

Peasantry, Capitalism and State

Peasantry, Capitalism and State:
The Political Economy of Agrarian Societies

By

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To the memory of my father
And to my mother
For all their sacrifices to get me educated

‘Every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilizations’.

—Antonio Gramsci

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PREFACE

A discussion of the process of proletarianisation/depeasantisation that follows in the subsequent pages presupposes a question to be answered at the outset. The question concerns the attitude, theoretical and political, towards the process. That is, should the historical process and its supposed inevitability be seen as a progressive forward movement of societies, social formations, or is the process to be theoretically lamentable upon considering the severe human costs involved and, therefore, to be resisted as well?

Often invoked in this context is the argument made by Engels in his 'The Conditions of Working-class in England' that the process of proletarianisation is liberative and that it is the "bourgeois radicals" essentially, who perceive the process as lamentable.

Here what appears important is the context of Engels' text: 19th Century English feudalism is defined as serfdom, wherein the peasantry is tied to the landlord's demesne, without the right to even physical mobility; while they also own a patch of land. In this context "depeasantisation" is understandably liberative.

However, in the Third World context in general, and India in particular, the serfdom on European lines is difficult to find (barring the increasingly waning practice of bonded labour), along with its land-tied peasantry. Hence, concern is with the large independent self-cultivating peasantry. On the other hand, the process of the growth of towns, merchandise and industry does not occur in a line of succession characteristic of the European development, owing to its colonial backdrops and historical specificities. The variance in contexts also appears responsible for the often observed non-absorption of the peasantry, after the "proletarianisation" as industrial proletariat.

These very differences across the spatio-temporal and structural contexts also indicate that the processes of proletarianisation/ depeasantisation, when they are taking place, need not necessarily be 'liberative' in Engels' sense. And this also makes consideration of the process in non-Euro-centric terms possible.

The process of the 'agrarian question' therefore, is inevitably plural in nature and, while retaining its specificities, pushes us into considering the point that the European model, or the English model, of transition is one

important variant of a possible variety of transitions which necessitate close empirical study and a considered generalization thereof; a point borne out by the diversities that characterise European history itself.

This apart, the problematic nature of 'depeasantisation' raises more important questions with regard to the progressive politics and strategies. If the process is only partial, as is argued in the following text, and peasantry persists, then it remains as a potential political force as well. However, whether or not it turns out to be an instant revolutionary force depends on a number of other factors, but it can be argued with a fair degree of certitude that the peasant persistence in general creates a powerful social base for different political ideological forces to rely upon.

In the following, the introduction (Chapter I) states the problem, the approach and the major related issues; Chapter II deals with the 'classical' notion of the formation of a working class out of the peasantry; Chapter III dwells on the more recent attempts at understanding class formation in terms of the 'articulation of modes of production' theory with reference to various case studies of the Third World; while Chapter IV presents a critique of some of the notions of hegemony and peasantry, followed by concluding remarks that draw various strands of analysis together, while pointing to some of the important deficiencies as well as certain possibilities in this field for further inquiry.

‘Scattered across the countryside one may observe certain wild animals, male and female, dark, livid and burnt by the sun, attached to the earth which they dig and turn over with invincible stubbornness. However, they have something like an articulated voice, and when they stand up, they reveal a human face. Indeed, they are human beings. Thanks to them, the other human beings need not sow, labour and harvest in order to live... ..That is why they ought not to lack the bread which they have sown’.

—La Bruyre¹

¹ La Bruyre, 1688; 292-93 in Hobsbawm, Eric “Peasants and Politics”, *Journal of Peasant Studies* (the) Vol. 1, No. 1, 1973).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is limited. It is to review the theories that explain the proletarianisation process that takes place as capitalism expands. Proletarianisation is always proletarianisation of a section of society. The major concern here is with the process in peasant societies; societies where peasants form a major part of the population. Although the terms 'proletarianisation' and 'depeasantisation' are, for the most part, used synonymously and interchangeably, a distinction between the two can be usefully made.

While we can define 'proletarianisation' as a process during which a section of the society loses its access to and control over the means of production and subsistence thereof, and becomes a 'proletariat'¹ where the only means of its reproduction is its labour power; we can define 'depeasantisation' more broadly as a process in which peasants become non-peasants. This is particularly so in the context of the transformation of socialist societies from agricultural to industrial, and the latter process is qualitatively different from the former, i.e. 'proletarianisation', during the development of capitalism and the social, economic and human costs of it are not repeated. This point needs to be qualified by the historical experience of the present socialist societies which are variegated.² What follows from this is that even the socialist transformation from agrarian to industrial societies can involve severe human costs.

Secondly, an attempt is also made to examine the theories of proletarianisation/depeasantisation critically, by way of placing them in the context of the experience of the Third World societies spanning the three vast continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, whose populations consist of large sections of peasantry. Their experience, both historical and contemporary, is of great importance. As colonies, they experienced proletarianisation through super-imposed capitalism and later, after their liberation from the colonial yoke, they continued to undergo the process through a variety of refined, inconspicuous, and often incomplete ways.³

The persistence of peasantry which, on its face, looks unproblematic becomes problematic when placed in the theoretical perspectives which

postulate its imminent disappearance as a structural necessity for the onward progress of either capitalism or socialism, or for the 'development process' in the Third World. Their continuity as peasant societies is mainly because of (1) the state of stagnation in the industrial sectors of their countries, (2) the "structural stasis"⁴ which does not often absorb the peasantry because of its capital-intensive nature, and finally, but most importantly, (3) the politics of the states, which in the absence of rapid structural changes (especially the development of industrial capitalism), and also as a result of the increasing political awareness among the peasantry, follow policies that simply aim at maintaining the status quo ante; that is to say, they cannot withstand rapid and conspicuous proletarianisation process.

Its economic importance apart, the persistence of peasantry is also of great socio-political and socio-cultural importance. But to argue that peasants survive and the life in these countries - in all its dimensions - is marked by their overwhelming presence and that it is not possible to have discourse on these societies simply by taking them for granted, is certainly not to mean that they should remain so with all their internal inequalities and backwardness. To argue that peasantry should remain as it is, i.e. their small scale, often use-value, subsistence or partially forced commercial production should be protected and that the values of their 'idyllic', 'communal', life with all their intricacies, should be left untouched, politically or intellectually, would be to take a position known as 'populism' or 'neo-populism'; a world view with its own philosophy and politics, assumptions and implications. The attempt in this book is to make the 'dissolution' of the peasantry a problematique, to take the peasantry as a crucial theoretical issue, and then to understand and explain the dynamics of the structural process in the context of relations between the state, peasantry, and the rural sector in general.

New Comparative Political Economy:⁵ Critically Considered

The approach followed with respect to the above discussed problem is, to a considerable extent, along the lines of what has come to be known as the 'New Comparative Political Economy' (NCPE from here on); the main features of it are:

- a) While taking inspiration from Marx, it takes Weber seriously;
- b) It takes the position that political class action simply cannot be read off from the economic class position. The former is seen as contingent on

- many factors;
- c) Considers the 'working class power approach' in which working class (here peasantry) is seen, not just as passive recipient of whatever befalls it, but rather as an active, politically conscious and organising force, thereby limiting, influencing or directing the policies of the powers that be; or at least fiercely resisting the latter, in many ways, in the event of the failure of all other attempts;
 - d) It views states as actors; the proponents of NCPE grant complete autonomy to the state organisation, (we, however, consider this critically);
 - e) What emerges as a corollary to the above view is a more 'interactive view' of the states and social forces which are in question. As the authors put it: 'The developmental consequences of conflicts and alliances within and among dominant classes have been a major focus of recent work'⁶;
 - f) Following Weber in certain respects means that the grounds proposed by the actors as rationale for their actions (e.g. peasant parties) need to be seen as having causal importance.

While the above are the broad features of NCPE, the critical distance maintained here from the approach is that firstly 'capital logic Marx' is not sidelined in the analysis. NCPE wants to replace 'capital logic Marx' with 'political analysis Marx'. We believe that the two are interlinked in that, while studying peasantry and the structural processes concerning it, 'capital logic Marx' is necessary. Though at the same time, politics cannot be simply deduced from it.

Secondly, the attempt is also to take Gramsci as seriously as NCPE does with respect to Weber. Although NCPE succeeds in 'bringing the state back in', it also underplays the socio-cultural sphere of 'civil society', which is here considered important, and which Gramsci also emphasises a great deal, particularly the relations of power, i.e. hegemony within the socio-cultural sphere. Peasant communities remain often localized and secluded, spreading over wide geographical areas and often quite remotely situated from the nerve centres of power and also from the cultural influence of the non-peasant, non-agricultural sections of the society; be it indigenous or metropolitan 'high' culture⁷. However, while this spatial distance enables them to retain a certain autonomy and identity of their own, the rapid spread of modern means of communications and culture industry affects this in so many ways. All this in turn has its own significant political implications.

As for the state, while the NCPE assigns full autonomy, we take it to be constrained or limited in terms of its autonomy by the socio-economic

structure; or class structure, to be precise. But nonetheless, the state actively intervenes, affecting the structural processes.

We are also sceptical here as to the international aspect of the NCPE. That is, regarding the NCPE's attempt to synthesize modernization and dependency approaches. While it is true that 'the ability of the Third world states to negotiate linkages with the north' is crucial, it is also true that they often do not have much choice (it is found to be increasingly difficult to negotiate away MNCs conducting mining in Southern Africa or agro-industries in Latin America).

The intervention of the 'state' has a special importance here, since proletarianisation is viewed as only one side of the coin known as 'agrarian transformation', the other being industrialization. Since states are more often interested in the latter, whether capitalist or socialist, proletarianisation or depeasantisation becomes an inevitable consequence and it is looked at as such. While the state-peasant relations in the context of the capitalist societies are mediated through structural processes, with the state intervention being relatively indirect, intervention of the state is more direct and unequivocal in the socialist states: collectivization of agriculture is often centrally planned, according to the logic of the larger framework of capital accumulation and then executed with the complete force at disposal. Soviet collectivization is a prominent example, and could compel as many sacrifices on the part of the peasantry-therewith social and economic costs, as in the case of the capitalist transformation, especially if there is a time constraint operating ruthlessly without leaving many options.

The critique of the process of transition to industrial society in terms of the costs to be borne by the society for the industrialization process is not entirely new, in the sense that critiques of the industrialization process both in the capitalist as well as socialist development contexts emerged as early responses. In the context of the capitalist industrialization process in Europe, the critiques came from as wide a range of sources as poets, novelists and political economists. In the context of the socialist industrialization process, on the other, especially in the Russian context, critiques were forwarded by a group of economists, statisticians and agronomists.

In respect of both contexts, the critiques have come to be known under the name of 'populism'. Further, 'Populism' as a school of thought appears to have come of age. Some writers such as Gavin Kitching even make a distinction between 'Populism' of the early stages and 'Populism' of more recent times⁸. The early theorists include political economists such as Sismondi and Proudhon in the European context, and Mikhailovsky, V.P.

Vorontsov, N. Danielson, Lavrov and others in the Russian context. Later 'Neo-Populist' theorists broadly include economists such as A.V. Chayanov, Michael Lipton and E.F. Schumacher. Gavin Kitching also includes organisations such as ILO (International Labour Organisation) and political leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Kitching also characterises, both Chinese and Tanzanian paths of development as 'populist'.

Here an emphasis of early 'populism' on the social costs of industrialisation developed into an essentially moral critique; however, it was also in turn criticized for being 'romantic' about the pre-industrial world. The later 'neo-populists' developed certain arguments besides providing economic grounds for the 'early romantic' critique. This time it became more sophisticated and informed, while the early 'populists' were busy theorising about the small peasantry or small scale commodity production in the face of the inevitable industrialisation, 'neo-populists' theorized *post factum*. They criticized the industrialisation processes as they have come to be over time.

Although going by the historical experience one can make out a more balanced case for industrialization⁹ (i.e. that which takes into account environmental and social costs and which is more decentralised and employment oriented, smaller in scale and geographically diffused e.g. China), it is the very possibility of industrialisation (labour absorbing industrialization) that is questioned here. When we take stock of most of these Third World industrialization processes, either the very process moves at a hackneyed pace or, even when it is rapid, it does not absorb available labour and create industrial employment for all.

Added to this is the chaos that results from the often unplanned urbanisation-industrialisation; while in the classical scheme, industrialization takes place along with urbanization, no-one with a little knowledge of the problems of Third World urbanization process would advocate it in an uncritical fashion. In such a context, cases made out for employment-oriented rural industrialisation processes cannot simply, or perhaps conveniently, be labelled as 'populist'. The contribution of 'populist' tradition in this respect or even otherwise, e.g. their views on education and its relation to society, needs to be taken seriously, while some of their views as stated above continue to be pertinent, needing reappraisal.

While Gavin Kitching argued that even a development model like the Chinese model of industrialization requires heavy industry as an economic pre-requisite, it is also necessary to note that Third World societies often develop capital intensive heavy industries, at whatever cost, without developing Chinese-model, small scale, rural employment-oriented industries; Kitching argues that the states are often interested in industrialization more

for military-strategic reasons than for employment-development reasons. This significant observation made by Gavin Kitching holds true in the case of the industrial history of most of the Third World.

The history of industrialization processes in the Third world only corroborates these observations. Industrialization here takes place not only under a large heavy industrial sector but also, and more importantly, it takes place by totally excluding large sections of the people, especially the peasantry, since most societies are agrarian. The typical population that is engaged in the industrial sector varies from 10 to 20 percent, while the rest remains in agriculture. For example UNIDO notes that the growth of industrial or manufacturing sectors in the Third World:

‘....did not necessarily affect, broadly the other economic sectors and particularly agriculture’¹⁰

and

‘....a deeply seated deformation of the socio economic structure and (reflected) the (individual) country’s inability to use its most valuable resource, i.e. the labour-force.’¹¹

What is questioned is ‘the suppressed historical alternative’, i.e. the transition to industrial capitalism on the classical lines. Studies emanating from LDCs often view the processes of industrial capitalist development as ‘distorted’, ‘dependent’, ‘perverse’, etc.

‘Perverse because, in its given institutional setting it is unlikely to lead to self-generating and self-sustaining development as was the case with classical industrial capitalism.’¹²

Studies in this area are categorical that

‘We need to recognize that it is logically impossible for LDCs to follow the path taken by industrial capitalist economies, that the experience of today’s LDCs is unique to them and can be understood fully only by taking a longer time period for analysis than is usual’.(13)

While these broadly form the sectoral contradictions, there are also contradictions internal to the sectors; especially the vexed question of development of capitalism within agriculture. It is certainly difficult to generalise across the LDCs in this regard, when even countries such as India exhibit ‘incredible diversity’. But a broad argument sought to be made based on the available evidence is that a strict polarization, i.e. concentration/proletarianisation processes are questionable, as is the very model of the euro-centric transition. In such a context where social relations of production do not conform to neatly laid out models, broadly

two types of peasant politics are identified: one struggling for a better share within the system; the other attempting to question its foundations and, if possible, overturn the system. It is argued that the struggle between them is for asserting hegemony, and that the struggle for hegemony is mediated through complex social, political, economic, cultural, and ideational structures.

*‘Men make their own history; but they do not make it just as they please.
Tradition of all the dead generations looms like a nightmare on the brain
of the living.’*

—Karl Marx

‘Capitalism is more revolutionary than socialism.’

—Bertolt Brecht

CHAPTER TWO

‘DEPEASANTISATION’: THE ORIGINS OF A CONCEPT

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the origin of the concept of ‘depeasantisation’ as it evolves in Marx’s writings and in the later Marxist theorists Lenin and Karl Kautsky. It appears from a close reading that some differences do exist between them. While for Marx, the critique of primary accumulation is part of his larger critique of the development and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, for the latter theorists, Lenin and Kautsky, it was a directly political question. That is, they not only analysed a process as they have understood it, but also held out against their immediate opponents.

Secondly, while Marx speaks of the process in the context of Britain, a country that represented the earliest capitalist development, Kautsky argues in respect of a relatively backward country of the period in West Europe, i.e. Germany; and Lenin in the context of substantial agrarian country where capitalism was only beginning to develop. These are the differences in the contexts of their analyses, while the contexts explain their emphasis. For Marx, the critique of the process of primitive accumulation was part of his ‘historical critique’, while for Lenin and Kautsky, it appears to be part of their ‘existential critique’¹. While Marx traces the process as to how industrial capitalism took root in Britain, Lenin and Kautsky deal with it with regard to their own countries.

Marx does not speak of ‘depeasantisation’ as the term occurs first in Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (DCR). Lenin’s contention is that peasants themselves use the term,

‘The peasants themselves very aptly and strikingly characterise this process with the term “depeasantising”. The process signifies the utter dissolution of the old patriarchal peasantry and the re-creation of *new types* of rural inhabitants’²

Lenin’s own term is differentiation; but he observes that the process is more than that:

‘The old peasantry is not only “differentiating,” is being completely dissolved. It is ceasing to exist, It is being ousted by absolutely new types of rural inhabitants - types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevail.’³

Therefore, it is clear that the term designates a process by which the small/middle peasants working on their family farm loses their means of production (i.e. basically land) following their incorporation into the market. The means of production are lost to the ‘agrarian bourgeoisie’ in a situation of increasing polarisation.

The question as to who is being dissolved is quite important. This presupposes a broad differentiation.

In Marxian analysis it is quite unclear. Marx uses ‘agricultural population’, ‘small peasant’, ‘peasant’ - all interchangeably and synonymously in Vol.I of Capital. However, in Vol. III it is clear when he makes his case against both large land-holding and small peasant’s land parcels. Here, small peasant appears as someone who works on her own parcel of land with her own family labour, while retaining a considerable autonomy from other social and political structures.

Lenin uses the terms ‘middle peasant’ and ‘small peasant’ at different places for designating the peasant-to-be-dissolved. However, this still sounds unclear, to say in strict terms. For the purpose of the present discussion we have considered two categories (a) those who neither employ labour nor sell labour (b) those who sell labour but do not employ labour; but with each of them owning some land. This criterion of labour exploitation can however be problematic if the qualitative nature of agricultural activity is considered. Often the activity of production even on small farms (owned say, by category (b)) involves labour hiring, if not for a wage, on *quid-pro-quo* basis. Thus a considerable part of productive activity involves not only family labour but also labour of others, e.g. for rice planting or for paddy or wheat harvesting. This is especially the case under circumstances where living labour predominates over objectified labour, i.e. non-mechanised agriculture, e.g. in most of today’s agricultural India.

However to say the above is not to deny their subordinate place in respect of socio-political structures. Teodor Shanin provides a definition of such categories of peasantry.

‘Small agricultural producers who, with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families produce mostly for their own consumption, direct or indirect/and for the fulfilment of the obligations to holders of political and economic power.’⁴

Another most important question that arises whenever we speak of 'depeasantisation' is: is the process purely economic? Is it only a loss of means of production, or does a peasant also lose her position in the 'status group'¹? For instance, will she be free of her caste identity, consciousness, and social ties with caste structures? This question is of great social and political importance.

According to the classical conception she is also simultaneously absorbed into a socialised labour process of industrial production, either within or outside agriculture, but specifically manufacture. This is a process which is preceded by the 'dissolution' of all earlier forms of community, the peasant remains individualized completely from 'the ensemble of social relations' of which she was a part.

It is, therefore, important to note that if the process is only economic, i.e. if the community ties hold strong even when the land is lost, then the process need not impart any 'intellectual edification' to them. This qualitative change could be conspicuously absent under circumstances where the reabsorption of the 'depeasantised' mass is not in the vicinity, or where such opportunities are simply dismal. In fact Antonio Gramsci notes this with a characteristic insight into their subjectivity, when he says in the Italian historical context:

'The agricultural labourers to this day are simply peasants without land(.....) and not the workers of an agricultural industry, developed through concentration of capital and the division of labour.(.....) Their psychology is, therefore, with all due expectations, the same as that of the farmer and the small holder.'⁵

Coming back to Marx, it may be said at the very outset that there is a certain paradox in his theory of 'depeasantisation'. It appears that the views of Marx as expressed in Vol. I of capital and those of Grundrisse on pre-capitalist Economic formations are governed by this underlying paradox.

The paradox is that while losing her means of production, a small peasant would become a wage labourer under circumstances where labour power by itself is a commodity, and at the same time, she also enters a higher mode of production; superiorly made both in terms of its relations and forces of production, i.e. those which are specific to industrial-capitalist mode of production.

In terms of social relations, she is 'freed': free from erstwhile bondages and being compelled to sell labour power. In terms of productive forces

she is now a part of the industrial production system. Besides, the 'liberated' peasantry now takes part in the socialised labour process in bright contrast to its erstwhile household-based, subsistence production activity and existence.

Although the new social relations deprive the peasant of her earlier autonomy; owning some means of production (land or some cattle and fowl). The new revolutionized productive forces and the objective conditions of labour created by them make the now-proletariat's cooperation, organisation and consequent class struggle possible. Further, the new mode of production creates conditions for the proletarianised peasants to come together, to know themselves, and for organising themselves into a social class; this involves, notably, transcending the earlier narrow community/caste/religious/tribal/ethnic/gender/sexuality-based loyalties and barriers. In other words, the process of proletarianisation or depeasantisation is also a process of crystallization of classes and their interests; a process of 'class-formation'. The process is as much political by implication as it is economic. It is a formation of 'universal class' that not only liberates itself but is also the only class that is capable of liberating all other classes in the society.

While the writings on primitive accumulation in Vol. I of Capital and its secrets tell us about the process of freeing of the peasant, i.e. the negative side of the paradox, the writings on 'cooperation' tell us about the positive side. Going by Marx, it appears that the 'depeasantisation' occurs at two temporally differentiated historical conjunctures (this could even be spatial) which need not necessarily be successive and which inevitably call into question the historical context and its specificity whenever one talks of concrete circumstances.

Firstly,

- (I) During the birth of capital: i.e., the process of transformation of money into capital - primitive accumulation.
- (II) Secondly, capital subsuming the small and middle peasantry, the latter's use-value in producing, 'subsistence-logic' economy, and capital has been born and established its preponderance over other branches of the economy and society and polity; we will see these two processes respectively.

(I) Primitive Accumulation

(a) The birth of wage labour for Marx is not a consequence of the development of capitalist relation, it is a necessary presupposition. The process of the birth of wage-labour and capital is simultaneous, i.e. 'The

historical process is not the result of capital but its pre-requisite’⁶. According to Marx it is ‘absurd’ to think that capital at first will say ‘let there be workers’⁷ and only later subjugate them to accumulate. In fact, capital is a relation which has two sides.

(b) Capital exists historically in the form of money. Money-wealth becomes capital as it moves through circulation into the sphere of production. The significant fact, however, is that for Marx this process also sets apace the progress of productive forces. As he says,

‘The process which negated these relations and thereby transformed these individuals into free labourers is the same process which has liberated these objective conditions of labour.’⁸

(c) Thirdly the interesting part of Marx’s account is that manufacture grows along the same process, and we cannot miss how important the development of manufacture is in Marx’s portrayal of primitive accumulation. It is not only the crafts-man guilds of the city where the socialised labour process at first begins, but the rural origins of manufacture.

‘The original historical forms in which capital appears at first sporadically or locally, side by side with the old mode of production, but gradually bursting them asunder everywhere make up manufacture in the proper sense of the word.’⁹ (emphasis in the original)

and

...‘manufacture (at) first establishes itself not in the cities but in the countryside in villages etc... The rural subsidiary occupations contain the broad basis of manufacture.’¹⁰

When we put together these three cardinal aspects of the ‘pre-history of capital’, i.e. the creation of ‘objectiveless’, ‘plucked’ wage labour, along with the transformation of monied wealth into capital, the creation of new objective conditions by way of liberating the productive forces from the erstwhile stagnation and revolutionising them in accordance with the interests of capital, becomes clear. Finally, the growth of these revolutionised productive forces into a systematic, fully rationalised organisation of manufacture, though in the first instance not in the city, but in the countryside, absorbing labour along with this, we get a picture of the ‘textbook-model’ of primitive accumulation.

It is based on these altered conditions that the cooperation of workers becomes possible.

‘When the labourer cooperates systematically with others he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species’¹¹

and

‘As the number of cooperating labourers increases so too does their resistance to the domination of capital and the necessity of capital to overcome this.’¹²

In other words, for Marx, this process is the birth of a universal class, empirically without anything but chains loose, philosophically stating: ‘I am nothing; I want everything’.

II. Capital Subsuming Peasantry; Post Factum

The dissolution of small and middle peasantry - who form a pre-capitalist social organisation. This is in fact the process of dissolution of all pre-capitalist modes of production, through capital in terms of its intricate and fateful ‘articulation.’

Marx’s postulation of the annexation of agricultural population by capital is simple and linear. They are not only necessarily dissolved but also are necessary to be dissolved.

‘As soon as capitalist production is on its own legs it not only maintains this separation but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process therefore that clears the way for the capitalist system can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of its means of production’.¹³

The dissolution in this case takes place through the market and also because of the laws of concentration and centralisation that come to operate in agriculture as well. Here the changing nature of organic composition of capital, and the dynamics (of increasing constant capital and consequent creation of a ‘relative surplus population’) inherent to it are supposed to operate in much the same manner as they do in the industrial production process. The concentration of capital and its centralisation, with the help of banks and the credit system, are said to inevitably proceed towards polarization, i.e. large mechanised firms with the advantages of ‘economies of scale’ on the one side, and on the other, the property-less wage labour forming the agricultural reserve army; the process is inexorable. The peasants are not only proletarianised or ‘depeasantised’ but also are rendered redundant, as a variable capital

stock, as soon as mechanisation comes around. This, whether or not they are reabsorbed into manufacture, in view of Marx would be

‘ready, waiting....in towns.’¹⁴

Therefore, to sum up, in Marx there are these two processes:

- (1) The process of expropriation of peasantry during the origin of capital;
- (2) The process of later ‘articulation’ with the peasantry having become preponderant in other branches.

In both the cases, the peasantry is necessarily proletarianised. Nevertheless, Marx is quite cautious enough when he observes,

‘The history of this expropriation in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In England alone, which we take as our example, has it the classical form’.¹⁵

The response of later Marxists to this note of caution is mixed and varied, perhaps as much as the process itself, objectively.

Lenin

Lenin’s approach to the problem has to be seen in the context in which he writes. He speaks not only of the process but also against the ‘populists’. The attempt is as much to show that they are incorrect as to uphold his own views on the process, which are basically in consonance with Marx. For instance, Lenin says

‘Of course, infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible and only hopeless pedants could set about solving the peculiar and complex problems arising merely by quoting this or that opinion of Marx about a different historical epoch’.¹⁶

But at the same time, Lenin describes the process of development in rural Russia in pure-classical terms. The rural bourgeoisie represent the pure contradiction of the countryside. For Lenin, the ‘middle peasants’ too are losing out in the process.

‘We have seen that the peasant bourgeoisie oust not only the bottom group but also the middle group of the peasantry. Thus a process specifically characteristic of capitalist economy takes place, the middle members are

swept away and the extremes are reinforced- the process of 'depeasantising'.¹⁷

His argument runs against the Narodnik view that the peasantry is an undifferentiated monolith, a homogeneous entity without any internal division, and more significantly, that there is no social division of labour in the Russian rural society. Their argument, as Lenin presents, is that the process of 'generalised commodity production', the consequent process of concentration of capital, is not taking place among the peasantry.

Lenin basically argues that the spread of social division of labour in Russia is at a considerable pace; and that this is a salient characteristic of capitalism and also that this process in agriculture leads to the growth of the domestic market. Lenin's observation is that the concentration and polarisation processes that take place because of 'depeasantisation' certainly expand the home market for the industry. The rationale underlying the argument is that the agrarian bourgeoisie would step up its consumption - both productive and unproductive - in the light of its newly acquired capitalist status. That is to say, it would increase investment in fixed capital such as machinery etc., while at the same time stepping up its own consumption level.

On the other hand Lenin is completely confident of the reabsorption of the 'depeasantised' rural peasantry into the urban manufacturing sector. What follows from this is that the peasant is bound to become an industrial proletariat.

'Thus one cannot conceive of capitalism without an increase in the commercial and industrial population at the expense of the agricultural population, and everybody knows that this phenomenon is revealed in the most clear cut fashion in all capitalist countries'.¹⁸

While the social division of labour spreads a generalized commodity production process, its continued reproduction leads to the expropriation of the small peasant and middle peasant: thus the 'ousting' of peasants in turn spreads or creates domestic market, therefore, the spread of capitalism and the home market are strictly interlinked and cannot be seen as separate problems, as the Narodniks saw it. What we would like to underline here, however, is that the sanguinity with which Lenin speaks of the reabsorption of peasantry by manufactures, as he observes:

'A direct conclusion from the preceding proposition (i.e., the basic process of the formation of a home market is the differentiation social division of labour) is the law- process of governing all developing commodity and the more so capitalist economy - the industrial (i.e. non-agricultural) population