

a class. Especially with the advent of the Green Revolution, share-tenancy is being absorbed into capitalist relations in agriculture, and sharecroppers transformed into wage workers (cf. Bardhan and Rudra:189).

Sharecroppers as a category within the peasantry

It is a popular theme in the literature, but one not usually backed by evidence, to treat sharecroppers as the lowest section of the peasantry, exchangeable with the rural proletariat. Perhaps one source of this assumption is the (mistaken) notion that sharecroppers in general offer only their labour power, while the landlord provides the land and all other factors of production. But this is the case only in one extreme form of cropping arrangements -- for example the 'pure' harrath in the muraba'a system which prevailed in the Levant at the turn of the century (see Grannot, 1952:301). Yet even here the harrath (the ploughman-tiller) usually, though not in all cases, provided his own plough and work animals, the access to which was not within the reach of most landless peasants, who had to sell their own and their family's labour on a daily basis.

The view of the sharecropper as the 'bottom of the heap' is rejected in a recent work by Bell and Zusman (also on India) who, in discussing land leasing arrangements, note that "household operational holdings that are partly owned and partly leased greatly outnumber those which are wholly leased in, ...and the former (accounting) for the lion's share of all land leased in." (Bell and Zusman, 1976:579). They further note that sharecropping tenants are mainly drawn "not from the mass of landless labourers, but from the ranks of the small peasantry possessing land of their own as well as skills and capital (or access to capital), all of which are traded (if, indeed, they are tradable at all) in imperfect market." (ibid., emphasis added).