

we will examine its relevance to three such problems: the nature of the relationship between the cropper and the landlord; obstacles posed by sharecropping arrangements to agricultural development; and the place of the sharecropper as a social category within peasant classes.

Sharetenancy and 'semi-feudalism'

The controversy around the nature of sharecropping contracts was revived in the recent literature interpreting data collected from village studies in India. In his well-known study of 26 villages in West Bengal during the early seventies, Bhaduri used the term 'semi-feudalism' to designate the condition of the Bengali kishan (landless sharecroppers), who constitute today between 40-50% of the peasantry in the region (Bhaduri, 1973). According to the author, sharetenancy arrangements between the kishan and his Bengali landlord reduce the former to conditions of semi-serfdom. This subjugation is achieved through a combination of perpetual indebtedness of the kishan to the landlord, who supplies him with consumption loans at usurious rates, and through the kishan's inaccessibility to the capital market. Although the kishan is "free to move," his mobility is hampered by the lack of any credit-worthiness among other landlords with whom no filial relations exist (Bhaduri, 1973:122-123).

This model of semi-feudal sharetenancy rests on the operation of two modes of exploitation simultaneously: one based on the landlord's property rights to the land, and another on his monopoly of lending privileges to the kishan (ibid.:135). Through the former mode, the landlord secures the sharecropper's continued landlessness or near landlessness, while through the latter, he maintains the kishan's relative immobility on the land.