

CHAPTER - XIV

CONCLUSION

(Feudalism to Capitalism)

The motive behind the reforms introduced by Houghton, in the revenue system was not only to ensure and increase the land revenue collection but also he desired to form an rich "middle class". His intention can be substantiated from the reports in which he refers : "here there are none of that middle class who should form the bone and sinews of the country. It appears to me that every effort should be made to improve this state of things, and to produce a class having an interest the country"¹.

Under the order of the Bengal Government the Ijaradari system was abolished in 1872².

The first settlement of the state brought changes in the structure of the rural society in Cooch Behar. In the first place it checked the absentee Jotedar, secondly, village Jotedars became the proprietors of lands, thirdly, the system of under tenures had been acknowledged and right of these intermediaries (chukanidars and etc.) was recognised by the state³. These changes in the intermediaries may be considered the most significant development in the rural agricultural society in Cooch Behar.

The Krishiprojas who formed a large number of cultivators got the favour of the State authority. Special steps were taken to protect their rights over the lands they possessed and pattas were issued against their names in the successive settlements⁴. To improve the condition of the adhiars and to safeguard their rights over the land, significant steps had been taken in the first settlement. Accordingly it was ordered that any adhiar who cultivates the same lands with his own cattle for consecutive twelve years would acquire a right of occupancy in respect of such land⁵.

In 1910 this occupancy right was made heritable but not otherwise transferable⁶. During the period from the first settlement to the end of the last settlement, the land revenue system of Cooch Behar was changed considerably in different settlements by adopting modern methods and knowledge. The revenue was fixed on the basis of regular settlement and were periodically revised in different operations in which the Bengal provisional rules followed⁷.

Cooch Behar, the princely state, dominated by the British administration had experienced the legacy of the imperial prototype of administration. The effort made by the imperial rulers to bring about the fruits of development, the imperialist power had an active hand to draw maximum resources of the state and in order to fulfil their mission, the imperialist power wanted to introduce certain steps for development. Thus, at the very outset, it is to be kept into the consideration that the British Government had their own way of development while administering the entire India as well as the princely states. In their effort to make their objectives implemented, the British Government through the help of the loyal kings of the princely states wanted to change the age old social, political and economic institutions by bringing about change in all the spheres of life such as economic, socio-cultural and political life.

In fact the paramount power used to uphold the interest of the royal family and maintained regular connection with the states under their domination. But, the people, for whom the development was designed, had been simply neglected. The concept of popular participation, and development from below and changes for the lower stage of the society were negated. The British type of administration under centralized control had been followed by the princely states of India as well as in Cooch Behar.

As a paramount power the British developed and fostered a feudal path of development⁸, and this is also applicable to Cooch Behar. In its progress, feudal economy does have both spontaneous and controlled factors. A feudal economy as was prevalent in the princely states of India exercised the fullest control over the factors of production which in other way should have helped the growth of capitalist economy in the states. The fact that the kings of Cooch Behar through ages had their fullest control over the management and administration of the State also corroborates this argument. The feudal economy has got its in-built weakness which may be verified through the "spontaneous forces" of the economy upon which the power holders do not have control and command. In fact, "spontaneous forces" of the feudal way of development endangers the weak rulers. It invites resentments and lessens the popular allegiance to the king. Though the Cooch Behar state did not face such type of resentments from below, a few popular sentiments sometimes cropped up here and there as an attempt to establish the social rights of the native people.

II

In this dissertation we have attempted to study the land revenue system of Cooch Behar and the nature of "feudalism" introduced by the Britishers. One of the reasons for the study of feudalism in India as Irfan Habib argues eloquently⁹ - "we are interested in feudalism (as in western Europe) chiefly for elucidating the consequences of its breakdown which opened the way to the genesis and development of capitalism. For such purpose its "laws of Motion" are most important for us. " These laws of motion, he argues, are likely to be different in superstructural features of medieval Europe. He rightly concludes.... "in that case to tar all such societies with the same brush will give no illumination because we cannot

read into them tendencies that we have established for an essentially different social order".

Capitalism, in Marxist terms, is not possible until the shape of society and economy is largely determined by the exploitation by owners of Capital of a class of propertyless wage workers. The problem of the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism is concerned predominantly with this issue ; but not exclusively, because the problem of the formation of Capital is also involved, not to mention the social and political process by which capitalists replace feudal aristocracies as the ruling class.

During the period of our study there were no significant class of propertyless wage workers in Cooch Behar, and no mark of class contradiction in the trust sense.

In Cooch Behar there is hardly any change of the society. Feudalism has not given rise to capitalism. Rather the society, inspite of so many changes have remained pre-industrial and pre-capitalist. Therefore, the theory which gives emphasis that feudalism gives rise to capitalism has not yet proved to be true or the society of Cooch Behar witnesses "perpetual transitional" phase. The spontaneous factor of the capitalist way of development did not superside the stagnant factors of the economy of Cooch Behar. This is because capitalism or path of capitalist development hardly reaches the feudal society of Cooch Behar. After the influence of the British in Cooch Behar certain land-laws were changed, a middle class based on landed aristocracy emerged but these were insufficient to bring about either industrialisation of capitalism in the sense we understand in the western

economy or even in the eastern part. Capitalism always remained dormant never proceeded further and perhaps it was what Rajani Kothari¹⁰ termed as the "Indian path of development" -- a mixture between feudalism and petty commercial enterprises.

After all what is feudalism ? What type of feudalism prevailed in Cooch Behar ? Why capitalism did not emerge ? These are the questions which require some discussions. Should capitalism necessarily come out of the womb of feudalism ?¹¹

Sweezy wrote : "We usually think of a transition from one social system to another as a process in which the two systems directly confront each other and fight for supremacy. Such a process of course, does not exclude the possibility of transitional forms : but these transitional forms are thought of as mixtures of elements from the two systems which are vying for mastery. It is obvious, for example, that the transition from capitalism to socialism is proceeding along some such lines as there : and this fact no doubt makes it all the easier for us to assume that earlier transition must have been similar... so far as the transition from feudalism to capitalism is concerned, there is a serious error....".

Now the problem is can we define properly feudalism as developed in Cooch Behar ? In fact the concept of feudalism " is elastic and there are various interpretations¹². Marc Bloch, way back in 1940, lamented the loose uses to which the term feudalism was put by many in these words : "Charged with more or less vague associations the word with certain writers seems to suggest no more than the brutal exercise of authority"¹³. According to one social scientist.... it is tempting to agree that feudalism "is a term with

little analytical value, one that merely spreads confusion and prevents clear thought on the question at issue -- a mask used to cover ignorance and intellectual uncertainty"¹⁴. According to another "disagreement might be reduced if words like feudalism now less a term of convenience than a cover of ignorance, were expunged from the historical vocabulary"¹⁵. Already in 1974 Elizabeth Brown argued forcefully for the abandonment lock, stock and barrel of the very concept of feudalism. Perlin¹⁶ decries authors mixing up two distinct concepts of feudalism the first one involving "a comparison implicit or explicit with classical feudalism, as it is seen to have occurred in medieval Europe most notably in England" and a second - very general one -- with universal applicability. Many authors while writing about feudalism did not go beyond the western hemisphere. At present, however, a large body of Marxists, led by Soviet historians and counting among them a majority of these belonging to third World countries, go so far as to extend the scope of the so-called "feudal mode of production" to histories of all countries. This general definition being all too simple, there is a near unanimity among those who accept it. In the words of the Soviet Scholar Sedov¹⁷ it goes as follows : "given that cultivators work on their own land with the aid of their own implements and they alienate their surplus labour in the interest of a third person or third persons and they are therefore subject to feudal exploitation". This is very similar to the one used by Dobb ...¹⁸ "an obligation laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfil certain economic demands of an overlord, whether these demands take the form of services to be performed or of dues to be paid in kind"...As a matter of fact, even dues in kind is too specific on Dobb, who, as is well known equates feudalism to serfdom, by which he means nothing more than labour subject to coercion of any kind.

This all too wide open definition has a large body of adherents among Marxists for its being the officially accepted one by the communist parties of the world ever since 1931, though these are variations in the phrasing used by different individual authors. For instance, Hitton talked in terms of "tenants paying rent to (or doing labour service for) a monopolistic land owner class" and Hitton goes as follows : "The essence of the feudal mode of production in the Marxist sense is the exploitative relationship between landowners and subordinated peasants, in which surplus beyond subsistence of the latter, whether in direct labour or in rent in kind or in money, is transferred under coercive sanction of the former"¹⁹.

Those who work with this definition exclude from it slavery as it occurred in European antiquity. There is of course no logical justification for this exclusion, for the slave is also just as coerced labourer subjected to surplus extraction by juridico-political means. This anomaly has been removed by Samir Amin²⁰ who has advanced the concept of "Tributary mode of production" which covers all pre-capitalist surplus extraction mechanism, whether through revenue taken by the state or rent by the landlord or slave production appropriated by the slave-owner, a definition that has found acceptance among some scholars e.g. Eric Wolf²¹ Sweezy also welcomes this concept, but while doing so he refers to it, as a "family of modes". Samir Amin however, used the singular term "tributary mode".

The impressive consensus about the serfdom definition of feudalism, however, disappears as soon as scholars sit down to write the actual history of any feudalism or any aspect of it, for then they find it necessary to take account of various other concrete features - political, cultural, ideological,

institutional aspects - be it in western Europe, other parts of Asia or even in the small principality of Cooch Behar. The actual society in study may modify some of the generalisations of the feudal mode of production. Even there is no agreement about the additional features that are essential for study of Western European feudalism. Gorreau,²² in a recent book presents an excellent summary, mainly French account of the perspective of different historians. Likewise, ward²³ in a recent article has done a good job of distinguishing between as many as ten foci in the scholarly understanding of feudalism. Thus, Focus I emphasises "ties of dependence" between man and man or vassalage. Focus II is on the institution of "fief" defined as land held in conditional rather than absolute tenure, that is, upon condition of provision of service - Ganshoff is cited as a principal proponent of the view. Focus III takes as the defining characteristic of feudalism - "the union of benefice and vassalage". Focus IV makes "specialisation of military services" as the touch stone of feudalism, authors cited being cronne and stephenson. Focus V is on the tendencies of "pacellisation" and so on.

But even this definition is not altogether comprehensive for leaving out certain aspects which were stressed by sweezy. Sweezy has been subjected to merciless and unremitting criticism for three decades by self-appointed protectors of the purity of Marxism for allegedly departing²⁴ from the orthodox concept of Marxism. Sweezy, wants to show that feudalism and capitalism may coexist in a given society and very often feudalism may fail to give rise to capitalism. But it is ironical, for the words he used for highlighting certain features of the feudal society, borrowed from Dobb. Thus (1) "a low level of technique" (2) "production for the immediate need of the household or village. Community and not for a wide market" (3) demense

farming" (4) "political decentralisation", (5) "conditional holding of land by lords on some kind of service - tenure", (6) "possession by a lord of judicial on quasi-judicial functions in relation to the dependent population" - these are not sweezy's own words but are taken from Dobb's "studies"²⁵.

However, it should be stressed as done by Perry Anderson, that "no structural analysis of feudalism considered simply as an "economic system". Likewise Brenner writes that it is indeed central to my view point that fusion (to put it imprecisely) between "economic" and "the political" was a distinguishing and constructive feature of the feudal class structure and system of production. In fact both Brenner²⁷ and Anderson tell us that the narrow definition of feudalism is very often irrelevant. The narrow definition insists that capitalism is bound to come from the womb of feudalism.

The orthodox line may best be summarised by Maurice Dobb's writings. "To the extent that the petty producers were successful in securing partial emancipation from feudal exploitation -- perhaps at first merely an alleviation of it (e.g. a transition from labour rent to money rent) they were able to retain some elements of the surplus product for themselves. This provided both the means and the motive for improving cultivation and extending it to new lands, which incidentally served to sharpen antagonism against feudal restrictions still further. It also laid the basis for some accumulation of capital within the petty mode of production itself and hence for the start of a process of class differentiation within the petty mode of production itself and hence for the start of a process of class differentiation within that economy of small producers -- the familiar process, seen at various dates and in widely scattered parts of the world toward the formation on the one hand of an upper layer of relatively well to do improving farmers

(the Kulaks of the Russian tradition) and on the other hand of a depressed layer of impoverished peasants. This social polarisation in the village (and similarly in the urban handicrafts) prepared the way for production by wage labour and hence for bourgeois relations of production".

This is at best a sketch and entirely speculative more vague than the "rise of money economy" or widening of the market. As a formula it is incomplete. It does not say how feudalism will transform itself into capitalism.

Dobb does not sketch nor Hitton nor Brenner later on tell, how the upper layer of peasantry or the agrarian conflict will lead to capitalism. The industrial entrepreneurs, the merchants, the bankers, the manufacturers who played such an important role in the industrial revolution and simply left without mention in the narration. If indeed all these "sprouted out of agrarian roots" as Dobb would suggest, the work of showing the connection between branches and leaves of the tree of capitalism with those roots remain yet to be started.

The fact remains that in Cooch Behar feudalism as introduced by the British did not give rise to industrialisation or capitalism. The feudalism of Cooch Behar remained virtually static with a few cosmetic changes in the successive periods. There was no major industries and more so there was no steady movement for change.

Perhaps Sweezy's²⁸ interpretation may give us some sort of theoretical reasons for understanding this phenomenon in this part of India - namely Cooch Behar.

Sweezy shows that the transition from feudalism to capitalism need not always be automatic. This transition is possible if potential internal

contradictions lead to strife and civil revolution. If internal contradictions are not sufficient to bring the change the external factors may lead to change. One of the most important factors that sweezy categorises as external factor is the pace of urbanisation. If neither internal factors nor external factors are strong enough the feudal system will continue albeit in a stagnant way. Perhaps sweezy's model of the transition economy may give us some ideas about the apparent stagnation of Cooch Behar and its truncated development. Capitalism never came out of the womb of feudal pattern of society in Cooch Behar.

Some extracts are given from sweezy's writings written in the context of feudalism of some other countries. (1) "We must not conclude, however, that such a system (feudalism) is necessarily stable or static. One element of instability is the competition among the lords for land and vassals which together foundation of power and pretige. This competition is the analogue of competition for profits under capittlism, but its effects are quite different. It generates a more or less continuous state of warfare, but the resultant insecurity of life and possession far from revolutionising methods of production as capitalist competition does merely accentuates the mutual dependence of lord and vassel and thus reinforces the basic structure of feudal relations. Feudal warfare upsets, improverishes and exhausts society but it has no tendency to transform it. A second element of instability is to be found in the growth of population. The structure of manner is such as to set limits to the numbers of producers it can employ and the numbers of consumers it can support, while the inherent conservatism of the system inhibits overall expansion. This does not mean, of course, that no growth is possible only that it tends to lag behind population increase. Younger sons of

serfs are pushed out of the regular framework of feudal society and go to make up the kind of vagrant population -- living on alms or bringandage and supplying the raw material for mercenary armies -- which was so characteristic of the middle ages. Such a surplus population however, while contributing to instability and insecurity, exercises no creative or revolutionary influence on feudal society" (Sweezy) Sweezy tries to elaborate the "change-resisting" character of feudalism and shows that how it can perpetuate without major changes in the fundamentals.

(2) What are the causes of decline of feudalism Sweezy continues .. "Dobb believes that they can be found inside the feudal economy itself. He exceeds that the evidence is neither plentiful nor conclusive but he feels that such evidence as we possess strongly indicates that it is the inefficiency of Feudalism as a system of production, coupled with the growing needs of the ruling class for revenue, that was primarily responsible for its decline, since the need for additional revenue promoted an increase in the pressure on the produces to a point where this pressue became literally unendurable. The consequence of this growing pressure was that in the end it led to an exhaustion or actual disappearance, of the labour by which the system was nourished. In other words, according to Dobb's theory, the essential cause of the breakdown of feudalism was over-exploitation of the labour force, serfs deserted the lords' estates en masse and those who remained were too few and too overworked to enable the system to maintain itself on the old basis... (Sweezy) but sweezy thinks that this theory is not fact of history. Sweezy writes, "The serfs could not simply desert the manors no matter how exacting their masters might become, unless they had somewhere to go. It is true... that feudal society tends to generate a surplus of vagrant population, but this

vagrant population, constituting the days of society, is made up of those for whom there is no room on the manors and it is hardly realistic to suppose that any considerable number of serfs would deliberately abandon their holdings to descend to the bottom of the social ladder" (Sweezy). "The feudal system contains no internal prime mover and when it undergoes genuine development -- as distinct from mere oscillations and crisis which do not affect its basic structure - the driving force is to be sought outside the system (I suspect that this applies pretty generally to feudal system.....") (Sweezy).

(3) "The whole problem, however, takes on an entirely new aspect to which Dobb pays surprisingly little attention -- when we recall the flight of the serfs took place simultaneously with the growth of town ... There is no doubt that the rapidly developing towns -- offering as they did, liberty, employment and improved social status -- acted as a powerful magnet to the oppressed rural population ... Dobb's theory of internal causation of the breakdown of feudalism could still be rescued if it could be shown that the rise of the towns was a process internal to the feudal system. But as I read Dobb, he would not maintain this. He takes an eclectic position of the question that their origin of the medieval towns but recognises that their growth was generally in proportion to their importance as trading centres. Since trade can in no sense be regarded as a form of feudal economy, it follows that Dobb would hardly argue that the rise of urban's life was a consequence of internal feudal causes.

To sum up this critique of Dobb's theory of the decline of feudalism : having neglected to analyse the laws and tendencies of western European feudalism, he mistakes for imminent trends certain historical developments

which in fact can only be explained as arising from causes external to the system".

"It seems to me that Dobb has not succeeded in shaking that part of the commonly accepted theory which holds that the root cause of the decline of feudalism was the growth of trade. But he has shown that the impact of trade on the feudal system is more complicated than has actually been thought : the idea that trade equals money economy and money economy is a natural dissolvent of feudal relations is much too simple" "It should be noted that the problem of the growth of trade in the middle ages is in principle separate from the problem of the decline of feudalism. Granted the fact that trade increased, whatever that reason may have been feudalism was bound to be influenced in certain ways But clearly one does not have to accept Pirenne's theory in order to agree that the growth of trade was the decisive factor about the decline of western European feudalism".

"Dobb cites Marx's chapter on 'Merchant capital' (111 Ch. 20) in support of the view that industrial capital develops in two main ways. The following is the key passage from Dobb : "According to the first -- the really revolutionary way - a section of the producers themselves accumulated capital and took to trade and in course of time began to organise production on a capitalist basis free from handicraft restrictions of the guilds. According to the second, a section of the existing merchant class began to take possession directly of production, thereby serving historically as a mode of transition but becoming eventually an obstacle to a real capitalist mode of production and declining with the development of the latter'. Dobb puts much stress on the first of methods .. He writes while the growing interest shown by sections of

merchant capital in controlling production - in developing what may be termed a deliberately contrived system of exploitation through trade - prepared the way for this final income (i.e. the subjection of production to genuine capitalist control) and may in a few cases have reached it and final stage generally seems as marx pointed out, to have been associated with the rise from the ranks of the producers themselves of a capitalist element, half manufacturing, half merchant, which began to subordinate and to organise those very ranks from which it had so recently risen"... and later, after a lengthy analysis of the failure of capitalist production despite early and promising beginnings, to develop in certain areas... Dobb says "when seen in the light of a comparative study of capitalist development Marx's contention that at this stage the rise of a class of industrial capitalist from the ranks of the producers themselves is a condition of any revolutionary transformation of production begins to acquire a central importance". It is noteworthy, however, that Dobb admits that 'details of this process are far from clear and there is little evidence that bears directly upon it'. In fact so little evidence, even of an indirect character, seems to be available that one reviewer felt constrained to remark that it would have been desirable to find more evidence, for the view, derived from Marx, that the really revolutionary transformation of production and the breaking of the control of merchant capital over production, was accomplished by men coming from the ranks of merchant craftsman.....".

III

The above controversy shows that orthodox Marxists believe that internal factors and contradictions must give rise to capitalism. But Sweezy differs from this doctrinaire orthodox conservative, and mechanical interpretation and emphasises that feudalism may have no sufficient internal mechanism to change.

After all 'class contradictions' and social polarisation may lead to upheaval. But was this present in Cooch Behar ? Was social polarisation a "fact" of Cooch Behar ?

Most probably the social polarisation, of the scale sufficient to create antagonism was never present in Cooch Behar. This is because the land was mostly held by a particular "ethnic group" - namely the Rajbansis and Koch. The Rajbansis and Koch had distinct Mongoloid features as opposed to Bengalees or other Indians. The Rajbansis who held most of the land in a hierarchical structure were related with each other by blood and ethnic relationship. For example, it is the practice of Rajbansi landlords to employ able-bodied young men for cultivation of land and enter into marriage relationship with their daughters. The landless young agricultural labourers were always treated as part of the family or part of the extended family. The concept of "We" and "they" had not developed in this type of economy. Feudalism is an extended family system in the context of Cooch Behar. Social polarisation could have occurred if the kitchen is different or labourers are hired or fired. This relationship is nearly absent in Cooch Behar. The jotedars, adhiars and landless peasants were very often related by family and blood relationship. The joint family system prevalent in India may not create a type of antagonism which we think is likely to create a "revolutionary" phase. Except a few sporadic cases no violent struggle between "Serfs" and "landlords" were found anywhere in Cooch Behar.

Economic and institutional changes, it was argued, created conditions favourable to the emergence of other "dominant" groups in the peasant society of Cooch Behar. But it is difficult even to suggest that this "dominant" group was at all "revolutionary". The critics of the system had

usually concentrated on "rural money lenders" - a new middle class and denounced the money lenders as the base of the peasant society. Two major shifts in the critique in this regard are notable. Peasant indebtedness to money lenders is not any longer believed to have been a distinctly British Indian phenomenon. The existence of large scale credit transactions in pre-colonial times has been firmly established. It is not assumed either that a distinct group of professional moneylenders alone provided the credit. A common assumption now is the complexity of the social composition of rural creditors and the diversity of their economic roles in the present society like Cooch Behar. A powerful group of rural creditors it is now held, was part of the peasant society itself. The old image of wily money lenders as aliens and disrupting the peasant society from without has been largely abandoned. A major modification of the orthodox critique is the notion of the rise of a rich peasantry. But the rise of rich peasantry steadily eroded the role and omnipotence of old landlords or zamindars or jotedars. In other words, the two-way simplified version of class war between landlords and serfs is no longer tenable. In between the zamindar or landlord there are innumerable layers of middle, not so middle, small, and very small ownerships. These different layers take away some of the edges of the intensity of class struggle.

Secondly, the money lenders are in no way shackled by the landlords²⁹. The landlords and money lenders were related with each other in same sort of symbiotic relationship. This relationship is of mutual advantage in the absence of banking and other financial institutions in the rural areas. Therefore, the "dominant middle class" of the rural areas was part of the peasant society and one cannot conceive any radical role for this type of middle class. Further in Cooch Behar many of the money-lenders were "outsiders" and "small" in numbers. The "smallness" of numbers put money lenders at a

disadvantage, particularly when they had to deal with the village community as a whole in that sense in Cooch Behar there was a "communal control" limiting money lenders powers. When it came to the question of settlement of disputes over interest charges and related issues, they were at a greater disadvantage. A formal legal machinery did not exist. Even if it existed it was rudimentary and time consuming at best. It was therefore, left to village panchayats (i.e. village councils) to arbitrate. The village headman and leading peasants settled the disputes. What happened if the frustration of money lenders over the decisions led them to reduce leading to a point where it hurt the local economy as also collection of revenue ? Was the Cooch Behar state still hesitant to take sides ? We donot really know. On the other hand, Panchayat (i.e. Village Council) decisions could not do much forward reducing peasants dependence on money lenders. What happened if peasants deeply resented the continuing domination of money lenders despite their usual services ? Did it lead to any overt conflict ? We have to give a very curious answer. We have to admit that as a result of this domination most of the "surplus product of peasants" became the property of the moneylenders even before the crop was harvested. Yet despite all this to portray the relationship between money lenders and the peasants as a relationship of tension and strife would be untrue to the social temper of Cooch Behar.

The economic organisation of a village in Cooch Behar, characterised by a combination of self-sufficient peasant economy and rural industry did not necessarily ensure "economic progress and growth" in the Marxist sense of the term. The village community of Cooch Behar was able to maintain "a sort of standard of living". As a result "most members of the village community were gainfully employed and were not usually compelled to seek employment

elsewhere, except during periods of severe natural calamities or famines. These circumstances mainly accounted for the negligible size of the group without any gainful employment in the agricultural sector of the economy, some sort of communal control over the existing stock of land and the presence of plentiful land in Cooch Behar. Under the circumstances and the changed revenue system any member of the village community could easily become a self possessing or self working peasant. Peasants, under different amended laws could 'freely' move to waste lands, forest lands, reclaim a portion and earn a living since the capital necessary to procure other means of production could not have been large in the art of primitive production system as prevailed in Cooch Behar. Land in many cases continued to be used as a source of peasant subsistence and not as a source of profit. Profit might have motivated resourceful few but large majority survived at a subsistence level and maintained some sort of living standard.

In this context a large number of Indian nationalist authors have talked about the existence of landless proletariat. The existence of landless proletariat was linked with the caste based social organisation of the pre-British Indian village. It was an extremely inequitarian society, the so called "village solidarity", "communal solidarity" it is argued is a myth. The village in India is only an architectural and demographic entity.... It is caste which is sociologically real³⁰. The lower castes did not have any sense of loyalty to the village. They were clients of powerful patrons. Obligations of clientship forced them to act in ways which are misrepresented as arising out of village solidarity. Dharma Kumar³¹ made the first systematic statement of the argument relating the origins of agricultural labour in pre-British days to the institution of caste. Demand for labour arose since caste have prevented

Brahmin (upper caste) land owners from touching the plough. Owners of large holdings, mainly Brahmin or upper caste could not also do without hired labour since their families could not provide all the necessary labour. The supply of labour became possible because of caste ban on ownership of land. Dharma Kumar estimates that at about the beginning of British rule about 15 percent of the total population of Madras presidency (in South India) were agricultural labourers. Saradmoni³² has a novel argument to propound in regard to the pulayas (lower castes) of Kerala. The pulayas once owner cultivators, gradually sank into the status of attached labourers largely because of the successive waves of Brahmin intrusions into their villages as colonisers. The process presumably involved use of force. Caste sanctions only formalised their dispossession. Caste rules were primarily designed to prevent any substantial improvement in the material conditions of the Pulayas and thus to keep them tied to their position as serfs. Ironically enough, it was caste system again that tended to split the pulaya community into rival groups. Rigid caste rules, made by the Pulayas themselves, separated one sub-caste from another sub-caste of the Pulayas. The Brahmin (upper caste) hegemony could thus consolidate itself. Kessinger's study³³ of a Punjab village does not say much about the origins of agricultural labour, but shows how caste system helped the dominant land owning family effectively control the low caste Kamina and thus reinforced the latter's dependence on the landed families (the Sahotas). In the context of Sikh administration of rural tracts, the dominant caste's hegemony of village politics and disputes was a virtual monopoly. Any non-sahota group intending to settle in the village must accept the political and rural power of the Sahotas. Things were far worse for agricultural labourer's of inferior castes. "The chamar's time was at the disposal of the sahates" Agricultural wages were regulated by custom and enforced by the Sahotes,

through their ability to use sanctions ranging from physical violence to an arbitrary change of wages.

In the context of Cooch Behar or in the area which is (nearly) north eastern part of India, the domination of Brahmins, as prevailed elsewhere in south, is not that important. The Koch Kings belonged to a very low caste of hindu society. The Koch distributed their land to their relatives settled them in cultivation. The settlers were again non-Brahmins -- by and large. Any exception proves the rule. The Koch society was not as differentiated as it was found in the other societies of India. The heterogeneity of the rural population was much less. Among the Koch or Rajbansis there was no such taboo as to use the plough. The Koch or Rajbansi landlords settled their own ethnic groups in cultivation and very often the relationship between landlord and the peasant is a relationship based on family ties. The Brahmins were insignificant proportion in the rural areas. The Brahmins were hardly land-owners. The upper castes mainly entered into service sectors. So the vast rural sector in Cooch Behar was not that caste based. Further, landless labourers were virtually non-existent in the censuses before 1951. The phenomenon of landless labourer is of recent origin in Cooch Behar and the caste system or hierarchy has nothing to do in this regard. The society of Cooch Behar was to some extent homogenous - at least from the view point of India's caste-class system.

How did the British-sponsored land management system in Cooch Behar affect the agricultural labour ? It was pointed out that agricultural labour in the sense we understand hardly ever existed in Cooch Behar. The excess population was more or less accomodated in the vast waste land under Patit charcha. It is difficult to say that British policies had ever produced

landless proletariat in Cooch Behar. Even if, for the sake of argument, the number of agricultural labourers had increased at all, the reason was rapid population growth, so much that there was not enough land to go round. A certain number of cultivators had inevitably slipped into landlessness - though their numbers may not have been adequately reflected in the census reports there was nothing that British ruler or the Koch king could do about it. We have cited evidences to show in this dissertation that the nature of land-management or transfer of peasant holdings, was not of the kind to create a sizable group of landless peasants. The dominant pattern in Cooch Behar was owner cultivator and this group of small peasants were not really 'have nots' in the orthodox sense of the term. The small peasants in Cooch Behar were not alienated from the land. The peasants were deeply committed to their small holdings. These small holdings were the pre-dominant 'mode of production'.

The nature of land-relation, as pointed out, was hardly caste-based agrestic serfdom. Even if there was anything bonded the conditions after successive land revenue management were such as to widen the market. The 'so called' attached workers in Cooch Behar could, as pointed out, break away from the master's domination and could themselves become small farmers. The small unlike many parts of India cultivated their own land. There was no taboo and the family labourers could be employed. It is in this context, so called alienation never really existed in the state of Cooch Behar - at least for a very long period.

If it is considered by the orthodox writers that the British solidified the caste structure and therefore sharpened the class struggle, then it is entirely irrelevant in case of Cooch Behar. Expansion of monetary sector,

gradual truncation of the barter sector, railways, commercialisation of agriculture created a condition which is far from solidification of the caste-class structure. The breakdown of the barter system and commercialisation of agriculture created new opportunities, new jobs new avenues of migration, social inter-course and spread of education. Hence, it is difficult to suggest that the existence of caste structure is the potential for class conflict in the rural areas.

The 'internal factors' were really not sufficient to give rise to new social order in Cooch Behar. The social order that existed was more or less continuation of the same system with periodic marginal changes. The factors outside the system, namely urbanisation or growth of cities, as suggested by Sweezy was not sufficiently strong enough to give birth to a new kind of economy. This is because of slow growth of urbanisation in Cooch Behar. During the whole period Cooch Behar's urban growth was less than the average of West Bengal and even in current period about 10% of total population of the district live in the urban areas, whereas for the state of West Bengal nearly 30% of people live in the urban areas.

While almost every fourth person is a town dweller in the state of West Bengal, in the district of Cooch Behar only seven in any group of one hundred people live in town. The district has a total number of six towns. Each of the five sub-divisional headquarters is a town, though some of them are big villages called towns almost by courtesy. Some of the towns of this district even do not satisfy the basic qualifying tests laid down in the census for defining an urban area, except of course, of their being administered by the town committee..... Cooch Behar municipal town only had a population of a little more than 10,000 in 1901, others had a population of a little above

one thousand only ...(census report, 1961, West Bengal, District census Hand Book Cooch Behar, p. 60).

It appears that urbanisation which should have acted as a catalyst for change in the agrarian society like Cooch Behar, as pointed out by Sweezy, ("external factors" as opposed to "internal factors" of Dobb) did not exist. Hence, there was a tendency for the society to remain stagnant. Again who were these urban people in Cooch Behar ? Did they come about as "displacement from the village" as Engels thought of the process of urbanisation or were they "producers becoming merchants or capitalists" as Marx wrote his idea of urbanisation in Das Capital Vol. III p. 393 ? The urban population in Cooch Behar was neither. It composed of a 'babu', 'Bhadralok' or 'Gentlemen' class who were averse to physical labour and kept themselves separate and distinct from the toiling masses as part of the prevailing 'babu' culture in India at that time. This 'babu gentlemen' requires a further explanation. This babu middle class is the product of British rule in India at that time.

The growth of 'urban society' in Cooch Behar is related in the final analysis to the growth of urban centres to cater the needs of British and Koch Raj administrative purpose. Centering round these 'administrative outposts' all kinds of commercial activities grew up. For administrative purpose the urban centres were connected to metropolitan capital and centres like Calcutta. Trade, commerce, administrative ramifications including establishment of law courts, judiciary, schools, colleges etc. led together an expanded employment base offering job opportunities to people. In consequence, attracted by the new openings, functional and occupational groups poured into urban centres of Cooch Behar from different parts of Bengal. First of all,

subordinate administrative posts were created which were open at that time to the Indians. Next came the clerical grades. These too were filled up by the Indians. The judicial system opened up considerable employment opportunities for the Indians. Still, however, there was a limit to the position available where all the aspirants could be absorbed. The spill-over took to legal profession. The British legal system provided opportunities for flourishing practices. Around these administrative and judicial establishments were secondary organisations like local self-government. Then came trade commerce and transport. In the indigenous system of trade and commerce there was very little scope for employment. If there was any scope at all, it would remain open to the member of the family engaged in trading - the business organisation being either partnership or proprietary. Commercial activity of the urban centres was mainly of two types (a) articles exported from the district and (b) articles imported from outside.

Both these formed a part of network of commercial activity spread across the whole country. Local trade was limited to the local demand, which in turn depended on the standard of living, the level of income and economic activity. In the outlying areas of Cooch Behar the rural economy was based on subsistence, whatever money circulation was there in the rural sector, it was too low to generate effective demand for increasing trade turn-over. The expansion of local trade and business, therefore, depended largely on the presence in the rural sector of a large number of wage earners or salaried people who exchanged the money for everything they required. In the early period of Cooch Behar, such groups were not in general so large in number, so as to generate demand to create opportunities on a big scale. Local trade surplus would remain small so long as the volume of local trade transactions

itself was small. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons of slow growth of urbanisation in Cooch Behar.

The judicial and administrative positions required formal English education. As the system of English education did not develop much in Cooch Behar, a large number of people migrated to the urban centres of Cooch Behar. This is one of the reasons for the migration of upper caste hindus population from their native districts of south or East Bengal. The census Report of 1901 wrote about the migration of East Bengal upper caste hindus ... its babus are found earning their living throughout Bengal and Assam and further a field. Many of the best clerks in the government offices came from Dacca District. Such examples are common. In case of commercial activities link with the metropolitan trading centre like Calcutta was necessary. At the same time, because of the absence of modern banking institution of finance these activities an indigenous credit system was necessary. Therefore, the new opportunities in employment and commercial activities were restricted in only those who had the qualifications and means.

The administrative and judicial set up created new employment, opening up opportunities for hindu upper caste having formal English education. In a colonial set-up these were the most coveted position. As formal education was necessary in these appointments, the upper caste hindus because of their socio-economic privileges and conditions evinced the greatest desire to obtain English education. These people migrated to the urban centres for service and profession. Their eagerness for higher formal education was motivated largely by the desire for self advancement in service and professions. Head work divorced from and adverse to manual industry was the characteristic of those who took formal education.

This was the reason why the great majority of Bengalee upper caste hindus were found in every nook and corner of the urban settlemnts of Cooch Behar. The Bengalee educated upper class hindus manned the clerical services in administration, courts, schools and other establishments. In the contemporary society they were known as 'Babus', 'Bhadraloks' or 'Gentlemen'. The 'Babus' were mainly 'white collar' employees and shunned all kinds of manual jobs. In fact these 'Babus' were the 'Elites' of the society.

This pattern of 'urbanisation' in a feudal society is different from what orthodox Marxists thought would happen. On Sweezy's hypothesis, the feudal ruling class constantly increasing demand for money in this crisis of feudalism arose from the ever greater luxury of the feudal mobility a conception similar to that presented in the first chapter on the HOF of Sombart's Luxus Und Kapitalismus. The excessive exploitation of the peasants by their lords, to which Dobb would ascribe the source of collapse of feudalism, was really in sweezy's view an effect of the lords need for cast with the resultant flight of peasants there came the establishment of cities, which produced the money economy. The external force which brought about the collapse of feudalism was 'trade' which cannot be regarded as a form of feudal economy. But the cities were not formed in the way sweezy desired in Cooch Behar.

Further, sweezy's insight that those who carried out the bourgeois revolution, who were the real vehicles of the industrial capital (capitalist production) of that time, were to be found in the rising small and middle bourgeoisie of the cities and towns and that the centre of attention must be

focussed on the contradiction between them and merchant and user capitalists (Haute bourgeoisie). It is surprising that Marxists in discussing the 'capitalist spirit' overlooks the remarkable insight of Weber (Max Weber- Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist der Kapitalismus (1904-1905). Weber pointed out that capitalism came from the Womb of feudalism because of capitalist spirit.

The 'capitalist spirit' which appeared in the form of puritanism was the way of life, the form of consciousness best suited to the class of yeomen and small and middle industrialists of that time and is not to be found in the mentality of hunger for money 'or greed for grain' common to all Marxist writers.

The Marxist writers overlooked this 'capitalist spirit' of Weber in their paradigm. Neither capitalist spirit nor 'animal spirit' of Keynes nor Schumpeterian 'entrepreneur' had any role to play in the theoretical structure of feudalism as developed by Dobb, Sweezy-Takahasi. It was assumed that capitalism will come out of feudalism because of internal contradictions and/or external pushes and pulls. But the logical process was very inadequately sketched.

Since the theory of feudalism was doctrinaire and rigid the Marxist writers failed to give adequate emphasis on technological progress, innovation or even education. The current emphasis on education as a factor in economic growth was overlooked in the Marxian structure. How does the rate of economic return on education as an investment compare with the rate of return on physical capital? How is the volume of educational expenditures correlated with a country's economic growth? What part of a country's economic growth can reasonably be attributed to its educational effort? These

are highly relevant issues to understand the stagnation of Cooch Behar but it was never raised by the writers who believed in the automatic transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Besides education, rapid technological change also characteristically requires some business leaders who will introduce the new technology or as they are commonly called entrepreneurs. To put it in technical terms it is important to recognise that there is need not only for invention but also for innovation or actually getting the new methods adopted in practical effective ways. Richard Ackwright, one of the great cotton lords of late eighteenth century England, but he did introduce these devices commercially, employed them on a large scale made a fortune for himself and was one of the key figures of the English industrial revolution. It is needless to add that "entrepreneurial class" who brought capitalism in England or in other parts were conspicuous by its absence in the small principality of Cooch Behar.

The "babus" of Cooch Behar had hardly the skill, acumen or mentality to be entrepreneur. But they were the emerging middle class -- so-called modern in outlook. These 'babus' were hardly suitable to take risk. The 'babus' preferred secured job in the government officer to the risk taking ventures of industrial activities. Another middle class of Cooch Behar namely jotedars, small peasants or 'new elites' of the rural areas were more interested in investment in land rather than in the risk taking ventures. They were rooted to the soil, conservative in outlook, tradition bound, and not 'urban' in outlook or spirit. The commercial class mainly composed of Marwari banias came from far away place and became virtual shopkeepers of the area. They were not local, speak a different language, have different customs and remained perpetually outsiders to the system of Cooch Behar.

New capitalism to emerge and to be economically effective, may require additional capital, changes in the scale of enterprise and a trained and a disciplined labour force. In an even deeper sense, they may require a society which is willing and able to adjust itself to economic change. Economic changes had always been a gradual process. In societies like Cooch Behar, attitudes and institutions are necessarily geared not to what is new but to what is traditional. Technological progress in the modern sense depends, of course, on applied science and ultimately on pure science. Abstract speculations on the nature of universe, motivated originally by the simple desire to know and understand, will often come to root in some practical appliance that reduces labour and provides for hitherto unsuspected needs. In a certain sense the 'scientific attitude' is the root of the whole thing. The notion of a rational and comprehensible universe, of natural laws which can be used to unlock nature's secrets- this kind of approach is by no means a necessary or universal one and in fact was the product of a long process of intellectual evolution in the western world. Therefore "generalisation" from certain common features of feudalism is not a valid procedure. Generalisation that feudalism is a distinct stage of human history and capitalism will come out of it (as part of Marxist doctrine) is again not valid. Feudalism has certain laws of development in the West and a set of different pattern in the east-or in a place like Cooch Behar and no generalisation is possible. The doministic-feudalism - must give- rise- to capitalism" a la Dobb do not give any room for "uncertainty".

But the World is full of uncertainty. The ability of organisation to deal with uncertainty is a function of internal characteristics, the diversity of their members as measured in terms of their backgrounds and their personality characteristics and the diversity of their interaction, as measured in terms of

the randomness of their communications. Unless we understand the background of Cooch Behar we cannot predict that capitalism is bound to emerge from feudal structure.

Social reality is tragically misshapen, intractable and untidy social theory is not. It imposes order and clarity by forcing the "facts" of social existence into pre-conceived ideological boxes - all in the name of objective science. Superficially it appears that what separates one "social theory" from another is the way in which some "objective facts" are arranged and combined. But it is the underlying ideology that determines with a social fact is to begin with and then proceeds to arrange the ones it finds to be theoretically relevant and compatible in a certain order. Different theories, being different constructions of "reality" have different objectives. Some seek to eternalise and thereby justify whatever is, while others seek to depass it to what ought to be. One thing all social theories have common, however, is that they all, in time, become obsolete as historical events unfold along lines no theory could have possibly anticipated.

In a sense, all social theories specialise in predicting the past and having done so, in accordance with their own "scientific" canons and thus to their satisfaction, they then turn their theoretical axes 180 degrees into the future, falsifying themselves in the act. Then comes the problem of reconstruction, after the patchwork attempts of the theoretical diehards repeatedly fail. And so the process goes on and on though by no means smoothly. For any major social theory with a large body of adherents, it is often a turbulent process that can turn ugly. But as ugly as it may turn, the

need to reconstitute social theories continues and new formulations more relevant to their times and places continue to appear.

The "feudal society" of Cooch Behar does not give signal for change. Here feudalism does not give rise to capitalism. Dobb talked about "internal forces" and Sweezy emphasised on "external forces". In Cooch Behar there was hardly anything "internal" to the system which allowed capitalism to emerge. Nor there was anything "external" which brought any transformation. If there were forces of change these were at best "potential" or to use Marxian terminology "transitional". At least changes were not automatic as Marxists would ask to accept.

Hence, Cooch Behar remained an agricultural society. Land has still remained the primary productive asset. From the womb of feudalism capitalism has not "sprouted" in Cooch Behar. What ultimately happened in western Europe was manifestly very different from what happened in other parts of the world, where the feudal mode of production in some sense prevailed. No 'revolutionary changes' occurred in our sample study namely Cooch Behar. The extent to which this may be due to variations among different feudal systems and the extent to which it may be due to "external" factors, are, of course very important questions. Feudalism is subject to different laws of development.

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