

as Doreen Warriner has noted -- was a credit operation. In addition to providing a system for the cropping of big estates, sharetenancy performed several other important functions. Those include the acquisition of consumption loans and stock by an undercapitalized peasantry; the rejuvenation of abandoned land and the consolidation of a middle stratum among the peasantry through mughârasa contracts and similar partnership arrangements; the alleviation of the impact of state-imposed taxes, etc., through patronage bonds which often worked to the economic disadvantage of landlords (Firestone); and the accession of landless refugees to a position of stable land tenure in a rural economy which -- due to excessive outmigration and shortage of labour -- began to favour the tenant.

Methodologically, the detailed study of sharetenancy arrangements helps us to dispel the misleading, and prevalent, use of the criterion of land possession as an empirical index for the examination of class differentiation among the peasantry. Since access to land, under conditions of scarce land resources, and the quality of land are frequently more important indicators of differentiation than the size of the holding or the legal title to the plot, the terms of tenancy become a crucial determinant of those criteria. The continued significance of the "land factor" in the identification of sources of status and power among peasants suggest that the proper demarcation of cutting edges within peasant strata should utilize a combined index of "land possession" and "access to land," (sharecropped, rented, co-cultivated, etc.). The weight of the share-rent component of this index is dependent, obviously, on the nature of the share-contract and on extra-economic factors, such as patronage relations and state intervention in the regulation of agricultural prices.