

Semi-Feudalism – Capitalism – Imperialism – Inter Relations

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Indian society has the nature of semi-feudal, semi-colonial system. These two are so entwined as to be indivisible. While feudalism serves as a social base to imperialism, imperialism in turn strives to uphold the feudal system by bringing about changes in it to suit its needs of exploitation. This document tries to analyse this in depth by the method of materialist dialectical historical methodology.

Karl Marx had explained that in shaking up the self-reliant closed economic system thriving in India, China and other Asiatic Societies, British colonial rule has played a revolutionary role. He stated the following about the restructuring it has undertaken in the agricultural sector aftermath of the said destruction:

“Both the zamindari and raitwari systems are agrarian revolutions ensuring out of British orders. But the two systems stand in opposition to each other. One is of regal nature and the other of democratic nature. One is the distorted form of English landlord system. The other is a distorted form of French peasant ownership. Both are regressive. Both have irreconcilable contradictions ingrained in them. They have been created not for the sake of peasants who cultivate or for the sake of lords who hold feudal rights. They were created for the sake of the government which imposes the burden of tax on land”.

Marx has described the manner how Indian rural system was destroyed and how feudal system, which was required for exploitative colonial rule, was restructured. Since then all the changes which British rulers effected in the feudal system have been continued without altering its fundamental nature.

At the same time Marx had also keenly analysed the future consequences of the British rule. The British rulers who destroyed the economic system of India which had all the potential of developing into a capitalist system, have in turn introduced capitalist relations through the formation of Railway lines. And their further development could not be checked. He felt that those developing capitalist relations and the rise of the working class resulting from them will not only undo the British rule, but also leads to industrial development which would lead to the abolition of the feudal system and along with it the abolition of the caste system and its characteristic hereditary division of labour.

With colonial exploitation as the main economic source, the capitalist system in European countries has morphed into its highest form namely imperialism. Giving up the progressive role it played till then, it has compromised with all the reactionary elements including feudalism. It has protected them and formed them as its social base and continued its hegemony.

Conscious of its inability in curtailing the growth of capitalist relations which were introduced by it in colonies, it adopted the policy of holding them under its wing. As a result

of this the independent development of them was prevented. It created comprador bourgeoisie which was bound to it in thousand different links. This is how Indian comprador class came into existence. Indian big bourgeoisie grew up under the lens of British rulers and acted in collusion with the feudal forces. The Indian big bourgeoisie which usurped the leadership of anti-colonial national movement and its political representative namely, Indian National Congress never offered any program to the peasants, leave aside an anti-feudal one, at any stage of national movement. Not only that, it has watered down the anti-feudal movements taken up by peasantry on their own initiative.

The great leader Lenin who had made in-depth study of these conditions had declared that the only way for the colonies to develop is the bourgeoisie mode of agriculture.

He stated that the development can occur in two forms. One is the transformation through reformation of feudal economic system. The other is to abolish feudalism through revolution.

This was the situation in India in 1947 when the transfer of power occurred. The direct rule of the Britishers ended and the transfer of power to the Indian big bourgeoisie and the big landlord class occurred.

On one side the peasantry was waging anti-feudal struggle. The heroic Telangana peasant armed struggle had already begun. This had brought on to the agenda the abolition of feudal system and the revolutionary land reforms demanding land to the tiller. This had posed the question of reform path proposed by Lenin or revolutionary path at the face of the ruling classes.

Indian ruling classes have chosen the Path of reform. Accordingly they have picked up the reformative measures of abolition of zamindari system and land ceiling legislations. These were meant to create illusions in the minds of the peasantry. At the same time they have drowned the peasant struggles in bloody repression. Abolition of zamindari system gave the rights to zamindars over vast swathes of land and the peasants got nothing. Land ceiling legislations with so many loopholes in them failed to help the takeover of the lands under the occupation of landlords. These policies adopted by the Indian ruling classes soon after the takeover of power indicates that they intended to preserve status quo.

After brutally suppressing the peasant movements only ruling classes took measures to bring about a change in the feudal system slowly and gradually.

Com. TN concluded that "Every specific step which the government implemented in this direction helped in strengthening the feudal base in rural areas".

"With all the talk of land reforms and its innocuous land ceiling legislations and tenancy acts, no democratic land reforms have been implemented by the Congress government in its long tenure in office for the last 23 years. Practically no change in land relations has taken place, except that with vigorous implementation of Panchayat Raj, Cooperative institutions, loans for tractors and other agricultural machines, etc., only happened. The economic and political strength of the landlords has been further strengthened in the rural economy. (P.417, India Mortgaged, 2002 edition)

About what harmful effects this gradual change has brought by the 1960 decade, Com. TN has described as follows:

"This is what we are witnessing in our country today. The excruciating pain which the rural economy today is undergoing – the forceful eviction of small peasants and tenants, the growth of concentration of land, increase in the number of agricultural labour, the

growing hegemony of the upper castes over lower castes – are all symptoms of this growing disease. Lenin has explained that “The evolution is transformation of feudal bondage into servitude and capitalist exploitation on the land of feudal landlords” (Ibid, P.414)

He has also enunciated our tasks at that stage of social evolution:

“Therefore, no communist can support this kind of evolution of feudal landlordism. Our task is to firmly oppose it by supporting the fighting peasantry for the liquidation of feudal landlordism”. (P. 414)

This was the situation by 1960s. By then itself green revolution was on the go. Green revolution was strategically framed for the entry of imperialist capital into Indian agriculture in the form of technological know-how with the aim to prevent revolutionary peasant upsurge. To this end in some areas of the country development of irrigation infrastructure was initiated. As a follow-up high-yielding crop varieties were introduced which can yield big only with the in-puts of high quantity chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These varieties introduced at the behest of American monopoly capitalist organisations such as Ford Foundation, covered almost all types of crops.

Green Revolution strategy made peasantry the purchasers of high-yielding seed varieties and thus created market for the agro-industry of imperialist countries. Com. TN. has described the Green Revolution strategy as follows:

“Therefore, it is clear that the imperialist policy of improving agricultural production in under-developed countries, is only to develop a profitable demand by the underdeveloped countries for obtaining additional goods necessary for agricultural development” (P. 144)

“Another result of this policy would be that, with the strengthening of landlordism in the countryside, the social tensions which have been growing between the haves and have-nots will intensify, creating bitter struggles between the landlords and the downtrodden agricultural labour and poor peasantry in all walks of life-economic and political” (P.145)

Just in the span of a decade the Green Revolution strategy fell into crisis. The crop yields got stagnated. Contrary to the expectations of government the rich farmers and the feudal landlords played no role in the venture of Green Revolution. It was the small farmers who increased the agricultural production with the support of subsidies offered by the government. But with the stagnation of crop yields the poor and middle-class farmers are mired in problems.

Under these circumstances the crisis in India economic and political system sharpened. People of India were beset with restlessness. A wave of Peoples movements cropped up demanding solutions to the problems faced by them. The Adivasi and Peasant revolts in Srikakulam and Naxalbari had shaken Indian political system.

This led to the second phase of reforms in the agricultural sector undertaken by the government. To divert the peasantry from the path of struggle the ruling classes spread the illusions with a series of land ceiling legislations. At the same time they unleashed brutal repression on people’s struggles. Also they ventured to water down the power of peoples unity inculcating divisive politics based on caste, religion and regionalism. As a result of the crisis borne out of the Green Revolution life became unbearable and the youth were in a state of desperation. We are aware that the Congress government diverted this into Khalistan movement in Punjab.

At this very juncture imperialism in order to get over its crisis formulated strategies to throw its burden on the third world countries. Its target was to see that imperialist finance capital got more and more penetration into the agricultural sector of those countries.

With this the World Bank came forward with its version of solution to the problems. It prepared a report to the effect that food grains produced in India with the help of subsidies provided by the government to the farmers are of high cost and that they are available in the international market at a lesser price. So, Indian farmers should give up their production and instead they better cultivate export oriented commercial crops. With the income gained, food grains may be imported at a lesser cost.

But the real reason for the crisis in the venture of Green Revolution is that much of the surplus produce goes into the purchase of agricultural in-puts (fertilizers, etc...) manufactured by imperialist industries and this finds its way to the imperialist countries, leaving no gain to the peasantry. By suppressing this fundamental reason and highlighting only the factor of low yields of crops, this version of interpretation has the strategical aim of latching Indian agricultural sector to the wheels of imperialist exploitation.

The Indian ruling classes by accepting the dictates of imperialists have begun to implement them. By propagating the lie that the subsidies offered to peasantry are an unbearable burden, they here began to cut to the lowest levels. The irrigation service charges, electricity charges and fertiliser prices have been raised. All this has gradually led the peasantry into the debt trap. That this has led three lakh peasants to suicidal end is a well-known fact. Through financial leverage they set out to remove peasants from their lands.

During this period technical know-how in agricultural practices rose up in imperialist countries. Especially the technical know-how regarding genetically improved varieties of crops, animals, and biofuels had made great progress. With this in hand imperialism drove forward to turn the agricultural sector of the third world countries as tail-end to its economic system. Besides capturing crores of acres of fertile land of the countries of African continent, and in countries like India by way of contract farming and corporate cultivation, it has tried to get the agricultural sector under its control. We have been enlightening the evolution and consequences of all this at appropriate junctures.

The question confronting here is whether these transformations have brought about a change in the feudal relations in the agrarian system?

1. Centralisation of land: There is not much of a change in the level of concentration of land between 1960s and 2010s. Even when the number of small and marginal farmers increased, they together hold only 30% of land either now or then. Less than 5% of those who hold more than 25 acres hold 30% of land in their hands.

2. Even though centralization of land is continuing and has brought in capitalist relations to some extent, they are in constant stagnation. Mechanisation of agriculture, institutional loan lending, utilization of modern technology, cold storages - all these cannot take a step forward without governmental support. All the recent governmental steps offering financial support to utilize the above indicates the crisis in the just said capitalist relations.

3. In the conditions of increasing landlessness, depressed state of poor peasantry, increase in the number of agricultural labourers and lack of alternative employment in the population of agricultural dependency leads to the enhancement of the fundamental cause of exploitation, namely, extra economic coercion.

In this coercion we find increase in the number of tenant farmers and enhanced rates of lease. These tenants are not capitalist tenants. These lease rates are governed by capitalist economic principles. It is well known that capitalism does not hesitate to utilise pre-capitalist modes of exploitation. An example of this is the exploitation of Mexican migrant labour in the grape gardens of America.

4. What are the reasons for the stagnation of capitalist relations in Indian agricultural sector? The reason is that while the major part of wealth created through labour in agriculture is whisked away by imperialism, large part of the remaining wealth is gulped by big business. This appears clear in the case of commercial crops. As a result agricultural sector is deprived of any surplus. As such capital investment fund remains unavailable for the expansion of capitalist relations in agricultural sector. That is why the demand for the increase in investment by the government in agricultural sector is coming to the fore again and again. With the intention of encouraging capitalist relations government has undertaken the flow of bureaucratic capital into the making of cold storages, market yards and institutional lending.

5. Just as it is keeping the capitalist relations in the industrial sector in its control and allowing them to grow only to the extent they serve its interests of exploitation, imperialism is also bent on regulating the extent of capitalist relations in the agricultural sector. We can gain an understanding of this if we critically analyse the suggestions of World Bank regarding the so-called reforms in agriculture.

Finally,

When we define a society as semi-feudal it means that in that society feudal relations and capitalist relations are cohabiting. Those capitalist relations should naturally grow and reach a level to abolish feudal relations. But imperialism, comprador bourgeoisie are playing a role to arrest this process. As a result capitalist relations are steeped in crisis. They have not grown to the level of abolishing feudal relations. They have no independent future.

Today we are witnessing the harmful effects of this slow and gradual social evolution.

Concentration of lands in the hands of a few; land grab by the native and foreign bourgeoisie with the collusion of the state; the growing landlessness among rural population; peasantry in debt-trap; unemployment of agricultural labour; the ongoing farmer suicides; the nominal employment schemes brought up to pacify the angry peasantry; oppressive measures by the state, these being labelled as upper caste attacks on lower castes, these are disease symptoms of gradual, slow social transformation. These disease symptoms which Com. T.N. had pointed out five decades ago are being witnessed by us today in more severe form.

As Lenin said, *"it implies the utmost preservation of bondage and the serfdom (remodelled on bourgeois lines), the least rapid development of the productive forces and the retarded development of capitalism; it implies infinitely greater misery and suffering, exploitation and oppression for the broad masses of the peasantry, and consequently also for the proletariat."* (Lenin, Page 243)

I conclude my paper with the words of com. TN once again :

"Therefore, no communist can support this kind of evolution of feudal landlordism. Our task is to firmly oppose it by supporting the fighting peasantry for the liquidation of feudal landlordism". (P. 414)

(Document Presented by Com. P. Jaswantha Rao in the Seminar on “Indian Revolution-Indian Communist Movement” in Vijayawada on 3rd and 4th of April, 2015)