

'Peasant in Marxism'

WITH STATE GOVERNMENTS, irrespective of their left or right tag, forcibly acquiring agricultural land on a massive scale for industrial uses and notorious SEZs and peasants, mostly dalits, 'scheduled castes' and 'backward people' and in some cases poor people belonging to the minority community, resisting the heinous move by continually facing state repression, the peasant question as defined in marxist literatures, has returned with a difference. And it is nowhere so sensitive and sharp as in the three marxist ruled states. Against the backdrop of peasant agitation in different states Himanshu Roy's thought provoking book 'Peasant in Marxism' is relevant at this juncture for more than one reason. A critical review of peasant issue is urgently needed for those who still think 'peasant revolution' is the pivot of India's unfinished democratic revolution.

Marx was an activist thinker and had declared his intentions in no uncertain terms. As is well known, unlike "philosophers" he did not seek just to "interpret the world in various ways", but "to change it", eventually leading to the state of the egalitarian human emancipation, where every one does "according to capacity" and gets "according to needs". Marxism is thus a science to comprehend the objective social reality in the context of time and space and an ideology of revolution to smash the paradigm of domination and subjugation and replace it by the paradigm of freedom and equality. Marx's core concern was the critique of Capitalism, the last antagonistic system, which has "simplified the antagonism" by splitting the Society "into two great hostile camps, into two great classes facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat". Marx's view that with the advancement of capitalism, the peasantry would be expropriated and proletarianized is proving to be prophetic, now even in the developing countries like India. Nevertheless the composition of the forces of change depends upon the objective realities and class structure of a particular society and the position of contending classes. Incidentally the revolutions occurred in backward capitalist and non-capitalist countries and hence with the changed composition of revolutionary forces that enlisted the large participation of the peasantry and the rural proletariat. Therefore the Communist Parties of the post-revolutionary societies had to fulfil the twin tasks - the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist reconstruction. Critical changes in Marx's and Marxist views on peasantry need a fresh debate and assessment as the expropriation and proletarianization of peasantry in the developing countries like India by the forces of the corporate-led globalization, reminds the situation in England in the early days of the capitalist development. Roy's book analytically and meticulously documents the debate on the Peasant's question in the Marxist theory and praxis: from Marx and Engels, Lenin and Mao till the era of globalization, the latest phase of Finance Capitalism.

The debate on the peasant question began in 1840s after Marx arrived at an understanding about the historical role of peasantry and their place in the Schemata of proletarian revolution in the historical context of Western Europe.

Marxist theoreticians and revolutionary leaders were quite perplexed regarding the role of peasants—the majority of the population. Starting from Marx's the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* of 1844 *Communist Manifesto*, the *German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy* and Engels' article "The Communists and Karl Heinzen" till Engels' *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* written in 1894 a whole new range of debates on peasant question is necessary. This major Marxist work on peasant question—*Peasant in Marxism*, elucidates the revolutionary policy vis-a-

vis various groups—big, middle and small—of peasants and elaborates the idea of the alliance between working class and the working peasantry.

Without deviating from their formulation of incapability of the peasantry in taking revolutionary initiative due to their heterogeneity and isolationist existence, Marx and Engels both had started distinguishing between revolutionary and reactionary historical roles of peasantry. Applying the method of historical materialism Marx and Engels had envisaged the maturing of contradictions and the occurrence of proletarian revolutionary transformation in the advanced capitalist countries. But the revolutions occurred in Russia and China—backward capitalist and semi-capitalist societies respectively. The first two practitioners of the Marxist theory were faced with different situations than obtaining in the Western Europe in the 19th century. While Lenin included the peasant demands of land distribution as a revolutionary tactic owing to the numerical and political inadequacy of the industrial working class, Mao recognized the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry and worked out the policy of encircling the cities with the countryside. Ever since the peasant question remains a hot topic of debate among Marxist scholars and activists. ~~████████~~

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