

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF BIHAR,
INDIA

by

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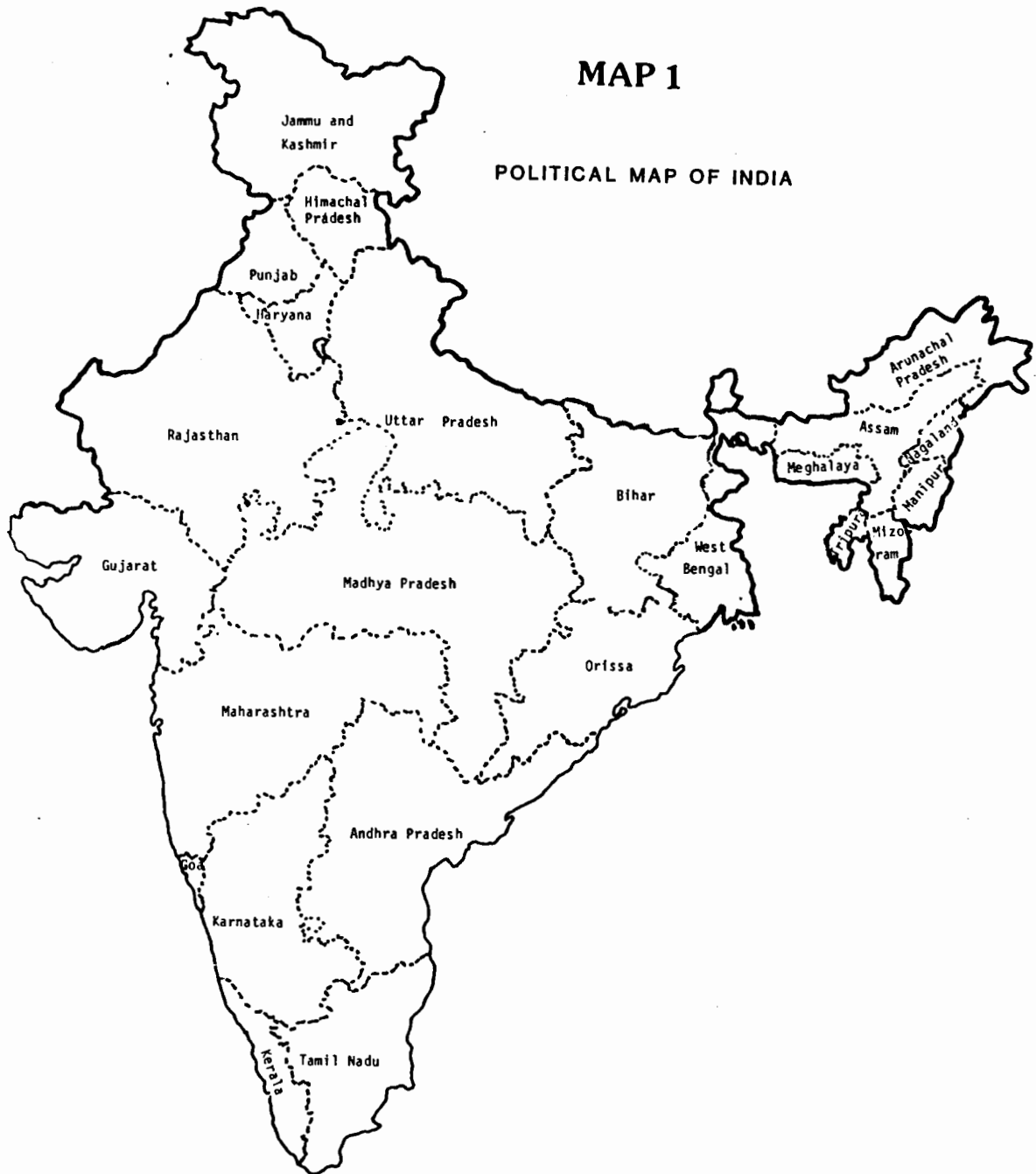
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MAP 1

POLITICAL MAP OF INDIA



Adapted from: States Atlas of India (Delhi: Indian Book Depot, 1982).

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and evaluates the nature and extent of change the agrarian social structure in the state of Bihar, India, has undergone since 1947. By agrarian social structure is meant the manner in which various social classes are organized and interact with each other around the activity of agricultural production.

Although the thesis focuses on a given region of India since independence, it takes into account both the long historical process through which agrarian relations have evolved, as well as the wider societal forces that impinge upon the agricultural sector of society and which are in turn influenced by it. Drawing on the historical experiences of the European transformation from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist one, this thesis demonstrates that major structural changes towards capitalization in the agrarian sector of India could not have been carried out by the Indian bourgeoisie.

In the Indian context, the capitalist class had to make an alliance with the feudal landlords for a compromised share of state power. Focusing on Bihar, this thesis demonstrates the manner in which the many legislative measures introduced to bring about land reforms and other institutional changes failed effectively. The technological changes introduced in the mid-sixties -- generally known as the 'Green Revolution' -- are seen as a response to the failure of institutional reforms.

Since quantitative data do not reveal aspects of relations of production such as the size of landownership, sharecropping and other forms of exploitation of the labour force, the thesis relies on a number of anthropological and other field reports to demonstrate that despite the introduction of the 'green revolution' technology, the agrarian structure in Bihar continues to be significantly characterized by feudal relations. Technological change, or development in the forces of production, cannot by itself lead to capitalist development without accompanying changes in social relations.

DEDICATION

To Aji, and my father, Mr. Rishi Deo Sharma, and mother, Mrs.
Krishna Sharma.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH

The Domain:

This study is an attempt to examine and evaluate the nature and extent of change the agrarian social structure in the State of Bihar, India, has undergone since 1947. Since a vast majority of India's population has been directly dependent on agriculture (83% in 1951) -- thus characterising India as an agrarian society -- a study of change in the agrarian social structure is essentially a study of change in the society as a whole.

By agrarian social structure is meant the manner in which various social classes are organized and interact with each other around the activity of agricultural production. More precisely, it signifies the specific form the relationship between the means of production, the most important being land, and the actual producers takes at a given point in time. This will be elaborated further later in the chapter.

The year 1947 has not been chosen arbitrarily. Its importance lies in the fact that it marks the end of British colonial rule in India. It was in this year that the political power was handed over to the leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC), a nationalist party in existence since 1885 which played the leading role in the struggle for independence. The task of undoing the legacy and the effects of over two hundred years of colonial rule fell upon this leadership. As this thesis will demonstrate, it was not an easy task. In the

area of agrarian relations, particularly, it involved dealing with a highly skewed land-ownership pattern and an extremely exploitative system of production relations, as well as very low levels of productivity.

Finally, something needs to be said about the choice of Bihar, one among the twenty-two states and nine "Union Territories" which constitute the Republic of India. Invariably a certain amount of arbitrariness is involved in such choices. Personal factors also play some part. In this case, although I was born and brought up in the Fiji Islands and have never been to India my ancestors came from there. They were part of that large mass of labour force which, after the abolition of slavery, was moved as 'indentured labour' from one part of the colonized world to the other to serve the growing plantation economy.' My ancestors originated in a region of India which falls close to the present state of Bihar. Thus, when my intellectual interests turned to India, there was a natural tendency to dwell more on Bihar and the surrounding regions, a tendency which ultimately culminated in this study.

India, however, is a vast country with much diversity in geographical and socio-cultural conditions, as well as considerable unevenness in development. No study of a given region, or a state, could claim to offer, by inference, an understanding of the country as a whole. This thesis should therefore be regarded as a case study of a single, well-defined region of India.

There are certain features of Bihar, though, which make it a particularly interesting region for detailed study. As the following chapter will make clear, Bihar is itself marked by considerable geographic, socio-economic and cultural diversity. It is endowed with a large part of the fertile Gangetic plains as well as with highlands rich in mineral deposits and forests. Highly developed Hindu social organization with its rigid and hierarchical caste system existing in the plains is counterposed with the non-hierarchical tribal organization of the many aboriginal peoples in the plateau region. Many newly-built modern cities centred around capital-intensive manufacturing and steel plants, amongst the country's largest, share the landscape of Bihar with India's most backward countryside. As far as the agrarian economy and social structure are concerned (the main focus of this study), Bihar once again provides sharp contrasts. Sizable pockets of 'green revolution' success stories are surrounded by vast areas characterized by the old persevering order, both in the techniques and relations of production. Furthermore, since Bihar was a part of the administrative unit called the Bengal Presidency, the earliest and most entrenched stronghold of British colonialism in India, it proves to be an interesting case for a study of the effects of colonial agrarian policy, a policy that dates as far back as the late eighteenth century. Finally, Bihar has had a long history of peasant rebellions that have evolved through several phases. For a student of peasant movements, too, it is an area of fruitful

study.

The Issues:

Several questions of theoretical and methodological significance are posed by the nature of this enquiry. Some are inherent in the very formulation of the topic: change in the agrarian social structure; while others emerge from the fact that the 'agrarian social structure' is constantly impinged upon by, and in turn influences, wider social forces.

Broadly speaking, the questions are: (1) What defines change in the agrarian social structure? (2) What processes does this change go through? (3) What are the socio-economic forces in the wider society which necessitate and facilitate this change? More precisely, this means looking at the relationship between the agricultural and other sectors of the economy. (4) In a given and historically specific situation what are some of the forces which act as a constraint on the process of change in the agrarian social structure? From the point of view of this study, this means looking at the specificity of the post-colonial society, its on-going linkages with the world system, and the manner in which these linkages influence its ability to bring about the necessary social structural changes.

This thesis does not aim at providing precise answers to all these questions. These are raised mainly as issues to help define the orientation of this study. Some of the features of this orientation are elaborated below.

Historically, the transformation of traditional agrarian economy and social structure has been a key component in the major socio-economic transformations in society as a whole. In as much as the history of western Europe in the last several centuries has been a history of the development and consolidation of capitalism and industrialization, it has also been simultaenously a history of the transformation of the traditional agrarian structure based upon feudal property relations. Marxist historians and social scientists have characterized this historic transition, spread over several centuries, as a total change in the "mode of production" itself.

This phase of European history has been a subject of considerable scholarly investigation and debate. Much of Marx's and Engels's scholarship was devoted to an understanding and explanation of this phenomenon. Many other social scientists during the last one century, including Weber (1904), Durkheim (1893), Spengler (1929), Pirenne (1937) and Tawney (1926), dealt with it either to seek explanations for this epoch-making transition or to offer an understanding of its consequences. This topic became the focus of a renewed discussion with the publication, in 1947, of Maurice Dobbs's Studies in the Development of Capitalism, resulting in the well-known debate in the pages of Science and Society in 1949 between Paul Sweezy, H.K. Takahashi and Dobb himself, among others.² Probing into this historical phenomenon and putting forward various interpretations of it continues till today, as is evident in the

recent spurt of publications on the issue, particularly the much discussed works of I. Wallerstein (1976), D. Nabudere (1977), A.G. Frank (1978), E. Laclau (1971) and S. Amin (1974, 1980) and others.

This post World War II literature on the subject has acquired an added significance. It is not merely concerned with probing into history for its own sake. A vast number of Third World countries have lately been going through the process of transforming old systems of property relations and production, often in a conscious and planned manner. Their experiences, and the difficulties they face, have added new perspectives and have lent a timely urgency to the scholarly debate around the question of the European transition. Some of the issues that are focused in this debate are: What were the main features of European feudalism? What brought about its decline and ultimate demise? What role did the trade with the outside world, as well as colonial expansionism, play in the development of European society? etc.

Not all of these issues are directly relevant to the immediate concerns of this thesis. However, a few general observations which help to delineate the orientation of this study can be made.

(i) Despite differences on details as to where it all began and what stages it went through, there is a general agreement among the Marxist scholars that the transformation of European society was a result of a lengthy struggle between the old ruling class

of feudal landlords and the rising capitalist class, a struggle from which the latter emerged decisively victorious.

(ii) Being 'decisively victorious' implied a total transformation from a feudal mode of production to a capitalist one (i.e. major change in both the forces and the relations of production). Feudal property -- land -- was transformed into capitalist property and the actual producers, whether peasants or artisans, were divested of the means of production and turned into a free and mobile labour force. Their relations with the owners of the means of production became one-dimensional, purely economic and contractual, as opposed to the earlier master-serf relationship, which had been based upon economic as well as extra-economic coercion.³ This change applied not only to the manufacturing and industrial sector but, increasingly, to agriculture as well. The appropriation of the surplus by the owning class acquired a new form and so did the deployment of the accumulated surplus.⁴ There were also corresponding changes in the socio-cultural spheres, in ideology, in the legal-judicial framework, as well as in the form of state and polity.⁵

(iii) In order to achieve this, the victorious European capitalist class subordinated not only all the aspects of society internally but also much of the outside world, first through trade and later through colonization. That this expansion, and the enormous wealth it brought back, made a vital contribution to Europe's transformation is a generally agreed

upon and well documented fact. Equally significant, and for the purposes of this study more relevant, is the effect colonization had on the process of development and growth in the colonized societies. We now turn, briefly, to look at some of these effects, particularly as they influenced agrarian relations.

The Colonial Scene: Development of Underdevelopment:

Colonialist historiography viewed the Third World societies of the present as lacking any endogenous dynamic for development and progress. Based on this premise, the conclusion that it was only the shattering impact of colonial domination that broke open that closed society and generated new forces of change, follows.⁶ However, such formulations have recently come under severe attack. There is increasing evidence today to show that many of the societies in Asia and Africa were on the path of self-generated capitalist development before the advent of colonialism. Samir Amin, the well-known Egyptian scholar, in his seminal Class and Nation (1980) argues that prior to colonization the productive forces in certain Afro-Asian societies were as developed as in Europe on the eve of the latter's capitalist transformation, and that the social struggle taking place in these societies would eventually have resulted in the emergence of capitalism (pp. 71-131). The recent works of Peter Gran (1979) and Robert Springboro (1982) confirm Amin's view, at least in the case of Egypt. As far as India is concerned, there is much evidence that the social forces emerging in pre-colonial

India would have resulted in a self-generated transition to capitalist development. Irfan Habib, in an important paper (1969) demonstrates that the economy in pre-colonial India was advancing towards "full-blown capitalism" (p. 77). He demonstrates how both agricultural production and non-agricultural production for the market were extensive, that in agriculture there existed khud kasht (literally, 'self-cultivation') based on hired labour, representing an advance in form towards capitalist farming. In handicrafts, merchant capital had developed considerably and had brought artisans under control through forms of the "putting-out system" (p. 77). Similarly, Ramakrishna Mukerjee in his The Rise and Fall of the East India Company (1974), argues that "because of forces attacking the institution from outside and within, feudalism in India had begun to weaken from about the fourteenth century onwards" (p. 174). He further argues that internal and external trade stimulated the development of a significant class of merchants in various regions of the subcontinent and that by the seventeenth century, a 'substantial' manufacturing industry based on cotton textiles had developed, catering for the urban middle classes and for export. Moreover, the Bhakti movement, "which sprang up simultaneously in most parts of the country challenging the Brahmanical orthodoxy of the Hindu social order and comparable in many ways with the Protestant reformation in Europe, was essentially an ideological response to the changing social forces " (H. Sharma, 1975: 293-94). The recent work of

Hamza Alavi (1980) further lends credence to these formulations.

The impact of British colonial rule on this process of growth in India was severe. As we will see in Chapter III, in the agrarian sphere the British eliminated the power of the upper crust of the Mughul landed elite and introduced new property rights which primarily benefitted merely a small segment of the agrarian population. From this segment there arose a new landed elite loyal to their colonial masters. Rising land values -- with a more or less constant tax burden -- put the agricultural surplus increasingly in the hands of landlords who found little incentive to become enterprising farmers because they could sit back and squeeze the peasantry. This domination over and squeezing of the peasantry was intensified by the growth of other rural intermediaries, as well as moneylenders who took advantage of the increasing monetization of the economy and growth of the market in land to drive many peasants into a condition of indebted dependence. Since there were so many opportunities for feudalistic exploitation of land, agricultural production remained very backward and the surplus largely dissipated into unproductive expenditures. Thus, colonial rule in effect intensified pre-capitalist relations in the countryside, destroyed much of the indigenous manufacturing and handicraft industries, and helped to convert India into an exporter of primary products and an importer of manufactured goods.⁷

However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, British investment in transport facilities (notably the Indian railways) began to stimulate some development of modern capitalist industry in India. Although British investors dominated the field, some Indian merchants who had survived the competition with their British rivals (usually through collaboration) began to develop an indigenous modern textile industry. The Indian capitalist enterprise became more diversified in the first half of the twentieth century, moving into other light industries and even iron and steel production. However, indigenous industrial development was very slow since the British capitalists maintained control over the modern sector of the economy. The Indian capitalist class which emerged under these conditions was highly concentrated among a few families, in a few regions of the country, and was subordinate and subservient to the British capitalist class.⁸ Suniti Ghosh (1983) aptly sums up the impact colonial rule had on the Indian economy:

The destruction of indigenous industries and forced conversion of India into a raw material appendage acted even more powerfully than the drain as a brake on the development of India's productive forces. Through export of capital, the imperialist bourgeoisie built up a few enclaves of capitalist industry but in the vast rural areas feudal relations of production were zealously preserved and merchant and usury capital flourished as never before (p.5).

Thus, unlike western Europe, "industrial capitalism" did not develop in India independently, on autonomous lines. "It is not the class contradiction and class struggle within the Indian society that led to the emergence and growth of Indian

industrial capitalism [as in Western Europe]. On the contrary, it was capitalism, which had developed elsewhere, that, urged by the laws of its own development promoted the growth of some industrial enclaves, dependant on it, in the midst of the vast semi-feudal economy in India" (Ghosh, 1983:5).

The Post-Colonial Scene: Persistence of Feudalism in India's Agriculture:

This dependant character of the Indian capitalist class, evolved through history, has continued to shape its abilities and limitations since India gained independence in 1947. Formal decolonization did not bring to an end the dominant role of international capital. To quote from a recent paper by Hari Sharma,

India in 1947 already had a visible and strong bourgeoisie, unlike most countries in the Third World.... Yet the Indian bourgeoisie was not strong enough to become an independent force, having grown as it did under the shadow and protection of the imperialist bourgeoisie (1985:32-33).

Sharma continues to argue that over the last several decades this "shadow" has become only larger "because of the very nature of the capitalist development process: the big necessarily gets bigger.... The big, monopoly bourgeoisie in India was, and remains, a junior and subservient partner of imperialism" (p.33).

Thus, unlike the European capitalist class, which could become victorious only by decisively smashing feudalism,⁹ the Indian bourgeoisie, weak, and dependent upon foreign capital,

was unable to carry out the task of destroying the feudal relations that characterized the agrarian structure. Using a vast array of empirical data and summarizing the developments since 1947, Suniti Ghosh aptly concludes that "Indian capitalism grew not by defeating feudalism but by adjusting itself to it" (1983:5). This "adjustment" is reflected in various ways, the most significant being in the realm of state power. To quote H. Sharma again

Consequently it [the capitalist class] had to share power right from the beginning with the feudal landlord.... The ruling class in India has thus been an alliance between the big, monopoly bourgeoisie and the feudal landed interests. Together they share, along with imperialism, the state power (1985:33).

It is however an alliance between two historically antagonistic classes: the very nature of capitalist development requires elimination of feudal property relations. In all fairness to the Indian bourgeoisie it should be said, though, that it did strive, at least in its initial history, to eradicate feudalism in India. But, the attempt was unsuccessful and the bourgeoisie had, eventually, to make the compromise of partnership in the state power. This point requires illustration through a brief sketch of India's political history over the last hundred years.

The Congress Party and the Agrarian Question:

The political scene in India over the last century has been dominated by the Indian National Congress popularly known as the Congress Party. It was formed in 1885 by a group of British and

Indian professionals in order to provide a forum of expression for the rising nationalism of India's urban intelligentsia. Over the years, this small organization became a leading political party and since 1947 has won all the national parliamentary elections except for a brief hiatus between 1977 and 1979 (Weiner, 1980).

Most observers of India's recent political history argue that although the Congress party became a mass organization after World War I, it essentially represented, through its urban professional leadership, the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie.¹⁰ The landed interests (e.g. native princes, zamindars, or landlords, and other intermediaries) remained opposed to the Congress Party and to the movement for India's independence, as they feared that their class interests would not be secure if the Indian capitalist class achieved its goal. Their fears were not unfounded. As far back as the mid 1920's, Jawaharlal Nehru, already a prominent leader of the Congress Party and perhaps the most eloquent spokesman of the Indian bourgeoisie, had begun to speak for the complete replacement of the "unproductive landed gentry" by a more production oriented landowning class.¹¹ Nehru heaped scorn on the zamindars, calling them "the spoilt child of the British government...physically and intellectually degenerate...who like a blight have prevented all healthy growth". He termed "the land problem" the "outstanding and overwhelming problem of India" and stated that the "feudal relics" obstructed not only agricultural but also

industrial growth, and "thus the fundamental prospects of the new nation".¹²

These sentiments became the declared policy of the Congress Party when, in 1937, it adopted a far-reaching agrarian programme. By this time, the socialist led peasant organization, the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), had also begun to agitate for a 'better deal' for the peasantry.¹³ The 1937 programme of the Congress Party called for "immediate relief" in the form of substantial reduction in rent and revenues, exemption for small holdings from both rent or land tax, cancellation of arrears for rent, the abolition of all feudal dues and levies, including forced labour, and, occupancy rights in land to all tenants. Most significantly, the programme recognized the need for "radical change in the repressive land tenure and land revenue system".¹⁴

With this programme as part of their policy it is hardly surprising that the Congress Party met with stiff opposition from the class of feudal landlords. That the Indian bourgeoisie was serious in its decision to carry through with its historical task becomes all the more obvious when we recall that within four months of independence, the Congress government with Nehru as Prime Minister, appointed in November 1947 an Agrarian Reforms Committee with the prominent economist J.C. Kumarappa as its chairman. This committee's report, concluded in mid-1949, has been described as "the most threatening document ever drafted by an official committee of the Congress Party with

respect to the property interests of the landed castes" (Frankel, 1978:68).

The Committee strongly asserted that "without comprehensive reform in the country's land system there cannot be any lasting improvement in agricultural production and efficiency". The Kumarappa Report recommended an immediate abolition of the zamindari system and all intermediary property rights, the elimination of all private moneylenders and traders in the countryside (a major prop of the feudal system), outlawing of all feudal forms of appropriation of labour such as beth begar (forced labour), serfdom and debt-bondage, the prescribing of a minimum wage for agricultural labour and, most importantly, the fixing of a "ceiling" on landownership (the maximum amount of acreage a family could own). The recommendation on ceiling, however, contained exemptions for, significantly enough, capitalist farms, plantations, orchards and 'efficient farms' (Malaviya, 1955:78-91).

Putting forward such far reaching recommendations, the Kumarappa Report was undoubtedly an embodiment of the ambitions of the Indian bourgeoisie. But these ambitions remained unrealised. Within a year of the release of the report, by the time the new constitution for the Republic of India was adopted in 1950, the capitalist class had made its retreat and entered into partnership with the feudal landlords. As H. Sharma (1985) points out, this partnership was most clearly revealed in "the manner in which the agricultural sector, including all policies

on land reforms etc., were left out of the central purview" (1985:33). This meant that the entire sphere of agriculture became a prerogative of the State government. The Central government could only lay down directive principles. The actual determination of agrarian policies, legislative enactments and their implementation became the responsibility of the various state governments. The far-reaching recommendations of the Kumarappa Report were reduced to the status of 'directive principles'.

What lay behind this quick retreat was the assertion of the real economic and political power the landlords enjoyed in the countryside. When it became clear that independence from the British was inevitable, large numbers of zamindars and native princes (Maharajas) who before independence were allied to the colonial regime, realigned themselves with the new post-colonial government, and, given the imperatives of parliamentary democracy under conditions in which their economic power gave them control over the vast majority of rural votes, they became the "new pillars of the Congress Party".¹⁵ Bailey (1957) designates them as "vote banks". They virtually took over the Congress Party at the local district and state levels. As M. Weiner (1966) comments,

Families which supported the pro-British Justice Party joined the Congress after Independence. Many landlord families eager to protect themselves against the proposed land reform legislation, joined the Congress and, in some instances entered the legislative assembly to play an influential role in shaping the character of the legislation (154-55).

Back to the Post-Colonial Scene:

In Bihar, the 1952 general elections showed that landed interests dominated the Bihar legislature: that over 70 percent of all MLA's came from upper caste zamindar families (S.K. Jha, 1972:161). Thus, by the end of 1950, the feudal landed interests had gained control of the Congress Party at the grassroots level and dominated the State Assemblies. The landed interests were succesful in forming coalitions with conservative elements sympathetic to landed interests (men such as Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, and Sardar Vallabhai Patel the first Home Minister). They were however unable to gain a strong foothold in the Central government where the Indian capitalist class and their allies had managed to consolidate their position, but nonetheless had to concede political power at the state level to the landed interests.

State governments, including the Bihar government, did indeed pass a whole series of legislation affecting land-ownership, tenancy relations and wage structure for the agricultural workers. Some of these measures, particularly those operating in the State of Bihar, will be examined in Chapter III. Here, it is important to offer some general observations. At least in words and appearance these legislative measures carried the spirit of the Kumarappa Report. Ceiling on ownership was imposed with the intention of breaking up the large-scale concentration of land. Tenancy regulations were introduced to provide security and better working conditions for the actual

cultivator. In some states, tenants were given outright ownership rights. Minimum wage for agricultural workers was proscribed. Usury was curtailed by regulating the terms of moneylending, and so on. Yet, as scores of empirical studies from all over India have revealed, all these measures failed to break the economic and political power of the feudal landlords.¹⁶ This happened partly because the legislation contained a sufficient number of loopholes to render it ineffective and also because the implementation of these measures became a major stumbling block. The weak and unorganized peasantry could not match the power of the landlords when it came to gaining access to the many rights the legislation gave them. State bureaucrats, law and order agencies and the judiciary, generally speaking, turned out to be instruments in the service of the landlord class (S. Chattopadhyay, 1973).

By the mid-sixties, it became quite clear that land reform and other institutional measures introduced to bring about changes in the agrarian class structure had by and large failed. Agricultural productivity too was not showing any signs of improvement. The food crisis of the mid-sixties not only led to a steep rise in the price of food and non-food commodities, but also led to widespread popular unrest throughout India.¹⁷ It is in this context that the Indian government adopted a new orientation in its agricultural policy and began to look for technological solutions to the problem of agriculture.

The New Agricultural Strategy:

The new strategy advanced by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and sponsored by the World Bank and the Ford Foundation recommended a major shift in policy from institutional reform to technological solutions to the problem of agricultural development within the terms of the existing class structure. The new approach was exemplified in the "Intensive Agricultural Districts Program" (IADP) which sought to concentrate an increased agricultural production via a greater use of fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds, technical assistance etc., in one pilot district each in several of the Indian states. The program and its successors (The Intensive Agricultural Areas Program [IAAP] and the High Yielding Varieties Program [HYVP]) were explicitly designed to allocate scarce agricultural resources and large sums of credit to "progressive cultivators" -- in essence the rich peasants and a section of the landlords -- and to "those areas which were best endowed for food production".¹⁸ In such localities, both the Central and State governments made available to the "progressive cultivators" a "package plan" of new agricultural inputs and credit. The introduction of the new technology was expected to rapidly increase agricultural production and formed the basis of what has since been termed the 'Green Revolution' (Byres, 1972:99-116).

The developments that followed set the stage for one of the most intense discussions and debates ever among the scholars of

India's political economy. (And this also brings us close to a summation of the discussion on the orientation of this study).

The new agricultural strategy and the accompanying incentives, predictably, brought about some discernible changes in the performance of India's agrarian economy. Expanded irrigation facilities, greater mechanization (use of tractors, electric pumps for irrigation etc.), greater use and reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and the use of new varieties of improved high-yielding seeds etc., led to a sizeable increase in agricultural production at least in those pockets which were directly influenced by the new strategy. There also seemed to be a greater articulation between the needs and fluctuations of the market and the performance of India's agriculture. These changes led observers to argue that Indian agriculture had, after all, acquired traits of the capitalist mode of production.

The Indian Debate on the Mode of Production in Agriculture:

Starting with Daniel Thorner (1967) till a very recent work of Gail Omvedt (1981), many scholars have argued that feudalism is no longer a defining feature of India's agrarian economy.¹⁹ While taking into account the increase in mechanization and other technological inputs, these scholars include other factors also in making their argument. Omvedt, for example, argues that the means of production in agriculture are now to a large extent produced industrially, and acquired through the market and that

over half of the rural population depends on wages for its survival, thus suggesting an increasing proletarianization of the labour force; and that agricultural production is being increasingly governed by the laws of the market (1981:143-47).

On the other hand, scholars like Paresh Chattopadhyay (1972,1972a), Ranjit Sau (1975), Amit Bhaduri (1973,1973a), Nirmal Chandra (1975), Pradhan Prasad (1974,1974a), Hamza Alavi (1975) and Nirmal Sengupta (1977), while conceding these changes, argue that the transformation to the capitalist mode of production is far from convincing. In the manner of Ernesto Laclau's (1971) polemical exchange with A.G. Frank (1967, 1969) concerning the latter's formulation of feudalism and capitalism in Latin America, it is maintained that the determining factor in characterizing the agrarian structure is not the sphere of exchange or of distribution, but the sphere of production.²⁰

This thesis maintains that although signs of change in the forces of production in agriculture are visible, as long as the actual relations in the sphere of production are characterized by the following features, the mode of production continues to remain a feudal one:

- (1) concentration of two modes of exploitation, namely usury and land-ownership in the hands of the same economic class;
- (2) widespread sharecropping;
- (3) widespread existence of extra-economic coercion namely through the use of bonded and attached labour, plus demands of begari; and

(4) evidence of non-economic coercion in addition to economic coercion. This is seen in conjunction with the prevalence of caste hierarchy and the resultant caste based brutality and violence.

It is the contradiction within the social relations of production that ultimately leads to the transformation of the mode of production from one mode to another. Thus, unless the social relations are transformed, one cannot argue that the mode of production itself has changed. Scholars who maintain that such a change in Indian agriculture has occurred do so on the basis of an examination primarily of the forces of production. This, in our view, is incorrect, for it fails to examine or underestimates the nature of production relations. While Omvedt argues for the predominance of capitalism, for example, on the basis that "over half the rural population depend on wages and are mobile and free", she fails to take into account the fact that "wage labour" is not necessarily absent in a feudal economy. It appears in peculiar forms: while "attached labourers" are paid a wage, they are nevertheless "attached" to whoever retains them for the specific period of time. Moreover, the landpoor and the landless, who are invariably from the lower castes or aboriginals, are far from being "free". Apart from the cultural and religious domination, most are in debt and depend upon the richer segments of the rural society for survival.

Although the forces and the relations of production are distinct categories, they are nonetheless interrelated. While

scholars who emphasize the fact that Indian agriculture has become capitalist do seek out empirical data to highlight changes that may have occurred in the social relations of production, they rely mainly on quantitative data which primarily emphasizes the forces of production. In studying the case of Bihar we have utilized data on both aspects of the agrarian society of the State (i.e. forces and relations of production). It is within this context that the attempt to examine the changes that have taken place in rural Bihar has been made.

Research Approach:

As is obvious from the preceding discussion, a study of the changing agrarian economy of Bihar has to deal with two kinds of material: (1) the forces of production and (2) the social relations of production. Under the first category, available quantitative data will be examined to reveal changes in patterns that are emerging in the agrarian economy: patterns namely, of land utilization, cropping, irrigation, mechanization, availability and utilization of credit facilities, extent of the use of fertilizers and other capital inputs, etc. Much of this data is available through various government publications such as the Statistical Abstract of India and the Bihar Statistical Handbook, both of which draw their information from periodic publications of the population and agricultural census. The data allows for comparative analysis both paradigmatically (over a

period of time) and syntagmatically (between India and Bihar as well as between the two regions of Bihar). The units of measurement and categories used in the two major sources are the same, thus there is no discrepancy. In addition, data is also available through other government bodies and private agencies. Limitations in terms of accuracy (as in all census data, particularly in underdeveloped countries) exists. For example, data that would shed light on land reform questions is unreliable precisely because of the question of land reform. The universal response of landowners to reform legislation or even intimations of the impending reform has often led to a concealing of the actual situation by the altering of records. It is axiomatic that holdings are far more concentrated than the data suggests and there is a great deal more tenancy than is recorded. Also, the juridical form of individual ownership reflected in most data obscures the real concentration of ownership by families. Moreover, data on land ownership (as opposed to operated areas) is frequently not available; ownership units are typically far more concentrated than operational units. Indeed, one of the reasons given for the lack of ownership data in the 1960 Pakistan Census of Agriculture was that the the land reforms (so it was believed) made it impossible to elicit honest responses to questions of ownership (Herring, 1983). Moreover, official definitions and field methodologies change over time, often in quite haphazard ways, and apparent agrarian structural transformations are frequently

artifacts of such changes. Finally, it must be emphasized that officially published data are subject to political considerations before seeing the light of day. Regimes often try to present their reform accomplishments in the most favourable light. Moreover, each level of bureaucracy produces figures under pressure to "show progress" in implementation. The point about the unreliability of numbers is important enough to merit the use of several examples. First, consider the question of the extent of tenancy in India. The proponents of the "capitalist mode of production in agriculture" argue that the decline of tenancy indicates the increasing domination of capitalism in agriculture (Omvedt, 1981:147). Even though Indian tenancy-reform legislation extends to volumes, and the state has made extensive efforts to collect data for planning purposes, there is no reliable answer to the question of the extent of tenancy. Household survey figures (the National Sample Survey) show more than double the tenancy shown in the Agricultural Census; whereas independent village or district studies show even more tenancy than the National Sample Survey data does. Laxminarayan and Tyagi conclude from an analysis of the available sources that "the longer the period of stay in the villages [by the researchers] the higher is the tenancy recorded" (1977:880). This is to be expected as the terms of tenancy are legalistically controlled throughout India, leading to widespread concealment (Sanyal, 1972).

For understandable reasons, no reliable nation-wide or region-wide data from official sources is available on even basic factors such as the ownership of land, the extent of sharecropping and other forms of tenancy. No official data is available on the extent of usury and indebtedness, and on the terms under which actual producers participate in the labour process. Moreover, aggregate data on the extent of bonded and attached labour and other various kinds of extra-economic coercion is also not available. To some extent, figures from the population census offer some indication, but, as far as shifts in occupational patterns are concerned, the figures are woefully inadequate.

For these reasons, we have had to rely on the insights provided by numerous micro studies of village communities in various parts of Bihar. Fortunately there is a considerable amount of literature available, both anthropological and sociological, as well as in the form of studies produced by political activists and investigative journalists. These sources are further supplemented by several detailed studies of rural life in Bihar over the last decade or so -- a period in which Bihar has figured prominently in the news due to the incidence of innumerable peasant struggles.

Chapter Scheme:

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter II briefly outlines the geographic, cultural and socio-economic features of

Bihar. Chapter III begins with an examination of the colonial agrarian policies in eastern India and its effects on the agrarian structure and then proceeds to critically examine the various "agrarian reform" measures introduced by the Indian government in the post-independence period. The extent to which the goals of "agrarian reform" have actually been realised and its effects on the agrarian social structure will be dealt with in detail.

Chapters IV and V examine the extent of the changes that have taken place in the agrarian economy of Bihar since the mid-50's. More specifically, Chapter IV examines the changes at the level of the forces of production -- i.e. changes in the occupational structure, cropping and land use pattern, mechanization, availability and utilization of credit, use of capital inputs and how all this has affected productivity etc. Chapter V deals with the nature and extent of change in the social relations of production. And finally, in Chapter VI, we summarize our major findings and draw some conclusions.

Notes to Chapter I

- ¹ For a discussion of this migration from India, see A.C. Mayer (1973).
- ² This debate was subsequently published in R. Hilton and C. Hill ([eds.] 1967).
- ³ While the master-serf relation was essentially based on exploitation, patronage and protection were not absent.
- ⁴ Three issues arising from the preceding discussion need clarification. First, the mode of production can be defined as the combination of existing forces of production and the existing relations of production. Feudal relations do not involve 'pure' economic appropriation (as in the capitalist mode) but involve the extraction of social surplus through traditional obligations and extra-economic coercion. For example, in feudal England, the basic economic institution of rural life was the manor, which contained within it two separate and distinct classes: noblemen (lords) and serfs. The lords lived off the labour of the serfs who farmed his fields and paid taxes in kind and money according to the custom of the manor. Similarly, the lord provided protection, supervision and administration of justice according to the custom of the manor. It must be added that although the system did rest on reciprocal obligations, the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the lord led to a system in which the serf was exploited in the extreme. Marc Bloch, one of the recognized authorities on European feudalism, summarized the characteristic features of feudalism in the following words: "A subject peasantry, widespread use of the service tenement [i.e. the fief] instead of a salary, which was out of the question, the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors, ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage...." (1964:446)
Second, the dissolution of feudalism in western Europe occurred because of contradictions between the developing forces of production and the feudal relations of production.

E.K. Hunt (1972) argues that the early sixteenth century is a watershed in European history as it forms the dividing line between the old, decaying feudal order and the rising capitalist system. He cites, for example, improvements in agricultural technology and practices which led to dramatic increases in agricultural output, which in turn made possible a rapid increase in urban population. The growth of towns and cities led to a growth of rural-urban specialization. Interregional, long-distance trade and commerce was another very important result of this increased specialization, for it not only led to the disintegration of medieval trade and custom but also by the sixteenth century the handicraft industry, in which the craftsman owned his workshop, tools and raw materials and functioned as an independent small scale entrepreneur, had been largely replaced by the putting-out system. The expansion of market forces further weakened the manorial system, the bastion of feudalism. Thus by the middle of the sixteenth century, money rents exceeded the value of labour services in many parts of Europe.

Third, for R.S. Sharma (1965), whose writings on Indian history justly enjoy a privileged status, argues that Indian feudalism originated in the 4th century A.D. Sharma visualizes the development in India of almost all components of western European feudalism--serfdom, manor, self-sufficient economic units, the process of feudalization of crafts and commerce. Of all these, the most critical element of Indian feudalism, in Sharma's view, consisted of the growing dependence of the peasantry on the land and intermediaries following the grant of more and more rights to them by the state. The dependence was manifested in terms of increasing restrictions on the peasants' mobility and their subjugation to forced labour which was becoming increasingly intensive.

⁵ The defeat of the feudal ruling classes by the bourgeoisie, for example, not only paved the way for the further development of society's productive forces, but in addition, spelled the doom of feudal values, ideas and institutions. For example, the values associated with vows of homage and fealty which were vital to manorial life were impediments to and incongruent with commerce and market transactions. Moreover, equality before the law, representative form of government, are all bourgeois institutions, and the rise of Protestantism was an ideological response to the established Catholic order.

⁶ For a detailed survey of such a position see P. Woodruff (1954).

- ⁷ In 1815, several decades after the industrial revolution had got under way, the value of British cotton textiles imported into India was a mere twenty-six thousand pounds. By 1832, it had gone up to four hundred thousand pounds and by 1850, India was the market for one quarter of the total British textile exports (Alavi, 1980:386).
- ⁸ For a detailed discussion of this, see V.I. Pavlov (1964).
- ⁹ That is, the European bourgeoisie acquired hegemonic and unshared control of state power.
- ¹⁰ The Congress Party, though composed largely of professional classes was "a superior ally of the Indian bourgeoisie...the holding of an industrial conference simultaenously with the annual session of Congress in 1905 and the launching of the boycott of British goods in 1906 were by far the most significant expressions of the alliance between the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie", B.B. Mishra (1961:352-367)
- ¹¹ The colonial rulers of South Asia distinguished between "good landlords" who invested in land and provided services to tenants and "bad landlords" or unproductive landed gentry who did neither. Nationalist thinking in British India elaborated and developed the critique of the bad landlord, the word zamindar came to mean the parasitic and collaborationist landlord.
- ¹² Nehru's remarks are cited in H.D. Malaviya (1955:20-73).
- ¹³ For a history of the AIKS and its links with the Congress Party see Rasul (1974).
- ¹⁴ Cited in F. Frankel (1978:58).
- ¹⁵ Frankel points out that the Congress Party in order to win elections made deliberate efforts to accomodate the large zamindars and native princes since their rank, caste and economic power gave them control over rural votes. The landed interests made thousands of "four anna" (cents) members and quickly took over the control of the Congress party machinery at the grassroots level (1978:76).

- ¹⁶ See specifically the work of P.C. Joshi (1976), who cites over a hundred scholars, all of who have examined land reform measures and arrive at the same conclusion that land reforms were a failure. See also the work of H. Sharma (1962), G. Kotovsky (1964), B. Sen (1962) and S. Chattopadhyay (1973).
- ¹⁷ Foodgrain imports rose to 10 million tons in 1964-65 from 1.4 million tons in 1956 (Bettelheim, 1968:177).
- ¹⁸ Areas with good soil and reliable water supply.
- ¹⁹ These scholars include Doug McEachern (1976); Kathleen Gough (1981); Joan Mencher (1978); John Harriss (1977); Ashok Rudra (1974, 1981); Dipankar Gupta (1980); Aparajita Chakraborty (1981); Utsa Patnaik (1971, 1971a, 1972), and P. Bardhan (1984) among others.
- ²⁰ Frank's conceptualization of capitalism in terms of a global network of trade is grounded on relations of exchange rather than relations of production. This issue is taken up by Laclau in his critique of Frank. Redefining the concept, Laclau writes: "We therefore designate as a mode of production the logically and mutually coordinated articulation of: (1) a determinate type of ownership of means of production (2) a determinate form of appropriation of the economic surplus (3) a determinate degree of development of the division of labour (4) a determinate level of development of productive forces" (1971:33).
- Specifying the feudal and the capitalist modes of production, Laclau argues that "the feudal mode of production is one in which the productive process operates according to the following pattern: (1) The economic surplus is produced by a labour force subject to extra-economic compulsion (2) the economic surplus is privately appropriated by someone other than the direct producer (3) property in the means of production remains in the hands of the direct producer. In the capitalist mode of production the economic surplus is also subject to private appropriation but, as distinct from feudalism, ownership of means of production is severed from the ownership of labour power, it is that [which] permits the translation of labour power into a commodity, and with this the birth of wage relation" (p.34).

MAP 2

POLITICAL MAP OF BIHAR: DISTRICTS



Adapted from: States Atlas of India (Delhi: Indian Book Depot, 1982).

CHAPTER II: BIHAR: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Although this study focuses on the contemporary phenomenon of agrarian relations and economy in the well-defined region of Bihar, it would be useful to situate this contemporary reality in the broader historical and socio-economic context. Thousands of years of settled human habitation has existed in India, shaped by the natural environment and in turn shaping it. River valleys have universally been places where civilization developed and India is no exception. And, since Bihar falls on the route of the Ganges river, around which highly developed civilizations emerged, it has acquired an important place in India's history. In this chapter we will try to outline some of the features of this history. More specifically, we will look at Bihar's natural environment and how it has historically shaped the socio-economic organization of the region.

Bihar, a landlocked state in eastern India, is surrounded by Nepal in the north, West Bengal in the east, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in the west and Orissa in the south (Map 1). In terms of land area, it is the ninth largest state in the country, covering 174,000 sq. kilometres or 5.3 percent of India's land area. For administrative purposes, the state is divided into thirty-two districts (Map 2). Each district is made up of several micro-administrative units known as anchals. A village constitutes the smallest administrative unit.

Particularly in the plains the village is often divided into different tolas, or localities, according to caste and/or occupations of the inhabitants.

The region which includes the state of Bihar has been one of the great foci of Indian civilization and culture. Archeological evidence indicates that the earliest traces of human settlement in this region date back to the second Inter-Glacial period between 400,000 and 200,000 B.C. However, by c.2000 B.C., a large and thriving human settlement already existed in this region along the fertile banks of the Ganges river. The Ganges culture was second in stature only to the spectacular Indus Valley Civilization (or the Harrapa culture) c.2400 B.C. to the north-west, in present day Pakistan (Sankalia, 1963). The Harappa and Gangetic cultures declined in the second millenium B.C. and had almost completely disintegrated when (c.1500 B.C.) the Aryan invaders entered north-west India (Kosambi, 1965). By c.1000 B.C., the Aryan conquest was almost complete, with Aryan rule and influence established in much of the sub-continent. During this period, the area now known as Bihar was divided into several kingdoms. The most famous of these ancient kingdoms was Videha or Mithila (c.700 B.C.). Mithila became the centre of early Hinduism (Pandey, 1963). It is believed that the two great Hindu religious epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were written in this period. In the Ramayana, Mithila is credited as being the birthplace of Sita, the goddess-queen of Lord Rama, the hero

of the Ramayana (Pandey, 1963:119-157). Today, parts of north-west Bihar (which corresponds to the ancient Mithila kingdom) are home to important religious centres, attracting thousands of Hindu pilgrims to its numerous temples and shrines.

By c.750 B.C., the Magadha empire emerged in the area that today constitutes central Bihar. Magadha was the foremost of the kingdoms in the Ganges plain and the centre of Buddhism. It was in Magadha that Buddha is known to have achieved enlightenment, and the banyan tree under which Buddha once preached is said to still exist in the vicinity of modern Biharsharif, drawing thousands of tourists and pilgrims alike each year. However, it was during the reign of Ashoka (c.273-232 B.C.) that Magadha reached the pinnacle of its glory. Ashoka moved his capital to Pataliputra (modern Patna, the capital of Bihar) and encouraged religious learning.¹ During Ashoka's reign, great Buddhist monasteries such as Nalanda and Vikramasila (which still exist), were centres of learning for Buddhists from all over Asia, and the vigorous intellectual life of these monastic universities made an impact upon the whole history of Asia (Thapar, 1968:72-91). Two centuries after Ashoka's death, civil war and invasions led to the decline of the Magadha empire and it was to remain in obscurity until 1526 when the Mughal invaders first entered Magadha.² The name 'Bihar' was given by the Mughals who were struck by the large number of monasteries (viharas) they saw in the present day Nalanda and Patna districts. During the Mughal period (c.1562-c.1760 A.D.) Bihar became an important

agricultural region exporting its surplus foodgrain and produce to other parts of the Mughal empire. Towns such as Patna, Biharshariff, Banipore, Bhagalpur and Monghyr grew rapidly in population and size and once again became important commercial and manufacturing centres -- famous for their silk and cotton textiles. Patna became the leading banking centre in the subcontinent and the largest manufacturer of saltpetre (for gunpowder), tobacco, saffron, metalware and alcoholic beverages. And, since it was located strategically on the banks of the Ganges, it was an important centre for east-west trade.³.

Bihar remained a province of the Mughal empire till the early eighteenth century, and only after the battle of Buxar in 1760, it became a part of the British administered Bengal Presidency -- an area which also included the present day states of Orissa and West Bengal. The Bengal Presidency was broken up in 1912 separating from its western region. This region was again divided in 1936 into separate provinces, Bihar and Orissa. Since then, Bihar has remained one administrative and political unit except for some minor boundary adjustments made after independence when the Indian states were reorganized along linguistic lines in 1956.

The Land:⁴

Topographically the state can be divided into two natural regions: (i) the Gangetic plains, named after the majestic Ganges river that flows through Bihar for over 450 kilometres of

its 1,600 Kilometres journey from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, and (ii) the Chotanagpur plateau in the south. The Gangetic, or the Ganga plains, cover an area of 94,800 sq. kilometres or 54 percent of Bihar's land area. They are largely flat alluvial plains with an elevation of less than 150 metres (500 ft) above sea level. These plains are among the most fertile agricultural regions of India, favouring the cultivation of almost any crop that can be grown in semi-tropical lowlands. The Chotanagpur plateau covers an area of 79,700 sq. kilometres or 46 percent of the land area. It is a heavily forested (containing over 80 percent of Bihar's forests) and mountainous region with elevations reaching upto 1,500 metres (5,000 ft) above sea level. Due to the uneven terrain, cultivation of the land in this region acquires traits peculiar to itself and makes heavier demands, although 75 percent of the population in this region was engaged in agriculture in 1981.

The climate of Bihar can be best described according to the three seasons, namely, the hot season from March to May; the monsoon or rainy season from June to October and the cold season from November to February. The weather conditions show only moderate variations in the plains. Temperatures range from 15 degrees celcius (55 degrees F) in November to February to 35 degrees celcius (90 degrees F) or more in May. In the Chotanagpur plateau, winter is slightly colder than in the plains. Temperatures in summer range from 30 to 35 degrees celcius (85 to 90 degrees F).

Bihar, like the rest of the Indian sub-continent, receives much of its rainfall between the months of June and October and cropping cycles are closely attuned to the rainfall patterns. Rainfall varies from an annual 1,500 millimetres(mm) in the plains north of the Ganges to 1,100 mm in the southern plains. The Chotanagpur plateau receives an annual rainfall of 1,700 mm. Adequate and reliable rainfall is crucial to Bihar's agriculture, for too little rain can result in droughts while heavy rains often result in floods in the plains. Despite the expansion of area under irrigation in the last two decades, Bihar's, and indeed India's, agriculture is still a gamble with the monsoons. As discussed in detail in Chapter IV, there are tremendous variations in the pattern of land use between the two regions. In the Gangetic plains, land cultivation is intense with over two-thirds of the area under the plough, whereas in the plateau, less than one-third of the land is cultivated. Moreover, in the plateau, over 25 percent of the land is comprised of forests, whereas in the plains forests cover less than 6 percent of the area.

Mineral Resources:⁵

Bihar is the richest state in India in terms of mineral resources. During 1980-81, it produced 41 percent of India's coal; 32 percent of its bauxite; 59 percent of its copper; 17 percent of its iron ore; 77 percent of its silver; 62 percent of its mica; 100 percent of its pyrites; 32 percent of its

fireclay; 12 percent of its asbestos and fairly significant quantities of manganese, graphite, uranium, chromite, gold and other minerals. All these mineral resources are found only in the Chotanagpur plateau, which is the richest mineral belt in India, containing over 80 percent of the country's known coal deposits and almost the entire deposit of coking coal. All the large scale heavy industrial development in Bihar is located in the Chotanagpur plateau. The Tata Iron and Steel Company, established in 1907, is the largest plant of its kind in India, and the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company -- also the largest in India -- is located in Jamshedpur in the Singhbhum district. Other major industrial complexes include the heavy machine building plant in Ranchi, an oil refinery in Barauni in the Giridih district, the Sindhri fertilizer factory in Dhanbad district, a uranium processing plant in the Singhbhum district, a large steel complex at Bokaro and the largest aluminium complex in the country in the Ranchi district.

The People:

According to the 1981 census, Bihar with 69,714,734 people is the second most populous state in India. This accounts for 10.2 percent of India's population. Bihar's population density of 402 persons per sq. kilometre is twice as high as that of India (221 per sq. kilometre) and third in rank among the states, after Kerala and West Bengal (654 and 614 persons per sq. kilometre respectively). Table 2.1 presents the regional

distribution of Bihar's population.⁶

TABLE 2.1
Bihar : Regional Distribution of Population--1981

	POP. IN MILLIONS	%	POP. DENSITY PER SQ. KM.
1. Gangetic Plain	53,302,665	74.8	595
2. Chota nagpur	17,612,069	25.2	198
Bihar	69,914,734	100	402

Source:
Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables, Series I,
Paper I.

Table 2.2 shows the rural/urban population pattern.⁷

TABLE 2.2
Bihar: Rural/Urban Population--1981

	RURAL POP. MILLIONS	%	URBAN POP. MILLIONS	%
1. Gangetic Plains	47,154,720	90.0	5,147,945	10.0
2. Chota nagpur	14,038,024	80.0	3,574,045	20.0
Bihar	61,192,744	87.5	8,721,990	12.5

Source:
Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables, Series I,
Paper I.

Among the 202 towns and cities in the state, only nine have a population of 100,000 or more.⁸ These nine cities account for one-third of the urban population. This means that a relatively small proportion of the urban population lives in large, urban centres. This further emphasizes the rural character of the state.

Anthropological studies indicate that the original inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent were the Dravidian people, the founders of the Harappa and Ganges cultures. They were a dark-skinned people with negroid features and of medium build and height (Guha, 1937). Most Indian anthropologists believe that the aboriginal people, or the adivasis, who make up approximately 7 percent of India's population are the closest physical representatives of these early inhabitants (Bhowmik,

1977). The non-aboriginal majority claim to be descendants of the Aryans, and while a section of the population (namely, the high caste Hindus) do retain certain "Aryan features" -- light skin and Caucasian features -- the vast majority of the population's racial/ethnic origin could be characterized as being "Indo-Dravidic", that is, a 'mixture' of Aryan and Dravidian physical features (Bhowmik, 1977)

In India, the adivasis usually inhabit the most inaccessible and inhospitable regions of the country -- having been forced out of the more fertile areas, through the ages, by the Aryans. In Bihar, over 95 percent of the 7 million adivasis live in the Chotanagpur plateau, and although they belong to the same "Austro-Dravidic" linguistic group, the adivasis are a culturally diverse group and divided into several different tribes. The Santhals are the most numerous of the tribes in Bihar, numbering over 2.5 million people. The other large tribes include the Ho, the Munda and the Oraon. The smallest group is the Baiga, with only about 130 members. There are altogether over 29 different tribal groups in Bihar. The majority of Bihar's tribal population is agriculturalist, practicing slash and burn cultivation, with some supplementing their diet and income through hunting and gathering in the vast primordial forests of the Chotanagpur plateau. In recent years, there has been a steady migration of the adivasi people to the urban centres and tea plantations in search of employment. The relationship between the adivasi and non-adivasi has

historically been antagonistic, and both groups avoid social contact -- marriage between members of the two groups is strictly forbidden, and, despite the dominance of Hinduism and Islam in Indian history and culture, the adivasi people have not readily accepted either of these two faiths. While a small percentage have converted to Christianity (a result of large-scale missionary activity during the colonial rule), the vast majority of the adivasis still adhere to their traditional animist beliefs (Vidyarthi, 1977). Indian anthropologists have argued that the adivasis rejected Hinduism for its hierarchical caste system and ritualism and Islam for its 'irrational' ban on pork and liquor consumption. The political and social organization of the adivasis is essentially non-hierarchical with the clan elders occupying the decision making position. Land and other resources have traditionally been communally owned by the clan. This is quite different from the stratified landownership pattern that exists among the Hindu agriculturalists in the plains. Moreover, the adivasis consume a wide range of meat products including beef and pork -- both taboo to either the Hindu or Muslim people.

In Bihar, the Hindus form the largest religious community, comprising 84 percent of the population, as against India's total of 82.8 percent. The proportion of Muslims in the state is 13.5 percent. The most distinguishing feature of Hinduism is the caste system.

The caste system is generally regarded as involving the division of society into a number of hereditary and endogamous groups, each associated with a certain occupation and occupying a specific ritual status in a hierarchy defined by the rules of purity and pollution. Romila Thapar argues that the "first step in the direction of caste (as distinct from class) was taken when the Aryans treated the dasas [Dravidians] as beyond the social pale, probably owing to a fear that assimilation with them would lead to a loss of Aryan identity" (1968:37-41). Thapar continues: "ostensibly, the distinction was that of colour, the dasas being darker and of an alien culture. The Sanskrit [language of the Aryans] word for caste, varna actually means colour. The colour element of caste was emphasized throughout the Aryan period and was eventually to become deep-rooted in north-Indian Aryan culture". Initially, therefore, the division was between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The Aryans were the duija or twice-born castes (the first being physical birth and the second the initiation into caste status). The contemporary Hindu population is divided into more than a hundred castes and sub-castes or jatis. However, all the various castes and sub-castes can be broadly grouped into the four basic Hindu varnas, or the four universal and unchanging categories of the Hindu hierarchy, namely, brahmins (priest-scholars); kshatriyas (warriors-rulers); vaishyas (traders-merchants) and shudras (workers-artisans). The first two varnas jointly constitute the 'twice-born' castes or the

'upper castes'. The vaishyas varna includes the bania or merchant and trader caste. The shudras, the most numerous of the four varna stratas includes most of the peasantry and artisans. The shudras are also referred to as 'lower castes'. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy, with no varna standing at all, are the harijans (untouchables) who are considered so unclean by caste Hindus as to defile caste persons merely through touch, and in some cases through sight. They are usually segregated at the edges of villages and form the bulk of the landless peasants in Bihar and indeed throughout India. According to the 1951 census (the last census, where among other things, the population was classified also according to caste), the 'upper castes' in Bihar, made up of Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars and the Kayasthas, constituted 14.2 percent of the total population. The middle or kisan (peasant) castes constituted 19.3 percent of the total population. The lower castes made up 31 percent, and the harijans and the adivasis accounted for 23 percent of the total population.

In Bihar, and elsewhere in India, the political and economic position of a particular caste is highly correlated with its ritual status in the caste hierarchy.⁹ For Bihar, the findings of the 1951 All-India Agricultural Labour Inquiry indicate that over 80 percent of all landlords were either Brahmins, Rajputs or Bhumihars and over 92 percent of the landless agricultural labourers were from the lower castes, harijans and adivasis.¹⁰

As discussed in detail in Chapter IV, there are tremendous variations between the two regions of Bihar in terms of the agrarian class structure and relations. The Gangetic plains are inhabited largely by the Hindus whose traditionally strict hierarchical caste system is reflected in their highly unequal landownership system. Some of the largest zamindari (landed estates) in Bihar are to be found in the Ganges plains. In the plains, land ownership is concentrated in a few hands, while the vast majority are either landless or cultivators of tiny, fragmented plots, usually as sharecroppers. In the Chotanagpur plateau, personal and inheritable rights in land have emerged over time within the framework of tribal organization. Consequently, there also developed some unevenness in the landownership. Until the consolidation of the British colonial rule, it was not a serious problem, since people could freely clear forest areas for cultivation if and when required. During the nineteenth century, however, there was an influx of outsiders, particularly traders, who settled in the area. These outsiders were able gradually to take possession of large areas of the land of the adivasis and emerged as moneylenders-cum-landlords, much like their counterparts in the plains.¹¹

The Land and the People:¹²

Although many developments in manufacturing, mining, transportation and other services have taken place over the last

few decades, Bihar continues to remain mainly an agrarian society with 87.5 percent of its people living in rural areas and over 85 percent of its workforce engaged in agriculture-related activities in 1981. Extraction of sustenance from land thus remains the main occupation for the vast majority of Bihar's people. Whether it is the plains -- north and south of the Ganges -- where for miles and miles one sees nothing but human settlements, called villages, dotted with mango groves and orchards, or the rolling and treed hills of the plateaus, the common sight is of people expending their labour on land. Depending on the time of the year, they could be ploughing the fields, making bunds, channeling water, planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, weeding, harvesting, threshing and the like.

It is not just economic activities that centre around land and its cultivation. The cycle of agricultural operations, which is determined by the cyclical motion of the yearly seasons, in turn determines practically every other aspect of life in rural Bihar. The harvest brings not only the much cherished food to be consumed and stored for use till the next harvest, several months to a full year away, it also brings a period of reprieve from hard work on the fields, till the next ploughing and planting season. The harvest also brings some money, at least for those who are in a position to sell part of their produce in the market. Repairs to houses or the building of new ones, buying and selling of cattle, and other similar activities are

carried out in the post-harvest period. Pilgrimages to holy places, conducting of marriages and other social obligations take place at this time. Although there is no control on when births and deaths occur, atleast as far as death anniversaries are concerned, a whole fortnight is set aside during the fall season (after the planting is over) when the ceremonies of the yearly 'feeding' the departed soul (called shradha) are carried out. Regardless of the time of year in which a person dies, the date of his/her death is observed according to the two-week long lunar cycle during this specially marked fortnight in the fall. Consequently, there is much feasting during these fifteen days. It is around this time also that numerous melas or festivals where traditional entertainment -- in the form of sports, dramas, minstrel songs and the recital of the epics such as the Ramayana -- are held for days at a time.

So central is the role of the land and its cultivation that the entire social organization of the village has traditionally been built around it. Not every economically active person works directly on the land. There are priests who perform religious and life-cycle ceremonies. There are traders-cum-moneylenders. Then there are a variety of occupations that arise from the production of various commodities or the provision of necessary services such as that of the carpenter, barber, potter, blacksmith, goldsmith, leatherworker, tailor, weaver, scavenger, etc. These occupations have traditionally been carried out by particular groups of people, their caste itself so designated by

their occupation. Since the majority of them own no land, their economic well-being and survival has been intertwined with that of the land-owning peasants, in that the value of what they produced or provided has traditionally been outside the cash nexus. Under what has come to be known in the social-anthropological literature as the jajmani system,¹³ these various producers of commodities or providers of services would be paid a certain amount of products of the field at the time of each harvest. In this manner, the entire productive life of the village centred around land and its cultivation. Even the fortunes of the trader-cum-moneylender as well as that of the Brahmin priest depended on how good or bad the harvest was.

Much of the labour migration to the cities also follows the pattern and the cycle of agriculture. When the demands of ploughing, harvesting and other operations are met, those with little or no land drift to the urban centres and seek jobs as rickshaw pullers, coolies etc., or at the sites of road building and dam constructions. In the plateau region, the adivasis turn to the surrounding forests to bring back wood and other forest products not only for their own needs but also for selling in the market.

Thus, in the socio-economic life of rural Bihar, as in the rest of the country, land -- its ownership and its cultivation -- constitutes the centrality. In terms of the locus of political power, the ownership of land is the ultimate deciding factor. For example, Brahmins -- as priests and scholars -- have

traditionally enjoyed the highest status in the ritual hierarchy, but in the plains of Bihar, it is the ritually lower status caste groups such as the Rajputs, Bhumihars, Ahirs, Yadavas, Kurmis who wield the real power because they control much of the land. At the other end of the spectrum, the lowest status caste groups -- the untouchables -- have been subjected to much feudal oppression and abuse, but their real oppression is rooted in the fact that they own no land and are forced to work for those who control land, as labourers, often under serf-like conditions.

As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, ownership of land is highly concentrated in a few hands in rural Bihar. In fact, Bihar has been known to be home to some of the largest landlords of India, with some owning as much as tens of thousands of hectares of land.¹⁴ Almost every village, particularly in the plains, would have at least one or two large landlords who owns fairly large proportions of the village's cultivable land. Even if they were absentee landlords, their presence in the village would be felt by the existence of an ostensibly and disproportionately large house, with an even larger walled courtyard. Other than these landlords, the village would have a few 'well-off' peasants -- often described in the literature as rich peasants. They own a substantial amount of land and hire labour to work on it, besides providing their own labour, agricultural implements and general supervision. Like the landlords, rich peasants also often lease part of their land

to sharecroppers. Next in the hierarchy are a large group of peasants called 'middle-peasants' and an even larger number of poor peasants. In the first category are those who own land barely sufficient to meet their own needs. Using their own tools and animals, they work the land themselves, hiring labour only at the peak seasons of harvest and transplanting. The poor peasants possess insufficient land, usually less than one hectare and often end up leasing land for cultivation, or work as agricultural labourers for the landlords and rich peasants in order to supplement their income. At the bottom of the agrarian class structure are the landless peasants working as sharecroppers (bataidars) or labourers. At the village level, they account for about 20-30 percent of the population. Almost invariably they are from the untouchable castes and constitute the poorest, the most abused and exploited sections of the rural society.

It is this socio-economic framework and the structure of political power which rests upon it, that defines the profile of the land-people relationship in rural Bihar. This framework is the context against which we have to view the many peasant struggles and agitations that mark Bihar's history. In the Chotanagpur plateau there have been numerous large scale insurrections and rebellions, mostly against the diku (the British and the non-tribal peoples) -- the Kol insurrection of 1831-35 (Fuchs, 1965); the Santhal rebellion of 1855-56 involving between thirty to fifty thousand armed men in open

warfare (Natarajan, 1953); and the Munda uprising in 1900 (Singh, 1966) -- all of which were aimed at driving out the dikus from the tribal areas and restoring land to the original inhabitants.¹⁵ The Gangetic plains also witnessed a series of agrarian agitations during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The most famous was the 'Champaran Satyagraha' (acts of non-violent civil disobedience) organized by the Indian National Congress and led by M.K. Gandhi, in the Champaran district in 1919. The protestors not only demanded a reduction in land rent but also an end to beth begar (Mishra, 1966). Between 1930 and 1943, the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, under the leadership of Swami Sahajananda led a series of agitations, demanding the complete abolition of the zamindari system (Das, 1983). In the late 1930's and early 1940's, the All India Kisan Sabha, under the influence of the Communist Party of India, organized and led some of the most militant peasant struggles in India -- the Tebhaga movement in West Bengal and the Telengana movement in the princely state of Hyderabad (S. Sen, 1982). As will be seen in Chapter III, this tide of peasant uprisings has not subsided in the contemporary period (Banerjee, 1980; Mukherji & Yadav, 1980).

The central issue of land and its distribution remains unresolved and continues to be on the agenda in the contemporary period. The next chapter examines, historically, how this relationship between land and the people was intended to be altered through governmental measures, and what came of them.

Notes to Chapter II

- ¹ Ashoka's rule is referred to as the 'golden age of India'. After converting to Buddhism, Ashoka preached tolerance and non-violence. Under his rule, the whole of South Asia and beyond was brought under the influence of one political system (Thapar, 1968:72-91).
- ² The 'Mughal' invaders, belonging to an Islamic tribe, originated in central Persia.
- ³ Cited in the various articles in Raychaudhuri and Habib ([eds.] 1984).
- ⁴ For details of the geographical and topographical features of Bihar see Ahmad Enayat (1965); R.R. Diwakar (1959) and R.P. Singh and A. Kumar (1970).
- ⁵ Data on mineral resources is compiled from the Statistical Abstract of India 1982, pp. 81-89.
- ⁶ The 1981 census data for India and Bihar was compiled and sent on my request to me by some students of Calcutta University. While they did include the source of the data, they did not include the page numbers of the census volume.
- ⁷ 'Urban' is defined in the 1981 census as (i) a minimum population of 5,000 (ii) with atleast 75 percent of its male working population engaged in non-agricultural livelihood and (iii) which has a density of population of atleast 400 persons per sq. km.
- ⁸ Five of the nine cities (Patna, Biharsharif, Gaya, Monghyr and Bhagalpur) are in the plains. Jamshedpur and Ranchi are in the Chotanagpur plateau.

- ⁹ See, for example, Rajni Kothari (1970); Gail Omvedt (1982); Hari P. Sharma (1971 & 1975). With reference to Bihar, see G. Mishra and B.K. Pandey (1975).
- ¹⁰ Cited in Ramashray Roy (1970:46).
- ¹¹ See, for example, Dubey and Murdia (1977).
- ¹² Many of the observations made in this section are based on the detailed field notes and taped interviews from Hari P. Sharma's fieldwork in Bihar in 1984, as well as detailed discussions on the subject with him.
- ¹³ For a discussion of the system see Lewis (1958); Wiser (1958).
- ¹⁴ Cited in Henningham (1982).
- ¹⁵ The term diku literally means outsider. More specifically, it meant the British mining and forest officials and Hindu traders, landlords who were responsible for the alienation of the tribal lands.

CHAPTER III: AGRARIAN REFORMS IN BIHAR¹

Historical Evolution of the Land System in Bihar

There has been a long and interesting debate on the nature of the pre-British land systems evolved mainly during the Mughal rule (mid 16th to mid 18th centuries) in India.² The debate has centred around the concept of ownership in land. Was land privately owned with the owner paying to the sovereign, i.e., 'remuneration of sovereignty and protection'? Or, was the ruler the sole landlord, granting occupancy rights to individuals and in turn receiving rent from the cultivators? Or was the ownership of land subject to simultaneous or competing claims? The various forms this debate took will not be examined for it is not central to the thesis. Instead, the discussion will be confined to those aspects of the debate that are necessary in understanding the land tenure system which India inherited in 1947.

There is now some agreement amongst critics that prior to the British conquest there had developed in India an intricately stratified system of relationship of the people to land. At the apex of the hierarchy were the Mughal rulers. Below the Mughals were their representatives, the zamindars or revenue collectors.³ Below the zamindars were many intermediate layers of cultivators or raiyats, who lived in villages, embodying varying degrees of communality in ownership of the instruments of production and usufructuary rights to the land.⁴ At the

base, composed largely of 'untouchables', were a class of landless agricultural labourers with no rights to the land. Confused initially by this system of rights in land, the British servants of the East India Company assumed that the zamindars were in fact the owners of the land. They were not. In general, the zamindars had been appointed by the Mughal authorities to collect land revenue from the actual cultivators. They were 'revenue farmers', whose interests were distinctly different from the interests of those who actually laboured on the land. Yet, the zamindars were treated by the British as though they were the absolute owners of the land and could be induced to perform the functions of English landlords.⁵

This perspective of the British concerning the zamindars was institutionalized through the introduction of the 'Permanent Settlement of 1793'. The Permanent Settlement was a major land revenue system that was introduced in the Bengal Presidency -- of which Bihar was a part. Under the 'settlement', the actual cultivator's customary rights in land were ignored, but zamindars were conferred proprietary rights. This 'settlement' was made by the British East India Company with the zamindars, on the understanding that the revenue due to the Company would be fixed in cash, in perpetuity. The unalterable revenue demand, fixed as payable by the zamindars was supposed to represent nine-tenths of what the zamindars received in rent from the cultivators. The remaining one-tenth was left to the zamindars as remuneration for their collection responsibilities. The

zamindars, who were allowed the right to fix their own terms of tenancy with the actual tillers of the soil (now their tenants), often raised rents to enlarge their own share. When the tenants fell behind in the payment of rent, or rejected demands for higher rents, they were ousted summarily by the zamindars. Finally, the settlement conferred certain proprietary rights upon the zamindars; they were accorded the privilege of transferring their rights to others and dividing their lands ("estates") without the sanction of the company (and later the State).⁶

However, the proprietary rights of the zamindars were not absolute. The colonial administration assumed the power to auction all lands the proprietors of which defaulted in the payment of revenue. The consequent inability of some of the zamindars to meet the extortionate revenue demands (land revenue increased by 328 percent between the last year of Mughal rule in 1764 and the first year after the operation of the permanent settlement in 1794)⁷ led to the transfer of land from some of the original zamindars to merchants, money-lenders, land speculators and British indigo planters.⁸ Thus, in the permanently settled areas there developed a class of intermediary proprietors between the actual cultivator of the soil and the state, which through a process of sub-infeudation grew into a hierarchy of non-cultivating landed interests.⁹ They all claimed a share of the gross produce of land leaving the actual cultivator barely at the subsistence level. During the

entire course of the nineteenth century this developed into a vicious circle which denuded the actual cultivator of the major part of the fruits of his labour.

Landed proprietors in eastern India were thus, by and large, merely rentiers. The zamindars in general, were utterly divorced from labour on the land or investment in it. They leased out their holdings to tenants and extracted the maximum surplus produce, in kind or in cash, and squandered it away in conspicuous consumption. In time, the zamindars came aptly to be described as 'mere parasites, who batter on the product of the actual cultivators'.¹⁰

Gross economic inequality was thus the most pronounced aspect of Bihar's agrarian structure on the eve of India's independence. At the apex of the hierarchy was the ruling authority, the colonial administration. Below the colonial government were the large 'princely' zamindars such as the Maharajas of Darbhanga, Bettiah, Hatwa, Pachet and Ramgarh. Below this group were the zamindars or 'tenure-holders' (a term used by the colonial rulers) of lesser means and occupying smaller properties. Next in the hierarchy were the 'occupancy-raiyats' -- roughly, rich peasants who enjoyed legal protection in the form of fixed rents and permanent and inheritable rights to the land they occupied. While there was variation within this class in terms of the size of holdings, most 'occupancy-raiyats' owned the land they cultivated, occasionally renting land from others and also occasionally

sub-letting part of their land, if they owned large parcels. At the bottom of the agrarian class structure were the 'non-occupancy raiyats' -- roughly, poor peasants, paying rent without the right of occupancy, and sharecroppers (the landless peasants with no security of tenure), and the agricultural labourers.

The Indian nationalists would later argue that decisions such as the Permanent Settlement would have to be reversed when Independence was achieved. The Permanent Settlement, they argued, had strengthened the non-cultivating, zamindari classes and had contributed to the degradation of the actual tillers of the soil. The whole system would have to be abolished so as to terminate the exploitation of one class by another. The goal of Zamindari Abolition was enunciated by the Congress long before 1947 and made explicit following Independence. In fact, for a time 'Zamindari Abolition' became almost synonymous with 'Agrarian Reform'.

Agrarian Reform Since Independence:

Since Independence, land legislation in India has been through four distinct phases. In the first phase (1948-52), laws were enacted in various states to abolish the plethora of zamindari interests including the interests of the various non-cultivating intermediate tenants. In the second phase -- from 1952 till the end of the fifties -- the emphasis was placed on the regulation of tenancy rights, which covered security of

tenure, fixation of rents and providing tenants with the opportunity to become owners of the land they cultivated. In the third phase, running from the late fifties to the early sixties, attempts were made to put ceilings on the size of individual landholdings, in the hope of creating a pool of excess land that could then be distributed to poor peasants, sharecroppers and the landless. In the fourth phase -- between 1969 and 1971 -- laws were enacted to cover the loopholes present in previous legislations and to implement the ceiling laws in order to distribute land to the poor sections of the rural society.

Zamindari Abolition in Bihar:

The government of Bihar made its first post-independence legislative attempt to abolish the zamindari system in Bihar by passing the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Bill in 1947.¹¹ The constitutionality of the bill was challenged by the state's premier landlord, the Maharajah of Darbhanga, and the court issued injunctions restraining the state government from implementing the bill. Subsequently, the bill was repealed and a new legislation, called The Bihar Land Reform Bill, 1949, was introduced. The bill (1949) received the assent of the President of India and was published as an act, The Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950. This act was also challenged by the landed interests in the Supreme Court of India, and the court again issued injunctions restraining the state government from implementing the bill. After two years, in May 1952, the Supreme Court of

India finally established the validity of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950.

Provisions of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950:

Through the introduction of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, the government of Bihar legally abolished the interests¹² of zamindars and tenure-holders¹³ and vested these interests in the state. By means of the 1950 act, even as subsequently amended, the state of Bihar holds exclusive proprietary interests in land, notwithstanding provisions permitting ex-intermediaries (zamindars and tenure-holders) to retain certain 'revenue-free' lands. By placing the state in a direct relationship with its 'tenants' with an exclusive right to all rents, cesses (taxes) and royalties from lands vested in the state, the act of 1950 provided for an eventual increase in state income from the land.

Problems in Implementing the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950:

In May 1952, having established the validity of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, the state authorities tried for the third time to enforce the new law. But, the landlords found yet another means of preventing its implementation. They simply refused to hand over to the state their rent-rolls and the related village records crucial in determining the amount of rent the landlords had previously received from their tenants and the extent of their landownership. Eventually, the state

authorities had to reconstruct these documents for themselves (a process known as field bujharat). Indeed, in 1967, seventeen years after the intermediaries had been legally 'abolished' and the state placed in a direct relationship with its 'tenants', the field bujharat had not been completed and verified throughout the state (Jannuzi, 1974:25).

Implementation of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, continued to proceed slowly until 1954 when the Bihar Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, 1953 (Bihar Act XX of 1954), removed some of the procedural impediments to facilitate a more expeditious implementation of the 1950 act. Whereas the original act provided for individual notification of 'proprietors' or 'tenure-holders' that their estates had been vested in the state, the 1954 amendment act made possible the general notification of all intermediaries. Instead of proceeding to 'abolish' the intermediary interests in labourious manner through individual notification, the state was now empowered to publish a proclamation signaling its intention to take over within a specified period of time all intermediary interests located in any region of the state, or indeed all such interests in the state as a whole. Upon being served with formal notices to surrender their estates to the authorities -- with compensation to be duly provided -- the landlords petitioned the courts on an individual basis to prevent the state government from taking over their estates. Until the final court decisions were rendered (a process usually taking several years) the

landlords were left in possession of the lands under their control. Thus, eight years after the Bihar legislature voted its acceptance of the principle of zamindari abolition, the majority of zamindars in Bihar were in legal possession of their lands (Thorner, 1976:20-21).

Inadequacies of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950:

Even though the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, vested all intermediary interests in the state, the zamindars and tenure-holders of Bihar did not lose all rights in land. While the state assumed the right to collect rent directly from its tenants, rather than indirectly through these intermediary classes, and took over the interests of intermediaries in trees, forests, fisheries, minerals, mines, bazaars etc., Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, specifically provided for the retention by intermediaries of certain interests. These sections were not altered in substance in the amendments that followed. The following are excerpts from the pertinent sections of the act as amended.¹⁴

Section 5. (1) With effect from the date of vesting, all homesteads¹ comprised in an estate or tenure and being in the possession of an intermediary on the date of such vesting shall... be deemed to be settled by the State with such intermediary and he shall be entitled to retain possession of the land comprised in such homesteads and to hold it as a tenant under the State free of rent.

Section 6. (1) On and from the date of vesting, all lands used for agricultural or horticultural purposes, which were in khas² possession of an intermediary on the date of such vesting,... shall... be deemed to be settled by the State with such intermediary and he shall be entitled to retain possession thereof and hold them

as a raiyat under the State having occupancy rights in respect of such lands subject to the payment of such fair and equitable rent as may be determined by the Collector.

Section 7. (1) Such buildings or structures together with the lands on which they stand, other than any buildings used primarily as offices [for the collection of rent]³ ... as were in the possession of an intermediary at the commencement of this Act and used as golas⁴, factories or mills, for the purpose of trade, manufacture or commerce or used for storing grains or keeping cattle or implements for the purpose of agriculture and constructed or established and used for the aforesaid purposes before the 1st of January, 1946 shall, notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, be deemed to be settled by the State with such intermediary and he shall be entitled to retain possession of such buildings or structures together with the lands on which they stand as a tenant under the State subject to the payment of such fair and equitable ground-rent as may be determined by the Collector in the prescribed manner.

(3) Where a building or structure, constructed by an intermediary, in his estate or tenure after the first day of January, 1946, is used for the purposes mentioned in sub-section (1), the intermediary shall be entitled to retain the possession of such building or structure together with the land on which it stands as a tenant under the State subject to the payment of the rent....

¹"Homestead" means "dwelling house used by the intermediary for the purposes of his own residence or for the purpose of letting out on rent together with any courtyard, compound... and includes any out-buildings used for purposes connected with agriculture or horticulture and any tank, library, and place of worship appertaining to such dwelling house" (ibid., Section 2, Clause [j]).

²"Khas possession" refers to land cultivated personally by an intermediary or by his own stock or servants or by hired labour or with hired stock (ibid., Section 2, Clause [k]).

³The phrase "for the collection of rent" is a paraphrase of the Act's wording.

⁴"Golas" are structures used for the storage of grain, implements etc.

The key words of these 'saving' sections were "khas possession" and "homestead". Note that "khas possession" referred not only to land cultivated personally by the

intermediary, but also to lands cultivated by his servants, hired labour or stock. This broad definition of "khas possession" allowed the ex-intermediary to claim land that he himself did not cultivate (prior to 'zamindari abolition' legislation), even though that land was in the personal, cultivating possession of a raiyat, so long as the raiyat did not possess incontrovertible, documentary evidence in support of his right of occupancy. Zamindari interests were quick to exploit the "khas possession" provision of the act. They not only used this provision to evict, legally, their former "tenants" from lands traditionally cultivated by them, but also to enlarge the definition of "khas possession" in order to add 'new lands' to the estates they planned to maintain, within the law, following zamindari abolition. Jannuzi comments:

The 'khas possession' provision has continued to make possible the legal eviction of uncounted thousands of raiyats in Bihar who cannot prove that they possess an occupancy right to the lands they have customarily tilled. In effect, the 'khas possession' provision in the Bihar Land Reforms Act of 1950, as amended, has enabled even absentee zamindars to abuse grossly the interests of the cultivating peasantry. The existing social order in Bihar has been such that the peasant cultivators generally have been in a subservient position to the ex-intermediaries, even in a civil court. Moreover, the dominance of the ex-intermediaries outside the court has been indisputable. Pressures have been applied to assure that the 'cultivating tenant' recognized that he had been working only as a personal servant of the zamindar, or even as his hired labourer. In this fashion, the 'actual cultivators' have not only lost possession of the lands they had tilled, but also, ironically, have sometimes continued to till the same land under new leases that do not jeopardize the absentee zamindars 'khas possession' of the land (1974:32).

Similarly, the "homestead" provisions of the act also served the

interests of the zamindars and tenure holders. It is interesting to note that homesteads could be retained rent-free by ex-intermediaries if the homestead and the lands integral to it were used as private residences. And, in the event that an ex-intermediary should decide not to occupy his homestead, he could rent his homestead provided he paid "fair and equitable ground rent" to the state. To this Jannuzi responds:

What constituted 'fair and equitable ground rent' was, in practice, a matter to be 'negotiated' between the ex-intermediary and the district collector. Not infrequently, the collector could be persuaded to set the ground-rent at a level considered reasonable by the ex-intermediary. If an ex-intermediary was known to have political connections [and most did] a collector might show himself to be particularly amenable to the ex-intermediary's suasion (1974:33).

Thus, the loose definitions of the terms "khas possession" and "homestead" permitted the ex-intermediaries to retain all or a large portion of the lands they held prior to zamindari abolition. Consequently, it was possible, as recently as July 1973 to find ex-intermediaries in possession of estates totalling 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) and more (Ojha, 1977:142).

Moreover, the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950, indicated that intermediaries, having lost the right to collect a share of the rent due the state, would receive compensation. Compensation would vary with the size of the net income and would be between 3 and 30 times of such income (J. Mishra, 1974:83-89). Precise data regarding compensation payments is not available for obvious reasons. However, the report released by the Land

Reforms Implementation Committee of the National Development Council in 1966 stated that in Bihar the estimated total due (in compensation payments) was Rs. 200,000,000 (Jannuzi, 1974:36). Needless to say, the ex-intermediaries benefitted greatly from the compensation payments, often investing in agriculture, rural industries or in the urban centres. The rate of compensation was determined according to a sliding scale of multiples which declined at higher levels of income (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1
Schedule for Compensation Payable to Ex-Intermediaries

Net Income	Rate of Compensation Payable
(a)Rs. 500 & less	Twenty times the net income
(b)Rs. 501 to Rs. 1,250	Nineteen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (a)
(c)Rs. 1,251 to Rs. 2,000	Eighteen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (b)
(d)Rs. 2,001 to Rs. 2,750	Seventeen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (c)
(e)Rs. 2,751 to Rs. 3,500	Sixteen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (d)
(f)Rs. 3,501 to Rs. 4,250	Fifteen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (e)
(g)Rs. 4,251 to Rs. 5,000	Fourteen times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (f)
(h)Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 10,000	Ten times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (g)
(i)Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 20,000	Eight times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (h)
(j)Rs. 20,001 to Rs. 50,000	Six times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (i)
(k)Rs. 50,001 to Rs. 100,000	Four times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (j)
(l)Rs. 100,001 & above	three times the net income, but not less than the maximum amount under item (k)

Source: Jannuzi (1974:35).

Land Ceiling Legislation in Bihar:

In the First Five Year Plan (1951-55) the Government of India made a national policy that there should be an absolute limit to the amount of land that an individual might hold. The Second and Third Five Year Plans not only proposed the introduction of ceilings on existing agricultural holdings, but also recommended ceilings on future acquisitions of land. The land ceiling was to be fixed by each state, with each state establishing its own definition of a maximum holding and its own regulations affecting the implementation of ceilings legislation.¹⁵

The legislations kept the levels of the ceilings high in most parts of the country. In Gujarat, the permissible retention per family varied from 19 acres of perennially irrigated land to 132 acres of other types of land, in Mysore from 27 to 216, in Rajasthan from 22 to 336. In Bihar, each member of a family was permitted to hold 20 to 60 acres,¹⁶ in Madhya Pradesh from 25 to 75, in Andhra Pradesh from 27 to 324 and where a household exceeded five members, additional land was allowed at the rate of 6 to 72 acres per member, in Maharashtra from 38 to 126, in Orissa from 20 to 80. In Uttar Pradesh the ceiling varied from 40 to 80 acres, in certain parts of the Punjab and Haryana from 27 to 80 acres, while in some parts of some states ceiling on ownership was not even placed.¹⁷ In cases of double-cropped irrigated land the permissible retention was two-thirds that of the irrigated single-crop land. By no means can it be said that

ceiling levels of this magnitude were aimed at reducing inequalities in land holdings.

Land Ceiling legislation was introduced in Bihar as early as 1955 when the Bihar Agricultural Lands (Ceiling and Management) Bill was framed and referred to committee. The bill was not acceptable to the numerous opponents of ceilings legislation. So deep were the divisions within the ruling Bihar Congress that the state government was unable to develop sufficient support to pass any version of the bill limiting the size of agricultural holdings in the state. The bill of 1955 was shelved for the time being until a diluted version was enacted as law in 1962 (Bihar Act XII, 1962), also known as the Bihar Land Reforms [Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land] Act, 1961).

Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act, 1961:

For the purposes of fixing the ceilings, the 1961 Act classified agricultural lands into five categories. The finest lands (Class I) were those irrigated by flow irrigation works, which were constructed, maintained, improved or controlled by central, state or local government institutions. Class II lands were those irrigated by 'lift' irrigation works or tube wells constructed or maintained by the central, state or local governmental institutions. Class III lands were those used for orchards, or for other horticultural purposes. Class IV lands

were diara lands¹⁸ and Class V constituted areas considered hilly, sandy or incapable of yielding paddy, rabi or cash crops.

The act stipulated that a 'person' would be permitted to retain possession of no land more than 20 acres of class I land, 30 acres of class II land, 40 acres of class III land, 50 acres of class IV land and 60 acres of class V land.¹⁹ However, there were several provisions in the act designed to permit a landholder to retain land over and above the ceiling limit. For example, a landholder could retain in addition to his ceiling area, land upto 10 acres which formed part of his 'homestead'. He could retain any land in consolidated blocks not exceeding 15 acres used for orchards or pasture. Thus, if one could get good agricultural lands, with occasional fruit bearing trees planted here and there recorded as an orchard, the entire area went out of the ceiling provisions (and there was a veritable rage in the planting of "orchards"). Similarly, any area with a slight depression that held flood or rain water could be declared a fishery tank and retained for use as agricultural land. In addition, a landholder with more than four dependents could retain lands in excess of his ceiling area as long as the aggregate of lands held by him did in no case exceed two times his specified ceiling area.

The act also exempted from ceiling (i) land under the direct possession of the village panchayat (council) (ii) land under the possession of the Bhoodan Yagna Committee.²⁰ (iii) land in the possession of educational institutions and hospitals

(iv) land belonging to charitable institutions other than religious ones (v) tea and rubber plantations (vi) land required for the establishment of industry or under the possession of the industry (vii) land under dispute in the civil and criminal courts till the finalization of suits (viii) specialized farms engaged in cattle-breeding, dairying and wool raising. Besides, the government was empowered to exempt, by special order, land belonging to licensed sugar factories and land under religious trusts and temples from the ceiling provisions -- religious institutions could keep any amount of land above the ceiling. There was nothing to prevent landholders from creating such a "religious" trust and transferring excess lands to it.

The act of 1961 contained provisions that permitted landholders to resume for 'personal cultivation'²¹ lands within their ceiling areas being cultivated at the commencement of the act by tenants or under-raiyats who were unable to establish that they were entitled to permanent occupancy of the lands they tilled. "That is to say, any landholder who was himself an occupancy raiyat within the terms and conditions of the Bihar Tenancy Act of 1885 could evict legally any of his 'tenants' who were non-occupancy raiyats (as defined by the Bihar Tenancy Act of 1885) and therefore not entitled to permanent security of tenure" (Jannuzi, 1974:49). Moreover, having evicted former tenants, landholders could satisfy the 'personal cultivation' provision of the act by having the same under-raiyats till the same lands as hired labourers, on fixed wages, or as

'tenants'-cum-sharecroppers. Legal and extralegal evictions of countless under-raiyats was therefore an inevitable byproduct of the act of 1961. Such evictions continued to be commonplace in Bihar throughout the 1960's despite the fact that the government of Bihar made no sustained effort to implement the ceilings act.

The Ceilings Act of 1961 also permitted the landholder under specified conditions to sublet any land within his ceiling area for a maximum of seven years on any one occasion. The rent of the tenant was fixed at one-fourth of the gross produce without any share in the straw or bhoosa.²² Other important provisions relating to the subletting of land made clear that no sublessee (or tenant) could obtain permanent occupancy rights, regardless of the duration of his tenancy, on lands he tilled for the landholder (whose lands were no more than those permitted by the ceilings legislation). The act also made explicit provision for the eviction of the sublessee by a landholder (i) for arrear of rent (ii) expiry of the term of lease (iii) the use of land in such a manner as to make it unfit for the purposes of tenancy.

Moreover, the act of 1961 stipulated that all persons whose lands were in excess of the ceiling area and were acquired by the state would receive compensation. Different rates were established for the different categories of land.

- (i) Grade I land at Rs. 900 per acre
- (ii) Grade II land at Rs. 600 per acre
- (iii) Grade III land at Rs. 450 per acre
- (iv) Grade IV land at Rs. 300 per acre
- (v) Grade V land at Rs. 50 to Rs. 150 per acre.

The Bihar Land Reforms Acts and the Ceilings Acts failed to provide land to the actual tillers or to put ceilings on land holdings. In fact, the vast majority of landholders were able to keep the majority of their land as 'household', or 'khas' land, which was 'personally cultivated' and not given over to tenants. Since 'personal cultivation' meant that the landowner need only supervise the work of hired labourers, not till the land himself, a major effect of the Bihar and similar Land Reforms Acts was that the landholders simply treated longtime tenant cultivators as labourers, evicting them from old plots and shifting them around to different plots every year to ensure that they did not occupy one plot of land long enough to claim it according to the law. The deficiencies in the law and its implementation, as well as bogus transactions, malafide transfers, benami, or fictitious transfers of land, "which in some cases went to the absurd length of pieces of land being transferred in the name of pet animals", and partition among family members, living, dead and non-existent, were used by many landholders to retain large areas of land. In addition, the landlords were able to claim generous compensation on the basis of these malifide and fictitious transfers of land; on paper they had 'lost' their land, while in practice still controlling it. By the end of 1968, only 10,000 acres (4,000 hectares) were declared surplus land in Bihar, whereas, according to the Bihar Revenue Department, land ceiling imposition should have yielded a minimum of over one hundred thousand acres (over 40,000

hectares) of surplus land. In Andhra Pradesh, the amount of land declared surplus after the imposition of ceilings was only 73,692 acres (29,476 hectares), in Assam only 34,000 acres (13,600 hectares) were declared surplus. In the sixteen states which implemented land ceiling legislation between 1958 and 1971, the declared surplus was only 2.4 million acres (0.9 million hectares) and 'area distributed' just half of that or 0.3 percent of the total cultivated land in India (Ladejinsky, 1972:403).

Agrarian Reform: The Fourth Phase -- 1969 to 1970:

In the period 1967-70, incidents of agrarian unrest associated with what the Home Ministry called "the persistence of serious social and economic inequalities" began to be reported with some frequency not only in Bihar, but also in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Manipur, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. This followed the major peasant uprising in the Naxalbari area of Bengal in 1967. In Bihar, in the period beginning June through to December 1967, groups of peasants forcibly harvested standing crops in separate incidents in Purnea, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga and Santhal Pargana districts. During January-February of 1968, several hundred peasants made an attempt to encroach upon government lands. There were also repeated demonstrations in which landless peasants were said to have demanded land from government officials.²³

By 1969, following careful assessment of evidence concerning all types of peasant agitations in the various states, the Ministry of Home Affairs concluded that steps would have to be taken both by the central government and by the states to reduce the tension in rural areas. This could be best achieved, it seemed, by meeting some of the immediate needs of the weaker sections of the rural society. The ministry recognized that twenty-two years of planned rural development had not transformed the agrarian structure in much of India. "Land reforms, generally, had not benefited the actual tillers. Superior rights in land were concentrated in the hands of a few. Much of the land was still cultivated by sharecroppers lacking security of tenure and forced to pay exorbitant rents".²⁴

In August of 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi instructed the chief ministers of all the states to implement immediately programmes that might benefit the rural poor and reduce social tensions. She especially asked "that ceilings on the size of land holdings be implemented and surplus land distributed to the landless" (Jannuzi, 1974:136). The recommendations of the central government transmitted by the prime minister to the state chief ministers were followed by the convening of a Chief Ministers' Conference on Land Reform in November 1969. At this conference, attention was directed anew by the centre to the states' need to transform "the agrarian structure of the country through speedy, efficient and effective implementation of land reforms". Once again the central government was attempting to

achieve through exhortation and the communication of a sense of urgency what had not been accomplished except in a few regions, in more than two decades of land reforms.

In the period immediately preceding and following the Chief Ministers' Conference, the Bihar state and central government officials did attempt to implement existing reform legislation and to introduce new legislation conforming in broad outlines to various recommendations made by the authorities of the central government.

During the last months of 1969 and the first few months of 1970, perhaps the most conspicuous activity in the broad field of agrarian reforms occurred in the state legislature, where numerous measures were introduced. These measures included the Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Act, 1970; the Bihar Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 1970; the Bihar Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, 1970; the Bihar Public Land Encroachment (Amendment) Ordinance, 1970; the Bihar Consolidation of Holdings and Prevention of Fragmentation (Amendment) Bill, 1970 and the Bihar Privileged Persons Homestead Tenancy (Amendment) Bill, 1970. However, the implementation of these measures was thwarted once again by the landed interests that dominated the Bihar state government and controlled the bureaucracy. All these measures were left at the proposal stage and by the end of 1970 shelved, i.e., none of these new measures were ever passed by the Bihar government.

Agrarian Reforms -- 1975-77: A Postscript:

During the period of National Emergency, between June 1975 and March 1977 (which concentrated unlimited power in the hands of the central government), the central government introduced the Twenty-Point Programme as a "direct attack on poverty".²⁵ The Twenty Point programme placed highest priority on the rapid implementation of land ceilings, stepped-up provision of house sites for landless peasants, abolition of bonded labour, a moratorium on the recovery of debts from landless labourers, small farmers and rural artisans -- including a plan to liquidate rural indebtedness and legislation to establish higher minimum wages for agricultural workers. Constitutional federalism and legal guarantees for individual rights no longer prevented the central government from making laws on any of these matters or from directing state governments to do so. Yet, as the prime minister acknowledged, "in reality it was the chief ministers who would have to do so".²⁶

Despite the far reaching pronouncements of the central government, the Twenty Point Programme fell far short of its aim. Implementation of basic agrarian reform remained out of reach, as the central government contrived to be almost entirely dependent upon the administrative machinery at the state and district levels to carry out its economic reforms.

A case in point was the promise to abolish bonded labour. Although the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Ordinance was promulgated by the President with effect from October 25, 1975

(and later passed by both houses of Parliament in February, 1976), the centre was entirely dependent upon the states for identification of bonded labourers. At the state level, the district collector had formal responsibility for carrying out the provisions of the act for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. Yet, the district collectors were ill-equipped to enforce these directives since political power at the state and district levels was in the hands of the landed interests. Similar problems of implementation reduced the effectiveness of the action of several states, including Bihar, in raising the minimum agricultural wages. The official responsibility for enforcing the new laws were given to the staff of the Revenue Departments or Labour Departments, but the real work of implementation had to be done in the villages and required the organization of unions of agricultural labourers. In most villages in India such unions have been absent and control and ownership of land is in the hands of a few landlords who are against such reforms.

Other deficiencies of institutional infrastructure limited the effectiveness of the government's effort to carry out plans for liquidating rural debt. The states (including Bihar) did take legislative action to impose a moratorium on the recovery of debts from the rural poor and in some cases, to scale down and even liquidate debts of the most impoverished. Yet, as district officials started to receive and decide on applications for liquidations of debts, they were confronted with the problem

of the "virtual drying up of the traditional source of credit, in particular for consumption purposes" (Frankel, 1978:554). Cooperative institutions were clearly too weak to provide an alternative source of credit, the rural branches of the nationalized banks were too limited in the type of loans they could make, that is, advances for commercial ventures and on conventional criteria of credit-worthiness (discussed in Chapter IV).

Agrarian Reforms: A Summary:

The national leadership's inability to enlist the support of state leaders for effective implementation of land reforms resulted in defective legislation that in effect aggravated the already existing inequalities in the distribution of protected land rights enjoyed by landowners and those without land. The abolition by state legislation between 1947 and 1954 of intermediary rights and tenures did accomplish changes in the pattern of land-ownership in those areas (Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh) where the zamindari system had existed on a large scale. Proprietary rights over vast agricultural estates extending over several villages and districts were transferred from a handful of absentee landlords to state governments. Even so, zamindari abolition fell far short of an agrarian transformation. The land reforms bore obvious marks of political compromise between the feudal landed gentry and the bourgeoisie. While they abolished the zamindari

system, the provisions stopped well short of expropriating the zamindars. On the one hand, the zamindars' proprietary rights were vested in state governments, on the other, the zamindars were permitted to keep land in their direct occupation for personal cultivation, and in most cases no ceiling was placed on the size of the 'home farm' so retained.

The acts, moreover, conferred full ownership rights on the ex-intermediaries with respect to their home farms. By contrast, tenants in direct occupation of land on resumed estates were confirmed only in the legal rights they enjoyed on the date immediately preceding vesting. In Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, the acts made no provision that would allow tenants to acquire full ownership rights, thereby perpetuating the cultivators' inferior status and position in relation to former zamindars.

Further, landlordism had not ended. In Assam, Bihar and Orissa, many of the tenants who entered into a relationship with the state did not cultivate land directly. Rather, they leased out some or all of their holdings to subtenants and sharecroppers. The fact was that the process of zamindari abolition mainly benefitted the intermediate peasant classes -- those larger occupancy tenants -- many of whom belonged to the shudra peasant castes. By no means did all who actually cultivated the land improve their position. The rural poor were adversely affected. The provisions in the state acts allowing intermediaries to keep land in their home farms without any

upper limit proved a direct incentive to zamindars to evict unprotected tenants-at-will from their holdings in order to exaggerate the proportion of the estate under 'personal cultivation'. Moreover, virtually no accurate land records existed at the village level to verify the actual distribution of holdings between zamindars and tenants. As a result, many small holders who customarily leased land lost this land or part of it to the ex-intermediaries under the provisions for personal cultivation. In the absence of accurate land records, it is impossible to establish the actual number of agriculturalists evicted in this way. The Planning Commission, however, believed the number was substantial in almost all states.

The balance of social costs and benefits of zamindari abolition were skewed even further to favour the ex-intermediaries by generous formulas for compensation in the loss of ownership or revenue rights on resumed estates. The great absentee landlords were, in general, not ruined by zamindari abolition. Many remained men of considerable wealth. Those with superior education and skills were able to expand their fortunes by taking up new activities in commercial agriculture, trading or manufacturing (both rural and urban), or by entering politics.

The principle of imposing ceilings on landholdings was first announced in 1953. Detailed recommendations for legislation were not made until 1956 and most states did not actually pass enabling legislation until 1960 or 1961. The

landowners, therefore, had a period of seven to eight years to arrange partitions and transfers of holdings to escape the impact of the new laws. Even while some states were still in the process of formulating legislation, the Planning Commission concluded that excessive ceilings in state laws, combined with transfers and partitions of land, "have tended to defeat the aims of the legislation". By 1961, the planners reported that ceiling legislation "was not likely to yield any appreciable surplus for redistribution". Furthermore, legislation to provide security of tenure and reasonable rents to tenants included loopholes that not only deprived cultivators of promised benefits, but in many cases actually jeopardized the customary rights they already enjoyed. The most immediate obstacle to tenancy reform was the lack of reliable land records and the failure of state governments to undertake a complete reconstruction of the record of rights to establish the identity of tenants and the extent of the land held by them. Yet, without documentary proof of tenancy, cultivators were unable to claim the protection of the tenancy acts that were passed. At the outset, therefore, the great majority of tenants and virtually all sharecroppers cultivating under oral lease were excluded from any new benefits under state tenancy acts.

Many landlords were, nonetheless, alarmed. Land records might be revised in the future. The safest course, therefore, was to show as much land as possible under personal cultivation. Two glaring loopholes in the tenancy acts were particularly

useful for this purpose. First, 'personal cultivation' was not defined as requiring manual labour. It was sufficient if the owner, or a member of his family, supervised cultivation carried on by farm servants. Except in Assam, a landowner did not even have to be a resident in the village during the greater part of the agricultural season to qualify as a 'cultivator'. The laws left the way open for owners to operate agricultural holdings either with the help of hired labour or through disguised tenancies, as in sharecropping 'partnerships' between owner and cultivator. Second, most tenancy acts also provided that tenants could 'voluntarily surrender' their holdings in favour of the landlord, and that in such cases, no ceiling restrictions would apply on the right of resumption. Together these two provisions virtually invited the landlords to evict tenants from their holdings under the guise of voluntary surrender in order to show the maximum area under personal cultivation. In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that between 1951 and 1971, the percentage of landless agricultural labourers to the total working population in Bihar increased from 23 percent to 39 percent.

Notes to Chapter III

- ¹ The term 'agrarian reform' is used in this thesis to refer to a series of programs designed to effect structural changes in the agricultural sector of Bihar. Thus, 'agrarian reforms' is a comprehensive term applying to 'zamindari abolition', fixation of ceiling on landholdings, distribution of ceiling surplus lands to poor and landless peasants, regulation of tenancy and eliminating sharecropping and other forms of tenancy relations.
- ² The debate has been carried on by, among others, Irfan Habib (1963); Nural S. Hasan (1964); Barrington Moore Jr., (1966); L. Natarajan (1953) and Hamza Alavi (1981).
- ³ The term zamindar refers to overlords of varying rank and power. In Bihar, there was considerable variation among the zamindars in the size and extent of their wealth and influence. Some like the Raj Darbhanga covered over 3,864 sq. kilometres of land. In 1915-16, its rent and other collections totalled close to 4 million rupees, a sum equivalent to almost two-fifths of the earnings of Bihar and Orissa from land revenue. Its nearest rival, the Bettiah Raj, covered 2,936 sq. kilometres of land. The Hatwa estate extended over half of the Saran district and the Maharajah of Ramgarh owned almost all the land in Champaran district (see Stephen Henningham (1982:1-36 & 1983). These large zamindars were descendants of Hindu rulers who had held sway under the Mughals and their properties held together through primogeniture. Moreover, these zamindars could not be classified exclusively as 'revenue collectors'. While such revenue collectors were the majority, these large zamindars were literally maharajas (kings). They held princely courts, maintained a standing army and claimed rights in land superior to those of revenue collectors (J. Jha, 1962). In addition to these large zamindars, there were many 'middle-range' zamindars and those who held smaller properties. These two groups were largely revenue collectors for the Mughals (G. Chand, 1946). And, finally, with the exception of the Chotanagpur estate, almost all of the zamindari type of landlordism was concentrated in the Gangetic plains.

- ⁴ The cultivating peasantry enjoyed security of tenure (as distinct from the idea of absolute ownership) on the land tilled by them on condition that they share their produce with zamindars (Baden-Powell, 1892).
- ⁵ Baden-Powell (1892:172-210)
- ⁶ For a detailed survey of the workings of the Permanent Settlement see Baden-Powell (1892); Amit Bhaduri (1976); P.T. George (1970); Hetukar Jha (1980); Girish Mishra (1978); Dietmar Rothermund (1976); Bhowani Sen, (1962); Sunil Sen (1979); Ram Narayan Sinha (1968).
- ⁷ Cited in R.C. Dutt (1960:xxvii).
- ⁸ The absence of industrialization forced almost all sections of traders, merchants and moneylenders onto the land. There were two major types of land transfer: (i) the leasing out of land by the zamindars to 'moneyed' interests (ii) the purchasing of land outright by the 'moneyed interests' from the bankrupt zamindar or from the agents of the colonial government.
- ⁹ "Till farm within farm became the order of the day, each resembling a screw upon a screw, the last coming down on the tenant with the pressure of them all", Baden-Powell (1892:407).
- ¹⁰ Vera Anstey (1957:99).
- ¹¹ The Bihar legislative assembly dominated by landlords voted its acceptance of the principle of zamindari abolition in 1947 after much pressure from the Central government. Within the Bihar Congress it was K.B. Sahay, Revenue Minister of Bihar until 1957, who was chiefly responsible for the act's being passed in the state legislature and being submitted repeatedly to the Central Government and the Supreme Court for approval. When the landed interests felt that Sahay was moving too rapidly in the direction of zamindari abolition legislation, he was "through acute political manipulation" defeated in the 1957 general elections by the zamindari interests (Jannuzi, 1974:14-19).
- ¹² 'Interests' as used above refers to interests in land, including interests in trees, forests, fisheries, bazaars,

mines and minerals.

¹³ 'Zamindars and tenure-holders' comprise those classes holding 'intermediary' interests between the state, which is the holder of the superior proprietary rights, and the peasant.

¹⁴ These excerpts are cited in Jannuzi (1974:30-31).

¹⁵ See Appu (1972) and Kotovsky (1964).

¹⁶ The definition of 'family' varied from state to state. In Bihar, the definition of 'family' was extremely vague--"persons entitled under personal law to be maintained by landholder and dependent upon him" (Appu, 1972:83).

¹⁷ The ceiling figures for various states is compiled from Ladejinsky (1972: 403).

¹⁸ Lands between two embankments constructed to control rivers.

¹⁹ Cited in G. Ojha (1977:116).

²⁰ Bhoodan literally means land-gift. The Bhoodan movement was first initiated by Vinobha Bhave in 1951. Bhave argued that the problem of landlessness in India could not be resolved by armed land reform nor through government legislation, but through the spirit of bhoodan whereby those holding land could be induced to feel compassion for those who had none and led voluntarily to donate to the poor and landless. The movement became popular during the fifties. Bhave went from village to village in many regions to obtain gifts of land. For the landlords this exemption provided a good loophole. The landlords only promised land for bhoodan and did not necessarily deliver. When they did deliver it was seldom good land.

²¹ 'Personal cultivation' means "cultivation by a raiyyat himself or by members of his family or by servants or hired labourers on fixed wages payable in cash or kind but not in crop-share under his personal supervision or the supervision of any member of his family" (Jannuzi, 1974:79).

- ²² 'Straw' or 'bhoosa' are jute sticks, rice husk, stalks from food crops that remain after the threshing of the grain.
- ²³ For details see Jannuzi (1974:133-35); Frankel (1978:374-382); and Sinha (1970).
- ²⁴ Cited in Jannuzi (p. 135).
- ²⁵ For details on the Emergency and the Twenty Point Programme see Frankel (1978:548-582).
- ²⁶ Cited in Frankel (1978:550).

CHAPTER IV: AGRICULTURE IN BIHAR: FORCES OF PRODUCTION

By the mid 1960's when it had become clear that land reforms and other institutional measures had failed to bring about major changes in the social and economic structure of rural society, the Indian government reoriented its agricultural strategy from institutional to technological solutions to the problem of agricultural development. Aided and encouraged by the World Bank, the Ford Foundation and other International Development Agencies, the new approach was exemplified in the "Intensive Agricultural Districts Programme" or, as it was more commonly referred to, the "Package Programme". The new approach sought to concentrate on an increased agricultural production via a greater use of fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds, irrigation, technical assistance etc., in one pilot district each in several of the Indian states. The programme and its successors, the "Intensive Agricultural Areas Programme" and the "High Yielding Varieties Programme", were explicitly designed to allocate scarce agricultural resources and credit facilities to "progressive cultivators " and to "those areas which were best endowed for food production". In Bihar, as elsewhere in India, this meant a concerted effort on the part of the government to concentrate development assistance in localities (such as the Shahabad district of Bihar, since divided into two districts: Bhojpur and Rohtas) that had already demonstrated high

production potential. In such localities both the central and state governments made available to "progressive cultivators" a "package plan" of new agricultural inputs and credit. The new technology was expected to rapidly increase agricultural production by quickly spreading to other districts within each state.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to examine, on the basis of available data, the nature and extent of the application of the new agricultural strategy. Whether these changes reflect a change in the social structure itself or not will also be considered.

As stated in Chapter I, there are limitations in the data base. Firstly, not all of the relevant data was readily accessible: district level data was not always available for the 1950's, and when it was, comparisons were not always useful due to the many changes that occurred in the boundaries of the districts. However, data on demographic and occupational patterns, irrigation, indicators of mechanization etc., were available and these offer comparative analysis over a period of time as well as for between Bihar and India as a whole.

The Land and the Labour:

In agriculture, besides the endowments of nature like the extent of rainfall, the quality of soil, etc., the two most fundamental elements constituting the forces of production are land and the human labour employed in the productive process.

These two are fundamental because it is essentially the interaction between them that sets the productive forces in motion. Other forces of production (e.g. artificial modes of irrigating the soil, use of organic or chemical fertilizer to increase soil fertility, tools of production ranging from a hand-operated hoe to power-operated tractors, and other machinery, and use of improved seeds) are only interventions in the basic process, affecting the outcome. Before taking a look at these various interventions, it is therefore necessary to first examine if there are any changes in the quantity of land and labour deployed in agriculture in Bihar.

Patterns of Land Use:

Fortunately, the Government of India has been collecting and publishing information periodically on the various uses of the total land in the country. The categories used in this connection have also been consistent throughout the period, thus making comparisons possible. The only change that has occurred is that in the earlier period information on land was calculated with "acre" as a unit, which was changed later to "hectares". But this does not pose any serious problems if the data is distributed in percentages. Table 4.1 provides this computation for both Bihar and India for two time periods, namely, 1950-51 and 1978-79.

TABLE 4.1

Patterns of Land Use in India & Bihar: 1950-51 & 1978-79 (percentages)

	BIHAR		INDIA	
	1950-51	1978-79	1950-51	1978-79
1.Total area	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
2.Forests	18.8	16.0	14.4	20.0
3.Not available for cultivation	12.3	15.3	16.7	15.0
4.Pastures, groves & cultivable waste	7.2	4.7	17.3	11.0
5.Fallow land	7.3	5.3	6.1	3.1
6.Current fallow	6.2	9.3	3.7	4.7
7.Net area sown	48.2	49.4	41.8	46.2
8.Area sown more than once	10.8	16.4	4.6	9.0
9.Total cropped area	59.0	65.8	46.4	55.2

Notes

1. 'Forests'--includes area actually forested or lands classed or administered as forests, whether state-owned or private and whether wooded or maintained as potential forest land. The area of crops raised in the forests and grazing lands of areas open for grazing within the forests are also included under forest area.

2. 'Not available for cultivation'--barren land or used for human habitation, buildings, roads, railways.

3. 'Fallow land'--is designated for agricultural use, but lying fallow for more than one year but less than five.

4. 'Current fallow'--land left uncultivated for less than a year.

Source:

Bihar 1950-51 figures--Bihar Through Figures 1967, pp. 56-57.

India 1950-51 figures--Statistical Abstract of India 1967, pp. 34-36.

Bihar 1978-79 figures--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, pp. 36-37.

India 1978-79 figures--Statistical Abstract of India 1978-79, pp. 32-35.

The most important and basic figure for the purposes of this

study is the one categorized as "net area sown". The Table demonstrates that while there is a noticeable increase in the amount of land put to agricultural use for India as a whole (from 41.8 percent of the total land in 1950-51 to 46.2 percent in 1978-79), in Bihar the area remains more or less constant. This indicates that as much of the land in Bihar as could possibly be brought under the plough was already under cultivation before 1950. In the country as a whole, there were obviously lands in the category of "cultivable waste" which were put to agricultural use after reclamation, showing a corresponding decline in category 4. Bihar too witnessed a decline in this category but apparently this "waste land" was either not fit for agriculture, or if it was, it was still being deployed elsewhere. This is exactly what seems to have happened as indicated by the fact that the land under the category "not available for cultivation" (item 3) has gone up considerably, quite unlike the rest of the country. The several new mega-cities around heavy industry and mining that have emerged in the southern region of Bihar explain this phenomenon. A further indication of this shift is given by the decline in the land designated as "forests", again unlike India as a whole.¹ Most of the forests in Bihar (over 80 percentage) are concentrated in the Chotanagpur plateau, the region where new heavy industry and mining has developed. Table 4.2 delineates major variations between the two regions of Bihar.

TABLE 4.2
Regional Variation in Pattern of Land Use in Bihar: 1964-65
& 1978-79 (percentages)

	G. PLAINS		CHOTANAGPUR	
	1964-65	1978-79	1965-65	1978-79
1.Total area	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
2.Forests	7.1	6.3	34.6	27.6
3.Not available for cultivation	15.1	16.5	12.0	13.9
4.Pastures, groves cultivable waste	6.0	5.2	15.2	15.6
5.Fallow & current fallow	6.9	7.5	7.0	11.4
6.Net area sown	64.5	64.5	31.2	31.2
7.Area sown more than once	19.5	27.6	4.2	3.1
8.Total cropped area	84.2	91.7	35.4	34.3

Source:

1964-65--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1966, pp. 38-39.
1978-79--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, pp. 36-37.

Forests in the Chotanagpur region declined from 34.6 percent of the total land area to 27.6 percent (from 2.7 million hectares to 2.2 million hectares). Moreover, the figures show that the Gangetic plains are intensively cultivated, with almost two-thirds of the total land area under the plough, and while the "net area sown" has remained constant in both the plains and the plateau region, the "area sown more than once" increased sharply in the plains from 19.5 percent in 1964-65 to 27.6 percent in 1978-79, but declined from 4.2 percent in 1964-65 to

3.1 percent in 1978-79 in the plateau region.

To return to the main point, land as a basic factor of agricultural production has remained quantitatively constant in Bihar. If the peasants' hunger for land had to be met, it could be done only through a process of redistribution; hence all the efforts made to introduce land reforms. If the problem of scarcity of agricultural products had to be met, the productivity of the available land had to be increased, and conditions that make it possible for the land to yield more than one crop in a year had to be created.

Items 8 in Table 4.1 and 7 in Table 4.2 catalogue this change. Sowing the same field more than once a year is largely dependent on the availability of irrigation facilities, given the climatic fact that rainfall in India occurs largely during the monsoon season. Later in this chapter we will look at the data on irrigation. Here it is necessary to point out that Bihar was already 'better off' compared to the rest of the country in 1951: almost 11 percent of its land was sown more than once compared to 4.6 percent in India. But while the increase in land sown more than once for the country as a whole over the last three decades has been about 100 percent, in Bihar it has been only 50 percent. In fact, the figures for the two regions of Bihar indicate that the share of land "sown more than once" has declined in the Chotanagpur plateau. Before returning to this and other related matters, it is necessary to discuss the second of the two basic factors of agricultural production: the labour

force.

Occupational Patterns of the Working Population:

Who among the total population is counted as a 'worker' and what particular occupational category a worker belongs to are problematic issues in the Indian context. In the four decennial censuses undertaken by the Indian government since Independence three different sets of definitions have been used. Comparisons over time therefore become difficult. Definitions used for various agricultural occupations in the first census (1951) were so drastically altered by 1961 that it is almost futile to use 1951 as a base year. While between the censuses of 1961 and 1971 there was a consistency on the various categories of workers, the definition of who is and who is not a 'worker' changed. In the 1981 census the definition of the 'worker' was again changed by the creation of an additional category of 'marginal workers'² besides lumping together a whole range of occupational categories, used in the earlier census, as "other workers".

Quantitative data on the workforce and on the occupational categories could not therefore be presented in a tabular form covering the period (1951 to 1981) under consideration. This is particularly so in the agricultural sector. The census of 1951, for example, divided the agricultural population into four categories: (i) "cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned" (ii) "cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned" (iii) "cultivating labourers" and (iv) "non-cultivating owners of

land, agricultural rent receivers". This classification threw considerable light on the production relations in the countryside. Those under category 4 were clearly landlords, and those in category 2 tenants. In the subsequent census reports all of these categories were replaced by only a two-fold classification of "cultivators" and "agricultural labourers". Consequently, we do not know what happened to the 5,324,301 people classified in the 1951 census as "non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers and their dependants" in the country as a whole (the corresponding figure for Bihar being 246,889 people). In Bihar, 3,326,677 people were listed as cultivators of land who did not, in the main, own the land they cultivated. They were obviously cultivators of land as share-croppers or under other forms of tenancy arrangements -- clearly the props of the feudal class structure.

By the end of the 1950's the census takers had either assumed that because of the numerous tenancy reform legislations the class of landlords and tenants had been abolished and only two categories of agricultural occupations remained. Or, they may have realised that the legislation had the effect of pushing the feudal relations "underground" -- making them so concealed that collecting information on landlordism was impossible. As will be seen in the following chapter, the latter was more likely the case. What has to be readily acknowledged, though, is that quantitative and aggregate data on occupational categories which could shed light on production relations in agriculture

are not available, as well as the fact that the significantly important data for the crucial year of 1951 cannot serve as the benchmark to trace changes in the subsequent period. It is essential to keep in mind the limitations created by the lack of such data before moving on to available data in order to assess the labour force engaged in agriculture in one capacity or another.

In an agrarian society, the rural-urban dichotomy offers an important indicator of the place agriculture occupies in the overall economy. This does not imply that the agricultural activities are limited to villages alone. Table 4.3 shows that at least a small proportion of "cultivators" and "agricultural labourers" were found to be living in the urban areas in 1981 -- in India and in Bihar.

TABLE 4.3

Agricultural Labourers & Cultivators by Rural/Urban
Category: India & Bihar, 1981 (percentages)

	INDIA		BIHAR	
	Culti- vators	Agricultural Labourers	Culti- vators	Agricultural Labourers
Rural	97.3	95.0	98.0	97.2
	2.7	5.0	2.0	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source:

Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables,
Series I, Paper I.

It is clear that agriculture remains a rural phenomenon even though a small proportion of workers in agricultural occupations reside in urban areas. Table 4.4 shows that both India and Bihar are overwhelmingly rural.

TABLE 4.4

Rural/Urban Distribution of Population: Bihar and India, 1951-81 (percentages)

	INDIA				BIHAR			
	1951	1961	1971	1981	1951	1961	1971	1981
Rural	81.7	82.0	80.0	75.0	93.2	91.0	90.0	87.5
Urban	18.3	18.0	20.0	25.0	6.8	9.0	10.0	12.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source:

1951 figures India & Bihar--Statistical Abstract of India 1958-59, p. 19.

1961 figures India & Bihar--Statistical Abstract of India 1968, p. 4.

1971 figures India & Bihar--Statistical Abstract of India 1978, p. 3.

1981 figures India & Bihar--Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables, Series I, Paper I.

Compared to India, Bihar was much more rural in 1951, and remains so in 1981. In fact, a greater proportion of Bihar's population was rural in 1981 than was the case for India in 1951. This is all the more striking in view of the many urban developments that have occurred in parts of Bihar over the last few decades. A look at the process of urbanization broken down by the two regions of the state (see Table 4.5) makes clear the fact that the Gangetic plains, the heartland of agricultural activity, have barely witnessed this process.

TABLE 4.5

Rural/Urban Distribution of Population in the Two Regions of Bihar: 1961-1981 (in percentage)

	GANGETIC PLAINS		CHOTANAGPUR	
	1961	1981	1961	1981
Rural	91.5	90.5	86.0	80.0
Urban	8.5	10.0	14.0	20.0
Total	100	100	100	100

Source:

1961--Bihar Through Figures 1967, pp. 8-9.

1981--Census of India: Final Population Tables,
Series I, Paper I.

The plains remain almost as rural today as they were two decades ago, while there has been a six percentage point increase in urbanization in the Chotanagpur plateau. The plateau region has, over the last few decades, seen the growth and expansion of such cities as Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Dhanbad and Hazaribagh due to the development of the mining and heavy industries. It would, however, be incorrect to conclude that in the plateau region the process of urbanization has affected the erstwhile rural population. Although no definitive data is available to establish it, it is quite likely that much of the growth in the urban population of the new industrial and mining centres is affected by migratory labour force from other parts of India.

To sum up thus far: even by the standards of India -- a predominantly rural society -- Bihar lags behind in the urbanization process, particularly in the Gangetic Plains. To the extent that the rural habitat of a people expresses the predominance of agriculture as a means of livelihood, Bihar remains a heavily agricultural State. Census figures -- on the major occupations of the inhabitants -- that support this argument are presented in Table 4.6 which offers a composite picture of India and Bihar for the years 1961 and 1981.

TABLE 4.6
"Workers" & Occupational Classification of the "Workers": India & Bihar (1961-81)

	1961	INDIA 1971	1981	1961	BIHAR 1971	1981
Total pop- ulation	439,072,582	548,159,652	685,184,692	46,455,610	56,353,369	69,914,734
Total workers	188,571,542	180,373,399	247,198,315	19,234,565	17,488,87	22,553,520
% of workers to total population	42.9	33.0	38.0	41.4	31.0	32.3
<u>Occupational Categories(%)</u>						
a.Cultivators	53.2	43.3	37.0	54.3	43.3	42.2
b.Agricultural labourers	16.7	26.3	22.4	23.0	38.9	33.0
c.Marginal workers*	--	--	11.0	--	--	7.4
d.Household industry	6.3	3.5	3.5	5.4	2.5	2.2
e.Other Workers**	23.8	26.9	26.1	17.3	15.3	15.0
Total workers	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: * "Marginal Workers"--added only in the 1981 census.

** In all censuses prior to 1981, "other workers" were broken down into these categories: (i) mining and quarrying (ii) manufacturing other than household industry (iii) construction (iv) trade and commerce (v) transport and communications and (vi) other services.

For easy comparisons with the 1981 census, and since these separate categories are not directly relevant to the thesis, all these have been put together in the category of "other workers" for the years 1961 and 1971.

Sources:

1961 figures for India & Bihar--Statistical Abstract of India 1968, pp. 15-18.

1971 figures for India & Bihar--Statistical Abstract of India 1978, pp. 24-26.

1981 figures for India & Bihar--Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables, Series I, Paper I.

The first significant trend one notices in the figures provided in Table 4.6 is the enormous decline between 1961 and 1971 in the proportion of people classified as 'workers' -- about a ten percentage point decline in both India and Bihar during the course of one decade. One would like to believe that such a decline was caused by demographic changes. A rapid decline in the death rate, a decline in child mortality, and an increase in the average life span might reduce the proportion of the economically active population, as occurred in the western industrialized nations. Such, however, was not the case in India. A demographic change of such magnitude in one decade would be unthinkable. What most likely happened was that the definition of the 'worker' was drastically altered in order to avoid the embarrassment caused by uncontrollable unemployment.

Furthermore, on examining the size of the workforce (kept constant for the three time periods at 100), some significant changes emerge. The 'other workers' as a category subsumes various occupational classifications that clearly represent not only the non-agricultural but also the modern industrial sectors of the economy. While there is a slight increase in this category for India, the proportion of Bihar's population under this classification has declined. A look at the figures for the two regions in Bihar (see Table 4.7) points up the fact that there has been a decrease in the 'other workers' category in the Gangetic plains. In other words, industrial development and the subsequent occupational diversification of its people in the

plains region have been negative.

TABLE 4.7
Occupational Classification of the 'Workers' in the
Two Regions of Bihar: 1961-1981

<u>Occupational</u> <u>Categories</u>	GANGETIC PLAINS		CHOTANAGPUR	
	1961	1981	1961	1981
a.Cultivator	48.5	39.1	66.4	42.5
b.Agricultural labourer	28.5	38.8	10.0	16.7
c.Marginal workers	--	5.0	--	15.0
d.Household industry	6.2	2.9	4.0	2.7
e.Other workers	16.8	14.2	19.6	23.1
Total	100	100	100	100

Source:

1961--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1966, pp. 9-10.

1981--Census of India 1981: Final Population
Tables, Series I, Paper I.

The proportion of people engaged in 'household industry' -- another non-agricultural occupation -- has significantly declined both in India and in Bihar, as well as the two regions of Bihar. Traditionally, much of the needs of the day-to-day consumer items (cloth, shoes, pottery, agricultural tools, etc.), were met in the villages by the local artisans. Obviously, these needs are now being increasingly met by products coming from the outside.

Before examining the agricultural sector, the category of 'marginal workers' (added in the 1981 census) needs to be

clarified. As mentioned earlier, 'marginal workers' are those people who worked for only a part of the year preceding the enumeration. If an urban-rural break-down of this classification is conducted, as much as 87 percent of these workers for India, in 1981, are found to be classified as rural (23,553,480 out of 27,125,784 'marginal workers'). For Bihar, the proportion of rural 'marginal workers' is much higher. As much as 97 percent of the total (1,739,726 out of 1,792,981) 'marginal workers' lived in villages. Given the fact that these are workers who could not find work for the major part of the year it would be safe to infer that they came from the class of landless agricultural labourers, or poor peasants, including perhaps some former artisans who were reduced to being agricultural labourers.

If, based on this assumption, the figures (in Table 4.6) for the 'cultivators', 'agricultural labourers' and marginal workers (for 1981) are added, we reach the inescapable conclusion that the proportion of workforce engaged in agriculture-related activities has remained more or less constant in India (69.9 percent in 1961, 70.4 percent in 1981) while it has increased in Bihar (77.3 percent in 1961 to 82.8 percent in 1981). The Chotanagpur plateau however registered a slight decline (76.4 percent to 74.2 percent in Table 4.7), a possible explanation being the rapid growth in the urban-industrial sector.

Placing these facts against the summary of the previous sub-section ("Patterns of Land Use") where it was concluded that quantitatively the availability of agricultural land has remained constant in Bihar, the only possible conclusion is that there is a much greater pressure on land today than there was two decades ago.

But, this still does not present the complete picture as far as the change in the character of agrarian relations is concerned. As a result of the changed definitions of agricultural occupations, we may never know precisely, and in aggregate terms, what happened to the large numbers of non-cultivating owners (i.e. landlords) and the still larger numbers of non-owning cultivators (i.e. tenants) who existed in 1951. But, the data presented in Tables 4.6 and 4.7 still offers some insights which will be corroborated with the help of qualitative data presented in the next chapter.

The 'cultivator' is defined in the 1981 census as a person who is "engaged either as employer, single worker or family worker in cultivation of land owned or held from Government [and] cultivation includes supervision or direction of cultivation". The 'agricultural labourer' is defined as "a person who works in another person's land for wages in money, kind or share, and [who] has no right of lease or contract on land on which he/she works".³

Given these definitions, it would not be surprising if the category of 'cultivators' included landlords who leased out

their lands simply providing 'supervision' or 'direction' of cultivation. Similarly, all 'agricultural labourers' are not necessarily wage-earners -- the so called rural proletariat of the capitalist mode of production. Included in this classification are workers who are paid in kind and even in the form of a share of the produce. Therefore, share-cropping and other forms of tenancy relations could not be assumed to have disappeared in the period since 1961; they seem to have been subsumed under new labels.

There is yet another observation which needs to be made on the basis of the data presented on occupational categories (Tables 4.6 & 4.7). The proportion of 'cultivators' to the total population of workers has been consistently on the decline (since 1961) in India, in Bihar and in the two regions of Bihar. On the other hand, the proportion of 'agricultural labourers' has been steadily on the increase. (The figures for 1981 are misleading: as has been pointed out earlier, most of the people classified as 'marginal workers' could only be 'agricultural labourers'). This means that the available land is being increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and that the small peasants are increasingly being pushed into the category of landless labourers. It is also possible that the many tenants who had been cultivating lands for generations were able to hold on to their juridical or normative rights in those lands until the beginning of the sixties. The process of large scale evictions, which was discussed in general terms in Chapter III,

and which will be looked at again in the context of Bihar in Chapter V, was completed only by the early or mid-sixties, reducing the former tenants to being year-to-year 'tenants-at-will' with no legal claims to the land upon which they worked. This perhaps partly explains why the category of 'cultivators' registered a sharp decline after the 1961 census.

With these observations on the two fundamental factors of production in agriculture -- land and the labour force -- we now turn to examine the new technology that was introduced in the mid-sixties and its effects on the agrarian sector.

The New Technology:

Despite the fact that the quantity of land and the numbers of labour force engaged in agriculture have remained more or less constant, the performance of Indian agriculture -- since the late sixties -- both in terms of total agricultural production as well as the average yield, has registered a phenomenal growth. India is no longer the text-book and dinner-table example of scarcity and food-aid that it was until recently. This does not mean that the problem of hunger and deprivation for the majority of the Indian people has been eradicated, but that is an issue outside the purview of this thesis. As far as the market demands of foodgrains are a determinant of the adequacy or inadequacy of supply, India is today supposed to be not only a self-sufficient but a surplus producing country.⁴

The total output of foodgrains in 1950-51 was 50.8 million metric tonnes. In 1981-82, the last year for which figures are available, the total output of foodgrains increased to 133.1 million metric tonnes.⁵ This growth is observable in all agricultural products -- food as well as non-food items. The output of wheat increased from 6.5 million metric tonnes in 1950-51 to 36.5 million metric tonnes in 1980-81; rice from 20.6 to 53.2 million metric tonnes during the same period. Production of oilseeds increased from 5.1 to 9.7 million metric tonnes. Increase is seen not only in terms of the total output, but also in terms of the productivity of soil as measured by average yield. For example, the average yield of wheat in 1950-51 was 6.6 quintals per hectare (1 quintal=100 Kilograms); by 1981-82 it had increased to 17.0 quintals per hectare. For rice, the increase was from 6.7 to 13.2 quintals.

It should however be pointed out that agricultural growth during the first fifteen to twenty years after independence was slow and sluggish. By the mid-sixties the situation had become alarming since the locally produced food was becoming increasingly insufficient to meet the demands of the market; forcing the country to seek help from outside. Foodgrain imports rose steadily from 1.4 million tonnes during 1956 to 4 million tonnes in 1960. The production figures for 1961-62 show no improvement over the previous year, and actually registered a decline in 1962-63. In 1964, the quantity of imports rose to 6.27 million tonnes. A particularly bad harvest -- due to severe

drought -- during 1965-66 resulted in the further increase in import figures to 10 million tonnes (Bettelheim, 1968:177). Also, by 1965-66, the per capita availability of foodgrain for consumption had fallen to the level of the mid-fifties (Frankel, 1978:226). The crisis was further accentuated by a steep rise in prices, both of food and non-food commodities: "Between 1961-62 and 1966-67 the foodgrain prices registered an increase of 83 percent, which also led to a 28 percent increase in the price of manufactured goods" (Dasgupta, 1977:30). np>It is within this context that the new agricultural strategy sought a solution to the problem of agricultural regeneration in modern technology. Table 4.8 shows, on the basis of figures for major agricultural commodities, that production and productivity rapidly increased on an all-India basis only after the mid-sixties--a result of the conscious change in policy orientation.

TABLE 4.8
Production & Average Yield of Selected Food & Non-Food Crops: India(Selected Years)

	WHEAT		RICE		TOTAL FOODGRAIN		RAPESEEDS & MUSTARD		POTATOES	
	P*	AY*	P	AY	P	AY	P	AY	P	AY
1950-1	6.5	6.6	20.6	6.7	50.8	5.3	0.76	3.7	1.6	69.2
1955-6	8.8	7.1	27.5	8.7	66.8	6.2	0.86	3.4	1.8	66.4
1960-1	11.0	8.5	34.6	10.1	82.0	7.0	1.3	4.7	2.7	72.5
1965-6	10.4	8.3	30.6	8.6	72.3	6.4	1.2	4.5	4.0	85.1
1970-1	23.8	13.1	42.2	11.2	108.4	8.9	1.9	5.9	4.8	99.8
1973-4	21.8	11.7	44.0	11.5	104.6	8.2	1.7	4.9	4.8	89.5
1974-5	24.1	13.4	39.5	10.4	99.8	8.2	2.2	6.1	6.2	106.0
1975-6	28.8	14.1	48.7	12.4	121.0	9.4	1.9	5.8	7.3	117.4
1976-7	20.0	13.9	41.9	10.9	111.1	8.7	1.5	5.0	7.1	115.7
1977-8	31.3	14.8	52.6	13.2	125.6	9.6	1.6	4.6	8.1	122.7
1981-2	NA	17.0	NA	13.2	NA	NA	NA	5.4	NA	NA

*P: Production

*AY: Average Yield

Production: millions of metric tonnes

Average Yield: quintals per hectare

NA: not available

Computed from:

Figures upto 1977-78--Statistical Abstract of India 1979, pp.50--55.

The figures for 1981-82(AY)--CMIE, 1982 (August).

For Bihar, figures for the various commodities for different years was not readily available. In particular, data for the years preceding 1964-65 could not be obtained. Even then, on the basis of data presented in Table 4.9 for three separate years, and for the three most important items of foodgrains⁶ a few trends can be identified.

TABLE 4.9

Area, Production & Average Yield of Selected Foodgrains in Bihar

	WHEAT			RICE			PULSES		
	A*	P*	AY*	A	P	AY	A	P	AY
1964-65	659	398	6.0	5,288	4,987	9.4	2,206	1,147	6.1
1969-70	1,145	1,200	10.5	5,493	4,009	7.3	NA	NA	NA
1977-78	1,984	2,502	12.6	5,592	5,519	9.9	1,509	955	6.4

A*= Area

P*= Production

AY*= Average Yield

Area in '000 hectares; Production in '000 metric tonnes;

Average Yield in quintal per hectare.

NA= Not Available

Computed from:1964-65--Statistical Abstract of India 1966,
pp. 34-50.1969-70--Statistical Abstract of India 1971,
pp. 58-74.1978-79--Statistical Abstract of India 1979,
pp. 46-55.

First, the area under pulses (various varieties of lentils) has seen a considerable decline, to be explained perhaps by the lack of any upward movement in the average yield per hectare. Rice cultivation, too, on an all-Bihar basis has seen very little increase in productivity (from 9.4 to 9.9 quintals per hectare as against an increase from 8.6 to 13.2 quintals for India as a whole during the corresponding period). Yet the area under rice cultivation in Bihar has increased slightly. This is most likely due to the fact that rice is the major staple in people's diet

in this part of the country. However, wheat has seen the most dramatic increase in average yield in Bihar (from 6.0 to 12.6 quintals per hectare) and a three-fold increase in the area in which it is cultivated. These figures from Bihar confirm the general observation that most of the HYV seeds other than wheat are not suitable to the soil and climatic conditions of Bihar (Dasgupta, 1977).

There is a considerable variation within Bihar, on a district-by-district basis, in terms of the productivity in rice and wheat crops. Before discussing this variation it is necessary to take a look at the various components of the new agricultural technology and their introduction in India and Bihar.

The many components which together constitute the "new package" of technology fall into different categories. Terry Byres (1981) offers a distinction between biochemical innovations and mechanical innovations; the former comprising the new high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides etc., and the latter consisting of tractors, threshers, drills, mechanical pumps for irrigation, oil engines etc. While this distinction is useful, it is necessary to point out that of all the elements which mediate in the interaction between land and labour force, irrigation (the assured and timely supply of water) is the most important and crucial input. Improved varieties of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc., can improve productivity only if water is available in the required

quantities and at the appropriate times. As far as tractors, harvesters, threshers and other mechanical devices are concerned, they affect only the labour process. In other words, these mechanical devices increase the productivity only in terms of per unit of labour input and not in terms of per unit of land.⁷

That availability of irrigation could increase yields by anywhere between 50 and 100 percent and more is evident in the 1978-79 figures on the productivity of various crops on an all-India basis. On an average, per hectare yield of rice on unirrigated land was 10.8 quintals, while it was 16.5 quintals on irrigated land. The respective figures for wheat were 8.9 and 16.9 quintals. For bajra (a millet variety) the figures were 5.7 quintals without irrigation and 12.8 quintals under irrigation.⁸

One of the major efforts of the new technology was therefore the improving of irrigation facilities. To recapitulate what was discussed earlier in the chapter, irrigation facilities seem to have been largely responsible for the increase in the amount of land sown more than once (cf. Tables 4.1 and 4.2). Table 4.10 presents data that shows the increase in irrigated area for both India and Bihar.

TABLE 4.10
Irrigated Area as Percent of the Total Cropped
Area: India and Bihar

	1956-57	1964-65	1978-79
India	15.1	16.1	20.1
Bihar	17.5	18.2	32.6

Computed from:

1956-57--Statistical Abstract of India 1961, pp. 82-84.
 1964-65--Statistical Abstract of India 1967, pp. 80-84.
 1978-79 (India)--Statistical Abstract of India 1980,
 pp. 77-78.
 1978-79 (Bihar)--Statistical Handbook of Bihar 1980,
 pp. 37-40

Compared to India, Bihar seems to have made a greater progress in irrigating its agricultural lands. This progress is minor when compared with some of the other states of India. For example, in Tamil Nadu 41.9 percent of the area is under irrigation, in Haryana 51 percent and in the Punjab, 81.3 percent.⁹ These figures reflect the uneven development in the country. This unevenness is prevalent at the state level as well.

The methods used to irrigate agricultural land are an indication of the level of productive forces in any given society. Privately owned wells (operated by animal power, with or without persian wheels) and communally owned tanks (built to store rain water during the monsoons) have been in use in India for centuries (Sengupta, 1980). The building of canals by damming rivers also took place in certain areas, particularly,

but not necessarily, during the period of British rule. Obviously nature has imposed restrictions on the extent to which artificial means of irrigation can be created. The efforts during the last two decades have been directed towards overcoming such restrictions. Arid and desert areas in Haryana and Rajasthan for example, have been watered by the building of thousands of kilometers of canals and large-scale dams. Traditional wells operated by animal power could tap the water resources only to a limited depth. This could be overcome by installing mechanical devices that had the capacity to pump water on to the surface of the land from a much greater depth. These devices, called tube-wells, have become popular in recent years. Tubewells have been almost invariably privately owned in India (Dhawan, 1979). For India as a whole, tubewells have increasingly become a major source of irrigation: from irrigating only 14 percent of the total irrigated area in 1956-57, the proportion increased to 41.6 percent in 1979. Correspondingly, in 1951 there were only 3,000 privately owned tubewells in the country, but by 1961, the number had risen to 22,000. The major increase occurred during the sixties with the number rising to 540,000 in 1971. In 1978 there were 1.75 million tubewells in India (Dhawan, 1979:143).

TABLE 4.11
Distribution of Irrigated Area in Bihar by Sources
of Irrigation :1956-57 --1978-79 (in percentage)

Sources	1956-57	1978-79
1.Government canals	21.0	38.5
2.Private canals	12.9	0
3.Tanks	13.6	3.5
4.Tubewells	12.0	35.3
5.Other sources*	30.9	23.0
Total	100	100

*Other sources: traditional wells, channelling of natural streams, lift irrigation, rivers, jhils (natural ponds).

Source:

1956-57--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1978, p.43.

1978-79--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, p.41.

A similar trend is observable in Bihar, as is evident in the figures presented in Table 4.11. Government operated canals have increased their share of irrigated lands, but the largest increase has occurred under tubewells (from 12 percent in 1956-57 to 35.3 percent in 1978-79) whereas the traditional means of irrigation have noted a decline.

Tubewells, as mechanical devices, require energy from pump sets run by electricity or by oil and the supply of electricity is itself dependant on the generating capacity of the country. India's overall performance is far from adequate. Out of a total of 67,566 villages in Bihar, only 23,108 had been connected to an electrical line by 1982 (the figure for the whole country

being 292,496 [villages] out of a total of 576,126).¹⁰ In view of this, many of the privately owned tubewells had to be fitted with oil-operated engines. In 1950-51, there were only 16 electrically operated tubewells per 100,000 hectares of cultivated land in India. The number increased to 326 in 1965-66. But, within the next decade, by 1976-77, it had gone up to 1,617 and two years later (1978-79) to 2,308. Similarly, tubewells operated by oil-engines numbered only 62 per 100,000 hectares of cultivated land in 1950-51. The number increased to only 295 by 1965-66, but within the next decade, it increased dramatically to 1,074.¹¹

The figures for oil-engines and electric pumps in Bihar are presented in Table 4.12.

TABLE 4.12
Oil Engines & Electric Pumps in Use in Bihar's
Agriculture (in numbers)

	1956-57	1966-67	1977-78
Oil engines	3,204	3,598	140,645
Electric pumps	.749	6,854	93,202

Source:

1956-57--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1966, p.54.
 1966-67--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1971, p.40.
 1977-78--Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, p.61.

It is obvious from these figures that mechanization of irrigation facilities in Bihar has gone up considerably during the period 1956-57 to 1977-78.

A similar indication of mechanization is visible from the data on tractors: a device to replace the slow and labour-intensive method of ploughing the fields with hand ploughs operated by animal power. For the country as a whole, there were only 7 tractors in use per 100,000 hectares of the cultivated land in 1950-51. The number rose to 34 by 1965-66. But the dramatic increase occurred in the following decade -- there were 234 tractors in use for each 100,000 hectares of the cultivated land in India by 1978-79.¹²

Bihar also shows evidence of a similar trend. The earliest accessible figures were those of 1956-57 when there were a total of 1,227 tractors in use in the whole state. In the next decade the number almost doubled (2,132 in 1966-67). But, during the

decade that followed there was a five-fold increase (10,574 in 1977-78).¹³

Corresponding to all these developments and consistent with the pattern is the increase that took place in the use of chemical nutrients to improve the soil fertility. Use of various chemical fertilizers (nitrogenous, phosphatic and potassic) increased at the average annual rate of 17.1 percent between 1951-52 and 1982-83 for India as a whole. In absolute terms, the country's use of fertilizer rose from a total of 66 metric tonnes in 1951-52 to 6,418,000 metric tonnes in 1982-83.¹⁴ The big increase occurred in the late sixties, as is demonstrated in Table 4.13.

TABLE 4.13

Fertilizer Consumption per Hectare of Gross Cropped
Area: India & Bihar (Selected Years) (in Kilograms)

	1951-52	1964-65	1968-69	1982-83
India	0.5	4.9	11.0	37.0
Bihar	NA	NA	7.3	19.9

NA= Not Available

Source:

India--CMIE, August 1983, Table 12:7.

Bihar--CMIE, September 1982, Table 7:10.

Compared to the country's average, Bihar's use of chemical fertilizers in 1982-83 falls much short, and even more so when compared with states such as Andhra Pradesh (50.0 Kg), Tamil Nadu (67.5 Kg) and Punjab (121.0 Kg).¹⁵ Still, the main point to be established here, as in the other indicators discussed previously, is that Bihar, like the rest of the country, showed a considerable increase in fertilizer consumption and that this increase began to take place substantially only in the late sixties. As far as comparisons with the other states are concerned, they only reflect the uneven development occurring in the country, a phenomenon also present within the state of Bihar.

Finally, it is important to note the fact that behind this dramatic growth in capital inputs there was a substantial rise in the flow of financial resources to agriculture. Data on this

is difficult to consolidate, as it derives from different sources since there are a variety of institutions -- public and private -- that channel financial resources to agriculture. There are Commercial Banks, Public Sector Banks, Agricultural Co-operative Societies and Public Sector Non-Bank Financial Institutions, all of which advance finances to the agricultural sector. To develop a total and composite picture would be a major exercise. A few selected items of information however are presented and together they offer a view of the trend.

According to the Reserve Bank of India (the Central Bank of the Indian Government which regulates currency and all financial matters), institutional finance of all kinds, direct and indirect, to agriculture more than doubled in a period of five years from Rs. 26,218 million in 1973 to Rs. 57,228 million in 1978.¹⁶ International funds, especially from the World Bank, directed towards agriculture increased from \$108.1 million in 1969 to \$451 million in 1977. The amount of outstanding loans from Commercial Banks to agriculture was Rs. 4,001 million in 1970, it increased to Rs. 28,695 million in 1979. For Bihar the figure rose from Rs. 54 million to Rs. 1,397 million in the same period.¹⁷ Outstanding loans to agriculture from Land Development Banks amounted to Rs. 7,288 million in 1970, and increased to Rs. 13,925 million in 1979. In Bihar the increase was from Rs. 231 million to Rs. 760 million. All-India figures on Agricultural Cooperative Societies show that their membership rose from 32 to 57.3 million between 1972 and 1981, while the

overdue loans went up from Rs. 3,766 million to Rs. 10,901 million. Bihar also experienced similar growth. Membership of all these societies grew from 2.8 million to 4.9 million persons and the amount of outstanding loans from Rs. 132.1 million to Rs. 369.3 million between 1972 and 1981.

Some more data could be presented: for example, the amount of advances made by Public Sector Banks and other Public Sector Financial Institutions. But, they simply reflect the same trend. There has been a significant growth in the flow of capital resources to the agricultural sector, in order to meet the demands for fertilizers, agricultural machinery, irrigation facilities etc. Most of these financial resources are advanced only on the basis of sufficient collateral in the form of land ownership. Many critics have observed that a substantial share of capital resources including those from the Agricultural Credit Societies, have been channeled to the large landowners in the countryside.¹⁸ As will be evident in the next chapter, the landless and poor peasants -- at least in Bihar -- still continue to rely on the usurious local moneylenders for their credit needs--most of which are consumption and not investment needs.

To sum up this section, agriculture in India and as well as in Bihar has shown evidence of much growth. Agricultural production as well as the productivity of the soil have registered an increase. There has also been an increase in the use of technological inputs backed by the greater availability

of capital resources. In the next section the extent to which this growth is universal is examined.

Uneven Development:

Evidence from all over the world has made a truism of the statement that development is not an even process. Regional unevenness and disparity has occurred in most societies. Nature and its endowments have played a part in it, as have historical circumstances. But, the social policies of the state, whether consciously or not, have also contributed to this phenomenon.

A look at the performance of the agricultural sector on an all India basis shows that considerable variation exists. Vast differences exist both in terms of the amount of inputs as well as the output of land. A few of these differences have been mentioned in the previous section. One of the most striking variations is the difference in the average yield of foodgrains between the various states. Even if the factor of irrigation is maintained as being constant, the average yield of wheat per hectare of irrigated land in 1978-79 still varied from the high of 2,821 Kgs. in Punjab to the low of 838 Kgs. in Karnataka; that for rice varied from 2,992 Kgs. in Punjab to 1,021 Kgs. in Bihar (CMIE, Sept. 1982, Table 8:15). The annual rate of increase in the overall food production between the triennia ending in 1961-62 and 1981-82 has been 6.2 percent in Punjab and 5.5 percent in Himachal Pradesh, while it has been as low as 0.4 percent in Rajasthan, 0.6 percent in Madhya Pradesh and 1.3

percent in Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Orissa (CMIE, Sept. 1982: Table 8:5).

Such vast differences can be observed in every factor: use of fertilizers, use of HYV seeds, availability of credit facilities, irrigation, mechanized tools for cultivation like tractors, threshers etc. Just as unevenness exists between the states on an all-India basis, the same is true for the regions and districts of a given state. That such would be the case is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the new agrarian strategy, based upon bio-chemical and other technological inputs was consciously applied to certain selected districts across the country. This section attempts to determine whether region-wise and district-wise disparities exist within Bihar.

Earlier in the chapter, while discussing Table 4.2, it was noted that vast differences existed between the Gangetic Plains and the Chotanagpur Plateau in terms of agricultural area which was sown more than once; while in percentage form such land increased from 19.5 to 27.6 percent in the plains, it declined from 4.2 to 3.1 in the latter. This, as has been mentioned previously, is largely a reflection of the availability of irrigation facilities. In table 4.14 we present data on this and several other factors in an attempt to offer a comparison between the two regions of Bihar.

TABLE 4.14

Regional Variation in Various Technological Inputs in Bihar

	GANGETIC PLAINS	CHOTANAGPUR	BIHAR
1.% of irrigated area to the total cropped area .			
1964-65	22.2	7.0	18.2
1978-79	43.0	8.0	32.6
2.Electric Pumps (numbers)			
1956	699	50	749
1966	6,276	579	6,854
1977	90,326	2,876	93,202
3.Oil Engines (numbers)			
1956	2,886	318	3,204
1966	2,965	633	3,598
1977	126,683	13,962	140,645
4.Tractors (numbers)			
1956	1,151	76	1,227
1966	2,008	124	2,132
1977	10,267	307	10,574

Source:

Data for item 1: 1964-65--Bihar Statistical Handbook
1966, p. 40.

1978-79--Bihar Statistical Handbook
1980, pp. 37-41.

Data for items 2,3,4: 1956--Bihar Statistical Handbook
1966, p. 54.
1966--Bihar Statistical handbook
1971, p. 40.
1977--Bihar Statistical handbook
1980, p. 61.

It is clear from the figures in Table 4.14 that the 'green revolution' technology has by and large bypassed the whole Chotanagpur Plateau. This region, made up of seven districts (Ranchi, Santhal Parganas, Palamau, Singhbhum, Dhanbad, Hazaribagh and Giridih), occupies 46 percent of Bihar's total land area. One might account for this backwardness by suggesting the unimportance of the region for agriculture, the plateau being essentially an area of rich mineral resources. This may be so, yet the fact remains that almost one-third (29 percent) of the total net area sown in Bihar falls in this region. Also, as has been observed earlier (under Table 4.7), approximately 75 percent of the population in this region was still engaged in agriculture related activities in 1981. Yet it was found that only 6.0 percent of the total irrigated land in the State, only 2.9 percent of all the tractors and only 3 percent of all the electric pumpsets in Bihar were found in the Chotanagpur region in 1977.¹⁹

Still more important is the fact that this unevenness exists even within the region of the Gangetic Plains. The district of Shahabad (later divided into Bhojpur and Rohtas districts), which was first selected for the IADP 'package plan', stands out compared with the rest. These two districts occupied only 6.5 percent of Bihar's total land area and about 9.0 of its total net sown area in 1978-79, and yet, as much as 21 percent of the total irrigated land of Bihar is found here, whereas the whole of the Kosi region in the Gangetic Plains, made up of the

districts of Katihar, Purnea and Saharsa, and comprising 9.6 percent of Bihar's total land area, and 12.6 percent of the total net sown area, accounted for only 9.7 of Bihar's irrigated land. Another well-defined region of the Gangetic Plains, made up of six districts (Sitamarhi, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Madhubani, Begusarai and East Champaran), occupied 13.7 percent of the total cropped area but only 9.7 of the total irrigated land fell in it.²⁰

Another way of looking at this disparity is by comparing the percentage of land irrigated out of the total cropped area in given districts. Table 4.15 presents this data for a number of districts in Bihar. Since the productivity of soil (measured by average yield per hectare) is the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of the new technology, the table also gives information on it for the two most important foodcrops in Bihar.

TABLE 4.15

Extent of Irrigation & Average Yield of Principal Food Crops in Selected Districts
of Bihar: 1978-79

DISTRICT	TOTAL CROPPED AREA '000 HECT.	IRRIGATED AREA '000 HECT	IRRIGATED LAND AS % OF TOTAL CROPPED AREA	AVERAGE (QUINTALS RICE	YIELD PER HECT) WHEAT
<u>Gangetic P.</u>					
Bhojpur/Rohtas	1,138	794	70.0	11.4	14.6
Muzzafarpur	324	76	23.4	9.0	12.7
Darbhanga	219	33	15.0	6.0	9.0
Sitamarhi	270	41	15.1	9.0	11.2
Gaya	513	371	72.3	9.0	10.7
Aurangabad	288	187	65.0	12.0	10.8
<u>Chotanagpur</u>					
Hazaribagh	238	24	10.0	9.0	8.0
Ranchi	802	43	5.3	7.0	10.0
Palamau	346	73	21.0	9.0	11.2
Singhbhum	430	18	4.1	6.0	6.0

Computed from:

Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, pp. 36-52.

The figures on productivity have to be looked at with some caution because they relate to only one agricultural year, and a number of factors in any particular year may influence the productivity. But since the districts, particularly in each of the two regions, are quite close to each other (see Map 2) the data could still be indicative of the vast gap that is suggested by them. Bhojpur/Rohtas districts have one of the highest intensities of irrigated land, as well as other inputs of new technology which we noted earlier. The picture emerges quite clearly: the new agricultural strategy has had the effect of creating some selected pockets here new kinds of technological innovations and institutional support are bringing about visible changes in the performance of agricultural productivity.

Regional unevenness is not the only disparity which needs examination. Within a given region, district or even a village, there are other disparities, based upon class distinctions within the agricultural population, which could be a result of the new strategy. Numerous students of the Indian agrarian scene have pointed out how the 'green revolution' has brought about sharp economic differences between the various segments of the rural population (Abel, 1970; Jannuzi, 1974; Dasgupta, 1977; Byres, 1981). To quote Jannuzi, who wrote, in the case of Bihar,

In many regions the benefits of increased yields were not being widely distributed. Raiyats with holdings of five acres or less, raiyats with insecure rights in land, under-raiyats, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers--these tended not to benefit from the green revolution success stories. Instead, raiyats having operational holdings of fifteen acres or more were disproportionate beneficiaries of the increased yields

made possible by new inputs. This was clearly evident in Bihar in 1970 where officials of the government, made no effort to disguise the fact that landholders with twenty-four acres or more had been deriving the major benefits from the states agricultural development activities (1974:164-65)

This however is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter IV

- ¹ It should be noted that the increase in forest land in India as a whole is somewhat misleading. The 1951 agricultural census did not include Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Goa and Pondicherry. Some of these regions are heavily forested.
- ² 'Marginal workers' by the 1981 Census definition are those who have worked anytime at all in the year preceding the enumeration but have not worked for a major part of the year.
- ³ Census of India 1981: Final Population Tables Series I, Paper I.
- ⁴ A.N. Agarwal (1980)
- ⁵ All these production statistics and the ones that follow are from the Statistical Abstract of India 1979, Tables 17 and 18, pp. 50-55 as well as from CMIE, August 1983, Table 13:2. A detailed summary of some of these figures are presented below in Table 4.8.
- ⁶ Non-food crops in Bihar's agriculture have never figured importantly. Over 90 percent of its agricultural land has been directed to food crops.
- ⁷ Based on Hari Sharma's class discussion in the graduate reading course, SA 864, Spring 1982.
- ⁸ Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE), Basic Statistics Relating to the Indian Economy, vol. 2, States, Sept. 1982, Table 8:15.
- ⁹ CMIE, Sept. 1982, Table 7:19.

- ¹⁰ CMIE, Sept. 1982, Table 5:13.
- ¹¹ CMIE, 1979 b: section 10, cited in Gail Omvedt (1981: A-143).
- ¹² CMIE, 1979 b: section 10, cited in Gail Omvedt (1981:A-143).
- ¹³ 1956-57 figures: Bihar Statistical Handbook 1966, p. 54;
1966-67 figures: Bihar Statistical Handbook 1971, p. 40;
1977-78 figures: Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, p. 61.
- ¹⁴ CMIE, Basic Statistics Relating to the Indian Economy, vol.1: All-India, August 1983, Table 12:7.
- ¹⁵ CMIE, Sept. 1982, Table 7:10.
- ¹⁶ CMIE, 1979 b: 10:11, cited in Gail Omvedt (1981:A-145).
- ¹⁷ This and the figures that follow are from CMIE, Sept. 1982, Tables 13:8 and 13:9.
- ¹⁸ The planners of the green revolution made explicit the fact that they were depending on the 'progressive cultivators' -- in essence the rich peasants and landlords -- to be in the vanguard of the new strategy. Rich peasants and landlords were the greatest beneficiaries of the 'green revolution'. They could afford to purchase the new inputs -- both biochemical and mechanical -- because of greater private resources and also because they captured to a very large extent the institutional credit that was made available at 'reasonable rates' of interest. Moreover, where the available inputs were scarce (HYV seeds, fertilizers, canal water), rich peasants and landlords were far better placed to acquire them. For example, cultivators with 7 to 10 acres of land needed between Rs. 10,000 and 12,000 to switch to cultivating HYV wheat (figures for All-India 1970). During the same period, the annual per-capita income for small cultivators was in the range of Rs. 190 and Rs. 250. This made it virtually impossible for the small cultivator to adopt the new technology (Ladejinsky, 1970:763). Moreover, Frankel (1971:59-60) comments that in rural India, the availability of credit, whether from private or institutional sources is severely constrained by the debtors land ownership status. Land owned is the primary collateral in loan negotiations. Small landowners thus have an inherent

disadvantage in accessing credit on reasonable terms. Even Co-operative Credit Societies or Land Mortgage Banks which have very liberal lending policies usually insist that the cultivators must be in a position to mortgage atleast 4 to 7 acres of land in order to obtain credit. This eliminates the majority of small farmers. The problem is much more acute for the large numbers of tenants and sharecroppers who do not own but only cultivate land, and these have little creditworthiness. Since most of the small tenants and sharecroppers are on oral lease, they do not in general have access to even short term cooperative credit for production purposes and must, more often than not, fall back on the village moneylender's mercy.

¹⁹ Computed from Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, p. 61.

²⁰ Computed from Bihar Statistical Handbook 1980, pp. 60-61.

CHAPTER V: AGRICULTURE IN BIHAR: THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter it was observed that the 'new agricultural strategy' did in fact result in the expansion of irrigation facilities, in the increased use of machinery, fertilizers and other capital inputs, and consequently, in the increase of agricultural production and productivity. There was however enormous regional unevenness in the development of these forces of production. On an all-India basis, while Bihar's performance has been better than that of some of the other States, it still lags far behind States like the Punjab and Haryana. Moreover, a similar unevenness is present between the various regions and districts of Bihar.

This chapter focuses on another important aspect of social reality in Bihar's agriculture: the social relations of production. The forces and the relations of production are interrelated, with the two mutually influencing each other. Development in one is either preceded or followed by developments in the other. Nonetheless there is no one to one correlation between the two. In other words, the level of development in one does not necessarily reflect the same in the other. Thus, even if the development of productive forces in agriculture were uniform throughout India, or Bihar (which as we noted above was not the case), it still would not tell us all

that needs to be known about social relations of production. While a greater use of machinery and other technological innovations certainly reflects an increase in capitalization, it does not by itself necessarily indicate capitalist relations in agriculture.

As outlined in Chapter I, the social relations of production are defined by the specific manner in which the surplus is produced and then appropriated from the direct producers. More specifically, it entails an enquiry into (i) who possesses the instruments or means of production (ii) what the direct social relations in the production process between the producers and appropriators of surplus are and (iii) the manner in which the appropriating class arranges to appropriate the surplus. It is within this framework that 'capitalist' or 'feudal' relations in agriculture can be established. In this thesis, feudal relations in agriculture are identified as follows:

- (1) concentration of two modes of exploitation, namely, usury and landownership in the hands of the same economic class,
- (2) widespread sharecropping,
- (3) widespread existence and use of serf like bonded and attached labour, plus demands of begari, and
- (4) evidence of non-economic coercion in addition to economic coercion. This is seen in conjunction with the prevalence of caste hierarchy and the resultant caste based brutality and violence.

Data Sources on Social Relations:

To empirically verify whether or not the above indicators of feudal relations exist, and the extent of their existence, poses certain difficulties. Aggregate quantitative data is either not available (as, for example, the census data on occupational categories in agriculture which could indicate the extent of tenancy relations), and what is available has to be treated with caution.

The Agricultural Departments of the State Governments, for example, have been conducting census of land holdings in various size categories. Nationwide Sample Surveys of land holdings have also been periodically conducted by the prestigious Indian Statistical Institute. But such undertakings by government agencies or by outside pollsters are not likely to reveal the true picture, since those who keep their tenancy arrangements concealed for fear of losing land under their control to the actual cultivators, or those who have divided their large holdings among real or unreal family members to avoid ceiling laws, are not likely to give correct information to such outsiders, particularly if they are associated with government agencies (Herring, 1983). Caution therefore has to be exercised in drawing conclusions from such data.

The fact that reliable information on these and other crucial indicators of the relations of production in the countryside does not get fed into the aggregate figures should not however imply that such information is concealed from

everyone. In a typical Indian village practically every aspect of peoples' lives and their socio-economic position is generally known to the village residents. Thus, though the exact amount of land controlled by a landlord may remain concealed from revenue records, it is not a secret for the village inhabitants. Who cultivates how much land and under what terms, who owes money to whom, the various modes of payment to agricultural labourers, and other such information are public knowledge. Meaningful conclusions concerning relations of production can be drawn by assembling this information either from detailed fieldwork or from studies dealing with production relations at the 'micro' or village level.

Although in 'scattered form', there is considerable literature available which reflects the above mentioned aspects of rural life in Bihar. Socio-anthropologists and other social scientists working at universities in Bihar and elsewhere, as well as research scholars affiliated with the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies in Patna and the Bihar Tribal Research Institute in Ranchi have published several detailed studies of rural life in one or another part of the State. Some of these are case studies of particular villages, while others offer comparative analysis between regions on the basis of detailed observations of selected villages. In addition, there are numerous organizations on an all-India basis, concerned broadly with social issues, in particular with the oppressed sections of the society. Among others, the Gandhi Peace

Foundation, and the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) have occasionally publish reports based on detailed observations of rural life in India, including Bihar. For example, Samra Marla's book Bonded Labour in India (1980) sponsored by the Gandhi Peace Foundation is the most comprehensive account of bonded labour to date.

Furthermore, there are politically active groups associated with either one or the other Communist Party¹ or independent² who have been busy organizing the weaker sections of the peasantry in Bihar, and elsewhere in India. Since Bihar has figured prominently in recent years in peasant mobilization and struggles, several detailed socio-economic accounts of life in the countryside prepared and published by these activist groups are available. Moreover, these class struggles in rural Bihar, often resulting in large scale repression by the state machinery, have attracted the attention of numerous journalists from India's leading daily and weekly newspapers. Their accounts, often very detailed, and which could be correctly labelled as 'investigative journalism', have furnished much insight into the existing social relations.

The ensuing discussion on social relations in rural Bihar is built on these diverse sources. As has been pointed out earlier, the information is of a scattered nature. As one would expect, there is an unevenness in the quality of the material because of the diversity of investigators involved. However, when all the material is put together, a clear and consistent

picture emerges. The greatest contribution these diverse sources make to the study of rural India lies in their capacity to provide insights beyond aggregate totals, by offering a close view of the concrete social settings of specific and identifiable people, and their diverse roles, and of specific and identifiable villages.

The many features constituting the totality of relations of production -- e.g. concentration of land ownership, sharecropping as a form of tenancy relations, usury, bondage in the labour process and extra-economic coercion -- are all interrelated. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity and proper emphasis, a look at these aspects separately is necessary.

Concentration of Land Ownership:

As discussed in Chapter III, the efforts of the Government of Bihar to abolish the zamindari system and redistribute land to the poor and landless peasants largely failed. Thus, land, the most important means of production, remained concentrated in a few hands.

Table 5.1 presents the total land area of Bihar distributed by the size of operational holdings in 1970-71.

TABLE 5.1
Size & Distribution of Operational Holdings: 1970-71.
Bihar

HECTARES	NUMBER '000	%	AREA '000 Hect.	%
Less than 0.5	35.2	46.5	8.6	7.5
0.5--1.0	13.4	17.7	9.7	8.5
1.0--2.0	11.0	14.6	15.6	13.6
2.0--3.0	5.7	7.5	13.7	12.0
3.0--4.0	3.4	4.4	11.5	10.0
4.0--5.0	2.3	2.9	9.8	8.6
5.0--10.0	3.2	4.2	21.8	19.0
10.0--20.0	1.0	1.3	13.9	12.1
20.0 & above	0.2	0.3	9.6	8.4
Total	75.7	100	114.0	100

Source:

Agricultural Census, Bihar 1970-71, cited in
Bihar at a Glance, 1977, p. 60.

Generally speaking, a holding of less than one hectare is considered 'uneconomic'. Peasants who occupy less than one hectare of land constitute the poor peasants. In 1971 as much as 64.2 percent of operational holdings fell in this category, which accounted for only 16 percent of the total land area. In the size category of 10 hectares and above there were only 1.6 percent of the holdings, but between them they controlled 20.5 percent of the total land area. Thus, Table 5.1 effectively demonstrates the continued existence of skewed landownership patterns although agrarian reform measures have long since been in effect.

The complete picture of the concentration of landownership still does not emerge from this aggregate data. As has been noted several times before much of the landownership has remained concealed. Nonetheless, in a study sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Sciences, G. Ojha (1977) was able to present a count of the large landowners in 12 districts of Bihar. Drawing from a variety of governmental sources, Ojha found that there were 186 big landlords in the twelve districts of Bihar for which he obtained the information, who owned anywhere from 40 hectares (over 100 acres) of land and above. Table 5.2 presents a break-down of these 186 landlords by landownership groups.

TABLE 5.2
Agricultural Land Held by 'Trustees'* & Big
Landholders in 12 Districts of Bihar, 31st
July, 1970

HECTARES	NO. OF LAND- HOLDERS	AREA UNDER CONTROL(hect)
40--200	133	10,864
200--400	12	5,387
400--4,000	33	59,370
4,000 & above	8	51,609
Total	186	127,411

Original tables in acres, but converted to hectares.

*"Trustees"--usually 'religious trustees' which are often fronts for the landlord and even when they are not, they in effect operate similar to the landlords.

Source:

Revenue Dept., Government of Bihar, cited in G. Ojha (1977:142).

Out of 186 'trustees' and big landholders, 41 held more than 400 hectares (1000 acres) of land each and 8 more than 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) each. Many of these large estate owners were most likely ex-princely maharajas. Despite legislative measures that were supposed to have abolished these landlords, it is obvious that the ex-maharajas retained large landed estates under their control.

In addition, other evidence present in the literature points to the phenomenon of concentrated landownership. For example, Ravi Kumar, one of the leading political activists with

the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, an organization referred to earlier, recently reported that a mahant (religious leader) in Gaya district illegally controlled over 16,000 hectares (40,000 acres) of land, worked on through the system of bonded labour, and dominated by his own private army of muscle-men".³ The existence of this particular 'religious' landlord is corroborated by another recently published report. This report also cites ten other landlords in Gaya and Aurangabad districts by name and lists the extent of landholding under their control. The list is reproduced below.⁴

NAME OF OWNERS	LAND OWNED BY THEM (in hect)
1. Anzar Hussain	1,460
2. Main Singh	1,180
3. Gopal Singh	600
4. Lal Singh	1,040
5. Dr. Vijay Singh (MLA)	280
6. Jagdish Singh	280
7. Jalil Khan	200
8. Rani of Domra	600
9. Satyendra Narain Singh	1,720
10. Rambali Singh	120

More recently, U. Sinha writing for the Bombay based Economic and Political Weekly noted that in Gaya and Aurangabad districts "there are several landlords who still have more than 1,000 acres [400 hectares] of land. Satyendra Narain Singh, a formidable Rajput caste leader and Congress Party MP... is

reported to have 4,000 acres [1,600 hectares] of land" (1985:344). Sinha estimates that in the plains of Bihar over 80 percent of the land is owned by a mere 5 percent of the population (p. 344). R. Narayan writing for the weekly Mainstream reported that in the Saharsa district, north of the river Ganges, one landlord alone controlled over 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) of fertile agricultural land (1977:23). Land concentration in a few hands is also prevalent in the 'green revolution' districts of Bhojpur and Rohtas. For example, in Tori-Mohanpur village, Gopal Singh, a Rajput landlord, controls over 1,000 bighas (1 bigha=1/6 th of a hectare) of prime agricultural land, most of which is leased out to sharecroppers. In the village of Basohari (Rohtas district) Bihari Singh, a Rajput landlord, retained control over 88 hectares(221 acres) of prime agricultural land by transferring it under the name of a temple -- the Ram Lakshman Janaki temple. He also controls land in other surrounding villages. Out of the 88 hectares, 24 hectares are cultivated directly through hired labour and 64 hectares are under batai (sharecropping). Landlords in both villages keep lathials (a private force armed with large sticks and guns) to punish recalcitrant peasants, practice usury and use bonded labour.⁵ Santosh Rana in his study based on field work carried out in the Rohtas district in 1984 states that most big landlords have their lands distributed over many villages. In this way, Bhanu Pratap Singh, a Rajput of Aklashpur village, is able to control over 1,200 hectares (3,000 acres) of prime

agricultural land. He employs all methods of surplus extraction: methods such as sharecropping and moneylending. "The huge surplus extracted... is spent for feudal extravagancies. Lakhs [1 lakh=100,000] of rupees are spent for marriages... or invested in mahajani (moneylending)"(1985:15).

Much more documented evidence could be presented to substantiate the point that the fundamental economic base (i.e. concentration of land) of feudal landlordism continues to persist in Bihar. This should be seen in conjunction with the earlier observation that practically every village in Bihar is dominated by the presence of at least one or two large owners of land. Concentration of land in a few hands does not by itself imply the existence of a feudal social order. But, in view of the fact that the present-day large landholders are a continuation of the old princely maharajas and other feudal landlords, it would not be unreasonable to assume that they continue to represent feudal relations, particularly since there are other manifestations of feudal types of exploitation.

As noted above, concentration of land in the hands of a few allows for an economic base on which the feudal type of social relations can exist. There are two major reasons why: first, in a setting where a great majority of the peasantry own small or uneconomic holdings, the large landlords are in a position to maintain their power and authority by virtue of their ability to oblige peasants with small parcels of land under tenancy arrangements. Traditionally, this has taken the form of

sharecropping in India. Secondly, the landlords combine their role as landlords with that of moneylending. The vulnerable economic position of poor peasantry and their inability to acquire low-interest loans from cooperative societies and other lending institutions invariably makes them turn to the landlords for loans -- both for consumption purposes and to fulfil production needs such as seeds or cattle. Moneylending is lucrative for the landlords: charging high interest rates brings in huge profits; it also invests them with the power to keep peasants in a state of perpetual dependence. In the following sections an attempt will be made to provide evidence on both the manifestations of feudal landlordism in Bihar: sharecropping and moneylending.

Sharecropping:

Sharecropping has existed in India for centuries. As early as the 4th Century A.D., Buddhist monastery and university lands were cultivated on a half-share contract, seeds being equally divided between the two parties. Hindu law books of the Gupta period mention non-cultivating landlords subletting their land for a share of the produce (Cooper, 1983).

Sharecropping became widespread (especially in eastern India) during the colonial period (Bhaduri, 1976). It was also during this period that this mode of tenancy relations became the most crucial prop of feudalism in India's agriculture. In the post-independence period, despite the numerous legislative

attempts to eradicate this feudal form of property relations, sharecropping still prevails in Bihar; in fact, it is the major form of tenancy.

Scholars such as Omvedt (1981) and Byres (1983) argue that in contemporary India sharecropping has acquired 'capitalist traits'. For example, Omvedt argues that unlike the pre-independence period, where poor and landless peasants leased lands from landlords, in contemporary India landlords are largely enterprising 'capitalist farmers': they lease the uneconomic holdings from the poor peasants. However, there is no evidence of this sort of 'reverse' sharecropping in Bihar. The sources cited below amply demonstrate that the predominant pattern today is still the old, feudal one.

Professor M.N. Karna recently examined agrarian relations in six villages in the Madhubani district north of the river Ganges. He came to the conclusion that the "agrarian structure of Madhubani has been semi-feudal in character" (1981:189), a conclusion based on observations like the following: (i) that the vast majority (over 80 percent) of tenants and sharecroppers cultivating land under oral lease are excluded from the 'benefits' described in the state tenancy acts (ii) that sharecroppers can be evicted by landlords on any pretext (iii) that the class of sharecroppers has increased from 10 percent, in 1951 to almost 38.1 percent in 1975, and "constitute a significant proportion of the agricultural population in the region" (1981:189).

Similar observations have come from other sources and from other districts of Bihar. Gerry and Janine Rodgers, in their detailed 1981 study of changes in the occupational structure of the workforce between 1971 and 1981 in five villages in the Kosi region of Bihar (districts of Katihar, Purnea and Saharsa), came up with some interesting findings. The Rodgers' observed: (i) There was little occupational change in the workforce of the five villages (ii) Sharecropping still remained particularly widespread, and though the number of sharecropping households remain unchanged, they are not the same households in 1981 as in 1971. Sharecroppers were being rotated in order to prevent them from acquiring legal rights to the land they cultivated. (iii) Small pockets of highly productive capitalist agriculture had developed but the semi-feudal mode of production which dominated the area had proved resistant to change (1981:17).

One of the most detailed accounts of agrarian relations in Bihar is a study by Dr. M.P. Pandey (1980) from the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies in Patna. Pandey selected one village each from three districts: Muzzafarpur, Bhojpur and Ranchi. It is important to note that the three villages are from vastly different regions of Bihar, as well as the fact that the village in Bhojpur falls in the very area where 'green revolution' technology has had the most success.

Shahbajpur village in Kanti Block, Muzzafarpur district, is made up of 168 households, with a total population of 1,197. The total area of the village is approximately 240 hectares (600

acres) of which 200 hectares (500 acres) are cultivated. The agricultural techniques are 'primitive' and land is concentrated in the hands of a few Bhumihar landlords.

Jamuaon village in Piro Block, Bhojpur district, is densely populated. There are 412 households, the total population being 3,114. The village has a total land area of 446 hectares (1,115 acres). Over 90 percent of the land is cultivated and controlled by Bhumihar landlords. The forces of production in agriculture are highly developed. Several kinds of crops are raised here but, paddy, wheat, sugarcane and potatoes are the most important. Most landlords also use chemical fertilizers and pesticides, tractors, pumpsets etc.

Bargama village, in Khijri Block, Ranchi district, is situated only 7 kilometres from Ranchi town. The total number of households in the village is 403. The total land area is 476 hectares (1,189 acres) but only 358 hectares (895 acres) are cultivated. The forces of production in agriculture are backward. Most landowning households are small, with only 5 big farmers owning land the size of 4 hectares (10 acres) or more. The largest landlord is the owner of a tea plantation controlling over 160 hectares (400 acres) of village land.

In all three villages Pandey found evidence of widespread sharecropping. His observations are summarized below:

(1) In all three villages, poor and landless peasants (who are either harijans or adivasis) lease land on a share-cropping basis from the landlords. While the term of lease is 50:50 of

the produce, the tenants have to bear the full costs of seed and water. In Jumuaon village they also have to purchase the capital inputs. Thus, after paying 50 percent of the produce as rent and other charges on account of seeds, water and capital inputs, the tenants are left "with a nominal quantity of grain" (pp. 52-53).

(2) Sharecroppers can also be freely evicted by the landlords. The practice of annual bidding for leasing the land is common among and advantageous to the landlords. Usually the same sharecropper is unsuccessful in getting the same land consecutively for more than three years. As was mentioned in Chapter III, the 'shifting of tenants' from one piece of land to another prevents them from putting forth claims of occupancy rights to the land. Pandey cites several cases of evictions, a few of these are summarized below:

(a) Maya Paswan, a resident of Shahbajpur village cultivated twenty bighas belonging to Hari Shahi on sharecropping basis for twenty-five years and his brother worked as a domestic servant for Shahi. One day Paswan's brother left the village for Dhanbad in search of a job. "Thereupon Shahi took back the land from Paswan" (p. 54).

(b) Ram Sakal Shahi evicted Bholi Thakur who was cultivating 6 kathas of land of the former for the last three years on the ground that the latter was not doing begari "which he was supposed to do".

(c) Mohan Ram cultivated 4.5 bighas of Banwari Shahi's land. He also built a small hut on the same plot. Ram also worked as a domestic servant for Shahi. "On one occasion Ram fell ill and could not go to the house of his master for a few days. This enraged Shahi, who in anger, drove out Ram from the hut and razed it to the ground. He took the land away" (p. 55).

(3) In Bargama village, Ranchi district, alienation of tribal land by non-tribal landlords is common. For example, over 160 hectares of tribal land was appropriated by the tea plantation

owner who later forced the tribals to work for him as 'bonded labour'.

(4) In all three villages, sharecroppers are completely at the mercy of the landlords, and have "to render free labour (begari) whenever the landlord demands it". Oppression and torture of tenants is widespread, the most common form of punishment being whipping.

These detailed findings of Pandey from the actual field are particularly significant. There is uniformity as far as sharecropping goes. The level of development of the productive forces -- as for example in the village of the 'green revolution' belt of Bhojpur -- does not alter the situation.

There is another report from a village in this belt that confirms Pandey's findings. Santosh Rana's study, conducted in 1984, and based on a detailed investigation of agrarian relations in thirteen villages in the "green revolution success" district of Rohtas, discussed the extent of sharecropping. Rana concluded that "the capitalist mode of production has made very little entry into the area" (p. 11). On the contrary, his survey revealed that bataidari (sharecropping) is supplemented by the mani and malguzari systems. In the mani system, the peasant paid an annual rent to the landlord in grains, while in the malguzari system the rent was paid in money. The rate of mani was very high, extracting more than 70 percent of the produce from the peasant. The sharecroppers had to bear the full cost of seed, fertilizer, water and other inputs. Thus, when the cost of the

capital inputs are taken into account, the sharecropper received less than 20 percent of the produce "and more than 80 percent goes to the landlord" (p. 11). In the thirteen villages Rana studied, he found that on an average, landlords rent out three-quarters of their land to sharecroppers. In some instances the landlords appropriate almost all the produce after deducting various dues. "At such times, the peasant stands with folded hands before the landlord and prays to waive the dues. If the landlord is 'gracious' and pats him on the back (pith thoka) it means that the loan is waived"(p. 13) -- the sharecropper receives an extension on his lease. Rana reports that "bataidars can be evicted whimsically by the landlords on any pretext" (p. 13).

Earlier, under the section on landownership several large landlords in Gaya and Aurangabad districts were noted by name. According to the same source, all of these landlords "engage in feudal exploitation" -- they lease out large portions of their land to sharecroppers, demanding over 80 percent of the produce. Like their counterparts in other districts, they do not bear the risk of cultivation, that is, it is the sharecroppers who have to bear the full cost of capital inputs. Moreover, as Pandey's and Rana's studies corroborate, sharecroppers are completely at the mercy of the landlords and can be evicted freely if the landlord so wishes (Sinha, 1985).

The power of landlords over sharecroppers, by virtue of the former's control over land, enables them to demand use of the

labour of the sharecropper's family. In all the cases cited above, begari, a form of coercive labour found to coexist with share contracts, is widespread. Usually, under begari, sharecroppers and poor peasants have to work for the landlord for a specified number of days without payment -- receiving perhaps a meal. Begar work varies from a week to two months in a year, usually at peak cultivation periods such as sowing, ploughing and harvesting. Begar can be enforced at any time and is a distinctly advantageous form of labour for the landlord for it guarantees labour at the critical times of the year when demand is at its highest and agricultural labourers at their most expensive. Moreover, there are other methods by which landlords are able to extract more from the sharecroppers. For example, although the practice of abwabs (exactions in money or kind) has been declared illegal, it is still widespread in Bihar. Abwabs can be demanded by the landlords at any time including on personal grounds such as that of the marriage of the landlord's son or daughter and for other expenditures such as those incurred on religious occasions.

Usurious Moneylending:

As discussed earlier, despite the expansion of rural Credit Societies, Banking Cooperatives and Commercial Banks, which offer low rates of interest, most poor and landless peasants are forced to borrow from moneylenders (usually the village landlords) because they do not qualify for loans from lending

institutions.

Pradhan H. Prasad, in the course of studies conducted in Bihar, came to the conclusion that

a vast majority of poor peasant households are 'deficit' ones in the sense that their earnings fall short of their bare minimum consumption expenditure. This forces them to take consumption loans from the big landowning class. The chronic 'deficit' nature of the households results in a situation where the full payment of principal and interest is not possible. This leads to a system of informal bondage which confers on the big landowning class enormous economic benefits such as cheap and assured labour, better terms for leasing out land, benefits obtained through what is known as 'distress sale' and acquiring poor peasant lands for almost nothing among others. It was found that the creditors do not always insist on full payment.... More often they force the debtors to sell their assets (mostly land) to them but rarely for complete discharge of the debt obligation. It has been found that, mostly, loans outstanding far exceed their assets and, invariably, the loans repaid during the year remain less than loans taken during the year (1979:35).

Several village level studies support Prasad's conclusions. For example, R.N. Maharaj's (1980) study of six villages in the Dhanbad district during 1979 shows that on an average, "65 percent of the landless and small holding peasants borrowings came from private agencies [namely] the village moneylender" (1980:225). Maharaj states that almost all the loans taken by the rural poor were for consumption needs, and while government agencies and cooperative societies charge interest rates below 10 percent, village moneylenders and landlords charge anywhere from between 50 to 100 percent interest per annum. However, "interest rates charging at more than 200 percent are also found" (1980:228).

Pandey's study (1980) cited earlier, also reported the existence of widespread usury. For example, in all the three villages he studied, over 75 percent of the population were in debt. He stated that majority of the loans taken -- that can be both in the form of cash and foodgrains -- were for consumption needs. "The loan given in foodgrains is recovered 1 and a 1/2 times after four months. In case the loans remain unpaid during the stipulated period of four months then the interest is just double.... One Shri Rajdeo Sahi, a resident of [Shahbajpur village] is famous for extorting interest which goes up to 12 1/2 percent per month" (1980:71-72).

Rana in his study of 13 villages in the Rohtas district (where usury is officially supposed to have been eradicated due to the expansion of credit facilities) also reports of widespread mahajani (money and grain-lending):

Mahajani is common in every village and almost every landlord practices it. Almost all poor and middle peasants are indebted. The rate of interest is 50 percent for six months or less. Very often the landlord grabs the land of the poor and the middle peasants against the debt. A middle peasant Garjan Singh reports that he took a loan of Rs. 3,000 from the landlord Manager Singh. He paid back Rs. 7,000. Even after that the landlord occupied 7 acres [2.8 hectares] of his land (1985:13).

From the study conducted by the Bihar Tribal Research Institute in Ranchi, in 1976, the following picture emerges: "Of the 200 Santhal families surveyed, 132 were in debt. Out of the 80 moneylenders who advanced loans to the Santhals only 5 were licensed moneylenders. The rate of interest varied between 150 and 600 percent. In the industrial area, the rate was 650

percent per annum.

Usurious money-lending is also prevalent in the Purnea district (Wood, 1976), in the Palamau district (Mundle, 1979) and in the Santhal Parganas (Hague, 1974). A fact finding team sent by the Delhi unit of the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in mid-1979 to the Singhbhum district found widespread moneylending at usurious rates widespread throughout the district. "The interest rate is 50 percent for six months, 125 percent for a year".

Bonded Labour:

Bonded labour exists in many gradations. As discussed earlier, poor peasants and sharecroppers who enter into an agreement of tenancy or crop-sharing undertake not only to hand over part of the produce but also to perform services (begar) for the landlord. In various ways and in varying degrees the landlords have managed to establish complete control over the socially and economically weaker groups of the village thereby facilitating the monopolization of their labour for a short period or even permanently. In general it can be said that the condition of dependence (created because of the concentration of landownership), on which agrarian relations are usually founded, led to a more or less permanent and in some cases even a hereditary bondage system.

The servitude of agricultural labourers has been institutionalized in different ways in the different regions,

but the multiplicity of forms does not conceal the fact that the type of relationship is essentially the same throughout India.⁶ The dependent relationship in most cases comes into being when the rural poor accept bondage in exchange for a loan in cash or kind, most often to meet the daily consumption needs of the family. Having undertaken to work as a servant for the landlord until the debt is paid off the chances of discharging the debt are extremely slight because of the low compensation received for services rendered. The usurious interest rates charged by the landlords and moneylenders, increases the debt dramatically and in the course of time, the labourer, with few exceptions, remains in bondage for the rest of his life. The bondage continues on into the next generation and so on. Over a period of time, the agreement between the bonded and the landlords becomes hereditary as well as permanent.

As mentioned earlier, Sarma Marla's book is to date the most comprehensive account of the nature and extent of bonded labour in India. The survey, sponsored by the Gandhi Peace Foundation and directed by the National Labour Institute in New Delhi, was begun in May 1978 and completed in the early part of 1979. Altogether 1,000 villages covering ten states, namely, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh were chosen. In Bihar, a total of 150 villages from sixteen districts were covered by the survey. The findings of the survey for both India and Bihar were surprisingly similar. For example:

(1) The projected estimate of bonded labourers in Bihar (based on averages of 150 villages) was 111,000. In India it was estimated at 2,617,000.

(2) In Bihar, harijans made up approximately 80 percent of the bonded labour, adivasis accounted for 10 percent and the lower castes constituted 6 percent. For India, 86.6 percent of the bonded labourers were either harijans or adivasis.

(3) For Bihar, 80 percent of the employers of bonded labour were 'upper caste' landlords. For India, the corresponding figure was 89 percent.

(4) In Bihar, 95 percent of the bonded were males, and 80 percent of them were below the age group 40, whereas in India, 97.5 percent of the bonded were males between the ages of 21 and 40. This indicates that the exploiters of bonded labour prefer workers of an age group which promises best physical condition for the maximum exploitation of labour.

(5) In Bihar, labourers became bonded for small amounts of loan. The average loan sufficient to lead to bondage was as low as Rs. 180.

The process of impoverishment in Bihar is advancing with such intensity that 10 percent of all bonded labourers become bonded without even incurring any debts themselves, forfeiting their freedom and subordinating themselves to the whims of the landlord only to get at least one meal a day (p. 53).

The data for Bihar indicates that 50 percent of bonded labourers had borrowed less than Rs. 100, 73 percent had taken Rs. 150 or less, 84 percent had borrowed Rs. 250 or less. Only 2 percent had taken loans of Rs. 1,000 or above. Moreover, 15 percent had

accepted loans in kind. The value ranged from Rs. 8 to Rs. 400 (p. 53). For India, the average loan taken was Rs. 530.

(6) Among all the reasons given for taking loans, the domestic reason ranks the highest. It includes expenditure for food and clothing as well as for medical treatment and other domestic needs. It is the exorbitant rates of interest charged by the landlords and moneylenders that leads to bondage. In Bihar, despite the small size of loans, the rates of interest were extremely high--between 50 to 200 percent per annum. For India, interest rates ranged from 50 to 400 percent per annum (p. 21).

(7) Figures for both Bihar and India indicate that there has been a steady increase in bonded labour since 1975 despite the legislative measures. For India, 37 percent of bonded labourers at the time of the study had been in bondage for upto two years. The same percentage (37) had been in bondage for two to ten years. Four percent had been in bondage for eleven to twenty years. Thus, the conclusion of Gail Omvedt, who argues that the rural semi-proletariat is, by and large, an increasingly mobile, migrant and free class, whose difference from the urban working class "seems more those of quantity than of quality (1981:151), does not seem tenable in view of the Marla survey since approximately 74 percent of all bonded labourers had come into bondage during the last ten years.

(8) Forfeiting the right to seek other (alternative) employment is one of the essential elements of bondage. The survey's findings show that even during the 'lean' agricultural season 75

percent of all bonded labourers were not allowed to seek other employment. The percentage was as high as 92.3 during the peak season. In Bihar "masters do not generally allow bonded labourers to seek other employment" (p. 57). However, at times they rent him/her out to other landlords or contractors. Large landlords in Bihar keep several bonded labourers.

(9) Even in the "modernized districts" (districts where the green revolution technology was introduced), the use of bonded labour is widespread (p. 31).

(10) Coercion in the form of beating, whipping and other forms of torture is also prevalent.

Dr. S. Mundle's study (1979) sponsored by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, in New Delhi, is another source of information on the nature of agrarian relations in Bihar. Mundle surveyed 29 villages in the Palamau district and reported evidence of widespread bondage and indebtedness among poor peasants (p. 102). He estimated that there were over 20,000 labourers in bondage in Palamau district alone. Mundle's findings support the conclusions of Marla's study. For example, Mundle found that most labourers entered into bondage by taking small loans for consumption needs (pp. 62-62). Moreover, the vast majority of bonded labourers were born into the harijan caste or the adivasis. Mundle presented several profiles of bondage. The two cases presented below illustrate what the system is like.

(1) "Puran Bhuiya, a landless harijan of Pipra village is bonded to the Rajput Gajadhar Singh. It was Puran's

grandfather who originally became bonded to Gajadhar's father Darogi Singh, for a loan of Rs. 60. When the grandfather died, the father took his place as a bonded labourer of the malik's family and he took a further loan of Rs. 50 for his daily consumption needs. Now, Puran is forced to work as a bonded labourer against the same total loan of Rs. 110. And he explained that when he dies his son too would have to replace him in bondage unless they are able to pay off the debt. Puran has to put in about twelve hours of labour everyday and his wife is also expected to work with him. If either of them fails to turn up for work, they are abused and given a sound thrashing. This happens even when they cannot work because of illness".

(2) "Basudeo Chamar, a harijan from Shrilapur tola in Hariharganj block, is the son of Shayama Chamar who originally borrowed Rs. 40 and again two years later another Rs. 60 from the Rajput landlord Kariman Singh of Madhubana village. Shayama Chamar got bonded for the original loan of Rs. 40 and put in labour services for a total of 14 years, before his son Basudeo took his place in the bondage contract against the same total loan of Rs. 100. In addition, Basudeo's fifteen year old son Mahesh, has also been working for several years as a charwaha (cattle grazer) against the same debt. Basudeo explained that he worked twelve hours a day... and is given a meal of coarse grain boiled in salt" (p. 147-48).

Arvind Das (1976) provides examples from Palamau district that only add to the mounting evidence of the workings of the bonded labour system.

Jagdish Manjhi of Ramkanda village in Ranka Block is barely 20. Five years ago he borrowed Rs. 225 for his own and his sister's marriage from Nathuni Sahu, a moneylender-cum-landlord. He has been working to pay off his debt ever since. If he was late by even a few minutes in reporting for work, he was severely beaten. His arm still bears the marks of a lashing. Since his master had multifarious interests, Jagdish was forced to do all kinds of work. Once when one of the malik's bullocks had run away, he was yoked to the bullock-cart and made to pull the cart three miles to the market where Nathuni Sahu bought and sold goods.

Joseph Tappu of Jori village in Mahuadaar Block took a loan of Rs. 45 from Tabla Mian for his wife's funeral. To repay his debt he not only worked for four years but also had to get his little motherless children to work.

Jhari Bhuiyan of Ramkanda worked for six years to pay off a loan of Rs. 15.

Ramlakan Bhuiyan of the same village borrowed Rs. 10 to buy clothes and has been working since he was the height 'of a man's thigh'. He is about twenty today.

When Megh Ram of Sembarburhni village in Mahudaar Block borrowed two maunds of paddy for himself and his widowed mother, he was told by his creditor Hari Oraon that just as the landowner would have bought a bullock, he had bought Megh Ram and that he would have to work like the animal. The boy who is barely fourteen years old, was paid no wages; he was only given some food to keep him alive. He has got so used to beatings, scoldings and curses, that he is unable to refer to himself as anything but 'Meghwa Ram'.

Somra Bhuiyan of Banari in Menka Block borrowed Rs. 17 for consumption and has worked for six years.

Nanak Manjhi of Chanandi in Latehar Block borrowed Rs. 125 and has worked for twelve years.

Janak Nagesia borrowed Rs. 70 and has worked for ten years.

Tapeswar Manjhi borrowed Rs. 80 for medical treatment and worked for twenty years.

And so on.... (pp. 724-25)

Moving away from Palamau into Nalanda district in the Gangetic plains, one notices a similar phenomenon of indebtedness and bondage. K.G. Iyer's study (1977) concludes that bondage was not only widespread in the two villages in which he conducted his fieldwork but also in the surrounding villages and indeed the whole of Nalanda.

Summary:

Despite the many visible changes in the development of productive forces, as noted in Chapter IV, as far as the conditions of the labour process are concerned, and the social relations reflected by them, the evidence presented in this chapter clearly indicates that not much change seems to have occurred. The rights and prerogatives of the old, feudal

maharajas and landlords may have diminished, but it appears that this was more formal than real. In rural Bihar, they are still the dominant force and their domination continues to be characterized by feudal features. They have retained much of their land; consequently, this most important means of production remains largely concentrated, and the economic base of feudal landlordism maintained. There is also substantial evidence that throughout Bihar other manifestations of feudal relations are also operative. Sharecropping is widespread and is not of the 'reverse' type, usurious money-lending serves as a means of expropriating the peasants' 'surplus' as well as of maintaining a relationship of domination. Moreover, serf-like bondage of the labouring masses is still present in large measure. In addition, numerous other manifestations that indicate the extent of the feudal social relations are to be found. For example, poor and landless peasants, belonging as they do to lower castes, are forced to live outside the main village area. They cannot walk, even in rain or under the hot sun, with an umbrella as it is considered an affront to the landlord who is supposed to be their 'umbrella'. They cannot wear washed clothes or shoes in front of the landlord, they cannot grow a moustache or sit in a cot in the presence of the landlord and his henchmen. All these are considered crimes and violators are severely punished (for details see Sinha, 1985: 343-44). In some areas of Bihar it has been customary for the bride of a poor peasant to spend the first night after her

marriage at the landlord's house. This is because "you were able to get married to her with my money" (Das, 1976:726).

Thus, the fact that there are more tractors and other mechanized devices used in Bihar's agriculture does not by itself reflect a change in social relations. Those who work on others land may be operating these new technological devices but their terms of work and relations with the landowning class still manifest feudal relations. Moreover, there is ample evidence to suggest that the feudal type of relations are not confined only to the agricultural sector. Many modern sectors of the economy like construction, plantation, and manufacturing also employ bonded labour. Even in large cities such as Calcutta, New Delhi, and Bombay, the use of bonded labour in the construction and service industries is known to be widespread.

The Challenge to Feudalism:

The extreme exploitation of the rural poor by the landlords was shrouded by forms of paternalism and protection. The landlords 'helped' the poor by providing them with loans when no one else would and traditionally treated them as their dependents. Moreover, social relations in Bihar (as elsewhere in India) tended to reinforce the economic hierarchy -- society was highly stratified along caste lines. Religious customs and prohibitions operated to reiterate superior and inferior status. In Bihar, landlords even acquired pseudo-religious status and were seen as kings, representatives of heaven -- gods on earth.

Their 'ideological control' only helped to conceal the reality of oppression and exploitation.

However, the argument that the Indian peasantry, historically, was a passive acceptor of fate with an attitude of resignation to economic and ideological oppression has been disproved by K. Gough's (1976) summary of the extensive forms of peasant protest. As mentioned in Chapter II, there has been a long tradition of peasant agitation and struggle in Bihar, articulated in various forms, from Gandhian satyagrahas, to the physical annihilation of landlords and government officials, to large scale armed insurrections.

Over the last one and a half decades (after the famous peasant uprising in Naxalbari, West Bengal), there has been an increase in peasant militancy and struggles not only in Bihar, but throughout India (Bannerjee, 1980). Peasant movements of today are better organized and the peasants are conscious of their social and economic conditions. The movements are organized around a very wide range of issues and demands including land reform, abolition of bonded labour, an end to the practice of usury and begar, land to the tiller, payment of minimum wages and an end to the landlords feudal rights and prerogatives.

This challenge to feudalism has brought the rural poor in direct confrontation with the landlords. The cases summarized below illustrate the landed interests' response when their power and interests are challenged.

(1) On May 27th, 1977, at Belchi village in Patna district, fifteen harijan families demanding the payment of minimum wages were burnt alive in their huts by the landlord and his henchmen. "The women and young girls were raped and later put into bondage" (N. Sharma, 1977:4).

(2) Arun Sinha reports (1982) that landlord atrocities against the rural poor is widespread throughout Bihar. In Nalanda district alone, between 1972 and 1976, an estimated 142 landless labourers were massacred by landlords for demanding the payment of minimum wages.

(3) In the 'green revolution' districts of Bhojpur and Rohtas 'landlord terror' is widespread. For example, a report published in Economic and Political Weekly (1977) stated that landlord Ramanuj Acharya "who also keeps a private army" was known to have massacred several sharecroppers working under him for demanding a "reduction of the produce rent from 70 percent to 50 percent" (p. 1832).

(4) More recently, Mitra (1984), a correspondent with the daily The Statesman, reported that on March 16th, 1984, "Bhumihar landlords objected to a harijan settlement in the midst of upper-caste locality, ejecting its inmates. Pleading poverty, the landlords attempted to reduce even the traditional wages paid to labour... the harijans objected... the zamindars gunned down six landless labourers and burned down the harijan bustee (settlement)" (p. 17).

(5) Between March 16th and 17th, 1984, six harijans were shot dead by the bhumisena or landlords army in Lashona village in Patna district (Ghosh, 1984: 46--47).

(6) In the village of Kaithi Bigha Tola, a harijan hamlet in Aurangabad district, ten harijans were killed. This occurred on December 31, 1984. "Every hut in the village was set ablaze... three brothers aged thirteen, fifteen and nine were thrown alive into the fire". The reason for the carnage was clear--a dispute had developed between the harijans and landlords over a piece of land in which some harijans had settled. "The landlords wanted to evict the harijans who resisted. The landlords took this as a challenge to their authority and destroyed the entire harijan tola" (Sinha, 1985:343).

The cases cited are not isolated incidents but regular features of rural Bihar. Lynching and burning of lower caste peasants on the flimsiest of excuses is a common occurrence. Furthermore, landlords exploit caste divisions to mobilize sections of the middle peasant or kisan castes against the

landpoor and the landless. In Bihar, as in other parts of India, the increasing class enmity largely coincides with the traditional cleavages rooted in caste. The landless and landpoor are commonly harijans and adivasis and the landlords they confront Rajputs, Brahmins or Bhumihars. It is not surprising that the landlords exploit the primordial and caste-based loyalties to their advantage. Even the private armies of landlords are named after their caste background. For example, in the Gaya and Patna districts, the Bhumisena (literally army of Bhumihars) have been responsible for the killing of 108 harijans and landless peasants in 1983-84. In the Aurangabad district, the Brahmarsis Sena formed by landlords and Congress (I) MP, Raja Mahendra Singh and Congress (I) MLA K. Singh has been accused of being responsible for murdering and terrorizing the rural poor. Similarly, the Kshatriya Kisan Manch (Nalanda district) and the Pragatisheel Kisan Manch (Bhojpur district) are private armies of landlords accused as responsible for the murder of harijans (Ahmed, 1984:72-74).

The challenge to feudalism posed by the growing militancy of peasant struggles is being met with a kind of repression and violence that can only be characterized as 'feudal' -- large scale burning, lynching, and rape in the name of caste-based superiority and arrogance. It may appear to be paradoxical, but it in fact shows how strong the hold of feudal relations is in Bihar's countryside.

The preceding discussion indicates that the pretense of protection and mutual reciprocity -- essential and universal features of feudal relations -- are increasingly being exposed in rural Bihar.

In view of this it is not surprising that the peasant associations most active in organizing the weaker sections of rural India are politically and ideologically led by communist organizations, all of which maintain that anti-feudal struggles constitute the centrality of the overall class struggle in India.⁷

Notes to Chapter V

- ¹ The Communist movement in India has been in existence since the early 20's, although the party--the Communist Party of India (CPI)--was formally founded only in 1926. In 1964, in the context of serious ideological debates in the international communist movement (the Sino-Soviet debate) the CPI was split into two, the breakaway section calling itself CPI(M), and generally understood at that time to be closer to the Chinese Party in ideological orientation. But a few years later, CPI(M) was forced to go through another split. A year after the famous peasant uprising in Naxalbari in 1967, and because of the many political ideological questions this uprising posed, many sections of the CPI(M) walked out of the party to form a new one, the CPI(ML). Since then, the Indian Communist movement is known to have two major trends: the CPI and the CPI(M) together representing one trend which appears to have abandoned the path of armed struggle, and the CPI(ML) representing the other trend.

In the early 70's, the CPI(ML) went through many setbacks and was met with severe repression by the state. Divisions within the Party took place, particularly after the arrest and death in police custody of its first General Secretary, Charu Mazumdar. In recent years, the Party, although still divided in district entities, seems to have gained much strength at least in certain parts of India. Bihar appears to be one of the areas with most developed forms of struggle and large scale mobilization of peasantry. The CPI(ML) led by Santosh Rana and the one led by Vinod Mishra are in the forefront of these struggles as well as in the mining and industrial belts of Bihar. For details on the communist movement in India see Mohan Ram (1969) and S. Banerjee (1980).

- ² Among the 'independent' political groups active in organizing the rural poor is the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (Student-Youth Struggle Brigade). This group emerged out of a large scale anti-corruption, anti-government movement which spread all over India under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974. Made up mainly of urban youth, particularly students, the CYSV has been active in certain districts of Bihar mobilizing the poor and landless peasantry against the feudal landlords.

- ³ Cited in India Now, vol. 6, No. 2, p. 11.
- ⁴ Cited in Struggling Bihar, p. 11.
- ⁵ Compiled from Hari Sharma's fieldnotes (fieldwork carried out during July-Oct 1984).
- ⁶ Bonded labourers are known by different names throughout India. In Bihar they are called kamias or dharmaru (literally catch and beat up), in Gujarat they are known as halis, as pandiyals, pannaiyals and charmas in Tamil Nadu, as adimas in Kerala; huttalus in Mysore,; busaliyas and shalkaris in Madhya Pradesh; bhagelas and gassi-galus in Andhra Pradesh; muliyas, gothis, chakars and haliyas in Orissa; kuthias, krishans and chakars in W. Bengal; harwahas, hariyas and sewaks in Uttar Pradesh and halis and sepis in Punjab (Breman, 1947:7).
- ⁷ See for example, the "Programme" of the Communist Party of India (PCC), adopted at a special Congress in August 1984 (cited in For a New Democracy, August 1984, p. 12). Another wing of the CPI (ML) led by Vinod Mishra also emphasized this centrality in their document adopted at the Party Congress in 1982 (cited in Agrarian Programme, adopted at the Third All India Congress of the CPI (ML) (Calcutta: Liberation Publications, 1983).

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study began with the assumption, based upon the 'materialist conception of history', that the key to historical change lies in the unfolding contradiction within a mode of production between the forces of production and the relations of production. In the European context, the transformation from feudalism to capitalism was a result of a long struggle between the old ruling class of feudal landlords and the emerging capitalist class -- a struggle out of which the latter emerged decisively victorious.

This historical study was conducted in conjunction with a parallel historical study of the effect European colonialism had on the development of a capitalist class in colonized societies. It was observed that colonial rule eliminated whatever chance there was for a self-generated transition to capitalist development in these societies. In the case of India, the capitalist class which emerged under colonialism was highly concentrated among a few families and in a few regions of the subcontinent and was subordinate to the British rulers.

Thus, unlike the European capitalist class, which became victorious by decisively smashing feudalism, the Indian bourgeoisie, weak and dependent upon foreign capital, was unable to carry out the task of destroying feudal relations that dominated the countryside. Indian capitalism 'grew not by

defeating feudalism, but by adjusting itself to it'. This 'adjustment' was reflected most significantly in the realm of state power, where the weak and dependent Indian bourgeoisie was forced into a compromise partnership with the feudal interests. These conclusions were drawn from an understanding of history in Europe as well as in the post World War II phase in the Third World, specifically India.

It was however noted that the Indian bourgeoisie did attempt to destroy feudalism. The numerous agrarian reforms introduced by the Central Government, in their goal to redistribute land to the actual tillers and otherwise weaken the economic base of the landlords, were efforts in that direction. But, the political and economic power of the landed gentry at the state government level thwarted all attempts at these reforms. By the mid-sixties, when it became clear that the land reforms and other institutional measures introduced to bring about change in the agrarian class structure had failed, the Indian government, with the aid of foreign sponsors, adopted a new orientation in its agricultural policy and began to look for technological solutions to the problems of agricultural development.

This thesis attempted to look at the supposed transformation in India's agriculture, while focusing on the state of Bihar. Data on a variety of indicators of 'green revolution' inputs were examined, as well as the output figures for certain important crops. This was done for India as a whole,

for Bihar, and for the two regions of Bihar. Population figures, particularly the occupational distribution of the labour force, were looked at, as well as the pattern of land distribution by size categories. Depending on the availability and accessibility of data, all this was done for various time periods in order to trace whatever changes might have taken place.

Some very definitive conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the various exercises undertaken. First, there is tremendous unevenness in the application and adoption of green revolution technology. Bihar has fared much better than some states, but falls far behind many others. Within Bihar, there is a vast gap between the two regions: the Chotanagpur Plateau and the Gangetic Plains. But the unevenness does not end there. Within the Plains -- the heartland of Bihar's agriculture -- it was the districts of Rohtas and Bhojpur (parts of the original district of Shahabad, which was selected in 1961 for the 'package deal') which seem to have benefitted the most.

Even on the basis of quantitative indicators of technological inputs and productivity outputs, the new agricultural strategy seems to have only accentuated the already existing regional disparities in the agricultural sector. Within regions, the disparities have been seemingly accentuated along class lines with those owning large tracts of land gaining the most.

The 'new agrarian strategy', based upon technological solutions, brought some discernible changes in the performance

of India's agrarian economy. Greater use of HYV seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation etc., led to a significant increase in agricultural production as well as in higher yields per hectare. All these changes led some of the students of India's political economy to argue that a structural transformation in rural India from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production had begun to take place.

The use of new technological innovations does not, however, necessarily reflect a transformation of the social structure. Beginning with the assumption that capitalization of productive forces does not mean capitalist relations of production and that it is quite tenable to have new techniques and tools and still retain pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and appropriation, the thesis examined diverse sources of data and information in order to find out what kinds of social relations existed at the production level. Detailed case studies by social scientists of villages in different parts of Bihar, investigative reports by various organizations of a political and non-political nature, as well as stories filed by journalists from the field, were looked at. Evidence was sought to throw light on aspects of production relations such as land ownership patterns, sharecropping as a mode of tenancy and the terms of tenancy, moneylending as a form of appropriating surplus from the poorer peasantry, bondage as a means of extracting labour, and other extra economic modes of coercion and domination. It was found that these manifestations of feudal relations have continued to

exist throughout Bihar, including in the 'green revolution' districts of Bhojpur and Rohtas.

While these findings are significant, I would like to point out certain obvious limitations of this study. First, this is a case study of only one state in India, and no definitive generalizations could thus be made for the country as a whole. While it may very well be that similar patterns exist in the rest of the country, there is still a need for comparative studies. For example, the case of Punjab, and to a lesser degree Haryana, where the consumption of fertilizers, seeds, irrigation facilities, electrical power, etc., and also the overall productivity per unit of land, are considerably higher compared with the rest of the country, requires a careful investigation in order to see how far these particular features reflect different social relations.

Secondly, this study cannot claim to be a study of India's political economy, or even its agriculture. A whole range of areas have not been explored. I did not, for example, deal adequately with the character and behaviour of the Indian bourgeoisie, even in its relations with the agricultural sector. It specifically requires looking at the inter-sector relations between agriculture and industry: the terms of trade between the products of the two, the flow of capital investment, particularly of any surplus from agriculture moving into the industrial sector, etc. The role market forces play in determining the behaviour of the agricultural sector was not

explored either. While examining the cropping pattern in Bihar, for example, it was noted that the area under pulses had decreased and the area under rice had increased, despite the fact that both crops showed no sign of increase in per hectare yield. In matters like these, definite conclusions cannot be drawn without adequately dealing with the demands of the market forces, the price structure, etc.

Despite these limitations, the thesis raises viable questions about the claims made by some that the mode of production in Indian agriculture has undergone transformation. At the very least, it suggests that definitive conclusions about social relations cannot be made merely on the basis of quantitative and aggregate data, even if such data relate to the specifics of social relations (e.g. the existence or non-existence of wage-labour). For an accurate picture of these relations, one needs to make detailed investigations at the actual site of production. Since I did not have the opportunity to undertake such a field investigation myself, I have relied on the works of the many who did. It can be said with some measure of confidence, that the social relations in Bihar's agriculture not only continue to remain feudal in character, the old feudal mode has also shown enormous resiliency against the forces which attempted to change it. It is obvious that the transformation of these old forms will require much mightier forces than the Indian countryside has seen so far.

GLOSSARY A

- Abwabs-----cess (tax) or levy in cash or kind, in addition to rent.
- Adivasi----literally the "original inhabitant"; means the many tribal peoples of India.
- Bajra-----a variety of small millet; coarse.
- Bania-----member of the trader/merchant caste; a moneylender.
- Batai-----sharecropping lease.
- Bataidars--sharecropper.
- Benami-----without name, fictitious.
- Beth begar--forced or corvee labour.
- Bhoodan----'land gift' movement initiated by Vinobha Bhave.
- Bhoosa-----jute sticks, rice husks, wheat and other grain stalks that remain after threshing, used as animal feed
- Bigha-----traditional unit of land measure, varies from region to region. In Bihar, a bigha is one-sixth of a hectare.
- Bujharat---field survey conducted by the Bihar government officials to construct new rent rolls.
- Charwaha---individual looking after a herd of domestic animals.
- Dasa-----Aryan term for original inhabitant; dark-skinned.
- Dharmaru---bonded labour (literally, catch and beat up).
- Diara-----lands on the river bank.
- Diku-----outsider; non-tribal.
- Duija-----member of a twice-born caste.
- Harijan----Gandhian term for the 'untouchables'.
A member of the scheduled castes.
- Jajmani----a system of inter-caste rights and obligations based upon occupational specialization.
- Jatis-----sub-caste.
- Kamia-----bonded or attached labour.
- Katha-----unit of land measure, roughly one-twentieth of a bigha.
- Khud kasht--self-cultivation.
- Kisan-----cultivator or peasant.
- Lathials---staff bearing mercenary; retainer.
- Mahajan----money or grain lender.
- Mahant-----religious leader or priest controlling land under religious trust; a landlord.
- Maharaja---an emperor.

Malguzari--rent paid for land in money.
 Mani-----rent paid for land in grain.
 Melas-----festivals; large gathering.
 Pith thoka-to pat one on the back.
 Raiyat-----tenant cultivator.
 Satyagraha-acts of non-violent civil disobedience
 initiated by M.K. Gandhi.
 Shudra-----a member of one of the lower castes (artisans,
 peasants).
 Tola-----locality divided according to caste or
 occupations in a village.
 Varna-----the four unchanging categories of Hindu
 hierarchy; colour.
 Zamindar---feudal landlord.
 Zamindari--feudal landlordism.

GLOSSARY B

Figures and Currency:

Rupee---an Indian rupee is roughly equivalent to
twelve Canadian cents (1985).

1 lakh---one hundred thousand.

1 crore--ten million.

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