



Indian agriculture in view of Postmodern Marxist literature

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Abstract

In Marxian literature, the predicament of the people belonging to the lower stratum of class hierarchy has always had greater priority. Considering peasant as a very important political entity, it opens up the question of the land relation to a specific type of mode of production as specified by Marx himself. Marxist literature traced mainly four tiers of agricultural hierarchy under capitalism-day labourers, small peasant, middle peasant, big landed estate owners. The socialist resolution is unambiguous about the transformation process of rural peasantry. The challenge was to protect the interest of the rural peasants as a future propertied peasant without compromising the principles of socialist programmes. To meet this challenge, socialists as well as many democratic countries like India introduced a theoretical preamble with reform proposals that sought to protect the small peasant's property from the destruction of capitalist mode of production. However, in Marxian discourse of land reforms-class has mostly been defined in terms of power and property; the notion of class processes were incorporated later on and presently the issues of non-class processes which may have conformity to the social, cultural, political as well as economic aspects, in the absence of which the entire class process will be jeopardized, have been introduced and discussed in the Postmodern Marxist literature. In the conjecture, we will exam how did India experienced a gradual transformation from exploitative class process towards non-exploitative (independent, communitic or communistic) class processes.

Key words: Marxian literature, Agriculture, Land reforms, Class process

I. Introduction:

The prolonged depression in agriculture economy of India was characterized by the severe exploitation of 'working class' by the higher class of the social echelon in the rural peasantry during British India. Even though, the political turmoil of the later 18th Century resulted in multi-dimensional and fragmented village communities, for the purpose of simplicity, this complex hierarchy of traditional land rights had been reduced into two broad divisions: primary zamindars that had immediate proprietary domination over the soil and the secondary zamindars that acted as bridge between petty landholders and British government. On the hand, there existed a large mass of landless agricultural labourers, tenant farmers, even temporary farmers. Thus, the man-land ratio was very high within the village community ultimately resulted in a combined structure having characteristics of both capitalism and feudalism often coined as "land-lord capitalism", "semi-feudalism." This complex fabric of agricultural peasantry and its impact on the agrarian relations drew the attention of various researchers, academicians and policy planners since dates back. It provided a great scope to analyze the class centric, exploited-exploiter version of agrarian relation in terms of Marxian discourse vis-à-vis Post Marxian literature.

After the Uruguay round, India entered in the new age of globalization, capitalization of agriculture and openness to all the sectors. With the advent of globalization, the earlier versions of class centric land redistributive measures were compromised to a great extent to provide larger room for technological inventions and innovations mainly of non-land inputs. This study seeks to throw light to simultaneously address both the land and non-land issues in the reform process. The critical question addressed, in this study, is to theoretically postulate Postmodern Marxian discourse to analyze the horizontal dimension of agrarian relation that emerged after the implementation of land reforms in India.

II. Methodology: The discussion of the study shall use extrinsic or contextualist approaches. The approach adopted here is analytical and interpretive. In this study, at the onset, we have critically analyzed the land redistributive programme in India in light of Marxian discourse. Thereafter, we have pointed out the emancipatory aspect of class and non-class processes embedded in the Postmodern Marxian literature. We have also identified the resemblance and divergence between both the approaches. Based on this typology, we have showcased the alightment of the notion of class in Marxian literature to the Postmodern Marxist methodology.

III. Literary review:

There is a general perception that before the arrival of British in India, there were no clear conceptions about Individual property. In this context, to quote Marx:

“In the Asiatic form (at least in the predominant form) the individual has no property, but only possession: the community is properly speaking the real proprietor- hence property only as communal property in land” (Marx, 1881).

Marx firmly pointed out that the Ancient Indian societies were based on possession on the common land (Habib, 1995). However, the feudal mode of production in the pre-colonial era received a blow with the introduction of Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. Introduced by Phillip Francis- eminent Physiocratic economist- in 1776, the concept of permanent settlement emerged as a major land revenue system by modifying the feudal lords into “*free agents of agri-capitalism*” (Chakraborty Spivak, 1999, as quoted in Talukdar, 2006). Guha (1983) revealed, “.....*Permanent Settlement shed all its earlier ambiguities and within fifteen years emerged as a clear definition of capitalist aims in agriculture*”. All of these experiments were distinctly different from each other and resulted ‘chaos and disorder’ in land relations. As Marx rightly put it, “*In Bengal, they created a caricature of English landed property on a large scale; in South Eastern India, a caricature of small allotment property; in the North-West, they transform the Indian communes with common ownership of soil into a caricature of itself*” (source: Capital, Volume-III). This skewed pattern of land experiments had a far reaching impact on the agro economic scenario of rural India. In contrary to the popular believe of the existence of a simple self-sufficient village economy in the pre-colonial India¹, it has been observed that the rural population was divided into numerous ‘social classes’ in terms of income and wealth one gains. The highest class of the social echelon was comprised of zamindars, mahajans and grain-traders. It was followed by the class of rich peasants and subsequently by the class of the mass of rural farmers. Next, comes the class of poor peasants who were dependent on money lenders or mahajans for the sake of purchasing agricultural inputs. The bottom tier of this hierarchy comprised of landless agricultural labourers who mostly belonged to the lower castes of the society (Habib, 1985). Habib’s observation on the ‘social class’ in the context of Mughal period evoked the idea of Lenin and Mao on the classification of social classes. Lenin and Mao observed five classes in the agriculture sectors of Russia and China respectively. Both of them detected the following classes: a) Landlords, b) Rich peasants, c) Middle peasants, d) Poor peasants and e) Agricultural labourers.

The categorization of five classes, mentioned above, is followed by Patnaik (1987, 1999)², who also noticed that the existence of five classes in Indian agriculture although she worked on different time horizon. Patnaik (1990) used the concept of leasing out and leasing in of land (tenancy) for differentiation between six classes of peasantry.

The classification of class as prescribed by Patnaik is presented in the form of the following charts:

Suppose ‘a’ denotes labour hiring and ‘b’ denotes rent.

Chart 1: Classification of class for landlord

Social class	Landlord	
Sub class	Capitalist landlord (a>b)	Feudal landlord (a≤b)

Chart 2: Classification of class for Rich Peasant

Social class	Rich Peasant	
Sub class	Proto Bourgeois (a>b)	Proto Feudal (a≤b)

Chart 3: Classification of class for Poor Peasant

Social class	Poor peasant	
Sub class	Agricultural labourer (a > b)	Petty tenant (a ≤ b)

It is worth mentioning that in the present context, Patnaik emphasized on the “*most important single aspect of the concept of social class*”, which she calls the ‘labour exploitation criterion’ of social class relations. Bhaduri (1983), in contrary to Patnaik’s idea of social class, considered moneylenders and merchants as a separate class. He took ‘ownership of the means of production’ as an indicator to differentiate between classes. Rudra’s (1988) ‘received theory of class’ contradicted the “Eurocentric” version of ‘class’ given by Patnaik, Bhaduri and others. Rudra (1985) pointed out that the definition provided by Lenin related the notion of class to the economic power that a person enjoys.

In all the above observations, the concept of class relates to either power or property an individual in a society holds and since the power position, in most cases depends on the property positions, the concept of class reduces to the property relations ultimately. The above theories specified class as a group of people having homogeneous class interests originating from power and property relations like land ownership, control on productive resources (Chakrabarti, Cullenberg and Dhar 2009). Thus, the approaches propounded by Patnaik, Bhaduri and Rudra reflect a tendency of reductionism in class analysis to some other ‘chosen entry point concepts’. This view of class is negated by the Post-modern Marxist literature as proposed by Ruccio and Simon (1986), Resnick and Wolff (1987), Gibson-Graham (1996), Gibson-Graham-Ruccio (2001), Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003). One of articles identified the queries regarding protests in view of global economic crisis and outlined the typology of the divergence in responses between Marxian analysis vis-à-vis Postmodern Marxist outlooks. Thus, the latter view proposes a departure from class to class process (Flic and Ram, 2014).

IV. From Marx towards Postmodern Marxian discourse:

The concept of class is multifaceted- generally the idea of class to which most of the common people are concerned is defined either in terms of property or in terms of power. Here we intend to intervene into this traditional notion of class by means of re-establishing the importance of one particular aspect related to the concept of class: the surplus labour theory of class. There are controversies relating to the definition of class. The three distinct notions of class-quo property, power and/or surplus labour are irreducibly different from each other. This means that persons with property may or may not have enough social and political power to enjoy. By contrast, persons having state power need not require having ownership of property. Similarly, to be property less need not

require a person to sell labour power. Class, defined in terms of surplus labour has a close relation to Marxian philosophy. Marx criticized the concept of class in terms of power and property on the ground that it inadequately addressed the strategies for social change by missing out the surplus labour process to alight at the socialist or communist society. So in this analysis of class, we will emphasize on the definition, in which class is defined in terms of surplus labour- the entry point of Marxian analysis. Therefore,

“classes can be defined as groups of people who share the common social position of performing surplus labour or of appropriating it from the performers or of obtaining distributed shares of surplus from the appropriators” (Resnick and Wolff,1987).

We consider the concept of class not to be a noun defined distinctly and reducibly in terms of either property or power or surplus labour, rather we adjectify class as a joint process of performing, appropriating and distributing as well as receiving the fruits of surplus labour. However, in the orthodox Marxian theory-named as historical materialism, class is understood as ‘noun’ as representative of a homogeneous group of people. Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), we contest this ‘noun’ version of class.

There is also even more subtle view of class in the Marxian discourse and we are particularly interested in that kind of reductionism given in the Marxian theory for analyzing our literature. The conceptualization of class in more complex dimension may be considered as a composite entity composed of economic, political, cultural and so many other constituents. In this way, we intend to depart from a reductionist concept of class to an alternative and non-reductionist concept of class, i.e., we will not consider class to be merely a process of producing and distributing surplus labour. We also understand class to be neither reduced to an effect of non-class processes of society nor non-class processes to be reducible to the effects of class defined in terms of surplus labour. Let us explain our views more intuitively.

By the word class we, simply, mean a particular economic process of performance, appropriation, distribution and receipt of surplus labour. There are a group of people who directly produced goods and services- they are labeled as direct producers in the Marxian philosophy. Direct producers consume a part of what they produce, which is considered as the (fruits of) necessary labour. Again, direct producers also perform labour over and above the necessary labour, which is called the ‘surplus labour’. Here, question arises who perform this surplus labour, who appropriate the fruits of it, and who are responsible for the distribution of the fruits of this surplus labour within the society. The persons who appropriate the fruits of surplus labour also distribute it but persons who perform surplus labour may well be different from the persons who appropriate the fruits of it. Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), the class process relating the performance and appropriation of surplus labour is known as the Fundamental Class Process (FCP): while the class process pertaining and receipts of (fruits of) surplus labour are known as the Subsumed to the distribution Class Process (SCP).

Now in this juncture an issue may be raised of why does the direct producers perform surplus labour over and above the necessary labour- their minimum subsistence requirement? The reason is that there are many non-class processes which are engaged with this class processes and in the absence of which the entire class processes will be jeopardized. And that is why; the appropriators have to distribute the surplus labour (or value of it) to the persons who are associated with these non-class processes.

In the class focused Marxist theory of development, the concept of class has been given decentred and disaggregated dimension which is defined as process of performance, appropriation, distribution, and receipt of surplus labour. This class mapping has important implications, as it takes into account the over-determined relation between performance and appropriation of surplus labour (epitomized by Fundamental Class Process-FCP) and distribution and receipt of surplus labour (proposed as Subsumed Class Process- SCP). This theory is envisaged in terms of FCP categorizing varying modes of class exploitations, namely: 1) Exploitative, 2) Self-exploitative and 3) Non-exploitative. A class is said to be exploitative if the direct producers are excluded from appropriating the surplus labour they perform. For self-exploitative class process the direct producer himself appropriates his own surplus labour. In the non-exploitative class processes the surplus labour performed by a person or group of persons is also appropriated by the same person or by the same group of persons. Now, we will examine whether

class-focused Marxist theory is compatible with the dual role of development: End of exploitation and provision of fair distribution. Then, obviously the question which comes first to our mind is: which FCP(s) are desirable i.e. progressive from Marxian standpoint? This can be judged in view of two principles-1) Principle of Exclusion, 2) Principle of Sharing.

Take the examples of self-exploitative and communitic class structures. The self-exploitative classes conform to the principle of exclusion but they do not satisfy the criterion of principle of sharing. On the contrary, communitic class process is not consistent with the principle of exclusion, while it is acceptable from the point of view of principle of sharing. So, a complex combination of the principle of exclusion and principle of sharing could be judged as desirable class process.

Let us now come to the over-determined relation epitomized by the Fundamental Class Processes as performance and appropriation of surplus labour in class focused Postmodern Marxist literature. Following Chaudhury and Chakrabarti (2000), the over-determined relation as can be found in the literature of Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003) can be viewed and judged in terms of FCPs in the following matrix.

Table 1: Over deterministic relations amongst the class processes

Appropriation of Surplus Labour			
Production of Surplus Labour	Direct labour(A)	Non labour(B)	Collective labour(C)
	AA (Self Exploitative)	AB (Class exploitative)	AC (Communitic)
	CA ¹ , CA ²	CB (Class exploitative)	CC (Communitic)

Source: Chakrabarti and Cullenberg (2003)

There is significant conceptual difference between two sub class processes, namely CA¹, CA². Consider CA¹, which is referred as Fractured communitic class process, in which performance of surplus labour is based on the principle of sharing while individuals appropriate only their own surplus labour but not the surplus labour of others. Thus, CA¹ is not an exploitative class process. By contrast, CA² is an exploitative class process in which appropriation of surplus labour is not based on sharing. Here the appropriator of surplus labour is also a performer of surplus labour and appropriates all surplus labour of not only of his own but also of others. AB and CB are the class processes in neither of which appropriation of surplus labour is based on sharing. For AB, performance of surplus labour is standing on the principle of exclusion while for CB class process, performance is based on sharing. Since, performers and appropriators of surplus labour are not the same group of people for AB and CB class processes, so they are said to be exploitative class processes. AA is a self-exploitative class process since for AA, performance and appropriation of surplus labour is exercised by a particular entity. Hence, AA is not class exploitative. Now let us discuss two most important class processes, namely AC and CC. For both AC and CC, appropriation of surplus labour is based on sharing, which is why, neither of them is class exploitative. The only difference between AC and CC is that the performance of surplus labour is done at individual level for AC, while it is done at community level for CC. Here, AC is called communitic class process, while CC is referred to as communistic class process.

By the principle of exclusion, AA, CC and AC qualify as the 'Just Class Process' or the 'Progressive FCPs'. However, by the principle of sharing, CC and AC qualify as the 'Just Class Process', but AA cannot be treated as the 'Just Class Process' as it fails to qualify the test of sharing.

Thus, what is noteworthy is that AA is accepted as progressive FCP from the point of view of its non-exclusion criterion, while simultaneously it is treated as regressive FCP as it does not share its surplus labour amongst the community as a whole. Hence, there is no one to one correspondence between non-exclusion and sharing. Thus, CC and AC can be identified as class processes having been based on the criteria of non-exclusion and sharing of surplus labour.

Thus, in this class-focused analysis we find different class processes having varying degrees of exploitations. There are self-exploitative, class exploitative, communitic and communistic modes of class processes in this literature. This categorization of exploitation exhibits a disaggregated existence of the social totality in term of FCPs. Transition of class process may take place not only between classes but also within a class in a particular direction. In our kind of non-essentialist and anti-historicist over-determinist methodology, this transition of class process, which eventually leads to development of the society, is referred to as “*Development as progress*”.

In order to capture the disaggregated and multifaceted class nature of the society, here we use the idea of class sets, which is involved with the class processes of the society concerned. For the purpose of having the complete view of these class sets and their relation with various class processes, we have followed the technique of class mapping by Thakur (2006)¹⁴. We identify class sets in terms of performance and appropriation of surplus labour and relate it to a) and b) in such a way that it would deliver the idea of different class processes in an unambiguous manner. One point is to be kept in mind that these class sets could not give the entire view of class processes since it is only related to FCP which includes the forms of output distribution and workers remuneration but it excludes the wing of SCP. This ‘class taxonomy’ can be viewed with the help of the following table:

Table 2: Class taxonomy as specified in Postmodern Marxist literature

Number	Performance	Appropriation	Distribution	Worker's remuneration
1	A	A	COM	WAGE
2	A	A	NON-COM	WAGE
3	A	A	COM	NON-WAGE
4	A	A	NON-COM	NON-WAGE
5	A	B	COM	WAGE
6	A	B	NON-COM	WAGE
7	A	B	COM	NON-WAGE
8	A	B	NON-COM	NON-WAGE
9	C	A	COM	WAGE
10	C	A	NON-COM	WAGE
11	C	A	COM	NON-WAGE
12	C	A	NON-COM	NON-WAGE
13	A	C	COM	WAGE
14	A	C	NON-COM	WAGE
15	A	C	COM	NON-WAGE
16	A	C	NON-COM	NON-WAGE
17	C	B	COM	WAGE
18	C	B	NON-COM	WAGE
19	C	B	COM	NON-WAGE
20	C	B	NON-COM	NON-WAGE
21	C	C	COM	WAGE
22	C	C	NON-COM	WAGE
23	C	C	COM	NON-WAGE
24	C	C	NON-COM	NON-WAGE

Notes: A=all, B=none, C=shared.

Source: Thakur (2006).

The varying forms of feudal enterprise described by the class sets (7, 8) found in larger extent in agriculture in India. Agricultural activities in Indian subcontinent are mostly done on the family basis. These activities could be exerted either by the family of raiyats who cultivate lands of their own, or /and by the family of Bargadars and/or by the family of agricultural labourers. However, no matter by whom this agricultural operations are exercised, the performers of these activities, that is, the family labourers -the wife, the children and others are excluded from appropriating the surplus labour or the value of it. The surplus labour may be solely appropriated by the head of the family, while the family labourers are paid off with non-wage remuneration as they originally belong to the family concerned. So the family labourers in that sense are the victims of class exploitation.

Private capitalist enterprises resembling class sets (5,17) are also seen in agriculture of India. This again is where the scope of class exploitation comes. Consider the situation where agricultural labourers are engaged in cultivation which might be combinations of cash and kind with the owner of the land. This sort of agricultural

activities where mainly the wage paid labourers are engaged are very much class exploitative in character. This problem with private capitalist structure of class sets become even more serious when we consider the age/and sex dimensions of the subsumed class payments to these agricultural labourers.

What we intend to say in this context is that generally women and children in agriculture are engaged in less remunerative activities, even in case where men and women perform jointly the operation. So this is another problem involved with the distribution of remuneration (necessary labour) to those who are involved in class processes to guarantee the conditions for existence of FCP. This sex-gender and age division of remuneration yields higher surplus labour to be appropriated by the capitalist non-producer.

Finally, we consider the case of class sets (21-24), which resembles good verities of communist enterprises. We presume all these class sets to be a good manifesto of what we all identify as the ‘cooperative’.

There is another kind of class sets (1-4) resembling varying aspects of self/ancient enterprises. Since, in this sort of class sets the performers and appropriators of surplus labour belong to the same group(s) of people, so there is no possibility of class exploitation.

V. Conclusion:

Thus, Postmodern Marxian discourse of class focused analysis is directed towards the disaggregated, decentred and uneven nature of social sub totalities; transition of a society must not be assumed as transition of one particular social totality (say feudalism) to another (say capitalism or socialism), caused by macro shifts in the modes of production. In this kind of Marxist literature, transition itself becomes reciprocal flow of various decentred social relationships. Thus, the idea of transition of social totality is being put in a space where the social relations amidst the class processes and between different class and non-class processes are the causes and effects of each other. These causes and effects are built into the society and lead to change the dynamics of society as a whole. These flows of effects from the micro to macro levels of class processes caused by the reciprocity in the social relations which could be referred as ‘over-determined’ relations between social sub totalities leads the society from a transition toward the desired goal of development.

Each class process in whatever form, say self-exploitative, class exploitative or non-exploitative has closed liaison with other class processes having contradictory qualities and influences. So, change in one class process must have contradictory effects on the class process with which it is constituted, resulting changing in the characteristics of the original class process and in the associated class processes as well, which follow from it. This over-deterministic and contradictory relations within a class process and between class processes lead to transform the qualities and characteristics of the entire societal relations between classes, thereby causing transition of the sub totality towards development of the economy as a whole.

NOTES:

1. Before the advent of the British, an outstanding feature of the Indian economy was “*the self-subsisting and self-perpetuating*” character of its villages....*Each farmer carried on cultivation of his farm with the help of his own family members. In such a society, there was little room for the existence of an independent and distinct class of landless labourers.Munro reported in 1842 that “there were no landless peasants in India” while a decade later George Campbell found that “as a rule, farming was not carried on hired labour”* (as quoted in Kaushal, 1991, pp-117).

2. Patnaik used Lenin and Mao’s idea of class to posit five classes in the context of Indian agriculture. They are- a) Landlords, b) Rich peasants, c) Middle peasants, d) Poor peasants and e) Agricultural labourers.

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