

...will be discouraged from introducing any technological improvement so long as his gain in income from increased productivity brought about by technological change falls short of his loss in income from usury due to a reduction (or complete elimination) in the level of consumption-loan required by the kishan (ibid.).

In Bhaduri's conception, the landlord who enters into sharecropping arrangements is predisposed against both short and long-term improvement of the land. The former because it reduces his income (expressed in terms of a lower rent share), while maintaining the peasant's indebtedness to him; the latter because it creates the conditions for the sharecropper's emancipation from dependence on the landlord -- even though it may be economically advantageous to the landlord. Thus, the sharecropping system fulfills a circular reinforcement of the conditions of agricultural backwardness. In a similar fashion, Ashour's survey of muraba'a (meteyage) contracts in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon sees sharetenancy not only as the cornerstone of 'feudal relations in land' ('Ashour, 1948a:47-48; c. 61-64), but also as a chief impediment to the rationalization and mechanization of agriculture (ibid.b:59) and even, surprisingly, to the production of cash crops (ibid.b:60).

Yet as in the question of 'feudalism', those positions have been seriously challenged in recent examination of the evidence. In the two cases of West Bengal and Syria/Palestine, discussed above, we are fortunate to have studies which re-examined the data for the same period (1970s for northern India; 1940s for Palestine). In the case of Palestine, the work of Firestone (1975), which we will discuss later in greater detail, shows that cropsharing arrangements achieved an increased integration of the agrarian economy into market relations and a general expansion of cultivated land which would otherwise have remained idle. Similarly, in the case of northern India, Bardhan and Rudra (1980) found that