaik, 'On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture: A Reply', *op cit*, pp 147-148.
- 13 A Rudra, 'In Search of the Capitalist Farmer', *op cit*, p 85.
- 14 K Marx emphatically pointed out that the "Proprietorship of land parcels by its very nature excludes the development of the social productive forces of labour, social forms of labour, social concentration of capital, large-scale cattle raising, and the progressive application of science", "Capital" (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), Volume 3, p 787. See also, V I Lenin, "Collected Works" Volume 21, pp 69-70.
- 15 See M Dobb, *op cit*, p 36.
- 16 See, for instance, R K Mukherjee, "Land Problems in India" (Calcutta, 1933), p 325.
- 17 In Orissa, there were altogether 425, 693 estates, and to abolish those in 1951, the Orissa Estate Abolition Act was passed. And so far 420,441 estates have been 'abolished'. Report of the Administrative Enquiry Committee, Government of Orissa, 1971, Volume I, p 68.
- 18 The hierarchy used in both Tables 1 and 3 follows the perceptions of informants of various castes in the village. The local caste terms when translated into English appear to be a mixture of occupations, varna terms, and alternate local terms. Nevertheless, we adhere to the local perception for the present purpose.
- 19 Here, broadly we follow, Mao Tse-tung, "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society", "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", and "How to Differentiate the Classes in Rural Areas", "Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung", Volume I, pp 13-21, 23-59, and 137-143, respectively. See also, K Gough 'Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India', *Pacific Affairs*, Winter 1968-69, pp 527-544.
- 20 However, the Tenant Relief Act, 1955, of Orissa provides that no tenant in lawful cultivation of any land on the first day of July 1954, or at any time thereafter, shall be liable to be evicted from such land by the landlords. Report on

- Enquiry into the Working of the Orissa Tenants Protection Act, 1948, and Orissa Tenants Relief Act, 1955, in the Five Districts of Orissa (New Delhi, 1970).
- 21 Irfan Habib argues that the caste system is a framework for peasant movements, and through the caste councils peasants were able to join the peasant movements. "The Agrarian System of Moghul India" (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p 332.
- 22 K N Raj, 'Ownership and Distribution of Land', *Indian Economic Review*, April 1970, pp 1-42.
- 23 Kathleen Gough, analysing peasant uprisings in India, has questioned Moore's explanation of the weakness of the peasant movement in India in terms of the caste hierarchy and values, 'Indian Peasant Uprisings', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number 1974, Volume 9, Numbers 32-34, p 1391; and also B Moore, "The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy" (Beacon Press, 1966), p 383.
- 24 The insecurity of tenancy is well described in: V M Dandekar and Nilakantha Rath, 'Poverty in India: Dimensions and Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay (January 2, 1971), pp 106-46.
- 25 See Pradhan H Prasad, *op cit*, and Nirmal K Chandra, *op cit*.

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