

the capitalist development occurs depends on many historical and current circumstances.

The totally unorganised nature of the destitute labour force combined with a vast underemployed reserve army ensures that wages are barely enough for subsistence. The big landowner does not employ free wage labour for profit. He maximises the returns from destitute labour tied to agriculture and forced to accept bare subsistence wages. He may be distinguished from the rich peasant who also employ wage-labour by the fact that he and his family members do not perform any manual labour but merely manage and supervise. Such a group of dominant land holders has been in existence for decades.

From the study of the composition and growth of population of the district of West Dinajpur, it has been learnt that a large number of landless farm labourer class has emerged. Side by side, there arises a new entrepreneurial landowner class interested to invest in land for extraction of higher surplus value from agriculture. The marginal farmers due to lack of solvency, lease out or sell their lands to this entrepreneurial landowners performing large-scale-investment in land with improved technology. The improved technology includes the application of pumpsets, tractors, power-tillers, threshers, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides etc. Thus, this new class of landlords is able to extract higher rates of surplus values on their investment by exploiting wage-labourers. From the data collected from Primary and secondary sources for some areas of West Dinajpur, it has been observed that the new

agricultural strategy has been adopted by the new entrepreneurial class of landlords. This has resulted in additions to capital-stock in the farm sector.

As a result of the emergence of such capitalist class, productivity per acre has been shifted in favour of them. In terms of economic feasibility, relative cost and returns to investment, the new capitalist class is thus clearly placed in a far superior position in exploiting the benefits of the green revolution.

In the context of some areas of the West Dinajpur District, the inequality in the distribution of operational holdings has been shown by the use of Lorenz Curve of concentration.

Thus, we have seen that the increased costliness and credit-intensity of the new agricultural technology have driven many small and marginal farmers out of cultivation, particularly in the agriculturally advanced areas. As a result, land is gradually passing to a new class of large farmer-entrepreneur. Such concentration of operational holdings in the hands of a few entrepreneurial landlords has led to new class formation and class relations in the agricultural sector. In order to study the phenomena, it is essential to derive a proper definition of the term "class". "Classes" are defined by "class-contradictions".

CONCEPT OF CLASS :-

Not all the relations of production define classes. They define various social groups, but only some social groups are classes. It is the nature of contradictions that distinguish classes from

social groups and it is the points of contradiction that define the boundaries of classes.

The Marxist position is that economic classes are to be looked at in terms of the two related criteria: (i) Possession of the means of production and (ii) exploitation of labour

However, the following agrarian classes may be identified in an agrarian economy like that of West Dinajpur. The landless and near landless, who possess no or little means of production and are therefore mainly or wholly dependent on working for others; the landlords and capitalists, who concentrate sufficient means of production and live on employing others; those who possess just sufficient means of production to make a living with family labour, neither employing the labour of others nor working for others.

However, individuals with differential endowments of means of production will sort themselves out into five classes :-

- (i) $SE = 0$; $HI > 0$; $HO = 0$
- (ii) $SE = 0$; $HI > 0$; $HO = 0$
- (iii) $SE < 0$; $HI = 0$; $HO = 0$
- (iv) $SE > 0$; $HI = 0$; $HO > 0$
- (v) $SE = 0$; $HI = 0$; $HO > 0$

where SE represents self employment, HI represents hiring in other's labour power, and HO represents hiring oneself out in agriculture. How he relates to the buying and selling of labour power defines an individual's class position.

EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS :

In an agrarian economy like that of west Dinajpur district, category (i) above may be called capitalist landlord, category (ii) may be called a rich farmer, category (iii) may be called a family farmer, category (iv) may be called a poor peasant and category (v) may be called a landless labourer. The labour-hiring classes (i) and (ii) are exploiters and the labour selling classes (iv) and (v) are exploited. An individual is exploited if he works more than is socially necessary. On the other hand, an individual is exploiter if he works less than is socially necessary. However, Category III is called neither exploiter nor exploited class.

The following table shows the class distribution of agricultural households in the districts of rural North Bengal in 1972-73.

T A B L E

CLASS DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN THE DISTRICTS OF RURAL NORTH BENGAL (1972-73)

District	Percentage distribution of total agricultural households in agrarian classes		
	Capitalist landlords, rich farmers	Family farmers	Poor peasants, landless
West Dinajpur	16.0	42.0	34.8
Malda	17.8	35.2	40.6
Jalpaiguri	3.6	53.3	33.7
Coochbehar	14.3	49.4	32.8
Darjeeling	26.6	38.2	19.9

Source: Household level data from the NSS, employment and unemployment survey, 27th Round, 1972-73.

It is evident from the data presented above that in the case of West Dinajpur, 16% of the total agricultural households belong to the category of capitalist landlords/rich farmers. About 42% of the households belong to the category of family farmers for whom $SE > 0$, $HI = 0$ and $HO = 0$. That is, this category of peasantry is neither exploiter nor exploited. But the capitalist and the rich farmers are exploiters for whom $SE = 0$, $HI > 0$, $HO = 0$ and $SE > 0$, $HI > 0$, $HO = 0$ respectively. The percentage distribution of landless labourers/poor peasants in West Dinajpur is 34.8% which is higher than the other three districts.

Malda is the exception in this regard. However, the poor peasants and the landless labourers belong to the category of exploited class for whom $SE > 0$, $HI = 0$, $HO > 0$ and $SE = 0$, $HI = 0$, $HO > 0$ respectively.

Classes may also be defined as the associated set of relations within the production process. For the purpose of looking at the process of change over time, however, we need to bring in the way that the operation of commodity production and exchange affects the degree of differentiation within the peasantry. This depends upon the fact that different classes within the peasantry have different production objectives and are involved in market relations in qualitatively different ways.

For example, the poor peasant who rents in land in order to ensure a subsistence for himself through cultivation is in a

qualitatively very different position in the 'lease market' compared to the rich peasant who leases in land in addition to the substantial owned area he already possesses, not as a matter of necessity but merely to expand the scale of production with hired labour for profit.

The lower middle farmer, who takes a loan at a high interest just to meet his seed or necessary consumption cost and keep production going, has a qualitatively different kind of involvement in the market for loans compared to the capitalist who takes loan at low interest from a bank to buy farm-equipment.

A poor peasant who sells his output to a trader at a low price immediately after harvest in order to meet pressure of cash needs is involved in a qualitatively different way in the product market compared to the land-lord who holds on to stocks and sells directly to wholesalers or through a co-operative, at a high price for profit.

Further, given the existence of 'reserve army' of unemployed, the rural landless labourers, especially in the context of West Dinajpur, possess very little bargaining power. This phenomenon leads to exploitation by the rich farmers.

One extreme line of argument for treating the agrarian relations as Pre-capitalist is to treat most of the agricultural labourers as 'bonded'. As 'bonded' labour is legally non-existent, we may talk of 'debt-bondage'. Surely, there is such a phenomenon as some labourers being attached to certain employer-families over

years. Such a debt-bondage emerges from acute poverty, unemployment and under-employment. A typical example of non-free labour market in the context of west Dinajpur district is the way different kinds of labour, different in the social background of the labour in terms of caste, tribe, sex etc., are prevented from entering the labour markets for different kinds of operations and for different seasons. Thus, certain higher castes would not touch the plough, however beyond their means it may be to hire labourers. Women members of the family would be confined to various kinds of non-field operations or allowed to work only on certain specified operations. Certain specific types of operations would be reserved for family labour from certain tribes or for immigrant labourers. These examples of division of labour, not based on any specialisation but based on customs, taboos etc., are non-economic coercive factors.

Many of the examples cited by those who talk about the lack of freedom in the labour market appear to us to be the examples of economic coercion which may well take place in capitalist or any other relations of production.

While these different occupation holders do not have any contradictions among themselves, all of them together have serious contradictions of interests with the vast majority of the agricultural population, which is subject to exploitation by these people, in the sense that, the surplus value generated by that section of the population gets appropriated by these people through the channels of wage-labour employment, tenancy, usury and trade.

It is true that the class of big landowners constitutes the ruling class in agriculture. This class includes members—farmers cultivating land with hired labourers, farmers leasing out whole or part of their land to tenants, farmers who lease in land from owners to enlarge the size of their farming business, farmers participating in cultivation and those not participating, agricultural and professional money lenders, traders and people who combine two or more of these occupations in their activities. There is no other class of 'feudal landlords' or 'capitalist landlords' or 'rich farmers' outside and distinguishable from this one class.

Let us now turn to examine the classes that may be recognized in the rest of the agricultural population in the context of the district of West Dinajpur.

The social group of landless agricultural labourers, the poor peasants as possessors of tiny bits of land, whether owned or leased in, whose principal source of income is working as labourers for other farmers, pose some problems. A peculiar characteristic of the agrarian relations in the district is the fact that even many small farmers go in for the hiring of labourers to work on their tiny holdings and this is true even for many who themselves work as labourers for wages. As such, possession of marginal holdings plus working as labourers, do not between the define a homogeneous class under the existing conditions. Small farmers who hire labour would have contradictions with the labourers whom they hire.

Therefore, we suggest that landless agricultural labourers and landed labourers with the qualification that they do not hire other labourers to any considerable extent may be treated as belonging to the same class ; but farmers who hire other labourers on their farms to a considerable extent, however small, have to be excluded from this class.

It is important to note that a large section of small landholders indulge in cultivating with the help of hired labourers because of various considerations including caste, taboos and other " feudal " values. Such small land-owners cannot be treated as rich or poor peasants. They are so poor that they cannot be treated together with big land-holders. On the other hand, they are exploiters of other's labour power and therefore, they cannot be treated together with those whose principal source of income is their own labour power. We suggest that they should be treated as not belonging to any class whatsoever.

A standard class concept is that of the so-called middle farmers. This class is defined as those who neither hire out their labour nor hire in any outside labour. That means, they are neither exploiters of labour nor owners of exploited labour.

Thus, if a farmer hires out more of family labour than hires in outside-labour, he is defined as a net seller of labour power. On the other hand, if a farmer hires out less of family labour than hires in outside labour, he is defined as a net buyer of labour power.

It is true that in the context of the district of West Dinajpur we can distinguish between only two classes : a class of big land owners who hire other labourers and a class of agricultural labourers including landless labourers, landed labourers and poor tenants who do not hire other labourers. There are members of the working population who do not belong to these two classes. In our view, they do not constitute or belong to the two classes.

However, from the study of the individual class position and various relations associated in the agrarian sector of the economy, it can be concluded that development of the forces of production may give rise to the contradictions between the various classes.

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