

AGRARIAN MOBILISATIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGE : GANDHIAN AND LEFT PERSPECTIVES

Partha Nath Mukherji

IN this paper I propose to examine agrarian mobilisations emanating from two different ideological persuasions, the Gandhian and the Left, the structural responses that made these possible, and the implications these mobilisations had for social change.

Analysis of agrarian mobilisations has been one of the serious preoccupations, particularly of Marxist analysis. What role the peasantry—or certain categories of it—is likely to play in the future establishment of a socialist state, by its support (or opposition) to the revolutionary proletariat, constitutes the subject matter of continuous debate and discussion.

There has been a considerable range of variation in the correlations between peasant status, corresponding set of class interests, and expected political behaviour patterns in contexts of conflict. Marx, from his well known French experience, found in them a basically conservative force and allowed them, quite skeptically, a possible subsidiary alliance role, in the event of a proletarian thrust towards a revolution (Dhanagare 1983 : 2). Lenin believed in accelerating the process of bourgeois—democratic revolution in the countryside, by sharpening and promoting the contradiction between the *kulaks* (the enterprising rural bourgeoisie) and the landlords, notwithstanding the fact that the *kulak* “was outside the feudal sector and was not directly involved in conflict with the landowners” (Alavi 1979 : 679).

Later, in a post-revolution summing up in 1917, Lenin was convinced that the support of the rural proletariat, the semi-proletarians and small peasants for the industrial proletarian vanguard became really effective “only *after* the latter won political power, only *after* it has resolutely dealt with big landowners and capitalists, only *after* the downtrodden people see in practice that they have an organised leader and champion, strong and firm enough to assist and lead them and show them their right path.” (684) It was Mao, who, for the first time, demonstrated that the peasantry (the poor peasants in particular) in a largely feudal society could act as an active revolutionary force in bringing about a socialist transformation.

Reappraisal of Role of Peasantry

With the revolutionary potential for socialist transformation continuing to be pervasive in the so-called post-colonial Third World countries, which are predominantly agrarian societies, the interests in the distribution of revolutionary potential *within* the peasantry has acquired increasing attention. This has led to the re-examination of the roles played by the poor (including the rural proletariat), the middle and the rich peasantry, for a better understanding of the agrarian changes taking place. Alavi contends that due to ideological obfuscations or imperatives the role of the middle peasant in the Russian and Chinese revolutions have not been correctly appraised. He attempts to demonstrate that the Russian middle peasant, inspite of being holders of substantial land allotments, which enabled him not to "depend totally on the landlord," nevertheless was bound by obligations to the landlord, which were an "insufferable burden". The poor peasant, in contrast, was too dependent on the landlord to risk opposition against him (677).

In the peasant revolts, that flared up between 1905-7 and again in 1917, it was the middle peasant who provided the main force in the struggle for "cut off lands" (676). Yet, curiously enough, Lenin "ignored the role of the middle peasant" and "overestimated the role of the rural bourgeoisie" (679). Likewise, Alavi contends, the middle peasant was a potent force in the Chinese revolution, but "Mao the 'theoretical Marxist' had a role which did not always coincide with that of Mao the 'practical Marxists'." Thus, Mao tailored the Hunan Report to the expectations of the Comintern orthodoxy and emphasized "repeatedly that both the leadership and the main force of the movement came from the poor peasantry" (690). Although Mao, according to Alavi, does not textualise it formally, in practice he and his comrades had grasped the true character of the middle peasant, which was not a revolutionary class but whose militancy could be utilised to arouse the poor peasants, who *then* could provide a sustained revolutionary leadership no longer contingent upon middle peasant initiatives. Citing from *tebhaga* and Telengana struggles¹, Alavi tries to fit in the middle peasant model. He finds enough empirical material to generalise that initially the middle peasant is very militant and can be a powerful ally of the proletarian movement, but they are given to vacillation when the movement approaches a revolutionary stage. Then they need their "fears to be allayed" or else they move away from the movement (715).

Character of the Middle Peasant

The middle peasant thesis finds a similar echo from Eric Wolf. The structural location of the middle peasant, "which has secure access to land of its own and cultivates

1. These are the two anti-feudal struggles, inspired by Marxist ideology, which I shall have occasion to discuss in some detail subsequently.

it with family labour", is strategically 'free' in relation to the landlord and the rich peasant, and at the same time extremely vulnerable to the fluctuations of the market which easily threaten to de-stabilise him. He is at once a repository of rural conservatism, and at the same time exposed to and is a direct participant in developing proletarianisation in the urban industrial areas. These and other factors make the middle peasant a rebellion-prone category. However, whilst rebellions can be spontaneously forthcoming from indigenous sources of leadership seeking quick redressal of wrongs, revolutionary behaviour of the peasants is unlikely to manifest itself without external leadership. The dependency of poor peasants and agricultural labourers, once again, inhibit them from taking the course of a rebellion "unless they are able to rely on some external power to challenge the power which constrains them" (Wolf 1973 : 290-94).

Entering the middle peasants debate a la Alavi, Pouchepadass argues that the middle peasant category is problematic. In turn, he takes Lenin, Engels, and Mao, and examines how each of them fill up the stratification between the rural proletariat and the rich peasant. Lenin does it by incorporating semi-proletarians, small peasants and middle peasants; Engels introduces small self-sufficient peasants and 'bigger peasants', but later, distinguishes between middle peasants and 'big peasants'; Mao refers to poor peasants, middle peasants with not enough land, middle peasants, well-to-do middle peasants. Pouchepadass concludes, that the class of middle peasants "lumps together a whole range of varying situations with regard to rights in land and relations of production" (1980 : 142-3). Illustrating from several empirical situations, he finds the middle peasant concept analytically inefficacious and considers "the dogmatic use of this category in a social context to which it is ill-adapted" as masking "the true social composition of the movement under study" (146).

Revolutionary Potential of Rural Proletariat

Joan Mencher considers the tie-up with interest in land per se as the discriminating variable, which decides whether the middle peasant or the class of landless labourers will provide the "pivotal groups for peasant uprisings". Contrary to Wolf's and Alavi's formulations, she finds the landless labourers, "unconstrained by possible ties to the land," as the main strikers and agitators in Tamil Nadu and Kerala (1982 : 1993).

Gail Omvedt's faith in the revolutionary potential of the rural proletariat remains undiminished, inspite of the fact that "class exploitation is compounded with caste and national oppression . . . which are difficult to identify as class conflicts" (1982 : 2063).

From the above discussion, however sketchy, it is not possible for us, at this stage unequivocally to arrive at any general proposition. The peasantry was not an active revolutionary force in Russia, but it seems to have been so in China. Whether

it was the poor peasant or the middle peasant or the *kulaks*, which provided the most active ingredient for mobilisation of rural anti-feudal discontent prior to and after the Russian revolution, remains a matter of controversy. Similar strains of argument permeate the Indian scene while examining the political behaviour of peasant classes. The issue is made more complex, but at the same time more realistic, by admitting the presence of non-class elements of structure and culture, such as caste, hierarchy and discrimination, which constitute important determinants of collective behaviour.

The above discussion merits a closer look at some of the important agrarian mobilisations that have taken place in the first half of the present century in India. I shall try to do so by examining, very briefly, the Champaran (1917) and Kheda (1918) *satyagrahas* initiated by Gandhi²; the *tebhaga* and Telengana movement under Marxist leadership around 1946-51; and the post-Gandhian sarvodaya movement and the Naxalbari peasant uprising.

Champaran (Bihar)

Although indigo was being cultivated indigenously earlier in Champaran, the English planters came on the scene in 1782. By 1850, the profitability of indigo rose to a point, where it replaced the sugar industry. At least four different agrarian arrangements involved the English planter in the cultivation of indigo: (1) capitalist farming with ownership of land or superior tenurial rights vesting in the factory, which got the cultivation of indigo done by hired labour under supervision of factory employees (*amlas*); this was known as *ziraat*; (2) the factory as proprietor or superior tenure holder leased out land to tenants on condition that they cultivate indigo in three *cattahs* per *bigha*³ of their leased lands; the factory would supervise cultivation and crop cutting; this system was known as *asamiwar* or *tinkathia*; (3) the factory entered into agreement with *ryots* who were not tenants of the Company (*khuski*); (4) the factory itself leased-in lands from its own *ryots* and cultivated indigo under its own supervision. The first two were the prevalent arrangements, of which the *tinkathia* system was the more pervasive form in practice.

The *ryots* under the *tinkathia* obligation, right from the beginning, resented the cultivation of indigo, not only because the cultivation process was repulsive, but also because of the compulsion to cultivate it at unremunerative rates and under oppressive and unwelcome supervision by the factory staff, who also forced illegal exactions out of the tenants (*dasturi*). In addition, non-legal customary extractions (*abwabs*) were also levied from the tenants in a manner similar to that of the Indian landlords.

2. *Satyagraha* is an essential part of Gandhian ideology, seeking to confront any social injustice by non-violent fearless action, based on truth and love. It proposes a purity of means and ends, and is the instrument, by which the desired goals can be achieved by the affected collectivity.
3. *Bigha* refers to a measure of land. Approximately two bighas make an acre in Bihar.

By 1867, the industry was threatened by the reluctance on the part of the *ryots* to cultivate indigo, who even went to the extent of forcible appropriation of indigo lands for sowing food crops. Official investigations into the grievances of the *ryots* led to an upward revision of rates paid to them from Rs 7-8-0 to Rs 12-0-0 per *bigha*.

Most of this unrest was generated within the Bettiah estate, which, due to gross mismanagement and profligacy of its feudal landlord family, accumulated enormous debts. To circumvent the crisis, the newly appointed English manager arranged to raise a sterling loan of Rs. 9,500,000, against which he awarded permanent and stable foothold to the British indigo planters in nearly half the district. This, in turn, gave them further scope to exploit the tenant on the *tinkathia* system.

Exploitative and Illegal Strategies

Between 1900 and 1913, the price of indigo made a nose dive from Rs. 232 per factory maund (about 37 kgs.) to Rs 130 per factory maund, on account of competition in the world market from the newly introduced German synthetic dye (1897). As an immediate consequence cultivation of indigo on *ziraat* lands was discontinued. In *asamiwar* lands the planters were no less keen to wriggle out of the *tinkathia* agreements binding on the tenant to produce indigo. The planters now insisted on replacing indigo with other crops within the same *tinkathia* framework! In the event the tenant wanted to 'free' himself from *tinkathia* obligations he could now do so, either (a) by paying *tawan* i.e. damages to the extent of Rs 100 per *bigha*, or, (b) by agreeing to *Sharahbeshi*—a new enhanced rent in lieu of indigo cultivation. Clearly the planters were trying to retrieve their indigo losses by employing this clever, exploitative, illegal stratagem.

By 1907-8, the tenants had become very restive. In view of the rising prices of foodgrains the paltry amount from *tinkathia* cultivation, at Rs 18 per *bigha*, led to great privations, whilst foodgrains cultivation implied an earning of Rs 200 per *bigha*. Violations of *tinkathia* sought to be repressed, even as peasant leaders, such as Sital Ray, Sheikh Gulab, Bhageswar Mahto, Jagan Lal, Dukhi Pandey, mounted representation after representation, appealing to the government to uphold the "principle of free trade" by which the British stood. When Sital Ray was arrested on 9th November 1908, 4000 *ryots* followed him up to Bettiah. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported the dire conditions of many of those who were arrested.⁴ Pouchepadass' detailed study of the Champaran satyagraha confirms this trend. He observes that, although the "driving force was made up of rich

4. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, reporting on 9th November 1908, as follows: "The agriculturists in those parts at the best of times lead a hand-to-mouth life. In these days of scarcity the day's earnings rarely suffice for the day's most pressing needs. But now that a large number of breadwinners have been shut up in *hajat* it can be imagined what untold privations their families must be undergoing". (*hajat* means prison).

and well-to-do peasants, usually belonging to high ranking castes . . . they carried along with them the remainder of the peasantry, including the agricultural labourers" (1980 : 138). It would, therefore, appear that the nature of exploitation affected all sections of the peasant adversely, the poor more than the rich.

Gandhi's intervention in 1917 has to be understood in its wider ramifications. Gandhi, the 'political man', was 'new' to the Indian situation, much more so with respect to Bihar and Champaran. In this sense, Champaran was to provide his initiation, not only into agitational politics, but also into agrarian complexities. Given this background, his quick grasp of the Champaran problem was indeed commendable. The large scale survey of 4000 *ryots*, with persons like Rajendra Prasad and Acharya Kripalani as his research assistants, in no small measure helped to force the issues with the British administration.⁵ J. A. Sweeny, the settlement officer conceded and supported Gandhi's main findings, on the basis of his own independent assessment (Raychoudhury (1955 : 92-5).

Terms of Settlement

The resolution of the Champaran problem took place in the following manner : (a) *tinkathia* was abolished; (b) those who had paid *tawan* were exempted from any rent enhancement for the next seven years; (c) exaction of *abwabs* by thikadars of the non-indigo concerns were described as illegal; (d) *sharahbeshi* rent was reduced but not withdrawn; and (e) recommendation was made for the wage rate of factory agricultural labour to be brought at par with the market rate.

From Champaran Gandhi started perfecting his model for a long drawn anti-imperialist struggle. For him, indirectly if not directly, the adversary in Champaran was British imperialism and its attendant system of exploitation and political subjugation, *not* the Englishman or the planter as such. Observed Jameson, the planter, that Gandhi "did not wish to stir up trouble with the Indian Maliks", and warned that "if our friend, the political agitator is successful in the case of a comparatively small community, it will encourage him to further efforts and there is no knowing where he will stop" (Roychoudhury : 108-9).

Consistent with his objective of national liberation from British imperialism, Gandhi was able to raise the local issue to the national level. This model required that no such political actions be encouraged which would divide the masses to the detriment of the national liberation movement.

Yet another feature of the Gandhian style was terminating agrarian movements at a time considered 'appropriate'. Such understandings would be reached after

5. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of the Indian Republic and Acharya Kripalani, until his last days, was given the status and prestige of an elder statesman. Others associated with Gandhi's survey emerged as front rank leaders of the Indian national movement in Bihar.

shrewd 'calculations'—not that they always turned out to be satisfactory. When he was accosted by Harbans Sahay and the younger group to know why he gave in to an enhanced (though less than the prevailing) rate of *Sharahbeshi*, he replied, "The British are Banias like myself. When they see that *tinkathia* is gone and there is no obligation on the raiyats to cultivate indigo, they will not get much profit and will very soon pack off and go." This is precisely what happened (126).

Kheda (Gujarat)

David Hardiman's well-documented work on Kheda satyagraha examines the 'middle peasant thesis'. The fact is that both the rich and the middle peasants made common cause in the movement although they may have had different sets of interests for supporting it. A particularly bad harvest, a series of other misfortunes in agricultural production in the past few years, the bubonic plague, led to the demand for suspension of land revenue, which the authorities were not inclined to concede. Gandhi picked up the 'no-revenue issue' and loaded it with nationalist content: "Our struggle is not merely for securing suspension of land revenue," he declared, "for such relief would be a petty affair", the important issue was that of "democratic government", of "swaraj" (1981 : 89).

The 'no-revenue issue', directed against British administration, was sufficiently broad to accommodate rich and middle peasant solidarity. This was further facilitated by the fact that they constituted the Patidar caste, who were socially woven closer by a system of hypergamous marriages. The Patidars also took pride in the status-raising anti-colonial struggle. Hardiman's observations on the structural response of the agrarian system in Kheda would largely be true of Champaran too, he points out :

"The mistake of both the 'rich peasant' and 'middle peasant' argument is that they try to pin the prime responsibility for the movement on one class or the other. In fact, both classes were involved to the same extent, for this was above all, a movement for the liberation of the peasantry from colonial rule, an issue which was of sufficient breadth to override the conflicting interests of the rich and middle peasants." (P. 250)."

Three other points made by Hardiman deserve consideration, that, (a) by and large, "it is truer to say that it was the nationalist leaders who responded to the peasants, rather than the peasants to the nationalist leaders" (P. 245); (b) the rich peasants accepted non-violence as a tactic rather than as a commitment to the ideology, whereas poorer peasants were prone to violent manifestations of protest; and (c) for the Patidar peasants it became a movement for their self-assertion as a community—"It was a movement of Patidar peasants, as opposed to Patidar landlords, because the landlords were able to assert themselves by other means" (p. 250). Hardiman concludes by observing :

"the chief initiative in the peasant movements of the 1917 to 1934 period came not from the elites, not from the petty bourgeoisie, and not from the middle peasants, but from the more substantial peasant communities. It was the

movement of these castes and communities which provided the initial challenge to authority and which triggered off the more revolutionary movements of the poorer peasantry. (p. 225)"

The Principal Contradiction

The Champaran and Kheda satyagrahas bring out the essential character of the agrarian mobilisations and their relationship with the national movement. Gandhi was *not* preferring "minor agrarian issues" over "more fundamental questions relating to the structure of agrarian relations", as Dhanagare believes. These were for him *major* tactical (agrarian) issues, related to the more fundamental questions of imperialist exploitation and rule of the mightiest colonial power. The principal contradiction for him was between British colonialism and the broad masses of the Indian people. He therefore evolved an anti-colonial strategy. The 'tactics' employed, in order to be consistent with this strategy, required the development of instruments and forms of struggle on the one hand, and solidarity of the masses against a common adversary, on the other.

He proposed and passionately believed in non-violent fearless action in the satyagraha form of collective mobilisation. As for the masses, he was painfully conscious of the glaring contradictions in the economic, communal and caste domains, which he tried to tackle through constructive work programmes. From the late 'thirties onwards, Gandhi was becoming increasingly conscious and concerned about the agrarian contradictions. He supported the *tebhaga* movement; he warned the "present owners of wealth," that, "they would have to make a choice between class war and voluntarily converting themselves into trustees of their wealth"; he repudiated the concept of private ownership of the means of production.

Tebhaga Movement (Bengal)

The peasant movements initiated by the Left started maturing close to the end of the nationalist struggle. The Land Revenue Commission in 1940 had already recommended share of two-thirds of the crop to the share-cropper and the balance third to be retained by the landowner. The decision by the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS)⁶ to launch a movement for the recovery of the two-thirds share was taken in September 1946. Between December 1946 and January 1947, when the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Regulation Bill⁷ was published in the

6 The Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha, the state level peasant organisation, was a part of the All India Kisan Sabha which operated as a national body. However, the BPKS in Bengal, although a separate body, was largely under the control of the Communist Party.

7. The main provisions of the Bargadars have been summarised thus by Sen :
"In the case in which the *Jotedar* supplied 'the plough cattle, plough and any other agricultural instruments and any manure the *bargadar* would get half of the produce of such land. If the *Jotedar* did not supply those inputs, the *bargadars* would retain two-thirds share. There were some provisions on the division of seed. If the seed was supplied by the *Jotedar*, it would be delivered to him by the *bargadar*. If the seed was supplied by the *bargadar*, it would be retained by him. If the seed was supplied partly by the *Jotedar* and partly by the *bargadar*, it would be divided between them in the proportion in which the seed was supplied by them" (1972 : 48). (*Bargadar* is the tenant.)

Calcutta Gazette (22nd January), the movement had spread to 19 districts of undivided Bengal (Sen 1982 : 106).

Although the Bill carried some disparaging features, which laid down conditions for dispossession of the tenant from the land, as when the landowner's family decided to have the land back for personal cultivation, or if the tenant was found not to cultivate the land properly or misuse it, or if he failed to deliver the stipulated share of the produce, it practically conceded the *tebhaga* demand (p. 112). The second phase of the movement began after the Bargadar Bill came into force. In many villages, where the share-croppers had stacked the entire harvest in the threshing floor (*khamar*) of the *jotedars* (landowners), the passage of the Bill signalled the recovery of two-thirds share of the crop without waiting for the landowners' initiative. The tenants invaded such *khamars* and forcibly appropriated the crops. In doing so they refused to discriminate between *jotedars*, rich peasants and middle peasants, contrary to the advice rendered by the BPKS leadership. This led to the alienation of the rich and middle peasants from the movement and helped to strengthen the forces of a counter movement. The movement was promptly and swiftly repressed by the coercive powers of the state.

Although the movement was launched by the provincial wing of the Kisan Sabha, the collective mobilisations that took shape were spontaneous enough, and at times took the leaders by surprise, by the sheer rapidity with which the events developed, outmatching their organisational control. It would appear that it was the Kisan Sabha leadership which responded to the urges of the *bargadars*, rather than the other way round.

To appreciate the phenomenon, one has to take into account the ethnic aspect of the structural response, which characterised the *tebhaga* movement. The tribal communities of Rajbansis, Santals, Oraons, Hajongs, predominated in the social mobilisations. Observes Sen,

"In most districts adivasis were in the forefront of the struggle. Socially and economically the tribals occupied the lowest position in the village. . . In most districts adivasi women, not only attended meetings but also enrolled as volunteers of the Kisan Sabha. . . . But the adivasis comprise a small proportion of the rural population, and any agrarian movement, centred only on them, is likely to end in defeat" (Sen 1972 : 84)."

Thus the ethnic-class mix provided the active ingredient for the peasant mobilisations in most of the situations. It is interesting to note that in areas, where Muslim landlords and *bargadars* were the main structural features of the agrarian system (as in Bogra), it was "difficult to mobilize the Muslim *bargadars*" (Sen, 1982 : 108), and when a Muslim *jotedar* shot a Rajbansi peasant dead, the leaders had to restrain 3000 armed peasants from strike for a reprisal. Here we find the *communal-ethnic* factor inhibiting *secular-class* considerations of peasant mobilisation.

Thus, the ethnic factor tended to intervene as a facilitating or an inhibiting condition in the mobilisation of peasants in the *tebhaga* movement.

Telengana (Hyderabad State)

The Telengana movement, in sharp contrast to the *tebhaga* movement, showed greater resilience and responded to varying situations until it was called off. Like the *tebhaga* movement, Telengana too was undergoing political socialization of its agrarian contradictions, for at least three to four years. Thus, the institution of *Vetti* (non-economic coercion), rack-renting, and eviction of tenants came under attack, security of tenure was demanded and oppressive taxes and revenues were opposed. While *tebhaga* was initiated in the explosive environment of communal violence, which ultimately led to the partition of the country, Telengana movement surfaced at a time when the Nizam was opposing the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union. The depredations of the armed band of *razakars*—a paramilitary voluntary force opposing integration of the state with India—was at its worst. It was at such an anarchic juncture that the Communists took to arms to ward away *razakars*, establish village soviets, enlarged their area of support, and attacked the feudal *jagirdari* and *deshmukh*⁸ elements of Nizam's crumbling state.

The leadership of the movement was provided by the ascendant Kamma and Reddy rich peasants, who wanted the dissolution of the feudal *jagirdari* system. They were able to forge common ground with the middle and poor peasants and agricultural labourers. However, after the takeover of Hyderabad State by the Indian army and the abolition of *jagirdari*, the rich peasants gradually withdrew from the movement. The militancy of the poor peasants and landless labourers was, thereafter, directed against landlords and *deshmukhs*, seizing surplus lands and redistributing these among themselves. However, 'police action' became very repressive and the Communist Party took the decision to terminate the movement (Dhanagare 201-5).

In both these movements we note a broad-based alliance of peasant classes engaged in a mobilization, which is not sufficiently clear about whether the objectives to be pursued will not be adversely affected by their own internal contradictions. Thus, so long as the big jotedars were the targets in the *tebhaga* movement, the broad spectrum peasant alliance held. Once this 'norm' was given up, the movement had to face the level of antagonism, which it was ill-equipped to handle. In Telengana too we find a close parallel, particularly in the first phase of the movement, subsequently the rich peasants were unwilling to comply with the demands which affected them materially. Therefore, notwithstanding the Left ideology, the rich-to-middle level peasants tended to constitute the critical resource of the movement, as a component of the leadership as well as support base.

8. *Jagirdari* refers to feudal landlordism, whilst *deshmukhs* were rent collectors on behalf of the Nizam.

The Sarvodaya Effort

I shall now finally examine the post-Gandhian *sarvodaya* movement in Bihar and the Naxalbari peasant revolt in North Bengal.

The *sarvodaya bhoodan-gramdan*⁹ movement emerged as an alternative to the Left movement. It sought the radical transformation of society through non-violent means. The movement emerged out of the womb of Telengana insurrection. The first gift of 100 acres came from Pochampalli in Telengana district in April 1951. By the 15th of August Vinoba Bhave, the leader of the *sarvodaya* movement, had received 10,000 acres. When Vinoba entered Bihar, on 13th September 1952, Jayaprakash Narayan's (J.P.) appeal fetched 7,000 acres within a week! The first *gramdan* village, Mangroth appeared in the Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh soon after. The village by a collective decision removed landlessness. Exclaimed an exhilarated J. P., after a visit to the village: "It was thrilling to visualise the great moral, economic, political and social revolution that would sweep over the country if Mangroth were repeated in every village" (Mukherji 1981). By 1954 more than 2.5 million acres of land had been collected, and a 'modest' target of five million acres by 1957 was set.

By 1962, there were nearly 100 *gramdan* villages in Bihar. Although nine of them were studied in 1962-63, I shall present very briefly the case study of only one—the village which came closest to becoming a model.

Gramdan in Berain (Bihar)

Berain, a settlement of 88 households with about 18 acres of land (including lands obtained in share cropping), with an exclusively backward and scheduled caste composition, voluntarily opted for *gramdan* in 1958. The change involved was transformatory. The land now belonged to the village, thus individual ownership or landlessness was replaced by communal ownership of land; share-cropping was no longer a contract between the landowner and the individual tenant, it was now between the *sarvodaya sahayog samiti* (cooperative society) and the landowner. The *samiti* was responsible for the contract and would allot labour power for the cultivation of such leased-in land. Individual indebtedness was transformed into collective debt of the village. Village lands were now under collective cultivation.

Primary basic education and adult education were universalised. All village children slept in the dormitory of the Community Centre irrespective of the

9. *Bhoodan* literally means land-in-gift, whilst *gramdan* is village-in-gift. In 1962 a 'gramdan village' was not necessarily a revenue village—it could even be a satellite settlement (*tola*) of a main village, with as few as ten households or more. Ideally, when the total land within the 'village', owned or share-cropped by village households, were made over in gift to the village community, *gramdan* was *total*. But a 'village' still qualified for *gramdan* if 80 per cent of all families in the village, landowners and landless, decided to declare *gramdan*; and if at least 50 per cent of the total owned land was gifted in *gramdan* (Mukherji 1981).

distinctions of caste. Frequent interdining signalled the end of commensal restrictions which remained confined to intermarriage. Enormous energies were released, particularly in the initial stages, which helped in the construction of the Community Centre, cow shed, through *shramdan* (voluntary gift of labour). The oil-press, the spinning wheel, the loom, toddy molasses, and bee-keeping were introduced for generation of employment. In a brief period, of about a year, Berain became free of debts, adult literacy was cent per cent, the entire village was employed for most of the time.

Gramdan was embraced by Berain, with the solitary exception of its largest landowner owning about three acres of land. This, in the view of the 'external' sarvodaya leadership, made gramdan 'incomplete'. They were hoping that he would undergo an inevitable 'change-of-heart' and throw in his lot with the rest of the village. When this did not take place, it became an ideological issue. When persuasions failed, even concessions were proposed, much to the disapproval of a large section of the village people. The landowner family finally agreed to a conditional entry—it demanded an assured quantum of harvest in lieu of his informal agreement to let his land be cultivated as per gramdan norms of collective farming. The formal integration would be complete only after the inevitable change-of-heart took place !

A Simplistic Solution

This simplistic assumption resulted in a different kind of dynamics. It was soon clear to the village that the 'assured amount' was more than this family produced out of its own labour from its own land. Also, the members of their family were reluctant to take up all kinds of work roles—they preferred to confine themselves to supervisory responsibilities. Since they had 'condescended' to make gramdan 'complete', they imputed on themselves a special status. This discriminant behaviour stood in sharp contrast to the egalitarian norms so assiduously engendered earlier. The denouement was at its worst, when two other families already committed to gramdan, who had about two acres of land prior to gramdan (poor peasants) also demanded similar concessions. The *gram sabha* (village assembly) was once again persuaded to allow them this concession in the interest of gramdan. This problem was further compounded by a loss of Rs. 20,000 suffered by the cooperative society.

The point to note here is that it was the single 'middle peasant' family which vacillated, while 'outside' gramdan, and once 'inside', sought a separate identity and a surplus. Thus, the conditional entry was based on exploitation of the total collectivity of gramdan. In course of time it was successful in weaning away two other poor peasants from gramdan commitments. This is how classless Berain developed a privileged class, which now threatened its very identity as a gramdan village !

But how did the social structure in general respond to the stimuli of gramdan at that stage? Barring one village, all the others were uniformly composed of backward and scheduled castes. Barring one village, again, of backward and scheduled castes where class heterogeneity was sharp and substantial, all the other villages were largely composed of landless agricultural labourers and poor peasants, of which five were more homogeneously poor villages. There were sprinklings of 'middle peasants' in all the villages except one, which was a new settlement of landless on *bhoodan* land.

The transition from *gramdan* to *sulabh gramdan* (gramdan simplified) was to retract from the original revolutionary content to a definition where considerable concessions were allowed for the retention of private property within gramdan. Just as *bhoodan* took off from the last remaining embers of Telengana, the Naxalbari movement in Bihar took off from the dissipated *sulabh gramdan* in Musahari. However, this is not the time to elaborate on this.

Naxalbari Revolt (West Bengal)

In sharp contrast to the other two Left movements, the Naxalbari peasant uprising was the outcome of two decades of patient and arduous political socialisation of the peasantry, by one of the most dedicated band of Communist workers and leaders. Though some of the principal party leadership, operating at the grassroots level, had an urban petty bourgeois background, their near complete immersion and total identity with the cause of the exploited peasantry and the indigenous grassroots level leadership, comes closest to the difficult concept of 'de-classing'. I am referring here to persons like Kanu Sanyal, Keshab Sarkar, Jogen Mukherjee, who worked with Jangal Santhal, Khokon Mazumdar, Chunilal Goala, Phagu Oraon, Punjab Rao, Oli Mohammad and a host of others.

In the beginning, in the early 'fifties, it was the *tebhaga* slogans that were carried into the foothills of the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district. In an extremely backward frontier region (bordering Nepal, East Pakistan-now-Bangladesh) the agrarian system crystallized into the *jotedari-adhiari* system. The *adhiar* played the dual role of a share-cropper (without tenurial rights) and an agricultural labourer without ownership of any of the means or instruments of production. He was bound by inextricable ties of exploitation and subordination of the *jotedar* (the tenure holding landlord). The extent of *adhiari* exploitation was such that, although he was entitled to a 50 per cent share of the crop, his take-home share after 'standard deduction' was a mere pittance of what he had produced.

By 1953-4, the party cadres were able to make some inroads in a region, where penetration by strangers was well-nigh impossible. The exaction of *Panudan* (a standard practice of deducting eight maunds of paddy in lieu of cattle plough supplied by the *jotedar*) was attacked, and 50 per cent interest on paddy loan was being reduced to 25 per cent. The demand for *tebhaga* (two-thirds share of the

crop) also materialised in several cases, where *adhivars* sought the intervention of the Kisan Samiti. Steadily, but surely, the Kisan Sabha gained the confidence of the poor peasantry.

Worker-Peasant Alliance

In 1955 when the tea plantations were rocked by strikes, on account of Bonus Struggle, peasant leaders provided the leadership of plantation workers, whilst peasants provided their activists with food and shelter. Worker-peasant alliance was a living reality.

Prior to the Assembly elections of March 1967, in which Jangal Santhal the tribal peasant leader was the CPI (Marxist) candidate, the peasants were mobilized to seize crops, defy payment of levy, etc., as this was a particularly bad crop year. Jangal lost the election, but his party was saddled in power; and so it was taken for granted, that the 'politics' of the party in that region could continue unimpeded. But the party, now in power, thought otherwise, and irreconcilable inner contradiction surfaced within the party, leading to the expulsion of the entire Siliguri membership. This led to the birth of yet another Left party—the CPI (Marxist-Leninist), on 22nd April 1969.

In the phase under the CPI (ML) the peasant leaders were soon put behind bars. The void thus created was neither filled-up nor was any attempt made to do so. Conspiratorial guerilla groups, with petty bourgeois urban revolutionary background, replaced the leadership of the peasant committees; open mass movements were replaced by underground activities; annihilations were given top priority; class analysis of political events and self-criticism ceased; democratic centralism was replaced by authoritarian centralism. The peasants felt left out and receded to the background, the plantation workers' alliance with the peasants lost its content—meanwhile all the peasant leaders were to suffer the hospitality of long prison terms! Remarked Kanu Sanyal, "after 1967 Charu Mazumdar ceased to be a Communist and became an anarchist".

In his well known Terai Report, Kanu Sanyal states, that the poor peasant, constituting 70 per cent of the peasantry, responded spontaneously to the anti-feudal struggles; the middle peasant, constituting 20 per cent of the peasantry, after an initial period of watching and waiting, once convinced that he would stand to benefit from the movement, threw in his lot with the poor peasant, enormously increasing "the sweep of the struggle". The rich peasant, constituting the balance 10 per cent were critical of the movement and its objectives, but once the middle peasants strengthened the poor peasants, "the rich peasants gave up the path of opposition and criticism and began to demand justice from peasant committees. And the peasant committees considered every case on its merits and did justice to them." This not only neutralised them, but in quite a few instances they "took an active part in the struggle".

One section of the small jotedars, "who were able neither to develop themselves as they desired, owing to the oppression by the government of the comprador-bourgeoisie and the landlords, nor to maintain their existing standard of living, took part in the struggle" (1978 : 203-27). Field observations do confirm the participation of these sections of the peasantry. It is also true that the peasant mobilisation displayed remarkable solidarity and functioned within the organisational control of the Krishak Sabhas and Samities.

Model of Class Collaboration

Here is a model of class collaboration in which the poor peasant took the initiative and the middle peasant followed. But its participation brought about a quantitative and a qualitative change in the movement. A reversal of the middle peasant thesis a la Alavi.

What has been happening since 1971 in the region? Preliminary findings give us paradoxical results about the agrarian system. Two principal forms of crop-sharing tenancies co-exist in this region. The *customary* form of crop-sharing tenancy stipulates a 50-50 share between landowners and tenants, with both sharing the costs of production. In the *post-reform* form of crop-sharing the tenant retains 75 per cent of the crop, but there is no cost sharing by the landowner. In the former, the landowner willingly advances consumption and non-consumption loans to the adhiar, in the latter, the landowner neither feels inclined nor is obliged to do so. On the face of it the customary form appears less 'free' and more 'exploitative', but strangely enough, it is in the movement *jotes* (in our sample) that this form predominates. In the non-movement *jotes* there is the equi-prevalance of both the forms of tenancies. This, in spite of the fact that there is absolutely no physical compulsion on the part of the adhiar to choose one or the other.

It is obvious, that the security of the economically more exploitative but 'tied' and dependent relationship between the landowner and the tenant, is preferred to the relatively 'free' but more uncertain existence under conditions of a stagnant economy. But, even this 'freedom' could, in one sense, turn out to be illusory. The tenant, now having to bear the total cost of production, has to depend upon institutional credit. Access to credit is mediated by other structures, such as the party. The peasant is quite likely to find himself dependent on some party or the other for obtaining institutional credit. Since institutional credit is not always unlimited, the party helps those who help the party. In this manner the party tries to perpetuate its political influence and power by creating a political base. So, in effect, in such a situation the share-cropper, in exercising his option between the customary and the post-reform form of tenancy, is actually also exercising a choice between one or the other form of dependency—that of the landowners or of the party. This is a pattern which exists, but how pervasive this is, it is too early to conclude.

Table 1

Association between crop-share and cost-share in movement and non-movement jotes ()*

Crop share Lessee : Lessor	Movement Jote			Non-Movement Jote		
	Cost borne by tenant only	Cost borne by both owner and tenant*	Total	Cost borne by tenant only	Cost borne by both owner and tenant*	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
75 : 25	16	0	16	37	1	38
60 : 40	0	0	0	0	2	2
50 : 50	3	58	61	10	28	38
Total	19	58	77	47	31	78

* Note : Tenant bears the fully cost of seed, fifty per cent cost of bullock labour; all other costs of material inputs, e.g., costs of fertilizer, irrigation, etc., are borne by the landlord, if at all used.

(*) Table taken from M. Chattopadhyay and S. Ghosh "Tenurial Contracts in a Peasant Movement Belt : An Analysis of Field Survey Data in Naxalbari, Khoribari and Phansidewa Regions of West Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly*, forthcoming, 1983.

Whilst the preference in the movement jotes for the customary form of tenancy can be rationalised, it is more difficult to reason out why, in the movement jotes, the wage rates for attached labour is lower than in non-movement jotes. The average daily wage rate of the annual farm servant works out to Rs. 3.84 (minimum) and Rs. 3.86 (maximum) for movement jotes, as against Rs. 4.16 (minimum) and Rs. 4.27 (maximum) for non-movement jotes.¹⁰

Different Responses

The main significance of the structural analysis of agrarian mobilisations lies in the possibility of identifying, more precisely, the role of different peasant communities and categories and their crystallization into politically conscious collective entities. We have observed, how similar categories of peasants in different contexts have responded differently. Thus, in Champaran, the initiative came from rich peasants, but the class alliance took in its sweep all categories of peasants and also the agricultural labourers. In Kheda, it was the rich and the middle peasant which

10. Source : Indian Statistical Institute project on "Conflict, Structure and Change", being conducted under the Joint Directorship of Partha N. Mukherji and Manabendu Chattopadhyay.

spearheaded the movement and the poor peasants joined in at a later stage. In the *tebhaga* movement, the main thrust seems to have come from poor peasants and middle peasants, the rich peasant remaining passive spectators during the early phase. But in the second phase, both rich and middle peasants seem to have swung on the other side crippling the movement.

The Telengana revolt started with rich peasant initiative, which subsequently withdrew from the movement, when the poor peasants and, agricultural labourers took over. In the sarvodaya gramdan movement in Bihar, the initiative came principally from the poor peasants and landless labourers. In the Naxalbari revolt, poor peasant initiative was followed by the active participation of the middle peasant. Subsequently, even rich peasants and some lesser *jotedars* identified closely with the movement. Therefore, to posit a simple middle peasant, or poor peasant or rich peasant proposition seems untenable. The structural response will depend upon the nature and hierarchisation of contradictions in a given social context, the goals which a movement seeks to set, and the historical conjuncture which may facilitate (or impede) the progression of a movement.

Secondly, we find incontrovertible evidence of the solidarity of ethnic communities or ethnic considerations in the *tebhaga*, Telengana, Naxalbari and *sarvodaya* movements, providing the major thrust in the mobilisation of the peasants. In Kheda too, the Patidars, with their caste councils and association, correspond to a structural equivalent. Therefore, the ethnic factor has operated as an important, if not necessary condition in these peasant mobilisations.

Thirdly, we find rich peasant initiative both in the Gandhian and the Left movements (Champaran, Kheda, Telengana), as also poor peasant and agricultural labourers taking initiative in the gramdan and the *tebhaga* movements. Therefore, ideological differences per se do not distinguish these movements in terms of structural response. The distinguishing features could lie in the similarity or differences in the historical contexts and conjunctures, in which the conflict occurs and the structure responds. Thus, Champaran, Kheda and Telengana took shape in an anti-colonial (or quasi-colonial) contexts, whilst Berain and *tebhaga* were either seeking solutions out of the feudal dispensation or fighting against its oppression and exploitation.

Concentration on Exploitation of Disadvantaged

Nor can one attribute 'failures' to any one of these ideologies, for each is a repository of progressive content capable of further elaboration and evolution. In so far as any political or reform group sincerely concentrates on contradictions, which centre on exploitation and oppression of disadvantaged groups, they will find structural responses forthcoming from the vulnerable sections of the social struc-

ture. Omvedt observes how a variety of political parties and groups are working for the emancipation of the *dalits*¹¹ and each making its own contribution (1982).

One general problem with such studies is that they stop short of the final lap by not pursuing the consequences of the movement to the logical next step. Indeed, there is some substance in the observation that "the concept of 'peasant revolution' is misleading, focussing as it does on the participants rather than on the outcome of a revolution" (Roxborough 1979 : 94).

A problem which requires decided resolution is some logical and theoretical basis for the characterisation of movements. Thus, the quantum of violence is still occasionally considered a reliable indicator of the seriousness or otherwise of a movement. The reason why, for instance, the *rebhaga* movement could not develop into a massive peasant rebellion, we are told, was because "the total number of peasants killed in scuffles with the police did not exceed fifty, although 3119 arrests were made . . ." (Dhanagare, 172).

Such a fallacy arises, if we do not address ourselves to the relevant questions. Namely, what are the goals of a particular social mobilisation? In what manner and to what extent are the pursuit of these goals likely to affect, alter or transform the system reference within which it is identified? Naturally, social mobilisations, seeking incremental and quantitative changes, cannot be of the same order as those seeking qualitative changes of the social structure. Therefore, it is imperative that we classify social mobilisations for collective action by a classification of social change.

Classification of Social Change

I have suggested elsewhere that we classify social change in the following structural terms, as : (a) changes occurring *within* given structure(s) of a system; (b) changes occurring from an *emergence of additional structure(s)*; (c) changes occurring due to the *elimination or loss of structure(s)*; and (d) changes occurring as a result of *replacement of existing structure(s)* by alternative ones. Changes of the first variety are *accumulative or quasi-structural*, the second and the third varieties are *alterative and structural*, whilst the last varieties are *transformative and structural*. Thus, social mobilisations seeking quasi-structural changes are quasi-movements, those seeking alternative changes are *social movements*, whilst those seeking transformative changes are *social or revolutionary movements*, depending upon the scale of transformative change involved.

The critical discriminant for the classification of collective mobilisations, therefore, depends upon whether goals are explicitly directed towards change (or resistance to change) of the structure, as against change *within* the structure, in the face of opposition against such a move. (Mukherji 1977 : 44).

11. *Dalits* is a generic term for oppressed and exploited communities. The term is not imbued with political connotation.

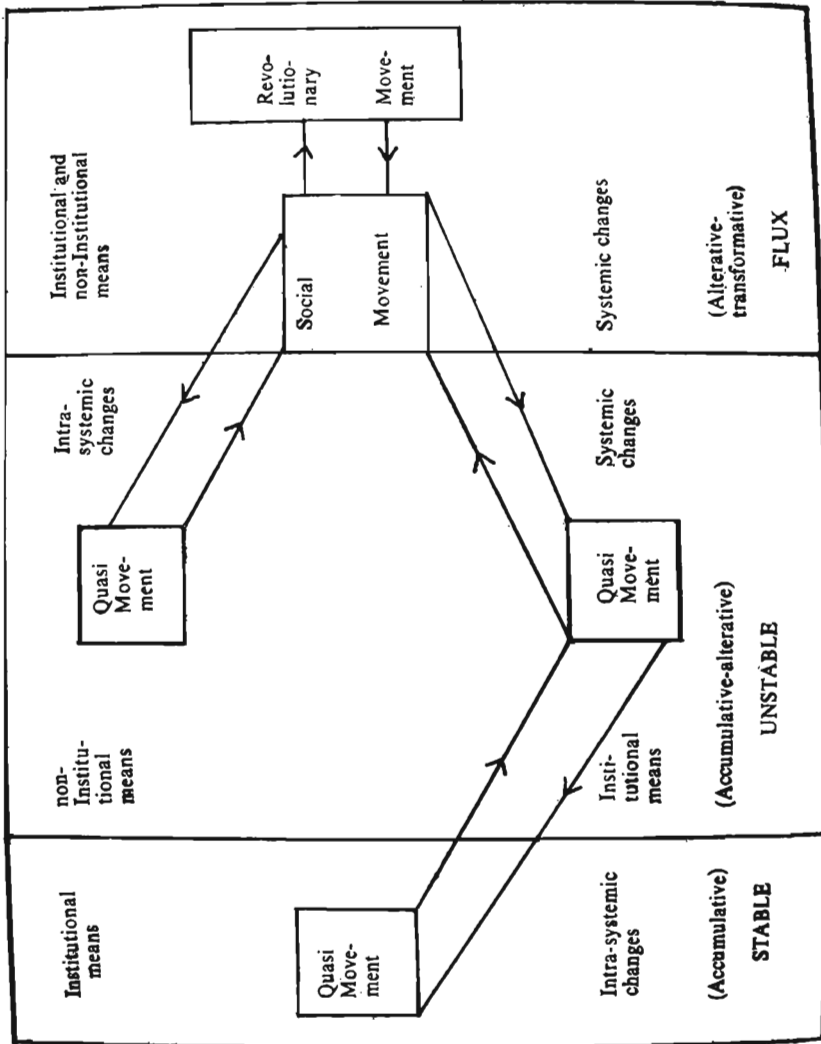
Classification of Movement by Type of Change

<i>Description of change</i>	<i>Type of change</i>	<i>Movement Type</i>
a) Changes occurring <i>within</i> given structure(s) of a system	Accumulative quasi-structural	Quazi-movement
b) Changes occurring due to emergence of additional structure(s)	Alterative-structural	Social Movement
c) Changes occurring due to elimination or loss of structures		
d) Changes occurring as a result of replacement of existing structure(s) by alternative structure(s)	Transformative-structural	Social and revolutionary movement

Just as it is important to understand the objectives of a movement, so also it is necessary to be clear, as far as possible, about the *means* which it employs. One rational classification can be the distinction between institutional and non-institutionalised means. The latter, in fact, will include violent and non-violent means. Thus, social mobilisation seeking quasi-structural or structural changes may employ both kinds of means.

This provides us with a framework (See page 66) for the analysis of movements. Both the Champaran and the Kheda satyagrahas had one proximate, and the other, a distant goal. In so far as the distant goal of replacing the macro-colonial structure with an indigenous political structure was transformatory and revolutionary, the implications of these movements were clearly, revolutionary. With respect to the more proximate goals, involving specific local agrarian issues, the Champaran struggle resulted in the elimination of a structural arrangement (the *tinkathia* structure), whilst in Kheda the mobilisation sought, not a change or alteration of the system, but some reprieve. The use of institutional and non-institutional means was invoked to press for the objectives. Both Champaran and Kheda were contributing towards the future national mobilisation for termination of British rule.

The *tebhaga* movement sought incremental changes *within* the system. Crop-sharing as a tenancy institution remained, only the ratio of the shares was sought to be changed in favour of the tenant. It was a quasi-movement with a limited goal. In contrast, the Naxalbari uprising was preceded by a gestation period of nearly two decades, during which an elaborate militant peasant organisation was established, through innumerable localised struggles against feudal exploitation and oppression. Thus, an additional structure came into existence with conse-



quences for the agrarian system. Institutionalised and non-institutionalised means had to be adopted for the achievement of intra-systemic goals. In short, the cumulative effect of numerous incremental changes was building up a vortex of agrarian tensions, which would erupt in 1967. It is these additional structures that were defused during the second phase of the movement. Thus, while the movement assigned itself the revolutionary goal of seizure of power, it at the same time immobilised the structures, through which this premature goal could at least have been attempted.

The target of the Telengana movement in the first phase, the abolition of the Jagirdari system, was as much a goal of the state which wrested power from the Nizam. In the second phase, however, the movement was able to create a parallel loci of power in the village soviets and peasant organisations, which sought to bring about alterative and transformative changes in the agrarian setting. These structures proved to be durable instruments of struggles, and many of these endured until the movement was called off. Perhaps this historical experience explains the recrudescence of the militant peasant revolt, in the form of Naxalite movement later, in the early 'seventies'.

The sarvodaya gramdan movement, at the micro-level of villages, provided the potential for revolutionary transformations, with creation of new structures and elimination of some, at the macro-level they emerged as additional structures, which could affect society vitally. But ideological diffuseness, doctrinaire rigidities, certain obscurantisms, and above all a dismal lack of any sense of strategy and tactics within a framework of social change, saw the gradual erosion of the movement.

REFERENCES

- Alavi, H. 1979 "Peasants and Revolution" in A. R. Desai (ed.) *Peasant Struggles in India*, Oxford University Press.
- Chattopadhyay, M. and Sumit Ghosh 1983 "Tenurial Contracts in a Peasant Movement Belt: An Analysis of Field Survey data in Naxalbari, Khoribari and Phansidewa regions of West Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (forthcoming).
- Dhanagare, D. N. 1983 *Peasant Movements in India 1920-1950*, Oxford University Press.
- Hardiman, David 1981 *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917-1934*, Oxford University Press.
- Mukherji, P. N. 1977 "Social Movement and Social Change: Towards a Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework", *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 26, No. 1.

- 1981 "Sarvodaya After Gandhi : Contradiction and Change", Paper read at Lokayan Seminar on "Gandhi and Our Times" Centre for Developing Societies, New Delhi.
- Naqvi, S.** 1969 "Economic Thinking of Gandhi—The Concept of Trusteeship" in S. C. Biswas (ed.) *Gandhi : Theory and Practice, Social Impact and Contemporary Relevance*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla.
- Omvedt, Gail** 1982 "Caste, Agrarian Relations and Agrarian Conflict", in : Sheo K Lall (ed.) *Sociological Perspectives of Land Reforms*, Agricole Publishing Academy.
- Pouchepadass, J.** 1980 "Twentieth Century Agrarian Movements in India", in : E. J. Hobsbawm et. al. *Peasants in History*, Oxford University Press.
- Raychoudhury, P. C.** 1955 *Gandhiji's First Struggle in India*, Navajivan Publishing, Ahmedabad.
- Roxborough, Ian** 1979 *Theories of Underment*, Macmillan.
- Sanyal, Kanu** 1968 "Report of the Peasant Movement in Terai Region", in Samar Sen (ed.) *Naxalbari and After : A Frontier Anthology*, Kathashilpa Vol. II.
- 1973 "More About Naxalbari", *Proletarian Path*, May-August, Vol. II, Nos. 4 & 5.
- Sen, S.** 1972 *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-1947*, Peoples' Publishing House.
- 1982 *Peasant Movements in India : Mid-nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, K. P. Bagchi, Calcutta.
- Thorner, Alice** 1982 "Semi Feudalism or Capitalism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVII, Nos. 50 and 51, December 11 and December 18.
- Wolf, E. R.** 1973 *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, Faber.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am thankful to the Department of Sociology, Poona University, for having given me the opportunity to present the paper in the National Seminar on Theory and Concept held in February-March 1983.