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An Analytical Study About The Formation of Peasant Union

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Abstract: *The situation of a peasant is very different from a factory worker. Different factory workers work within the same building complex. Therefore, there is a possibility for them to unite and form of a workers' union. But the different peasants do not work on the same plot of land; only one family works on a given plot of land. So there is no question of forming a union of workers of that plot. If a peasant family goes on strike against the cultivation of his plot and creates a lock-out situation, it will have nothing to eat.*

Key Words: factory workers, building complex, possibility, strike against, cultivation, situation.

In this paper the views of Marx, Lenin and Mao about the peasants as a social class are discussed. It is also taken up that the peasants have fought unitedly against their exploiters by forming the peasant unions or the Kisan Sabhas during the colonial rule. It is true that the peasant can afford strike neither at the sowing time nor at the harvesting time, for these are the only times which give him opportunity to subsist. The small plots of land are scattered here and there. The peasants are devoted to their plots, cultivating them day and night, hardly finding any time to communicate with each other, and form unions. A factory worker does not own the factory, he has no concern for it. What matters is only his pay. But the peasant owns his plot of land, he pays rent on it. He is concerned about it, he cannot afford to keep it uncultivated. Marx had the picture of peasants working on their own plots, scattered here and there, finding no time to communicate with each other and form national unions. According to him peasants form a mass of people without forming a social class. As he says referring to the condition of these cultivators of the soil.¹

The small peasants form of vast mass . . . Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse . . . Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union, and no political organization, they do not form a class.

This was the reaction of Marx because of the role played by peasantry in the French revolution in 1848. It supported the reactionary bourgeois forces of Napoleon. Since then he considered the peasants as a 'sack of potatoes', lacking interconnections, common political identity and organization. Not only this he also considered them as representing barbarism in the midst of civilization.

The assessment of peasantry by Marx is questionable. However, his views influenced the Marxists throughout the world. Echoing the views of Marx, Chang Kuo-Tao says :²

The peasants take no interest in politics. This is common throughout the whole world . . . All they care about is having a true son of Heaven to rule them and a peaceful bumper year.

This implies that the peasants can never dethrone the rulers, however bad these rulers may be. What they care for is not the political change, but a change in the weather so that they may have good harvest. Most of the Marxists in their formative career seem to forget that Russia, China, India and other Afro - Asian countries are primarily agricultural countries. They are very unlike the tiny European countries which have developed the urbanized character. There are only two alternatives for the Afro - Asian countries, either it is accepted that there is no possibility of revolution in these countries or that the vanguards of revolution must be the peasants.

In his early days Lenin exhibited the influence of Marx on peasantry. In the tradition of the Communist Manifesto and the Eighteenth Brumaire Lenin found in 1895, as Esther Kingston Mann points out:³

The small producer still stands aloof from the class struggle. He is still tied by his tiny enterprise to the old
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bourgeois system: and although he is oppressed by the capitalist system he is incapable of understanding the true causes of his oppression.

At this stage 'Lenin's Russian countryside was filled with peasants who were like Marx's sack of potatoes.'⁴ Lenin simply failed to find any political consciousness in them.

Lenin's political thinking started changing from 1905 after the first Russian Revolution in which the peasants participated actively. The Russian peasants' uprising of 1905-1906 was known as the *Jaquerie* of 1905-1906 or the agrarian revolt of 1905-1906. In 1905-1906 a series of peasant uprisings and violence broke out throughout the Russian Empire. After seeing the successful agrarian revolt he started thinking that no restriction should be placed on the potential for leadership. According to his later views the political consciousness was not a permanent monopoly of any person or class. This means that the revolutionary leadership is possible on the part of the rural peasantry. Lenin started supporting peasantry even to the extent of taking anti-socialistic stand. Two months before the October Revolution, Lenin said, as quoted by Trotsky, 'The peasants want to keep their small properties, standardize them on a basis of equality and periodically re-equalize them. let them do it.'⁵ Trotsky further writes that Rosa Luxemburg criticized Lenin on the ground that the equal distribution of land had nothing to do with socialism.

Like Lenin Mao was also an orthodox Marxist in the beginning of his political career. From 1921 to 1925 he was a labour organizer. At that time he also thought like Lenin that the peasantry could function only as an auxiliary force in the proletariat revolution. It was only after 1925 that the picture changed. He started considering the urban proletariat as an auxiliary force and peasantry as the main force for bringing revolution. He further enhanced the social position of peasantry by refusing to impose any external leadership on it. As Han Suyin describes the Mao inspired movement:⁶

All Mao-inspired moments have the tendency to look wildly undirected at the beginning, precisely because Mao feels that direction from above will not do; it is the people themselves who must educate themselves in doing practising revolution shaping their own rules of conduct and a new order.

There is historical evidence for showing that the peasants of Awadh started organizing themselves from 1917. The Awadh peasant moment has similarities with the Mao-inspired moments. The peasants of Awadh organized themselves without the help of any outside agency. The outside agencies such as the educated urban leaders, entered the villages at a later stage. When the grievances of peasants reached their limit, the peasant organization from within took place. The grass root leaders, viz., Jhinguri Singh, and Sahdev Singh, were the pioneer leaders of the Awadh peasant organization from below. They formed the Kisan Sabhas against the taluqdars of Awadh. These Sabhas exhibited antagonism of the peasants with the taluqdars. As Kapil Kumar says:⁷

The class tensions became acuter in the fast changing Socio economic milieu of the country. The peasants' discontent grew deeper. In 1917, some peasants thought of a peasant organization to fight for their class demands. Jhinguri Singh and Sahdev Singh initiated a Kisan Sabha at Rure, a small village in Patti Tahsil of Pratapgarh district. This Sabha channelized the peasant discontent, organized a mass movement to voice their demands, and to affect their emancipation from taluqdar's tyranny.

Thus the peasants of Awadh organized themselves in 1917, and stood as a class in the Marxian sense of the term, because for Marx the formation of unions and associations is the sign of class consciousness. In Awadh the taluqdars formed a class of exploiters, and the vast majority of peasants formed the class of exploited. They were two classes which were in antagonism with each other. The B.I.A. (The British Indian Association) was an expression of unity of the taluqdars whereas the Kisan Sabha of Jhinguri Singh and Sachdev Singh expressed a consciousness of peasants.

The B.I.A. was formed in 1861, whereas the Kisan Sabha came into existence in 1917. Therefore, the



question arises what were the reasons for the delay in the formation of Kisan Sabha when the taluqdars formed their association so early? Taluqdars were busy in establishing themselves in the early years of taluqdari system. Their Association was an instrument for securing and pleading for the rights and privileges. So they did not pay much attention to a large-scale exploitation. It was only when their roots were firmly established in Awadh that the large-scale exploitation started. The taluqdar had to spend money on the fee of B.I.A., and they had to spend huge amount on their urbanization and Westernization. Over and above these they had to spend on the opening of schools and colleges, clubs, parties to the British Bureaucrats and shikar (hunting) trips, etc. All this amount had to come from some source. The source was the peasant community. The increase in rent rate, Nazrana and different kinds of cesses were the source of extra income. Then came the First World War which led to the exploitation of peasants to its zenith. All taluqdars were imposed war funds by the British, and on their turn the taluqdars imposed war fund on their tenants. So the cultivator was completely crushed. When the suffering of the peasants reached its zenith they started organizing themselves against exploiters. They could not remain passive observers of their suffering.

To conclude, like the Russian and Chinese peasants, Indian peasants led the class struggles against the exploitation either by the taluqdars, zamindar or white planters during the colonial rule.

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