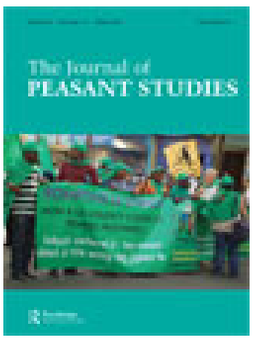

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Was There Feudalism in Indian History?

Harbans Mukhia *

The notion of an 'Indian feudalism' has predominated in the recent historiography of pre-colonial India. This notion, in its different interpretations, has West European feudalism as the model for reference. At times the close resemblance of Indian feudalism to this model has been emphasised, while on other occasions its divergence from it has been given prominence. The manorial regime and the role of trade provide the points of departure for comparison in all such arguments. In this article the validity of 'Indian feudalism', whichever way it is defined, is questioned. The author compares the processes of agricultural production in medieval Europe and medieval India in terms of the respective ecologies and social structures and suggests a basic dissimilarity between them such as would make any comparison futile. He argues that unlike the structured dependence of the entire peasantry upon the lords in medieval Europe, pre-colonial Indian society was characterised by self-dependent or free peasant production.

To discuss a problem such as 'Was there feudalism in Indian History?' one should, in fairness, begin by defining one's terms. What, in other words, is feudalism? Unfortunately the answer to this simple question varies with the historian who makes the attempt.[1] If there is no universally applicable definition of feudalism, there is an objective reason for it, which has critical significance for our argument: feudalism was not a world-system; capitalism was the first world-system.[2] It follows therefore that there is no universally applicable abstraction of feudalism as there is of capitalism. When we speak of capitalism in its abstract form, as generalised commodity production where labour itself is a commodity,[3] we do so because of our awareness that all of humanity was, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, subjected to the force of this production system through different stages of antecedent developments. Feudalism, on the other hand, was, throughout its history, a non-universal, specific form of socio-

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economic organisation — specific to time and region, where specific methods and organisation of production obtained.[4]

It is necessary to lay stress on this point here, for it is lost sight of when feudalism is defined as a system based on 'non-economic compulsion' or as a 'redistributive world system' or in even more general terms as an agrarian economy with a fairly cohesive ruling class siphoning off the agrarian surplus through the use of overt or covert force.[5] These definitions seek to identify an entire social and economic structure in terms of the political or juridical basis of the exploitation of the primary producer, the peasant; they do not take into account the totality of the production system. They seek to identify a mode of production by merely referring to the relations of exploitation. Secondly, these definitions are so broad as to cover all pre-capitalist systems in one sweep, for all pre-capitalist societies were characterised by primarily agricultural production, unequal division of property and non-economic coercion by the ruling class which appropriated the peasants' surplus in a variety of forms — rent (in labour, cash or kind) or revenue or in the form of servile or bonded labour. The use of the term 'feudal' in such a broad sense fails to demarcate the specifics of the feudal social and economic organisation from the pre-feudal ones in Europe and from other, non-European, medieval, social and economic systems.[6] It therefore does not explain much.

I shall, in the following pages, try to establish these demarcating lines by suggesting the specificity of feudalism to western Europe between the fifth or the sixth century and the fifteenth. Feudalism also developed in its classic form in eastern Europe between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century and possibly in Japan during the Tokugawa regime in particular. I am, however, constrained to leave these regions out of the discussion in this paper, hopefully without causing much harm to my argument. Since western Europe always provides the reference-point for any discussion of feudalism in India, or, for that matter, elsewhere, I shall also attempt a comparison between medieval western Europe and medieval India. The focus of this comparison will be on the respective conditions of labour which are determined by interaction between nature and social organisation and which, in turn, determine the dominant characteristics of a social formation.

I

Feudalism, like other social formations before or after it, was a transitional system. As such it stood mid-way in the transition of the west European economy from a primarily slave-based system of agricultural production[7] to one dominated by the complementary classes of the capitalist farmer and the landless agricultural wage-earner, but in which the free peasantry also formed a significant element. It is necessary to suggest here that the term 'free peasant' as used in this paper is not concerned with the legal freedom of the peasant to alienate his proprietary rights in land or implements or the usufruct of his land; it is even less concerned with the absence of legal restriction on the peasant's mobility. Legal restrictions on the alienation of land acquire social significance only in the

context of a fairly developed land market, just as legal restrictions on a peasant's mobility become important only if there is a developed labour-market so that the peasant, by being made immobile, is deprived of a competitive price for his labour. In the absence of these features of developed land and labour markets — which, indeed, characterised the era of the rise of capitalism and were thus bound to be absent earlier — not all the legal freedoms would make much difference to the fate of the peasant. The economic, rather than the legal, significance of the term 'free peasant' therefore denotes a peasant who, quite independently of his social or juridical status, earns his and his family's subsistence off his own (including his family's) material resources and labour. In other words, he (or his family) does not render labour to any one else either in performance of labour service (for purposes of production) or for wages. This does not, of course, exempt him from the obligation to part with his surplus produce in the form of taxes to the State, or, on its behalf, to its officials. Nonetheless, he retains complete control over the process of production on his land through his (and his family's) labour[8] and is assured of a relatively more certain, though perhaps no higher level of, subsistence[9] than peasants who are 'unfree'.

As slavery became an increasingly uneconomic element in the production process of late Graeco-Roman Antiquity,[10] the European slaves, freedmen and, for reasons of growing insecurity, allodialists with varying resources were transformed into different strata of dependent peasantry.[11] This transformation never succeeded in eradicating social and economic differences within the class of peasants;[12] nor were the allodialists completely eliminated from any region in any period.[13]

With slavery becoming increasingly unproductive and the capitalist farmer, along with the landless agricultural worker co-existing with free peasant economy still to develop a long way in the future, the feudal economy came to be characterised by an intermediate and transitional feature which formed the core of the feudal mode of production in its early phase: in the early feudal economy the peasant, irrespective of his social or juridical condition, came to acquire certain hereditary rights for the use of land and other resources even when they belonged to the lord; on the other hand, his and his family's labour potential was always in excess of the resources on which it could be fully expended. In general, as Georges Duby has put it, with the exception of a stratum of the class of allodialists, the area of arable land cultivated by the tenanted manses, varying greatly in size, 'was always less than the amount of land which in theory corresponded to the physical capacity of a peasant family'.[14] One could perhaps add that this would be equally true of small peasant families, legally free but economically dependent on the sale of their labour to supplement their income from the land and that the limitation of resources would include agricultural implements and draught animals, in addition to land.

This hiatus between the labour potential of a peasant family and its resources (used for production) appears to have constituted the distinctive characteristic of the feudal mode of production in its formative stages; it enables us to distinguish the feudal mode of production from the slave and the capitalist modes in Europe[15] and from other medieval economies in different regions of the world.[16]

The agrarian economy of the ancient Graeco-Roman region depended largely on the separation of the producer from the means of production under a condition of slavery facilitating the appropriation of his entire labour by the owners of the latifundia. Capitalist agriculture, on the other hand, is characterised by the separation of the producer from the means of production under the conditions of a wage labour-market, so that surplus value is appropriated by kulaks through the sale of the produce. Co-existing with it, though far from being its rival, is free peasant production with regional and temporal variations. In the feudal system in its classic form, the producer is neither completely separated from the means of production, nor is he an independent economic being. Indeed, it is via this intermediate feature that the western European economy effected its transition from slavery to capitalism. This feature formed the objective basis of the appropriation of the peasants' surplus labour by the feudal lords primarily for purposes of agricultural production.

Non-economic coercion by the feudal lords, then, consisted of a system of exploitation of the structural labour surplus, or excess of the labour potential of the peasant family over its resources. This hiatus formed the basis of the availability of labour for the cultivation of the lord's demesne through forced labour or, marginally, hired labour. This form of coercion became part of the conditions of labour and subsistence, and hence far more effective than any amount of overt force. The dependence of the entire peasantry (including the serfs, but barring a stratum of allodialists) on the lords was thus structured in the production-process, for the lord controlled, even if only partly, the use of labour-time for production on the peasant's manse.

This view of feudalism based on *the structured dependence of the entire peasantry on the lords* (with the only exception of the crust of independent allodialists) enables us to take into account the dynamism of feudal society and to understand its development during the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries and its decline in the fourteenth as the culmination of peasant resistance generated in the course of the daily toil in the field during the preceding centuries. For this dynamism was also structured in the hiatus between the peasant family's labour power and its productive resources.

For the surfeit of labour power of the peasant family and the lord's demand for it were not quite symmetrical. In a system of agricultural production based on an intensive use of labour (including the wastage of labour in traversing vast fields), where the returns on labour were abysmal and where the period available for agricultural operations was brief, the input or withdrawal of even small amounts of labour made considerable difference to output, whether on the lord's demesne or the peasant's own manse. Hence a silent struggle between the lord and the peasant to push the limits of the surfeit labour in the one's or the other's direction. This silent class struggle occurred in the actual process of tilling the soil.[17] If the lord imposed rigorous supervision over the peasant's toil, the peasant had on his side inertia and deception and, of course, the merciful incompetence and corruptibility of the supervisory staff. If the lord endeavoured to exact labour beyond the time that the peasant could spare from the cultivation of his own land, the peasant was also constantly on the watch for opportunities to steal from the

lord's time and devote it to his own manse. Such opportunities were not rare, particularly at the peripheries of the manor where supervision was less rigorous, or wherever the peasant manse might lie adjacent to the demesne.[18]

The labour-intensive nature of agricultural production was conditioned by a number of factors. The chief constraint upon medieval European agriculture was the lack of manure.[19] The implements used were relatively primitive,[20] and even the draught power of the animals was under-used owing to defective methods of harnessing them;[21] this limited the period for which land was under the plough. All these factors necessitated extensive cultivation, and the seeds had to be spread out on the field, the deeper fertility of which remained unutilised. Extensive cultivation in turn meant wastage of labour in traversing long distances on the field itself and from the nucleated village settlements to the outlying fields.[22]

Thus in the few weeks available for actual cultivation there was great demand for manual labour on which agricultural practices were so heavily dependent.[23] This might perhaps explain the relative stability of village settlements in western Europe during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries,[24] for agricultural operations at every level, from the lord to the humble peasant, required a stable supply of labour.

This great demand for manual labour in turn conditioned some other aspects of early feudal society; labour services were so organised as to place the heaviest burden on those with least resources — those who had nothing else to give except labour with bare hands.[25] It is in this context that the question of population also assumes a peculiar complexity. For medieval Europe, in what Marc Bloch has called the 'first feudal age', was both over and under-populated at the same time. It was over-populated during the larger part of the year when peasants had *little* to do and had to subsist off the forest products such as wild fruits, honey and wild animals and were periodically wiped out by famines;[26] but during the brief period when agricultural operations were to be carried out there was an acute scarcity of labour.[27]

If this scarcity were to be overcome, it would be necessary to make a more intensive use of soil-fertility and to forge some labour-saving devices. West European society as a whole was thus poised for technological development with a direct bearing on agriculture.[28]

The centuries after 1000 A.D. witnessed technical development which related primarily to implements and agricultural practices; manuring remained almost as meagre as earlier. Most of the tools and techniques that spread widely in western Europe during the first three centuries of the second millennium A.D. had been known to Europe in theory or practice for varying lengths of time, though their application had been very limited. Only in this period did conditions evolve for their wide social acceptance.[29] On the whole this era was marked by a 'technical dynamism'.[30]

The agricultural progress of these centuries, particularly of the twelfth and thirteenth, following the use of better implements and practices and a more effective use of human and animal labour, led to a phenomenal rise in the productivity of land and labour. The seed: yield ratio which stood at 1:1.6 or at

best at 1:2.5 during the ninth and tenth centuries came to stand at 1:4 during the thirteenth.[31] The magnitude of this advance can be assessed from the fact that a rise in the ratio from 1:2 to 1:3 would double the amount of food available for consumption. This continued to be the average ratio until the sixteenth century in many regions of western Europe and in some of them even up to the nineteenth.[32]

Indirectly, following a rise in the productivity of land, the size of holding necessary to maintain a peasant family declined sharply from about a hundred acres a manse on an average in the ninth century to anywhere between twenty and thirty in the thirteenth.[33] While the ninth century was characterised by the existence of full manses, in the twelfth century the quarter manse had become the standard unit of a tenure.[34]

Reduction in the size of the holding minimised the wastage of labour in agricultural production; the rise in productivity on the other hand stimulated the growth of population. The availablity of greater amounts of food (and particularly vegetable proteins) made possible by agricultural progress should have allowed population to grow at the lower ends of society where scarcity of foodgrains and proteins was a constraint on reproduction. The relative decline in the frequency and intensity of famines during the first three centuries after 1000 assisted in population growth at the peasants' level; later on, during the fourteenth century, when food again became scarce and famines resumed their dismal visitations with customary ferocity, it was at the peasants' level that death took its largest toll.[35] Life expectancy also appears to have risen from about 25 years in the Roman Empire to 35 in England of the thirteenth century.[36] However, the problem of the growth or decline of population is not related merely to the productivity of land; the uncertainty of production, and, even more important, the unequal distribution of produce (and resources in general) played a more decisive role.[37]

At any rate, even though the benefits of the rise in productivity were differentially distributed, the rural poor also shared in it and were assured of a certain amount of secure nutrition; this was not a negligible impetus to human multiplication. Duby has noted that the influx of men to the towns during the centuries of agricultural progress originated in villages with more generous harvests.[38] There is a consensus among historians that between 1000 and 1300 there was considerable growth of population.[39]

Many of these developments — diminution in the amount of land necessary to provide subsistence to a peasant family, the more effective use of soil-fertility through better tools and techniques, the rise in population — caused extensive land-reclamation in Europe, starting hesitantly in the late tenth or early eleventh century and reaching its peak in the second half of the twelfth. In the thirteenth century it began to taper off and was gradually replaced by increased pastoral activity.[40] Initially it was the peasants who reclaimed land in search of lessening their encumbrances.[41] Group-migration from old villages notwithstanding, the consequence of the land-reclamation movement was individualisation — both of the holdings and cultivation.[42] Individualisation was also reflected in the break-up of the large kinship groups into nuclear family units.[43]

The movement for land-reclamation was soon taken over by the lords and it became far more organised.[44] There was, however, a distinction in the condition of peasants on the two types of land reclaimed. On the piece cleared by himself, the peasant had a greater autonomy and therefore lighter burdens; on the lord's reclaimed land, on the other hand, the peasant's dependence and burdens were greater, though in comparison to peasants in the old villages they were substantially lighter.[45]

The conditions of labour in west European countryside had changed. As the productivity of land rose with the introduction of relatively capital-intensive technology, the price of land and implements also rose; on the other hand, the demand for manual labour declined. Consequently, the burden of forced labour now shifted from bare manual work to work with a plough-team;[46] it shifted, in other words, from the lowest rung of society to a rung or two above it. The peasant also, seized by the legitimate desire to raise more produce from his own land, became increasingly reluctant to render labour service.[47] Thus unpaid labour was once again becoming an uneconomic proposition in west European history, as it had earlier become under slavery. On the other hand, the growing peasant population made labour available in the expanding labour-market. It was thus that the process of 'commutation' of forced labour into payments in cash and kind started. There was, besides, the process of 'enfranchisement' whereby the dependent peasant purchased his freedom ('the franchise') off the lord. Indeed, the lords encouraged commutation and enfranchisement, for these brought them ready incomes, whereas they could hire in the expanding labour-market such labour as they required for the cultivation of their estates. The peasant, for his part, also welcomed commutation or enfranchisement.[48] Payment of a fixed amount of cash or kind in rent, wherever it was so fixed, would enable him to devote more attention to his own manse and he would be the exclusive beneficiary of increased production or higher prices. Franchise would permit him to become independent once and for all, so that he could look after his land or migrate to places where he would obtain the highest prices for his labour. However, some caution is called for in assessing the progress of commutation and enfranchisement. These did not proceed in a linear progression; there was many a reversal on the way.[49] Nonetheless there was definitive lightening of the peasant's many burdens.

Commutation and enfranchisement made a differential impact on the different strata of feudal lords. Whereas the seigneurs[50] still had various sources of their income intact — the right to mint coins, the administration of justice[51] which was being increasingly used to collect fines, the establishment of 'monopolies'[52], — the smaller lords with no seigneurial authority had increasingly to shift to new forms of subsistence. They took to cultivating the demesne with their own, and hired, labour and selling the produce in the market[53] which was increasingly influencing the patterns of agricultural production. The agricultural progress of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries had considerably increased the marketable surplus in the countryside and this in turn led to a noticeable growth of trade and urbanisation in this period. On the other hand, trade and urban centres began, to an extent, to determine the

patterns of production in the countryside. Of course, the demand for agricultural produce was growing in rural areas as well wherever the landless agricultural worker, being paid his wages in cash, had to buy his subsistence. Rural artisans were similarly placed.

The problem of the role of trade and towns in the decline of feudalism in Europe has been examined by many historians and it is not necessary to go into the highly controversial theme here.[54] It does, however, appear on balance that the main direction of peasant migration in western Europe in the first five centuries after 1000 A.D. had been within the countryside itself. By and large, it was the land with lesser encumbrances that beckoned the peasants to uproot themselves from their old villages and resettle at long distances; the town played at best a marginal role in this movement. Indeed, when the west European peasantry broke into rebellions of literally continental dimensions during the fourteenth century, one of their chief demands was the right to free mobility, whereas most cities on the continent looked on passively whenever they did not help the lords suppress these uprisings.[55]

The changes in the west European countryside then, which had resulted from the interaction of the developing social structure and the given means of production in the first feudal age, undermined the very basis of feudal society. These changes had, above all, led to a process of differentiation in the countryside and the emergence of the complementary classes of the kulak and the landless agricultural worker together with — as a subordinate element and with great regional variations — the free peasant.[56]

With the increased marketable surplus in the countryside, trade began to assume increasing importance in the west European economy from the eleventh century,[57] though it had never been absent earlier.[58] The use of the horseshoe-nail in this period greatly improved transport which in turn assisted in the promotion of trade.[59] There were, of course, considerable regional and local price variations and local price fluctuations. The short-term price fluctuations, however, occurred in the background of a long-term average price-rise. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were marked by a rise in production followed by a rise in prices.[60] Clearly, demand was growing faster than the supply.

Conditions were thus very favourable for production for the market. Both productivity and prices were rising. Labour could be hired. Wages would decline as the demand for foodgrains rose — both resulting from a growing population. It was also possible, of course, on some manors to combine production for the market with the use of the serf's unpaid labour.[61] These conditions began increasingly to drive agricultural production into the patterns of commerce and this in turn lent strength to the process of differentiation.

There were many sources of the rise of the class of kulaks, the most important amongst them being the bigger lords' agents or bailiffs etc.[62] These agents, often originating at the lowest rungs of society,[63] were familiar with agricultural practices at first hand; they did not, however, consider touching the plough as beneath their dignity; nor did they scruple to grab money at every opportunity whether from the peasants, the lords, the merchants or from God's own house, the Church.[64] Their power over the peasants corresponded to the lord's power.[65]

But there was an incipient conflict between them and their masters. For as commercialisation of agriculture proceeded, the agents took the lord's demesne on 'farm' or gradually purchased land. On this they employed their own and family labour supplemented by hired labour, with a view to selling its produce. They were thus emerging as alternative bases of economic power within feudal society. This class of much-maligned *nouveaux riches,* of low social origins and moderate cultural tastes, the butt of the aristocracy's ridicule,[66] driven by the desire for profit — this class formed one of the chief dynamic elements in the later medieval economy of western Europe.

Besides the agents, the small lords, pushed by the need to sell in the market but constrained by the limits of their resources, found themselves alongside the bailiffs.[67] There were also the merchants, urban and rural, who entered the arena in search of profit.[68] They 'farmed' fragments of large estates which the lords were willing to hand over to them when feudal rents were declining.[69] They gradually purchased land on which they employed hired labour, the produce being sent to the market. They tried to expand the scale of production by re-investing the returns.[70]

Some peasants were also able to rise. The number of such peasants was rather small and at any rate they were, in most cases, better off at the starting point than those from whose ranks they had risen. Some cases of peasants taking the lord's demesne on 'farm' have also been noted.[71]

The small and marginal peasants, on the other hand, by and large, became landless agricultural workers. To use the new, capital-intensive, technology, the small (and marginal) peasant had to depend upon loans. He had also to borrow money if he desired his franchise, or if he migrated elsewhere where he would need sustenance for the initial breathing period. He was thus subject to stiff borrowing conditions, either by the merchant-moneylender or the lord. The former would buy off a part or whole of the peasant's surplus produce in advance repayment of the loan or the interest and thus deprive him of the advantage of price-rise. The lord, on the other hand, would impose stiff conditions, including, at times, labour services.[72] Real freedom came only to those peasants who had their own resources to buy it.[73] The lord also adjusted to the economic benefits of the age by replacing hereditary tenancies with fixed-time tenures and gradually even the latter with tenancies-at-will so that at each renewal of a tenure the advantage of any rise in productivity or prices could accrue to him.[74]

The small and the marginal peasants were thus subject to the pressure of many forces. Deprived of the protection of the lord, the village community or even his own group of kinsmen, the slightest vagary of production or prices would compel this peasant to sell or forfeit his mortgaged land and implements and he would immediately go reeling into the ranks of the landless looking for work in the labour market. It is perhaps true that socially the small peasant suffered a depression in his status on losing his bit of land but economically, even as a landless agricultural wage-earner, he was better off than he was as a small peasant.[75] But this situation could last only so long as the society as a whole registered economic progress. With the slightest setback in the economy, those who were at its lower end had to pay the heaviest price. Famine would make its

terrible appearance and wipe out large numbers of resourceless peasants.[76]

It was thus that feudal society was growing and, in the process, giving birth to two inter-related classes, and reviving an older one in greater strength, which were to destroy the parent structure through various stages and forms of struggle. The initial thrust for capitalist development originated in the countryside.

The agricultural progress of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries consisted primarily of extension of the arable into the forest and the pasture; and it had also reduced the period of the fallow thereby utilising the existing soil-fertility more intensively. This could, however, go on only up to a point, for a shrinking pasture would reduce the animal population which in turn would diminish the quantity of manure, scarce as it already was. The forest on the other hand, also maintained a delicate ecological balance which would be disturbed by cutting down trees in large numbers. Besides, apart from wood, the demand for which was on the increase,[77] they provided supplementary food to both men and animals.

Historians are generally agreed that agricultural progress had begun to recede from the beginning of the fourteenth century all over western Europe, though the intensity of the recession varied regionally, for the land reclamation movement during the preceding two centuries had over-reached itself.[78] Given the unequal distribution of resources, the declining yields from the more marginal of the reclaimed lands, were beginning to weaken and sweep off numbers from the poorer strata.[79] The availability of labour was itself, perhaps, inhibiting any further technical development.

The fourteenth century witnessed great social upheavals. There was also considerable ecological disturbance which was reflected in an appreciable fall in the temperature and continuous rainfall for long periods such as in 1315-17. Famines resumed their dismal visitations and there was a series of epidemics. The famine of 1315-17 deprived western Europe of a tenth of its population.[80] The Black Death of 1348-50 was only one in a series of disasters, though the most catastrophic of them;[81] it wiped out anywhere between a quarter and a half of the population. Nor did the epidemics cease after this terrible toll. Thus, even assuming a lower death rate of 25 per cent in 1350, the west European population had lost 40 per cent of its strength during the course of the fourteenth century,[82] even if we assume that those who suffered acute malnutrition but still survived could be counted as full members of the work-force.[83]

The immediate consequence of these disasters was a price-scissors effect: the prices of foodgrains fell owing to a fall in demand, but wages and the prices of industrial goods were on the increase.[84] This was a direct challenge to the lords' standards of living, for their incomes from the land were declining but the cost of agricultural production and prices of luxury goods were rising. This should have reinforced the process of differentiation within the class of landlords, for the smaller ones, with no other source of income than land, were ruined more easily than the bigger ones who could still rely upon court-fines, monopolies etc.[85] Land was also available more freely now and in this way the free peasantry re-emerged in strength.[86]

The aristocracy, on the other hand, took resort to war and plunder. Everywhere in western Europe this was a period of extensive wars — the

Hundred Years' War in France, the Wars of the Roses in England, in Germany and Italy; in Spain and Flanders. Even the resurgence of the state during this period added its weight to the crisis by raising the level of its demand for taxes.[87]

But then it was not these developments which created the 'general crisis' of feudalism. Feudal society had, in the past, been familiar with over-population, wars, famines and deaths. The general crisis was, on the other hand, the result of the determination of men to get over the impasse according to their situation in society.[88] The class of feudal lords, faced with declining incomes and rising expenditures, still commanded the power of the state and took resort to an overt use of it. The State, which was reviving all over western Europe at this time, intervened on behalf of the lords by fixing wages at the pre-Black Death level, and by legally restricting peasant mobility — unlike in the first feudal age when peasant immobility was part of the production system. This was a challenge to the landless wage-earner, the small and marginal peasant who earned their living in part by selling their labour and the emerging class of kulaks who hired labour and therefore required a mobile peasantry. The 'feudal reaction' assumed similar forms everywhere.

The peasantry, on the other hand, was so situated as to be able to defend its gain much more forcefully than ever before, for demand for labour was much greater than the available supply. The desolate lands also provided the opportunity to those peasants who had the other necessary means to emerge as free peasants. The peasantry thus responded to the 'feudal reaction' by bursting out in a string of rebellions everywhere in western Europe.[89]

The fourteenth century saw a series of minor peasant uprisings and some really massive rebellions, spread all over the hundred years. A remarkable feature of these great rebellions was that most of them occurred in the most prosperous rural regions of western Europe and were led by the most prosperous sections of the peasantry: the Flanders rebellion of 1323-27, the Grand Jacquerie of 1358, north of Paris; the Tuchin movement in central France from the 1360s to the end of the century, and, of course, the great peasant uprising of 1381 in the East Anglia region of England. The fifteenth century witnessed the massive outburst of the *remensas* of Catalonia.[90] Germany also had a series of peasant uprisings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[91]

It is also remarkable that in regions where poverty prevailed, the peasantry remained passive. In central Italy, rent-racking of the peasantry led to a decline in the rate of growth of population, but, sadly, engendered no rebellion.[92] When the Grand Jacquerie was up in arms in the region north of Paris, one of the most prosperous regions in European countryside, the area to the south-west of Paris, where poverty reigned, remained inert.[93]

The peasantry was thus rising to defend the gains it had made thanks to the emergence of a new mode of production in the countryside;[94] for rebellions occurred by and large in those areas where the emergence of the new mode of production was more pronounced, and peasants were acquiring self-confidence, so essential to the act of rebellion, which, after all, is an act of great humanism.

By the end of the fourteenth century the failure of the feudal reaction had become apparent.[95] From the beginning of the fifteenth century western Europe

began to recover its bases of strength. The ground for this recovery had been prepared by the preceding 'crisis' that had undermined much of the economic and social system which had become outmoded by its own tremendous onwards movement. The attainment of the abstraction of capitalism was yet a long way off.[96] But the movement had been set firmly in its direction.

II

Expression of grave regret over the lack of adequate information on almost all crucial points of the social history of ancient and medieval India is perhaps the inevitable starting point of all historical research on these periods. The poverty of information gets even more hurtful when it stands face-to-face with the almost embarrassing riches of evidence on medieval Europe. If, therefore, what follows in the pages below appears to be a string of conjectures and speculations, at least part of it could, perhaps, be blamed on the collective misfortune of historians that so little of the evidence from India's ancient and medieval centuries has survived.

If the meaning of the term 'feudalism' differs from one historian to another, as we noted earlier, it follows that the period of the history of a country — in this case India — characterised as feudal would also vary widely according to each historian's understanding of feudalism. Thus while some Soviet historians of India have found traces of feudalism in the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya,[97] for R.S. Sharma Indian feudalism originated in the fourth century A.D., reaching its peak during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[98] With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, for political and economic reasons, feudalism, in B.N.S. Yadava's view, began to decline.[99] The distinguished Russian historian of the nineteenth century, M.M. Kovalevski, on the other hand, believed that the process of 'feudalisation' in India started precisely with the 'Muslim conquests'.[100] For D.D. Kosambi, whose writings on Indian history justly enjoy a privileged status, the feudal system broke down around the middle of the seventeenth century, under Aurangzeb;[101] Col. James Tod, on the other hand, was witness to the functioning of what he believed was the classic form of feudalism in Rajasthan in the early nineteenth century.[102]

The point of comparison in the works of the historians mentioned above, and of many others who have considered the problem of Indian feudalism, invariably rests in medieval western Europe. This is understandable, for so long as we remain concerned with the question, 'Was there feudalism in India?', we must seek to answer it in the light of the most developed form of feudal social organisation, which was west European. This comparison is quite independent of the answer to the question raised here. It is thus that Tod compared early nineteenth century Rajasthan with the west European feudal system as described in Hallam's *Middle Ages* (published 1824),[103] and found that four of the six elements which comprised feudalism were prevalent in Rajasthan.[104] D.D. Kosambi also drew upon Marion Gibb's *Feudal Order* and Maurice Dobb's *Studies*.[105] R.S. Sharma and B.N.S. Yadava have repeatedly referred to western Europe by way of comparison.[106] It is in relation to medieval Europe that Satish Chandra finds, 'in many respects' a similarity in the Indian concept of landownership.[107]

D.D. Kosambi provided a fresh outline for the study of Indian feudalism — his famous concept of feudalism from above and feudalism from below[108] — an outline that was unfortunately found inadequate by some other historians.[109] It was Professor R.S. Sharma who first made a systematic study of Indian feudalism in his book and in various articles.[110] Professor B.N.S. Yadava has added a great many details to Professor Sharma's work by studying northern India in the early medieval period, particularly during the twelfth century.[111]

The main theme in the works of Professor Sharma and Professor Yadava is woven around the assumed antagonism between trade and urban life on the one hand and feudalism on the other,[112] and, particularly, the rise in importance of landed intermediaries owing to an increasing number of grants of land by the state to its officials and to the Brahmans in charity; this resulted in the subjection of the peasantry to the intermediaries and in the peasants' dependence on them. R.S. Sharma visualises the development in India of almost all components of west European feudalism — serfdom,[113] manor,[114] self-sufficient economic units,[115] the process of feudalisation of crafts and commerce,[116] apart, of course, from declining trade and urbanisation. The elements which had allegedly undermined the European feudal structure, namely, the revival of trade and towns, the flight of the peasants to the towns to escape excessive impoverishment at the hands of the lord and the process of commutation of forced labour into monetary payments — all these, in Professor Sharma's view, developed in India also and similarly undermined Indian feudalism.[117] Indeed, the only important determinant of European feudalism which Professor Sharma could not trace in India was foreign invasions[118] — and B.N.S. Yadava has made up even this deficiency by drawing attention to the barbarian, particularly the Hun, invasion of India which shattered the lame Gupta empire and contributed to the rise of feudalism. 'The Gurjara-Pratihara empire', says Yadava, 'arose in Northern India like the feudal Frankish Carolingian Empire'.[119] Of all these, the most critical element of Indian feudalism, in Professor Sharma's and Professor Yadava's view, consisted of the growing dependence of the peasantry on the landed 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 peasant's mobility and his subjection to forced labour, which in turn was becoming increasingly intensive.[120]

It is not possible here to go into all the points made by Professor Sharma and Professor Yadava in establishing the similarity between Indian and European feudalism; at any rate, it is hard to have to disagree with the work of such eminent historians. I would confine my comments to some of the important arguments advanced in support of an Indian feudalism.

The alleged antagonism between feudalism and the trade-urbanisation complex has been a matter of great dispute between historians ever since Henri Pirenne's days; increasingly, however, the two are being seen as less incompatible than was the case in the 1930s and the 1940s — a mere point that we have noted earlier. At any rate, even in terms of historical evidence, D.C. Sircar and, more effectively, B.D. Chattopadhyaya have questioned the extent of the decline of trade and urbanisation in the period concerned.[121]

More important, however, is the fact that while R.S. Sharma and B.N.S. Yadava have established considerable similarity in the features of Indian and European feudalism, the one basic difference appears to have been overlooked by them: in Europe feudalism arose as a result of a crisis of the production relations based on slavery on the one hand and changes resulting from growing stratification among the Germanic tribes on the other, the two coming into what Perry Anderson calls a 'catastrophic collision of two dissolving anterior modes of production — primitive and ancient'.[122] In other words, European feudalism developed essentially as changes at the base of society took place; in India, on the other hand, the establishment of feudalism is attributed by its protagonists primarily to state action in granting land in lieu of salary or in charity, and the action of the grantees in subjecting the peasantry by means of legal rights assigned to them by the State. It is, indeed, a moot point whether such complex social structures can be established through administrative and legal procedures.

Above all, however, it is the concept of the peasantry's 'dependence' that appears to be of uncertain value in the context in which it has been used. The evidence marshalled by Sharma and Yadava at best establishes the increasing *exploitation* of the peasantry; dependence, on the other hand, should consist of an extraneous control over the peasant's process of production, and this has yet to be proved in the Indian context. If one speaks of European peasants' 'dependence' on the lord, it is primarily because such dependence had become rooted in his very conditions of labour, as we have seen in section I above. The critical element in such dependence was the diversion of at least a part of peasant's labour from his own process of production to that of the lord. It is doubtful whether this could be said of India. The nature of forced labour in India — of which there is considerable evidence throughout her history — is in its very essence different from that in Europe, for in India it is very rarely used for purposes of production.[123] There is, indeed, an objective reason for the absence of serfdom in Indian history, for conditions of production in India did not require serf-labour, as I shall try to argue below. Thus forced labour in India remained, by and large, an incidental manifestation of the ruling class' political and administrative power rather than a part of the process of production.

Certain specific features of Indian agrarian history could, perhaps, be clearly enough established, even though only a small segment of it has been studied. The fertility of Indian soil in general appears to have been far higher than that of Europe until as late as the nineteenth century.[124] Nature, on the other hand, permitted the Indian peasant to subsist at a much lower level of resources than his European counterpart. Secondly, and in part conditioned by the factors just mentioned, Indian agrarian history has been characterised predominantly by a free peasantry (in the economic rather than in the legal sense).

A number of indicators point to the high fertility of land in India, though, of course, there was considerable regional variation.[125] The cultivation of two crops, of one crop in each field, every year, which even the spread of the three-field rotation in Europe from the tenth or the eleventh century onwards could not ensure, was a feature of Indian agriculture from at least the Vedic period onwards.[126] Indeed, three crops are also mentioned in our sources which do not

appear to treat the phenomenon as exceptional. It is quite difficult to establish whether every field yielded two or three crops a year; some of the references do clearly suggest that such indeed was the case, though it may be rash to accept their suggestion for *all soils*. Obviously, some lands did bear crops twice or thrice a year.[127]

But even if we were to ignore this evidence, the outstanding fact still remains that no field remained uncultivated for more than a part of the year, something that even the three-field rotation was unable to achieve in late medieval Europe. Indeed, the negligible incidence, if not the complete absence, of the system of fallow in ancient and medieval India is a remarkable testimony to the high fertility of the Indian soil. Historians, while using the term 'fallow', have almost invariably referred in fact to either virgin or abandoned lands, or, at best, lands withdrawn from cultivation for brief periods, which corresponds to permitting the land a lea.[128] Fallow land, unlike the virgin or the abandoned land, is an integral part of the cycle of cultivation. Indeed, it has to be ploughed more often than the land sown, for its soil must be repeatedly pulverised and weeds ploughed back or burnt down to be turned into green manure or potash. The practice of the fallow obviously suggests a soil that is quickly exhausted; the lea, or a brief withdrawal of the plough from the field, on the other hand, would be adequate for a soil relatively less prone to exhaustion. William Tennant, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, noted that '. . . the Indian allows it (his field) a lea, but never a fallow', though he ascribes this to the general backwardness of Indian agricultural techniques.[129] Some other evidence also suggests the practice of the lea, but rarely of the fallow. The *Ain-i-Akbari* describes the second of its four categories of land as one that '(the peasants) do not cultivate for a time and thereby increase its strength'.[130] The *Risala-i-Ziraat* also mentions the prevailing practice, in the second half of the eighteenth century in Bengal, of the cultivation of fields in alternate years.[131] It is quite possible, of course, that instead of following the practice of the fallow, it would be simpler to abandon the exhausted fields and reclaim new ones, for, after all, there was no scarcity of land.[132] But there is very little evidence to suggest that it was widespread. Indeed, the reclamation of land is, after all, a costly process and would hardly be resorted to unless the cost of the restoration of soil-fertility through the use of manure outweighed the cost of reclamation. And manure, as Irfan Habib reasonably argues, should have been available in far greater quantity in the centuries before the beginning of the twentieth than after it.[133]

The system of manuring appears to have developed into a fine art if we go by the minute details of the methods and ingredients of preparing manures for different plants. It is far from certain whether Vedic Indians practised manuring.[134] But the *Arthasastra*,[135] the *Brhatsamhita*, the *Agni Purana*,[136] the *Krsi-Parasara*[137] and the *Upavana-Vinoda*,[138] among others, describe in very great detail the elements of which manures were made. The elements varied from cow-dung and goat's and sheep's droppings to the fat of the pigs[139] and the flesh of the cows;[140] green manure and a mixture of honey and clarified butter with some other elements have also been recommended. Some of these preparations

were meant for treatment of seeds before they were sown to ensure better germination.

Nor were the agricultural implements and practices too primitive for their age. Almost definitive evidence of the use of the plough has been uncovered at a pre-Harappan site, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, belonging broadly to the first half of the third millennium B.C.[141] The Vedic age, of course, used the plough,[142] and it has naturally continued in use ever since. The size and weight of the plough varied from region to region and, perhaps, from one stratum of the class of agriculturists to another.[143] It is true, as Elliot so derisively states, that the Indian plough — 'simple... and wretched in construction' — merely scratched the topsoil,[144] but this appears to have been primarily due to the fact that the fertility of most soils in India lies at the surface.[145] Elliot himself noted that 'when anything like a mould-board is required, the people have sufficient ingenuity to frame one'.[146] Construction of a deep-penetrating plough should not have been beyond their capability, if it were required.

The literature of successive periods refers to many other implements used for agricultural production, besides the plough. The Vedic literature mentions the sickle and the sieve;[147] the *Ramayana* of Valmiki refers to the spade.[148] The *Amarkosa* speaks of the hoe and the harrow, besides mortar and pestle for separating the grain from the chaff, and the winnowing fan etc.[149] The *Krsi-Parasara* gives, with many details, the names and the dimensions of various parts of the plough.[150] From about 600 B.C. the use of iron in making agricultural implements appears to have been on the increase.[151] It is, on the other hand, difficult to establish the origin of the seed-drill, but this important device which, in Elliot's words, 'has only within the last century been introduced into English field husbandry... has been in use in India from time immemorial'.[152]

Experts in agriculture recommended the ploughing of the field more than once, sometimes as many as five times.[153] It is not easy to say how far the recommendations were actually heeded, but Grierson did notice the ploughing of the field five times in modern Bihar;[154] although, of course, it might be a phenomenon of recent origin. Weeding was to take place twice.[155] Given the two or three crops in the year, crop rotation was 'practically a gift of nature and to know the combination which best suited particular soils would have been a matter of experience'.[156] The system of transplantation was also known;[157] and so was the treatment of diseased plants.[158]

It is in irrigation that the most important technological advance has been registered in ancient and medieval Indian agriculture. The *Rgveda* mentions some devices for water-lift (probably from a tank), but the technical details of these are as yet unknown.[159] The *Arthasastra* also refers to several methods of obtaining irrigation water from rivers, lakes, tanks and wells;[160] the Mauryan state apparently imposed a heavy irrigation cess — ranging from one-fifth to one-third of the produce[161] — even when the sources of water were privately owned.[162]

It was the spread of the noria from about the seventh century and of the Persian wheel from around the time the Delhi Sultanate was established in north India, that appear to have made a critical difference to the extension of agriculture at

least in the Panjab,[163] the fertility of whose soil Abul Fazl considered unrivalled.[164] The canals, on the whole, appear to have been marginal to agricultural production. Firuz Shah Tughlaq[165] and Shah Jahan[166] did order the construction of canals, but for all practical purposes canal irrigation appears to be a more recent phonomenon.

If, owing to the natural richness of the soil and the relatively efficient tools and techniques, agricultural productivity in India was high, the subsistence level of the peasant was very low — thanks to climatic conditions, and, as we shall argue later, social organisation. Consequently, the amount of land considered necessary for the subsistence of a peasant family in India was estimated at anywhere between nine and fourteen acres in the fifth century B.C.[167] Unfortunately, there is little evidence to go by for the later periods of our history on this point, but unless we assume a significant decline in soil-fertility or rise in the subsistence level, this size of landholding was hardly likely to have changed drastically. Indeed, such a landholding, with traditional implements and practices, but with a reasonably assured supply of irrigation water, should even today earn the peasant family the pittance that it needs to survive and reproduce itself.

The relatively small size of holdings in India had the principal effect of averting the wastage of labour in the process of production which occurred in Europe; consequently far less labour was required for agricultural operations here. Moreover, these operations could be spread over a much longer period in the course of the year than in western Europe. Thus there does not appear to have been a highly concentrated demand for large amounts of labour during short periods. It is thus that the absence of serfdom in Indian history, except for some marginal incidence,[168] becomes intelligible. Indeed, even Sharma and Yadava are led by their evidence to conclude that serfdom was far from being the dominant feature in India.[169] For the process of production in India did not create an acute scarcity of labour; enserfment of the peasant therefore was hardly necessary. It is not as if the ruling class or the state in India was more compassionate to the primary producer than the feudal lords or the medieval state in Europe; it resorted even to enslavement of the peasants and the artisans[170] whenever it felt the need. But such need arose rarely and for short periods of time.

When historians, therefore, describe the Indian peasant as a serf[171] or a 'near-serf', they do so primarily on the basis of legal restrictions imposed on his mobility, the absence of the right to free alienation of land, and, of course, his subjection to the rendering of forced labour.[172]

It is true that the state in India, concerned as it primarily was with the collection of revenue from land, made it obligatory on the part of the cultivator to keep his field constantly under the plough. The *Arthasastra* recommends that the 'lands may be confiscated from those who do not cultivate them and given to others; or they may be cultivated by village labourers and traders, lest those who do not properly cultivate them might pay less (to the government)'.[173] The *Arthasastra* also places restrictions on the free alienation of land or the free mobility of peasants, once again with a view to preventing the loss of revenue: 'Tax-payers shall sell or mortgage their fields to tax-payers alone; Brahmans

shall sell or mortgage their *Brahmdeya* or gifted lands only to those who are endowed with such lands; otherwise they shall be punished with the first amercement. The same punishment shall be meted out to a tax-payer who settles in a village not inhabited by tax-payers'.[174] The state was advised even to compel the peasants to grow an additional crop on their fields if the king found himself financially straitened.[175] Manu prescribes the imposition of a fine on a cultivator who does not cultivate this field in proper time nor guard the crop against animals.[176] All this, however, did not violate the owner's title to the land even if it had been cultivated by another.[177] Indeed, the period for which the title remained legally valid went on increasing from 10 years at the time of Manu (c. second century A.D.) to 105 years in the thirteenth century, with limits fixed at 20 years, 60 years and 100 years between these dates.[178]

Thus, when Aurangzeb's *firman* to Muhammad Hashim[179] on the one hand recognised the peasant's ownership of land[180] (including the right to sell or mortgage it[181]) and on the other advised the use of persuasion and, if necessary, compulsion, to have the peasant till his land, it was really reiterating a very ancient Indian position.[182] If the state asserted its right to ensure uninterrupted cultivation of land, or to collect the revenue due to it even when the peasant neglected to cultivate his field,[183] or else to have the land tilled by another in case the owner had fled, the extent of its actual enforcement would vary from one situation to another. In the seventeenth century when the incidence of desertion of land had assumed serious dimensions, the state's insistence on its right became more emphatic.[184]

However, one aspect needs to be kept in view while discussing the problem of peasant immobility: we can hardly speak of a developed labour — or land — market in ancient and medieval India, though hired agricultural labour and instances of sale or mortgage of land have been mentioned in our sources.[185] Thus, it is primarily the economic, more than the legal, limitations on mobility which confined the peasant to his village,[186] though, of course, we must not visualise the ancient and medieval Indian peasant as completely immobile. Even if we were to accept state intervention in uniformly enforcing restriction on the peasant's movement or on his right freely to alienate his land, his mastery over the means and the process of production still remained intact, provided, of course, that he cultivated his field (in such manner as he chose) and paid the revenue to the state or its assignees.[187] It is true, as many historians have pointed out, that the pre-modern Indian peasant did not enjoy modern or bourgeois proprietary rights in land, for he could not freely alienate, abandon or abuse his land;[188] obviously no historian expects the peasant to have enjoyed such a right. But then is it merely a legal problem? If, by some stretch of the imagination, these legal rights could be granted to the peasant of the ancient and medieval past, would they have made a material difference to his situation, other things remaining the same — when he could rarely find a buyer for his land or labour or when he could not easily give up cultivation for some other occupation? At any rate, the absence of these rights did not deprive him of control over his field or the plough or — above all — his labour.

And it is in this sense that we have earlier defined a free peasant, following

Marx's insight. The question of the legal ownership of land, which has been discussed by a very large number of historians of ancient and medieval India,[189] and the other legal rights carries, at best, a moderate significance in the actual socio-economic context.

In this sense, free peasant production appears to have been consolidated in post-Maurya times. In the Buddhist literature large farms are met with, sometimes with as many as five hundred ploughs, tilled by a gang of hired labourers.[190] The *Arthasastra* also speaks of state farms worked by 'slaves, labourers and prisoners'.[191] But in Gupta and post-Gupta times these large farms, whether owned by individuals or by the state, are no longer referred to; instead, there is the transformation of the *sudras* into petty producers. By the first half of the seventh century most, if not all, *sudras* had become peasants.[192] In part, at least, the spread of peasant production appears to have been due to the state policy of extending cultivation. The Maurya state undertook to settle new villages, or resettle deserted ones, 'either by inducing foreigners to immigrate' or by transferring excess population from the densely populated regions of the kingdom.[193] But individual reclamation of land may have become more common in post-Maurya times — a phenomenon reflected in the formulation of the *bhumicchidranyaya:* the field belongs to him who first removes the weed, as the deer to him who first shoots it.[194] It is reasonable to assume that with the spread of the noria and the Persian wheel, to which reference has been made earlier, considerable reclamation should have taken place at the hands of those who could afford the price of the apparatus.[195] The medieval Indian state gives the impression of extreme keenness to extend cultivation if only because more evidence has survived from this period. Thus the grants made by the state in charity comprised two equal halves of cultivated and waste lands.[196] Among the duties of the revenue-collector of the Mughal state enumerated in the *Ain* is reclamation of wasteland for cultivation and prevention of arable land from falling waste.[197] Various other officials and semi-officials were similarly charged; the Karoris,[198] the Zamindars,[199] even the Jagirdars.[200] Thus when Aurangzeb's *firman* of Muhammad Hashim unambiguously recognises the peasant's title to land reclaimed by him,[201] it merely establishes the continuity of a very old Indian practice of encouraging the extension of cultivation by individual peasants.

The primarily free peasant form of agricultural production gradually evolving from post-Maurya times, thus characterised the agrarian economy of ancient and medieval India. This need not, however, blind us either to the existence of other classes in the countryside or to the extreme poverty of the peasants, or to the considerable changes within the agricultural economy of pre-modern times.

It is no longer necessary to try to prove the existence of stratification in the ancient and medieval Indian countryside, for there is now hardly any dispute about it. The Caste-system in particular appears to have maintained economic and social disparities, especially in making landless agricultural labour available for the cultivation of the lands of big land-owners.[202] When, therefore, we speak of free peasant production, it is by and large in terms of its primacy in the production system.[203]

If the Indian peasant's control over the process of production demarcated him

from his medieval European counterpart, there is little reason to believe that he also enjoyed a higher standard of living. We have noted earlier that nature in India allowed the peasant to subsist off very meagre resources; what nature permitted as the minimum level was made the maximum by social organisation. There are continual references in our sources to the heavy demand of revenue and other taxes from the peasants and the consequent miserable level of their existence. The Pali texts draw a pitiful picture of peasants' poverty.[204] Kautilya prescribes between one-fifth and one-third as irrigation cess, even when the source of irrigation is privately owned as we have noted earlier.[205] As R.P. Kangle argues, with the *bhaga* or land revenue being fixed at one-sixth, the total would amount to one-half of the produce for peasants paying one-third as irrigation cess.[206] The law-books had 'unalterably' laid down the rate of land revenue demand in the range of one-twelfth to one-sixth depending on the nature of the soil and its yields. Yet the actual collection varied between one-tenth and one-third according to the status of the ruler. Indeed, a specimen document in the *Lekhapaddhati* reveals that at times up to two-thirds of the produce was being collected in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[207] In the *Sukranitisara*, different portions of which belong to centuries after the eleventh, the recommended land revenue rates vary between one-sixth and one-half of the produce.[208] King Lalitadiya of Kashmir (eighth century) gave advice to his heirs which Sultan Balban was to repeat in turn to his own heirs, five centuries later: Do not allow the villagers to accumulate more than they need for bare subsistence lest they revolt.[209] D.C. Sircar and B.N.S. Yadava have enumerated the formidable number of taxes and cesses collected from peasants and artisans[210] and if Professor Yadava reaches the conclusion that 'mostly the peasants appear to have been left with a bare margin for subsistence'[211] in the twelfth century, he is by no means overstating the case. It is in continuation of this tradition that the Sultans of Delhi and the Mughal Emperors collected anywhere between a quarter and a half of the produce as revenue from land.[212] It is possible, of course, that with technical progress such as the introduction of the noria and the Persian wheel and with great diversification of crops,[213] the value of produce from the land increased and the state raised its demand for revenue, but this is an aspect that needs to be carefully examined before a statement can be made with confidence.[214]

The characteristics of agrarian history discussed above — high fertility of land, low subsistence level and free peasant production — also explain the relative stability in India's social and economic history. It is, after all, true that there has hardly been any concentrated social effort caused by acute tensions to change completely the means, the methods and the relations of production. Indeed, barring the *arghatta* (noria) and the Persian wheel, one can hardly speak of a major break in the means of agricultural production. It appears that the features we have discussed above have some relationship with the absence of these major breaks. In India, unlike Europe, there appears to have been no prolonged and acute scarcity either of labour or production; the routine increase in demand could perhaps have been met by the routine extension of agriculture.

Thus with a high quantum of agrarian surplus available in the form of land-

revenue and cesses etc. to the state — which formed the chief instrument of exploitation[215] — because of high fertility of land and the low subsistence level of the peasant,[216] a kind of equilibrium existed which facilitated the state's appropriation of the peasants' surplus in conditions of relative stability. Whenever the state tried from time to time to trespass upon the limits of the equilibrium, the peasantry reacted by either abandoning cultivation or even resorting to violence.[217] But it needs perhaps to be admitted that such cases of active resistance were rather rare, and, except for the peasant rebellions of Aurangzeb's reign, remained largely localised. For once the state's intrusion had been rejected, balance was again restored.

In combination with this factor, the peasant's independent control over his process of production eliminated the possibility of acute social tensions which might have necessitated significant changes in the entire system of production. The conflicts that characterised the economic history of pre-British India were conflicts over the distribution and redistribution of the surplus rather than over a redistribution of the means of production, which had changed the face of the medieval European economy.[218] The conflicts over the redistribution of the surplus were resolved by and large within the existing social framework. It is thus that even when the Mughal empire was collapsing, one gets the impression that the class of zamindars at various levels was turning out to be the main beneficiary of this collapse. It was, in other words, an older form of property that was re-emerging in strength.[219] Medieval Indian society did not have enough tension in it to lead it to the bourgeois system of production.[220]

To argue against the notion of an Indian feudalism need not lead one to the acceptance of the Asiatic mode of production.[221] Indeed, the concept of the Asiatic mode of production is based on the absence of private property in land,[222] which is far from the generally accepted view among Indian historians today. It is evident that a wide range of social formations have existed in the world prior to their subjection to the universality of capitalism, and this range cannot be exhausted with the concepts of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production. Irfan Habib has questioned the validity of the concepts of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production for Indian History[223] and has suggested a neutral term, namely, the Indian medieval economy.[224] I have perhaps been quite rash in emphasising free peasant production as the characteristic feature of the Indian medieval economy. But a critique of the existing straitjackets of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production may have this much to recommend it: it might clear the path in search of a typology more specific to pre-British India. Additionally, it might draw us away from Euro-centrism in the study of history.[225]

NOTES

1. Marc Bloch's classic description of the fundamental features of European feudalism is well-known everywhere: 'a subject peasantry; widespread use of service tenement (i.e. the fief)

instead of a salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialised warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority — leading inevitably to disorder; and, in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family and state, of which the latter, during the second feudal age, was to acquire renewed strength', *Feudal Society*, tr. L.A. Manyon, Chicago, 1964, p. 446. To Joseph R. Strayer and Rushton Coulborn 'Feudalism is primarily a method of government, not an economic or a social system, though it obviously modifies and is modified by the social and economic environment', 'The Idea of Feudalism' in R. Coulborn, ed., *Feudalism in History*, Princeton, 1956, p.4. For Henri Pirenne feudalism was a 'closed estate economy' where production was largely for consumption and trade was practically absent, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, tr. I.E. Clegg, London, 1958, (first published 1936), pp. 7-12. Even historians sharing a common analytical methodology, namely Marxism, have understood feudalism in a very wide range of meanings. Thus, whereas Paul Sweezy's conception of feudalism is virtually akin to that of Henri Pirenne, in R.H. Hilton, ed., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, London, 1976, pp. 33-56 and 102-08, Maurice Dobb equates it with serfdom, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, revised edition, London, 1963, reprint 1972 (first published 1946), pp. 35-37; for Perry Anderson it was 'the specific organisation in a vertically articulated system of parcellized sovereignty and scalar property that distinguished the feudal mode of production in Europe', *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, 1977 (first published 1974) p. 408.

In the Indian context R.S. Sharma characterises the period between 300 and 1200 A.D. as feudal when he finds most features of west European feudalism having developed here, *Indian Feudalism c. 300-1200*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 1-2, 7, 16, 52-3, 63-4, 154, 158, 271, etc. S. Nurul Hasan, on the other hand, calls medieval India feudal even though she 'did not have *any* of the characteristics of western European feudalism', *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 2, (emphasis added).

2. Clearly other pre-capitalist universal categories such as 'stone age', 'bronze age', etc. do not stand in the same class as a highly organised mode of production with an advanced social organisation.

3. Karl Marx & F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1969. pp. 160-62.

4. Cf. the perceptive remark of Jean Suret-Canale: '*By its very nature*, capitalism, as well as being one of the great stages of human progress, also assumes a universal value, destroying or reducing to the status of residual survivals, the previous modes of production. *A fortiori*, such universality appertains to socialism. But one cannot project this universality of the last two stages of social development on to the history which precedes them', cited in Marian Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production*. The Hague, 1977, p. 208 (emphasis original).

5. Thus Maurice Dobb, equating feudalism with serfdom, explains the latter term as a type of exploitation that is enforced and perpetuated through 'so-called "extra economic compulsion" in some form', *Capitalism, Development and Planning*, New York, reprint 1970, pp. 2-3. R.H. Hilton also accepts the equation of serfdom with 'non-economic compulsion', though he does not define feudalism as the equivalent of serfdom, Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights and Heretics*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 4. 'Redistributive world system' is Immannuel Wallerstein's term. This world system is 'based on a mode of production wherein a surplus is extracted from agricultural producers normally in the form of tribute to sustain an imperial (or state) bureaucracy at a given level of consumption', 'From Feudalism to Capitalism — Transition or Transitions?' *Social Forces*, Vol. 55, No. 2, December 1976, p. 281 n2. This term is as general as 'non-economic compulsion' or 'pre-capitalist society', and is therefore hardly superior to it.

S. Nurul Hasan understands feudalism to mean a primarily agrarian economy where the surplus is appropriated by a 'fairly closed' ruling class through both non-economic coercion and the role played by it in agricultural as well as the subsidiary handicrafts production, *Thoughts*, pp. 1-2.

Perry Anderson has sharply criticised universalist definitions of feaudalism, which, with suitable modifications, would equally appertain to different regions of the medieval world,

Lineages, pp. 401-12. His criticism arises from the assumed similarity of the 'infrastructure' of economies in different parts of the pre-capitalist world, economies that are imprecisely defined by and large in terms of 'large landownership with small peasant production, where the exploiting class extracts the surplus from the immediate producer by customary forms of extra-economic coercion — labour services, deliveries in kind, or rents in cash — and where commodity exchange and labour mobility are correspondingly restricted', *ibid;*, p. 401. He suggests that since '*all* modes of production in class societies prior to capitalism extract surplus labour from the immediate producers by means of extra-economic coercion ... pre-capitalist modes cannot be defined *except* via their political, legal and ideological superstructures, since these are what determine the type of extra-economic coercion that specifies them. The precise forms of juridical dependence, property and sovereignty that characterise a pre-capitalist social formation, far from being merely accessory or contingent epiphenomena, compose on the contrary the central indices of the determinate mode of production dominant within it', *ibid.,* p. 404 (emphasis original). Anderson himself defines feudalism, as we have noted earlier, as the specific organisation of the seigneurial and serf classes 'in a vertically articulated system of parcellized sovereignty and scalar property that distinguished the feudal mode of production in Europe', *ibid.,* p. 408. Quite apart from the problem with defining a mode of production (even a pre-capitalist one) in terms of the politico-legal specifics, into which we need not go here, Anderson has unnecessarily accepted the notion of similarity between the 'economic infrastructures' of different medieval regions. The similarity exists only when the definitions are wide, and therefore futile, enough to cover all of these economies (definitions such as 'non-economic coercion'); in fact the histories of these medieval regional economies have followed quite divergent paths even when they were all primarily agrarian economies and even when surplus was extracted through non-economic compulsion in all of them. Japan's feudalism is the only one outside Europe the genuineness of which is accepted by most analysts from Karl Marx to Marc Bloch to Anderson himself, although even there divergent opinions have not gone unrecorded. See Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, Moscow, 1954, p. 718 n.; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* pp. 446-47, 452; Perry Anderson, *Lineages,* pp. 413-17, 435-61. Frances V. Moulder on the other hand suggests that certain similarities in the political structure between Tokugawa Japan and European feudalism notwithstanding, Japan's history, was closer to China's than Europe's, *Japan, China and the Modern World Economy: Towards a Reinterpretation of East Asian Development c. 1600 to 1918,* Cambridge, 1977, pp. 25, 71-90.

In India the chief protagonists of an 'Indian feudalism' seek to establish the system's kinship with its European counterpart not so much in terms of the 'economic infrastructure' as in politico-juridical and ideological terms in consonance with unequal social distribution of property, though they make do with a simple, rather than a fanciful, language. See R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* and 'Problem of Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian History' *The Indian Historical Review,* Vol. I, No. 1., March 1974, pp. 1-9; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century,* Allahbad, 1973. Prof. R.S. Sharma's persuasive scholarship has indeed inspired a large body of literature on Indian 'feudalism' written along the lines suggested by him.

6. Thus is S. Nurul Hasan able to use the terms 'feudal' and 'pre-capitalist' as synonyms: 'the Mughal system was feudal and pre-capitalist in character', *Thoughts,* p. 3.

7. There are, of course, divergent opinions regarding the primacy of slavery in the economy of Graeco-Roman Antiquity. A.H.M. Jones and R.H. Hilton believe that the ancient economy was dependent on the majority of small independent peasants rather than large latifundia cultivated by slaves. See Jones, 'The Economic Basis of Athenian Democracy', *Past and Present,* No. 1., Feb. 1952, pp. 13-31, and Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rebellion of 1381,* London, 1973, p. 10. M.I. Finley, on the other hand, suggests the ratio of slaves to free citizenry at around 3 or 4:1 in the fifth or fourth centuries B.C., precisely the period Jones is concerned with, 'Was Greek Civilisation Based on Slave Labour?', *Historia,* VIII, 1959, pp. 58-59 cited in Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism,* London, 1974, pp. 22-23, n. Anderson himself suggests a ratio of 3:2 after considering various other estimates, *ibid.*

8. This is essentially how Marx had understood the term, *Capital,* Vol. III, Moscow, 1971, pp. 804, 807.

9. 'Subsistence' as a Marxian concept includes 'the maintenance and reproduction of the producer', Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I, p. 512. Clearly subsistence needs would vary from region to region according to the climate and from class to class according to custom. They would also vary with time as nature's productive capacity is utilised more fully. But in any pre-socialist society, given the class division, they are likely to approximate more closely to 'the natural wants imperatively calling for satisfaction' *(ibid)* at the lowest ends of society than at the middle and higher ends.

10. M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy,* London, 1973, pp. 85-87; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* tr. Janet Sondheimer, London, 1976, p. 68; Bloch, 'The Rise of Dependent Cultivation', M.M. Postan, ed., *Cambridge Economic History of Europe,* Vol. I, 2nd edn., Cambridge, 1966, p. 248; Georges Duby, *Early Growth of European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to Twelfth Century,* tr. Howard B. Clarke, New York, 1974, p. 40 (hereafter *Warriors and Peasants);* Perry Anderson, *Passages,* pp. 18, 25-28, 79, 82.

11. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* pp. 171-73; Bloch, 'The Rise of Dependent Cultivation', pp. 255-56; Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 72-74, 76-77, 85-90; Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West,* tr. Cynthia Postan, London, 1968. pp. 33-35; Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 88-89; R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* pp. 33-35; Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 149.

12. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* p. 180; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 40, 87-88, 90-91; Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 148; R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* pp. 42-44.

13. Marc Bloch had once argued that in England, where feudalism was much more thoroughgoing because of being imposed from above after the Norman Conquest, the spread of the manor completely wiped out all traces of allodial property, *Feudal Society,* pp. 187-89, 244, 248. More recently it has been suggested that feudal land tenures, along with other feudal institutions, had developed in England before the Conquest which only accentuated their further development, while features of the pre-feudal past continued to exist as subsidiary elements; see J.O. Preswich, 'Anglo-Norman Feudalism and the Problem of Continuity', *Past and Present,* No. 26, Nov. 1963, pp. 39-57.

14. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 33-35, 40.

15. Maurice Dobb did make this distinction in terms of unfreedom of the serf as the reflection of a property relation which asserted itself as a direct relationship between rulers and servants, *Studies,* p. 35. This distinction hinges on the juridical basis of unfreedom rather than on the economic basis, though it does have economic 'content' as Dobb asserted. More important, while the equation of feudalism with serfdom may faithfully describe the numerical preponderance of serfs in the production system, the bi-polar division between lords and serfs excludes from its purview the vital multi-polar tensions which were leading the feudal society on to hectic growth, and, ultimately, to its decline. Dobb's bi-polar division of feudal society explains feudalism's decline in terms of impoverishment of the peasantry owing to the lord's demand for more revenue; this explanation assumes a static level of production. In fact, feudalism declined owing to its tremendous onward march. For a detailed review of Maurice Dobb's argument, see Harbans Mukhia, 'Maurice Dobb's explanation of the Decline of Feudalism in Western Europe — a Critique', (mimeo, to be published soon in the *Indian Historical Review).*

    We have already commented on Perry Anderson's delimitation of west European feudalism's specificities, which, indeed, are such that pre-thirteenth century early medieval India, at least, can find herself comfortably placed there much against Anderson's will.

16. China is another major region of the world which is said to have had its feudalism, beginning with the Chou dynasty in about 1050 B.C. The distinguished Chinese historian, Wu Ta-k'un has, however questioned the validity of the concept of Chinese 'feudalism', 'An Interpretation of Chinese Economic History', *Past and Present,* No. 1, Feb. 1952, pp. 1-13.

17. F.L. Ganshof and A. Verhurlst, 'France, the Low Countries and Western Germany', *Cambridge Economic History,* pp. 314-15.
18. G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 89-90, 94-95.
19. Charles Parain, 'The Evolution of Agricultural Technique' *Cambridge Economic History,* pp. 133-34, 145-46; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* p. 25; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 24-25; Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 169.
20. Charles Parain, *op. cit.,* pp. 128-29, 148-57; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 17-21; Lynn White Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change,* London, 1973 (first published 1962), pp. 41-43, 53.
21. Charles Parain, *op. cit.,* pp. 144-45; Lynn White, *op. cit.,* pp. 59-60.
22. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* pp. 60-61; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 6, 14.
23. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p.18; Charles Parain, *op. cit.,* pp. 129-31, 152-53, 157-59.
24. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 6-7, 14-15.
25. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 72-74; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 40-42; R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* pp. 61, 85-86.
26. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 12-15; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 78-83.
27. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 38-39, 48-49.
28. Marc Bloch and G. Duby have argued that the incentive for technological development came from the lord's estates. See Bloch, 'Mediaeval Inventions' in his *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe,* tr. J.E. Anderson, London, 1967, p. 182, and Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 95-96, 177, 229-30. For the suggestion that the society as a whole created this development see Harbans Mukhia, 'Maurice Dobb's Explanation' pp. 20-25.
29. Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 183.
30. Lynn White, op. cit., p.88.
31. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 25-27; 103; C. Parain, *op. cit.,* p. 125; Lord Beveridge, 'The Yield and Price of Corn in the Middle Ages', in E.M. Carus-Wilson, ed., *Essays in Economic History,* Vol. I, London, 1966 (first published 1954) pp. 15-16.
32. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 102.
33. R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* p. 28. The manse comprised the amount of land necessary to maintain one household at subsistence level; it therefore differed from region to region according to soil-fertility and customary subsistence needs of the peasant family unit. See Robert Latouche, *The Birth of Western Economy,* tr. E.M. Wilkinson, London, 1961, p. 82 and A. Gurevich, 'Representations of Property during the High Middle Ages', *Economy and Society,* Vol. VI, No. 1, Feb. 1977, p. 8.
34. G. Fourquin, *Lordship and Feudalism in the Middle Ages,* tr. Iris and Lytton Sells, London, 1976, p. 168.
35. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 294-95.
36. R.S. Lopez, *The Birth of Europe,* London, 1967, p. 398, cited in Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 190.
37. E.A. Kosminsky suggests, in passing, the significance of unequal distribution of property in feudal society in this context, 'The Evolution of Feudal Rent in England', *Past and Present,* No. 7, April 1955, p. 22.
38. G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 198-99.
39. J.C. Russell, *Late Ancient and Medieval Populations,* Philadelphia, 1958, pp. 102-13; Russell, 'Population in Europe', in Carlo M. Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe* Vol. I, London, 1972, pp. 39-40; M.M. Postan, *The Mediéval Economy and Society,*

London, 1975 (first published 1972), pp. 35-36, J.Z. Titow, 'Some Differences Between Manors and their Effects on the Condition of the Peasant in the Thirteenth Century', *Agricultural History Review,* Vol. X, No. 1, 1962, pp. 1-2; Maurice Dobb, *Studies,* p. 47; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* p. 16; Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 119-22.

40. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 81-87; Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 199-210.

41. Hermann Aubin, 'The Land east of the Elbe and German colonization eastwards', *Cambridge Economic History,* pp. 455-56; E. Miller, 'The English Economy in the Thirteenth Century: Implications of Recent Research', *Past and Present,* No. 28, July 1964, p. 33; Patricia Croot and David Parker, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development', *Past and Present,* No. 78, February 1978, p. 39; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 201, 208.

42. B.K. Roberts, 'A Study of Medieval Colonisation in the Forest of Arden, Warwickshire', *Agricultural History Review,* Vol. XVI, 1968, p. 102; Leopold Genicot, 'Crisis: from the Middle Ages to Modern Times', *Cambridge Economic History,* pp. 733-34; Ganshof and Verhurlst, *op. cit.,* pp. 297-98; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 205.

43. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* pp. 137-41; Joan Thirsk, 'The Family', *Past and Present,* No. 27, April 1964, pp. 117-22. Laslett, however, is reluctant to accept the notion that changes in family structures correspond to social transformations, *The World We Have Lost,* cited in Hans Medick, 'The proto-industrial family economy: the structural function of household and family during the transition from peasant society to industrial capitalism', *Social History,* Vol. I, No. 3, October 1976, pp. 292-93.

44. G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 205-08.

45. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 77.

46. *Ibid.,* pp. 115-16, 207-8.

47. *Ibid.,* pp. 207-08, 263-64; Lynn White, *op. cit.,* p. 65. Andrew Jones argues that labourers' perquisites had to be created in England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to obtain speedy and efficient use of customary labour, 'Harvest Customs and Labourers' Perquisites in Southern England, 1150-1350; the Corn Harvest', *Agricultural History Review,* Vol. XXV, 1977 p. 14.

48. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 106-12; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 208; Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 91-92.

49. M.M. Postan, 'The Rise of a Money Economy' in Carus-Wilson, ed; *op. cit.;* Vol. I, p. 7; R.H. Hilton, 'Freedom and Villeinage in England' in Hilton, ed., *Peasants, Knights and Heretics,* p. 181; P.D.A. Harvey, 'The English Inflation of 1180-1220', in *ibid.,* pp. 74-75; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 222; E.A. Kosminsky, 'Services and Money Rents in the Thirteenth Century', in Carus-Wilson, ed., *Essays in Economic History.* Vol. II, 1966 (first published 1962), pp. 39-42 where he suggests that villeinage remained a more important part of labour-supply on the larger estates while the smaller ones depended more on hired labour.

50. Among the lords were the seigneurs, or the banal lords, whose authority was derived from their exercise of the *ban,* theoretically the king's power to give orders, but actually usurped by lords from the eighth century onwards. Since it was by nature an arbitrary power, its flexibility as a source of income and authority was much prized by the seigneurs who had both land and men within their jurisdiction. Then there were the landlords whose control extended to the land. Besides, there were the non-territorial lords who derived their income from the right to collect taxes, tithes etc. a right they had either earned or had simply usurped. See Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society,* p. 251; J.S. Critchley, *Feudalism,* London, 1978, p. 67; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 174-77; Guy Forquin, *op. cit.,* pp. 133-36.

51. The power to administer justice was as stratified as the class of lords; see Critchley, *op-cit.,* p. 57; also Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 78-80; Guy Fourquin, *op. cit.,* pp. 185-86; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 211-13, 227, 249-51.

52. The 'monopolies' comprised the mills for grinding corn, the oven for baking bread, the

winepress for the grapes, and the bull and boar for replenishing the livestock of the village, etc. These monopolies were fiercely contested by the peasants; see Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe,* pp. 135-68; Bloch, *Feudal Society* p. 251; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 222-23, 227-29.

53. E.A. Kosminsky, 'Services and Money Rent', *op. cit.,* pp. 46-48.

54. However, the paper on 'Maurice Dobb's Explanation' referred to earlier discusses this question in some detail on pp. 34-38

55. R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* pp. 128-29, 130, 132 and 206-7 where Hilton discusses the attitude of the urban bourgeoisie towards the Grand Jacquerie, the Catalan *remensas,* the Tuchin rebellion and other peasant movements respectively.

56. L. Genicot and G. Duby have discussed this process of differentiation in considerable detail and with impressive clarity. See L. Genicot, *op. cit* and Duby, *Rural Economy,* passim.

57. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 126-65.

58. See for the existence of money and exchange in classical feudalism of earlier centuries Marc Bloch, 'Natural economy or money economy: a pseudo dilemma', in his *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe,* pp. 230-44. Witold Kula, constructing a 'model' of feudal economy, suggests the existence of 'monetary' and 'natural' sectors within every feudal 'enterprise' big or small, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System,* tr. Lawrence Garner, London, 1976, p. 133.

59. R.S. Lopez, 'The Evolution of Land Transport in the Middle Ages', *Past and Present,* No. 9, April 1956, p. 24. Marc Bloch notes the construction of a large number of bridges all over Europe during the twelfth century, *Feudal Society,* pp. 69-70.

60. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 302-05; Perry Anderson, *Passages* p. 191. The rise in agricultural prices were especially sharp in England between 1180 and 1220; see P.D.A. Harvey, 'The English Inflation of 1180-1220' in *Peasants, Knights and Heretics,* pp. 57-58.

61. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 263-64; M.M. Postan, 'The Rise of a Money Economy', *op. cit.,* p. 7.

62. The large size of the noble or clerical domains within the range of 2,000 to 4,000 acres necessitated the recruitment of bailiffs to supervise production, storage, consumption, sale etc. For the size of the estate, Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 140. See also Guy Fourquin, *op. cit.,* p. 172; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 46-47, 229; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 228-31 and *passim.* In Duby's *Rural Economy,* scattered at many places, is perhaps the best account of the transformation of the class of agents into rich farmers or kulaks.

63. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 191-92; G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 47; Henri Pirenne, *op. cit.,* pp. 60-61.

64. G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* p. 229; Duby, *Rural Economy* pp. 219, 245.

65. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 244-45.

66. G. Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 257-58.

67. E.A. Kosminsky, 'Services and Money Rents', *op. cit.,* pp. 46-48; Kosminsky, 'The Evolution of Feudal Rent', *op. cit.,* p. 35n; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 247; Duby, *Warriors and Peasants,* pp. 176-177.

68. Guy Fourquin *op. cit.,* pp. 80-82; G. Duby, *Rural Economy* p. 129.

69. L. Genicot, *op. cit.,* pp. 715-16.

70. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* p. 124.

71. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 236.

72. *Ibid.,* pp. 252-59, 285. The intensification of labour services on the English estates towards the end of the thirteenth century has been sufficiently highlighted by Kosminsky, 'Services and

Money Rents,' *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47, and Hilton, 'Freedom and Villeinage in England', *op.cit.*, pp. 181, 184.

73. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 256-57.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-58.

75. L. Genicot suggests that during the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries the small landowners suffered a depression and the landless agricultural workers and marginal farmers registered an improvement in their economic conditions, so that 'at the end of the Middle Ages not the whole but the greater part of the rural population shared approximately the same economic standard of life', *op. cit.*, pp. 728-31. See also G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 152, 280, 305.

76. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 286.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-45.

78. Ibid., pp. 317 ff.; Perry Anderson, *Passages,* pp. 197-99; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History,* pp. 17, 112; M.M. Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society,* pp. 63-79; R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* p. 16; E. Miller, 'The English Economy of the Thirteenth century', *op.cit.*, p. 38. Guy Bois makes the point in the classic Marxist idiom: 'Above all, the system had exhausted its possibilities for expansion in a virtually complete conquest of the cultivable area', 'The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism', (mimeo), presented to the Indo-French Seminar on the same theme at the University of Delhi, Jan. 1979, p. 21.

79. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 294-95.

80. For disturbed ecological balance etc., Perry Anderson, *Passages,* pp. 198-99; for famines and epidemics, G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 295. Also Ian Kershaw, 'The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-22' in Hilton ed. *Peasants, Knights and Heretics,* pp. 85-132.

81. Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death,* London, 1970 (first published 1969); Perry Anderson, *Passages.* p. 201.

82. J.C. Russell, *Late Ancient and Medieval Populations,* p. 131.

83. Duby suggests that the middle-aged resisted epidemics with greater strength, *Rural Economy,* p. 308. This should reflect the decreasing resistance of the younger generation perhaps because of diminishing nourishment owing to the declining returns from the land. Slicher van Bath very sensitively discusses the physical and mental consequences of prolonged malnutrition, *Agrarian History of Western Europe, 500-1850,* tr. O. Ordish, London 1963, pp. 11, 84.

84. Thus, for example, while between the thirteenth and the mid-fifteenth century agricultural prices fell by 10 per cent, wages rose by 250 per cent, R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* p.154; Genicot, *op.cit.*, pp. 684, 692, 694; G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 307-08, 320; Guy Bois, 'Note on the movement of prices in feudal economic systems', (mimeo), p.2.

85. G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* p. 316.

86. Cristobal Kay, 'Comparative Development of the European Manorial System and the Latin American Hacienda System', *Journal of Peasant Studies,* Vol. II, No.1, October, 1974, p. 72.

87. L. Genicot, *op.cit.*, pp. 699-700; Guy Fourquin, *op.cit.*, p.210.

88. Guy Bois, 'Transition' *op.cit.*, pp. 21-26; R.H. Hilton, 'A Crisis of Feudalism', *Past and Present,* No. 80, August, 1978, pp. 11-18.

89. R.H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free,* pp. 85 ff.

90. *Ibid.*, G. Duby, *Rural Economy,* pp. 332-35.

91. Peter Blickle, 'Peasant revolts in the German empire in the late Middle Ages', *Social History,* Vol. IV, no. 2, May 1979, pp. 223-39.

92. Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 199 and n.

93. R.H. Hilton appears to be astonished that 'the impoverished and badly harassed area to the south

west of the city — precisely where one would expect an explosion of pure misery — was virtually untouched by the rebellion', *Bond Men Made Free,* p.117.

94. *Ibid.,* pp. 82, 89-90, 94.

95. Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 293.

96. Maurice Dobb justly considers the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries 'transitional' between feudalism and capitalism, *Studies,* p. 20.

97. V.I. Kalyanov and I.P. Baikov cited in B.N.S. Yadava, 'Some Aspects of Changing order in India, during the Saka-Kusana Age' in G.R. Sharma, ed., *Kusana Studies,* Allahabad, 1968, p. 80. For Baikov the exploitation of the two lower *varnas* or castes by the higher ones constituted feudalism.

98. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 1-76, 210-62.

99. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 172-73.

100. Daniel Thorner, 'Feudalism in India', in R. Coulborn, ed., *op.cit.,* pp. 143-45.

101. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History,* 2nd revised edn., Bombay 1975 (first published 1956), pp. 391-92.

102. Col. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan,* ed. W. Crooke, Vol. I, London, 1920, pp. 155-56, 182-83, 190.

103. Tod, *op.cit.,* p. 154. Interestingly, Hallam's work still provides the reference point at least to D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphic Records,* Lucknow, 1969, p.36.

104. Tod, *op.cit.,* p. 190.

105. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction &c.* pp. 353-55 and 403 n. See also his *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline,* reprint, New Delhi 1972, (first published in 1970), pp. 23-24.

106. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 1-2, 16, 34, 63-64, 84, 154, 208 etc., B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 171-72, 175-80 etc.

107. Satish Chandra, 'Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India During the Eighteenth Century', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. I, No. 1, March, 1974. p. 51.

108. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction & c.* chs. 9 and 10.

109. For a critique of this concept see Irfan Habib, 'Marxist Interpretation' *Seminar,* 39, Nov. 1962, pp. 36-37.

110. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism:* 'Problem of Transition', *op.cit.;* 'Origins of Feudalism in India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* Vol. I, 1957-58, pp. 297-328; 'Indian Feudalism Retouched' (review article), *Indian Historical Review* Vol. I, No. 2, Sept. 1974, pp. 320-30 etc.

111. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture.* Yadava's numerous articles rarely go beyond the arguments and evidence of his book.

112. Thus the decline of trade — both internal and international — and, following it, the decline of urban centres is seen by R.S. Sharma as evidence of the rise of feudalism in post-Gupta times, and the revival of trade and city life, of feudalism's decline, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 65-73 and 242-62. For a similar assumption of a trade-feudalism dichotomy in B.N.S. Yadava's work see his *Society and Culture,* pp. 172-73 and 'Immobility and Subjection of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. I, No. 1, p.27. Unfortunately, Yadava has misunderstood Moreland's phrase 'peasants' payments' in cash as 'the regular practice of payment *to* the peasants in cash', which contributed to the growth of economic mobility; Moreland was referring to the revenue paid *by* the peasants to the state or its agents.

See W.H. Moreland, *Agrarian System of Moslem India,* Allahabad, 1929, p. 204 and Yadava, 'Immobility and Subjection', p. 27 (emphasis added).

113. *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 53-59, 118 and *passim.*

114. *Ibid.,* pp. 74, 271.

115. *Ibid.,* pp. 71, 242, 271.

116. *Ibid.,* pp. 238-41.

117. For revival of trade and towns, *ibid.,* pp. 242-62; flight of peasants to towns p. 244; commutation, pp. 243-44, 262.

118. *Ibid.,* p.74.

119. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 137-39.

120. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 50-53, 121-22, 243, 283; R.S. Sharma, *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy,* Bombay, 1966, p. 73; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 163-73; Yadava, 'Immobility and Subjection', pp. 21-23.

121. D.C. Sircar, 'Landlordism Confused with Feudalism', in Sircar, ed., *Land System and Feudalism in Ancient India,* Calcutta, 1966, pp. 58-61; Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and Urban Centres in Early Medieval North India', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. I, No. 2. Sept., 1974, pp. 203-19. See also M.R. Tarafdar 'Trade and Society in Early Medieval Bengal', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. IV, No. 2., Jan. 1978, pp. 274-86.

122. Perry Anderson, *Passages,* p. 128.

123. Forced labour rendered gratis appears to have been absent in the pre-Mauryan period, P.C. Jain, *Labour in Ancient India,* New Delhi, 1971, pp. 242-43; in the Mauryan period compulsory labour was used for purposes like the construction of state buildings, though it is not clear whether it was paid for or unpaid, *ibid.,* and G.K. Rai, 'Forced Labour in Ancient and Early Medieval India', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. III, No. 1, July 1976 pp. 26, 37. By the first century A.D. *visti* had acquired the characteristics of unpaid compulsory labour. Its scope began to expand even as a wider section of the people was subjected to the exactions under this heading; forced labour came to acquire a permanence in Indian society that is exceeded only by the caste-system, for we find continuing reference to it throughout the ancient and medieval periods; see R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 48-53, 121-22, 242-43; Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India,* Bombay, 1963, pp. 150, 239, 248; H. Fukazawa, 'A Note on the Corvee System (Vethbegar) in Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom' in *Science and Human Progress* (Essays in Honour of the late Professor D.D. Kosambi), Bombay, 1974; Harbans Mukhia 'Illegal Extortions from Peasants, Artisans and Menials in Eighteenth Century Eastern Rajasthan', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* Vol. XIV, No. 2, April-June 1977, pp.231-45; Henry Elliot, *Memoirs of the History, Folk-lore and Distribution of the Races of the North-Western Provinces of India* ed., John Beames, Vol. II, London, 1859, p. 232. While forced labour was used for a variety of purposes like the construction of forts, repair of roads, carting of goods of the King's officials etc., there is very meagre evidence of its use for agricultural production. R.S. Sharma cites only one source — the *Kamasutra* — where peasant women are required to work on the village headman's fields, apart from cleaning his house, carrying things from and into his house etc., *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 51-52. But quite apart from the vagueness of the reference to peasant women working in the village headman's fields, one of a whole range of their tasks, even the interpretation that those women were rendering forced and unpaid labour has been questioned by G.K. Rai, 'Forced Labour', *op. cit.,* p.30.

There is some primary evidence for the existence of forced labour for agricultural production such as in the *Bhagvata Purana* (not later than 800 A.D.) cited in G.K. Rai, *op. cit.,* p.33, and some village level documents in Rajasthan cited in Harbans Mukhia, 'Illegal Extortions' p.233. But on the whole its incidence is quite marginal and even Professor Sharma agrees that serfdom had not become 'a common trait of the Indian agrarian system in medieval times' 'Indian Feudalism Retouched', *op. cit.,* p.328.

Curiously, it is the artisans who were continually subjected to forced labour from the post-Gupta period. In the *Arthasastra* they are treated as independent, *Kautilya's Arthasastra,* tr. R. Shamasatry, Mysore, 8th edn. 1967 (first published 1915), Book IV ch. 1, pp. 229-32; but from the post-Gupta period, particularly from the sixth century, the artisans were attached to merchants and were liable to render forced labour, R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 69-73. In the seventeenth century we still find them being subjected to forced labour, this time by the nobles: F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire 1656-68,* tr. A. Constable, London, 1916, pp. 228-29 and Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-Ahmadi,* Vol. I, ed. Nawab Ali, Baroda, 1928, p. 260. The phenomenon is somewhat curious because there is little evidence of the scarcity of artisan labour. Of course, forced labour was not necessarily unpaid labour and there is a considerable amount of evidence of wages being paid to artisans. See, for example, F. Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India,* tr. W.H. Moreland and Peter Geyl, Cambridge, 1925, p. 60, and *Waqai-Ajmer-wa-Ranthambor,* transcript, Andhra State Archives, Hyderabad, p. 227.

124. Elliot, for once championing the cause of India against a compatriot, argued in 1859 that the average produce of the Province of Allahabad was *double the average* of the scientific cultivators of England; he also noted the decline in soil-fertility in his own day, *Memoirs,* Vol. II, p. 341 and n. (emphasis original).

125. Thus, while Abul Fazl speaks in glowing terms of the fertility of the *suba* of Lahore, he is far less enthusiastic about the provinces of Gujarat and Ajmer, see *Ain-i-Akbari,* ed. Blochmann, Calcutta, 1867-77, Vol. I, pp. 538, 485 and 505 respectively.

126. The *Taittiriya Samhita* makes a clear reference to the harvesting of two crops of corn in a year from the same piece of land apart from beans and sesamum; this would naturally imply crop-rotation, see S.P. Raychaudhuri, L. Gopal and B.V. Subbarayappa, 'Agriculture' in D.M. Bose, S.N. Sen and B.V. Subbarayappa, ed., *A Concise History of Science in India,* New Delhi, 1971, p. 353, (hereafter *History of Science);* P.C. Jain, *Labour in Ancient India,* pp. 35-36. A.K. Ghosh and S.N. Sen accept the two crops but are less certain about rotation, 'Botany: Vedic and Post-Vedic period', *History of Science,* pp. 377-78. References to two crops can be found continually since the *Taittiriya Samhita:* in Megasthenes' account, Puspa Niyogi, *Contributions to the Economic History of Northern India,* Calcutta, 1962, p. 20; in Kautilyas *Arthasastra* pp. 131-32; in the *Brhatsamhita* of the Gupta period, S.P. Raychaudhuri, et. al., "Agriculture", *op. cit.,* p. 361; in the *Ain* Vol. I, pp. 304-36 where all the revenue rates of Akbar's reign are mentioned for two crops — the winter and the spring.

127. Panini (c.400 B.C.) refers to three annual crops, see P.C. Jain, *op. cit.,* p. 50; *Ain,* Vol. I, p. 389 (*suba* Bengal where rice was harvested thrice), p. 473 (*suba* Khandesh where *jowar* — a millet — was similarly reaped thrice and p. 513 (*suba* Delhi). The sources that leave one in no doubt regarding the cultivation of two or three crops in a year in the same field are: *Taittiriya Samhita* and *Ain,* Vol. I, p. 389 (Bengal *suba).* The *Arthasastra,* on the other hand, suggests the use of compulsion by the state to grow a second crop on the field if the state's interest so required, p. 273.

128. Thus in the law-book of Narada (Gupta period) a tract of land that had not been cultivated for a year is defined as *ardhakhila,* Puspa Niyogi, *Contributions,* p.21, and as *Khila* if it had been uncultivated for three years, R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* p. 35. *Khila* is then rendered as 'fallow' by Professor Sharma, though Niyogi prefers 'half-waste' for her *ardhakhila.* Prof. Sharma also renders *bhumicchidra* as fallow, *Indian Feudalism,* p.36, though the context clearly points to virgin land. R.P. Kangle in fact translates *bhumicchidra* as 'land which cannot be used for agriculture because it is unsuited for it', The *Kautilya Arthasastra,* part III, Bombay, 1965, p.174. See also Niyogi, *Contributions,* p. 69. D.C. Sircar has a section entitled 'Reclamation of Fallow Land' which would appear curious but for the fact that 'fallow' denotes virgin or deserted land to most historians of ancient India. See Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy,* p.4; P. Niyogi, *Contributions,* p.1; B.P. Mazumdar, *The Socio-Economic History of Northern India* (1030-1194 A.D.), Calcutta, 1960, p. 175. See also D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary,* Delhi, 1966, for *Khila* (rendered: uncultivated land, fallow land), p.157 and *Khila-Ksetra* (rendered: fallow land) p. 157. To S.P. Raychaudhuri it appears that the system of fallowing was known in the age of the *Yajurveda,* though, unluckily, he says nothing more about it, in

Raychaudhuri, ed., *Agriculture in Ancient India,* New Delhi, 1964, p.81. However, even some of the later works dealing exclusively or partly with agricultural practices make no mention of the genuine fallow. See, for example, the *Arthasastra,* the *Krsi-Parasara,* ed. and tr. G.P. Majumdar and S.C. Banerji, Calcutta, 1960, and Sarngadhara, *Upavana-Vinoda,* ed. & tr. G.P. Majumdar, Calcutta, 1936. The estimates of the date of *Krsi-Parasara* vary widely between 1300 B.C., the post-Vedic but pre-Christian era, and between 100 and 600 A.D.; see S.P. Raychaudhuri, 'Land Classification in Ancient India', *Indian Journal of the History of Science,* Vol. I, No. 2, Nov. 1966, p. 107; A.K. Ghosh and S.N. Sen, 'Botany: Vedic and Post-Vedic Period', *History of Science,* p.379, and G.P. Majumdar, 'Introduction', *Krsi-Parasara,* p. vi, respectively. Some of the recent secondary works also discuss the whole range of agricultural operations in ancient India but do not refer to fallow; see, for example, B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 256-62. If modern historians have used the term 'fallow' for virgin or deserted lands, or for the lea, it is obviously because the genuine fallow hardly existed.

129. William Tennant, *Indian Recreations; consisting chiefly of strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahomedans and Hindoos,* Vol. II, Edinburgh, 1804, p.16.

130. *Ain,* Vol. I, p. 297. This category is named *parauti.* However, the third category, *chachar,* is so classified when it falls out of cultivation 'owing to excessive rain or inundation', *ibid.,* p. 301; and the last, *banjar,* land when it loses its productive capacity through inundation, *ibid.* Thus, barring *parauti,* the forced exclusion from cultivation of the other categories of land is due to circumstances extraneous to the cycle of production. Indeed, the first class of land, *polaj,* is that which is never allowed to lie uncultivated, *ibid.,* p.297 and the other lands are to be slowly encouraged to develop into the *polaj* class, by means of progressive taxation keeping pace with the diminishing period of their non-cultivation, *ibid.,* pp. 301-02. I am grateful to Miss Shireen Moosvi for drawing my attention to the difference in the *Ain's* treatment of the *parauti* and the other lands.

131. *Risala-i-Ziraat,* Edinburgh University Library Persian MS. No. 144, ff. 6b - 7a.

132. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* p.23 and n. Irfan Habib's informant speaks of the customary practice in Gorakhpur, eastern U.P., of reclamation of new land once the old soil had spent its fertility. The period is early nineteenth century. Mufti Ghulam Hazarat, the informant, however, makes it a point to highlight the low fertility of the region where the practice prevailed.

133. Irfan Habib suggests the following logic: Since in Mughal times between one-half and three-quarters of the land was cultivated compared to the area of such land at the beginning of the twentieth century, keeping in view regional variations, the medieval Indian peasant should have had at his disposal extensive wastelands and forests and therefore more cattle and draught animals. He could also have burnt firewood and used animal dung for manure. See Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* pp. 53-54, 55-56, 116, and 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India', *Enquiry,* new series Vol. III, No. 3, Winter 1971, p.4. If this were so of medieval India, it should have been truer of the earlier period.

134. A.K. Ghosh and S.N. Sen appear to be doubtful, 'Botany: Vedic and Post-Vedic Period', *History of Science,* p. 377.

135. p. 132.

136. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* p. 257.

137. Pp. 74, 78.

138. Pp. 81-83.

139. *Arthasastra,* p. 132.

140. P.C. Jain, *op. cit.,* pp. 60-61.

141. B.B. Lal. 'Perhaps the Earliest Ploughed Field So Far Excavated Anywhere in the World', *Purattatva,* No. 4, 1970-71, pp. 1-3. Professor Romila Thapar drew my attention to this evidence, for which I am extremely grateful.

142. P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, pp. 32, 34; S.P. Raychaudhuri, et. al, 'Agriculture', *History of Science*, p. 352, R.S. Sharma, *Light &c.* pp. 55-56.

143. The *Atharvaveda* refers to ploughs driven by six and twelve oxen, P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, p. 35. There are references to the yoking of 6, 8, 12 and even 24 oxen to the plough, R.S. Sharma, *Light etc.*, p.57. The *Krsi-Parasara* in a colourful verse suggests that 'a plough is said to have eight bulls, six for the ordinary use, four for the cruel and two for the cow-killers', p.73. Abul Fazl implies that a peasant having four oxen for his plough was too poor to be taxed, *Ain*, Vol. I, 287.

The regional variation in the shape of the plough as used today has been recorded by Jaya Datta Gupta and B.N. Saraswati, 'Ploughs and Husking Implements', in *Peasant Life in India*, Memoir No.8, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 25-29. The regional variation in the weight of the plough was noted by N.G. Mukherji, *Handbook of Indian Agriculture*, Calcutta, 1915, pp. 93 and 99 where the ploughs of Bengal and Bundelkhand are respectively estimated at 1.25 and 3.5 maunds. It is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that these variations are a legacy of the distant past.

Panini divides agriculturists into three classes according to the type of plough they used and whether the plough belonged to them or not, P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-49.

144. Elliot, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 340-41.

145. This was the conclusion reached by the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, *Report*, London, 1928, pp. 110-12 cited in Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 24 n.

146. Elliot, *Memoirs*, p.340 n.

147. S.P. Raychaudhuri, et. al., 'Agriculture', *History of Science*, p. 352.

148. D.R. Chanana, 'The Spread of Agriculture in the Ganges Valley', *Contributions to Indian Economic History*, No. 2, 1963, p. 115n. The Pali texts also refer to the spade, P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

149. S.P. Raychaudhuri et. al., 'Agriculture', *History of Science*, p. 360.

150. *Op.cit.*, pp. 74-75.

151. R.S. Sharma, *Light etc.*, pp. 57, 60-61.

152. Elliot, *Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 341-42.

153. According to Panini, the field was at times ploughed twice and at others thrice. P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, p. 49; Kautilya suggested ploughing the field 'often', *Arthasastra*, p.129; The *Krsi Parasara* recommends five ploughings for abundant crops, p.77.

154. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life*. 2nd edn., Patna, 1926, p. 172. cited in A.K. Chaudhuri, *Early Medieval Village in Northern-Eastern India (A.D. 600-1200)*, Calcutta, 1971, pp. 153-54.

155. *Krsi-Parasara*, p.82.

156. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System*, p.26; also B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture*, p.257.

157. *Krsi-Parasara*, pp. 80, 81.

158. The *Vrksayurveda*, also attributed to Parasara, author of *Krsi-Parasara*, deals with the treatment of plants, as the title suggests, A.K. Ghosh and S.N. Sen, *op.cit.*, p. 379.

159. S.P. Raychaudhuri et. al. 'Agriculture', *op.cit.*, pp. 353-54.

160. P. 131.

161. *Ibid.*

162. R.P. Kangle, *op.cit.*, p.174.

163. Irfan Habib, 'Presidential Address', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 31st Session, Varanasi, 1969, pp. 149-55.

164. *Ain*, Vol. I, p. 538.

165. Zia-ud-din Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* ed. Saiyad Ahmad Khan, Calcutta, 1862, pp. 367-71; Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi,* ed. M. Wilayat Hussain, Calcutta, 1888-91, p. 127.

166. Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-ul-Tawarikh* ed. Zafar Hasan, Delhi, 1918, pp. 29-30, 36-37.

167. Baudhayana suggests a holding of six *nivartanas* for the purpose, R.S. Sharma, *Light etc.* p. 62. A *nivartana,* according to Professor Sharma, comprised roughly an acre and a half, *ibid.,* p.73. Puspa Niyogi on the other hand suggests, on the basis of a longish discussion with many impressive details, that a *nivartana* was equal to 40,000 cubits, *Contributions,* p. 97, and n. That would bring it close to 2.3 acres.

168. The Malabar Kannamkar, for example, tied to the land and working for the *janmi* landowners, could come near the category of serfs.

169. R.S. Sharma: 'On the whole while a great part of the time and energy of European peasants was consumed by their work on their master's fields the peasantry in India gave most of their time to their own fields, of the produce of which a considerable share went to the holders of the grants and other intermediaries; on the contrary, the number of free peasantry seems to have been far greater', *Indian Feudalism,* p. 75; also *Light etc.* p.83. B.N.S. Yadava: 'Thus the Sudra peasants cannot be equated with the unfree serf of Medieval Europe', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *Land System and Feudalism,* p.94; also *Society and Culture,* p. 171 and 'Immobility and Subjection', *op.cit.,* p.25.

170. The State farms of the Mauryas were cultivated by slaves, amongst others, *Arthasastra,* p.129; artisans were enslaved by the Sultanate of Delhi during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Zia-ud-din Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi,* pp. 313-14. See also Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate — An Essay in Interpretation', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. IV, No. 2, Jan. 1978, pp. 292-94, 297.

171. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 56, 118-24. In a recent article Prof. Sharma describes the Indian peasants as having been reduced to the position of 'semi-serfs as a result of numerous impositions made on them', 'Indian Feudalism Retouched', *op. cit.,* p. 327.

172. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* pp. 115-16, 118; 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate', p.298. Irfan Habib does not consider forced labour an important element in this situation.

173. p.46.

174. p.197.

175. p.273.

176. Cited in B.P. Mazumdar, *op.cit.,* p. 171.

177. *Arthasastra,* p.197.

178. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 149-50.

179. Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi,* pp. 268-72.

180. *Ibid.,* article III.

181. *Ibid.,* articles XIII and XVI.

182. Zafarul Islam reasonably questions Irfan Habib's suspicion of the testimony of the *firman.* While Irfan Habib thought the order had little relevance to the agrarian conditions in India for it was expressly drafted to set out the laws of the Shariat, *Agrarian System,* p.113, Zafarul Islam, comparing its provisions with those of Islamic law, suggests its specific late seventeenth century relevance to India, 'Aurangzeb's Farman on Land Tax — An analysis in the Light of the Fatawa-i-Alamgiri', *Islamic Culture,* Vol. 52, No. 2, April 1978, pp. 117-26. It is possible to trace these provisions back to the *Arthasastra* and to later Hindu law-books.

183. Aurangzeb's *firman* to Muhammad Hashim, article II.

184. Besides the *firman* to Muhammad Hashim, Article II, B.R. Grover has brought to light pieces of evidence from Shah Jahan's reign wherein the Desais were charged with resettling in their

original homes tenants who had migrated to some other villages, 'The Position of the Desai in the Pargana Administration of Subah Gujarat under the Mughals', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress,* twenty-fourth session, Delhi, 1961, p.152. Grover's evidence comes from some Persian documents located in Paris. The Desais, however, used persuasion and reassurance rather than coercion in carrying out their duties; but then the line between the two is very thin.

185. *Arthasastra,* p. 213; P.C. Jain, *op.cit.,* pp. 236-39 for regulation of wage-payments by law-giver of the Gupta age; Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* p.120. For sale of land, see *Arthasastra,* p.197; D.C. Sircar, *Land System and Feudalism,* p.12; R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 36, 149; B.R. Grover, 'Nature of Dehat-i-Taalluqa (Zamindari villages) and the evolution of the Taaluqdari System During the Mughal Age', *I.E.S.H.R.,* Vol. II, Nos. 2 and 3, April and July 1965, p.261.

186. R.S. Sharma, 'Indian Feudalism Retouched', p. 329: 'In fact even without compulsion peasants and artisans had no option but to stick to the village for the set up being the same everywhere, migration to another village could not materially change the situation.' B.N.S. Yadava stresses the role of ideology more than of law in enforcing immobility, *Society and Culture,* p.166.

187. R.S. Sharma and B.N.S. Yadava have merely *inferred* that the state's grant of villages, enumerating a number of rights transferred to the intermediaries, should have led to the creation of dependence of the peasants on them. This is by no means certain. Villages, according to Professor Sharma's own evidence, were donated even by private individuals, *Indian Feudalism,* p.61; these individuals were clearly in no position to change class relations in the countryside. As D.D. Kosambi remarks with characteristic perception, 'The recipients of a whole village gained at most the rights the state would normally claim. That is, they collected the taxes already fixed by usage. No portion of the tax was to be passed on to the state or any state official, but the donee had not the right to increase such taxes, nor any property rights over land and cattle', *An Introduction etc.* p.321. At any rate the creation of peasant's dependence implies changes in the processes and relations of production and these can hardly be brought about by administrative fiat.

188. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction etc.,* p. 323; Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* p.115; S. Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts,* p.3.

189. Historians, too numerous to be referred to here, have discussed the questions of land-ownership confining the options by and large to the state and the peasant. Communal ownership is definitively ruled out by all. Various combinations of the state's and the peasant's rights have also been suggested. Thus D.C. Sircar urges that it was the king who in theory owned the land and the cultivators were his tenants. However, they held permanent occupancy rights and the king was not expected to evict them, *Landlordism and Tenancy,* pp. 1-3. B.N.S. Yadava believes that royal ownership and private individual ownership of land were not mutually exclusive in the context of the land system of the twelfth century, *Society and Culture,* p. 254. For medieval India, B.R. Grover has strongly argued in favour of peasant-proprietorship of land, 'Nature of Land-Rights in Mughal India', *I.E.S.H.R.,* Vol. I, No. 1, 1963, pp. 2-5; 'Dehat-i-Taaluqa.', pp. 261-62. Irfan Habib, on the other hand, while accepting the notion of private property in land, qualifies it with the absence of the right to free alienation etc., as we have noted above. Noman A. Siddiqi goes to the extent of denying to the peasants the right to sell or mortgage land, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals,* Bombay, 1970, pp. 11, 16.

190. P.C. Jain, *op.cit.,* pp. 44-45.

191. P.129.

192. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* pp. 61-63. Elsewhere, Professor Sharma remarks of the post-Gupta period: 'Perhaps the major portion of land continued to be in the possession of free peasants, who paid revenue directly to the State'. *Light etc.,* p.83. Professor Sharma, of course,

appears to derive his definition of free peasantry from Fa-hsein who states that 'only those who till the king's land pay a land tax' and that they are free to go and stay as they please, *ibid.*

193. *Arthasastra,* p.45.

194. Manu, cited in P.C. Jain. *op.cit.*, p. 51.

195. Irfan Habib, 'Jatts of Punjab and Sind', in Harbans Singh and N.G. Barrier, ed., *Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh,* Patiala, 1976, pp. 92-103.

196. *Ain,* Vol. I, p. 199.

197. *Ibid.*, pp. 285-86.

198. Abdul Qudir Badauni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh,* Vol. II, Bib. Ind., p. 189.

199. B.R. Grover, 'Dehat-i-Taalluqa', p.262.

200. See the 'Yad-dasht-i-izafa-i-dehat' (memorandum regarding newly settled villages) of Shah Jahan's time in Ziauddin Ahmed Shakeb, ed., *Mughal Archives,* Vol. I, Hyderabad, 1977, p. 295; also pp. 36-45. The fact that such memoranda were to be submitted enumerating the number and location of newly settled villages suggests that the official injunction to extend cultivation had to be taken seriously.

201. Article V: 'whoever turns (wasteland) into cultivable land should be recognised as its owner (malik) and should not be deprived (of land)'.

202. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* pp. 121-22.

203. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* p.75; R.S. Sharma, *Light etc.* p.83; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* p.171; S. Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts,* p.18.

204. P.C. Jain, *op.cit.*, p.43.

205. *Arthasastra,* p.131.

206. *Op.cit.*, p.174.

207. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp.297-98.

208. Puspa Niyogi, *Contributions,* p.180.

209. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction etc.* p.365; D.C. Sircar, *Land System and Feudalism,* p.21. For Balban's similar advice see Zia-ud-din Barani, *op.cit.*, pp. 100-101.

210. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy,* pp. 66-79; Yadava, *Society and Culture,* pp. 288-301.

211. *Society and Culture,* p.301.

212. Irfan Habib, 'Potantialities etc' pp. 11-12, 27; *Agrarian System,* pp. 192-96. Irfan Habib suggests a major new argument that the Delhi Sultanate created 'an entirely new kind of agrarian taxation in India. Once implanted, the single massive land-tax was to last in India till practically the first half of this century. The State would henceforth regularly claim the bulk of the peasants' surplus . . .', 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate', p.297. The bulk of the surplus was, indeed, claimed by the Sultans, but in view of the evidence available for the pre-Sultanate period, particularly for the eleventh and twelfth centuries, we need really to be more certain whether they were doing anything unprecedented.

213. Even if we took only foodgrains into account, the increase in their number over the centuries has been very impressive. Thus, while barley, wheat and rice are referred to in the Vedic literature, R.S. Sharma, *Light etc.* pp. 56, 58, the *Arthasastra* enumerates many crops, some of which remain unidentified, and the number of grains comes to about ten, p. 131. A twelfth century work refers to twenty-four kinds of food-grains, P. Niyogi, *Contributions,* pp. 23-24. The *Ain* has revenue-rates against twenty-nine varieties of grains and fourteen vegetables Vol. I, pp. 298-301. Even of the same grain, a large number of varieties gradually began to be cultivated. We are informed that around the twelfth century fifty varieties of rice were grown in Bengal, B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* p.258. Abul Fazl makes nearly the same point

when he remarks that if a single grain of each kind of Bengal rice were collected, a large vase would be filled up, *Ain,* Vol. I, p.389.

214. The water-wheel might have had a three — rather than a two — stage history which Irfan Habib has so painstakingly reconstructed. The *arghatta* (or the noria) had buckets attached to its rim and was thus functional only on surface water — in a pool or on the bank of a river. It also had to be manually operated. The fully developed Persian wheel, on the other hand, was an animal-powered, geared machine which collected water from a well in its bucket chain attached to the rim. A technologically intermediate stage appears to have consisted of the water-wheel with a bucket chain but without the gear. It was manually operated and drew water from wells. A three-stage history of the water-wheel, if valid, should suggest not only a longer period of development of this irrigation device but also a wider social participation in the process of its development, for a larger number of peasants could perhaps afford the wheel available in a wider range. The consequent rise in the productivity of land should also have had its impact on the process of state-formation between the seventh-eighth and the fourteenth century. The establishment of a highly centralised state-structure, collecting at times as much as a half of the peasants' produce as revenue in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, was perhaps not an act of conquest but the culmination of a process that started during the seventh century or thereabout. The first to notice the rise in productivity, owing to the spread of irrigation, were the village potentates and they might also have been the first to demand a greater amount of the peasants' produce in revenue. The state would take its own time to wake up to this new reality; but once it did, it introduced an element of systematisation in the appropriation of the peasants' increased surplus, through a relatively efficient, and highly centralised, administrative apparatus. The establishment of this state can thus be seen as the culmination of a process that developed from the bottom upwards rather than from top downwards.

Clearly, this is still the very initial outline of a hypothesis and much research is called for to arrive at a conclusion.

215. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System,* p.257. Irfan Habib makes this remark in the context of medieval India, but this would as well be true of the earlier period irrespective of direct collection of revenue by the state-officials or on its behalf by assignees.

216. Bhimsen, a late seventeenth-century chronicler, grasped this point in his description of Tanjore: in the whole world nowhere else are there so many temples, he says. The cause of the building of these temples he assigns to the very high fertility of land — producing four crops a year — and the abysmal standard of peasants' subsistence which he describes in detail and 'without exaggeration'. Consequently, 'a large revenue is raised, the amount of which is known only to the Recording Angel', *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha,* tr. Jadu Nath Sarkar, Bombay, 1972, pp. 193-94.

217. In the Mahabharata, Bhisma says, 'If the king disregards agriculturists, they become lost to him, and abandoning his dominions betake themselves to the woods', cited in P.C. Jain, *op. cit.,* p.54; in the eleventh century Ksemendra bemoans the fact that the poor, with malice towards the property of the rich, were turning violent, B.N.S. Yadava, 'Problem of Interaction between Socio-economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. III No. 1, July 1976, p.55; the Kaivarttas in east Bengal took to arms to resist the increasing state oppression in the last years of the eleventh century, R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism,* p.268; the peasantry of Doab revolted in the second quarter of the fourteenth century against the state's excessive exactions, Zia-ud-din Barani, *op. cit.,* pp. 472-73; for the documentation of the widespread peasant rebellions of the second half of the seventeenth century, see Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* pp.330-51.

218. It has been argued that Indian feudalism comes closest to European feudalism of the twelfth century, B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture,* p.171. Quite apart from the validity of this comparison in terms of historical evidence which is by no means conclusive, even if such evidence were conceded, a momentary convergence between two social systems following independent paths of historical development can hardly justify the conclusion that they were both marked by the same characteristics.

219. It is too early to be definitive about it, but some work on different regions of eighteenth century India is in progress at the Jawaharlal Nehru University to test this hypothesis.

220. For a persuasive argument regarding the absence of any potential for capitalist development in the Mughal economy, see Irfan Habib, 'Potentialities etc'.

221. Irfan Habib vehemently questions the validity of the notion of the Asiatic mode of production; see his 'Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis', *Enquiry,* n.s. Vol. VIII, No. 2, Monsoon 1969, pp. 52-67. For a recent re-statement of the rejection of this notion see Bipan Chandra, 'Karl Marx, His Theories of Asian Societies and Colonial Rule' (mimeo). Unfortunately, in Bipan Chandra's discussion of ancient and medieval Indian history there is hardly a statement that can go uncontested. Marian Sawer has, in her *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of production,* referred to earlier, made a very interesting study of the history of this concept and the recent political context in which it has been discussed.

222. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana suggests that Marx had at some point abandoned the notion of the absence of private property in land in India, 'The Analysis of Pre-Colonial Social Formations in Asia in the Writings of Karl Marx', *Indian Historical Review,* Vol. II, No. 2., Jan. 1976, pp. 365-88. Gunawardana has in this connection drawn attention to evidence hitherto overlooked by historians. It remains true, however, that this evidence belongs to the period between 1853 and 1858; on the other hand in his writings of the latter phase of this period afterwards Marx continued to insist on the absence of private property in land in that he spoke of its communal ownership: *Grundrisse,* tr. Martin Nicolaus, London, 1973, pp. 472-73; *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,* Moscow, 1970, p.33 n. (where Marx says that 'primitive communal property . . . is still in existence in India'); *Capital,* Vol. I, pp. 357-358.

223. 'Problems of Marxist Historical Analysis'.

224. 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate', p. 298.

225. Whenever we discuss the question of feudalism in any country and in any period, medieval western Europe inevitably provides the point of reference for such a discussion, whatever be our answer to this question. One can, of course, see the justice of comparing the history of other countries with that of western Europe in modern times for it was, after all, in western Europe that capitalism arose which was later to encompass the whole world; but it is difficult to see the logic of such a comparison in the ancient and medieval periods when it might only persuade us to ask questions which have so little relevance to our history.

    It is possible, of course, to speak of regional variations of feudalism. One could thus argue in favour of an Indian feudalism, a Chinese feudalism, a West Asian feudalism, etc. apart from the west European and the Japanese one. However, I visualise two reservations with respect to this argument. First, the use of a common denominator for the whole range of regionally and temporally variant socio-economic systems could hardly be justified unless one could establish a fundamental similarity underlying these variations — a similarity that was precisely defined. Secondly, quite apart from the fact that feudalism as a category achieves universality only through the looseness of its definition, the very search for a universal category, equally applicable to different medieval regions, is based on the assumption that the medieval world was one world sharing a common socio-economic system. We thus attribute to the medieval world characteristics which more appropriately belong to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.