

## Confronting the Indian Modes of Production Debate : An Unhappy Encounter of a Third Kind

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*This paper analyzes the Indian modes of production debate from a non-essentialist, Neo-Althusserian Marxist perspective revealing in the process the debate's contributions to the theorization of transition of Indian society as well as some of the major problematical features associated with such a theorization ending finally with a detailed treatment bringing to light insuperable problems related to its analysis of class in the Indian context. Along with a description about the content of the debate, this critical exegesis is especially distinct for tracing out the deep-seated deficiencies associated with the shadowy methodological underpinnings (such as rationalism, empiricism, etc.) and founding concepts (such as class, centered social totality like capitalism, etc.) that are driving the Indian modes of production debate.*

### I

## Dismantling the Indian Modes of Production Debate : A Marxian Reformulation

### Introduction

*Turning and turning in a gyrating gyre;  
The falcon cannot see the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed in the world.*

—W.B. Yeats : "The Second Coming"

The first major Indian academic debate on Marxism reflecting on the process of transition in India, now known as the Indian modes of production debate, began in the late 1960's and continued into the 1980's. This theoretical debate had its roots in the furious transition debate that was going on in the political arena within and between the Indian communist parties.<sup>1</sup> The communist parties took different positions on the

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This paper is a development from my dissertation work (Chakrabarti 1996) and is now part of an ongoing project directed at constructing an archive of the concepts of transition in the Indian context. At various point in time I have benefited from comments by Stephen Cullenberg (the chairperson of my committee), Keith Griffin, Victor Lippit, Gary Dymski, Joseph Childers, Ajit Chaudhury, Richard Wolff, Ashok Mitra and R.S. Deshpande. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>1</sup> In 1962, the Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) split away from the Communist Party of India (CPI). The former, in turn, split in 1967, giving birth to the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (CPI (M-L)). A major cause of the splits can be identified with disagreements over the issue of transition of India's mode of production. The CPI was a pro-Moscow party that wanted to ally with the bourgeoisie whom they called nationalist and progressive. The CPI (M) did not consider the nationalist bourgeoisie to be progressive since they were in alliance with the pre-capitalist elements. The CPI (M-L), which was pro-Beijing, declared the bourgeoisie to be outrightly comprador. Keeping in line with their different perceptions of the bourgeoisie,

(contd.)