

0501. Political Economy of Bagepalli Taluk (Jun 1985)

Makes a class stratification of the rural population into feudal landlords, big peasants, middle peasants, small and poor peasants, and traces the property relationship between these classes.

1. THEORETICAL & PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE TALUK'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Partly because of ADATS' 7½ years involvement in the taluk and more importantly because of developments in the subjective and objective conditions of the region and the overall political atmosphere due to state and national developments, a sharper class consciousness is now developing in the peasantry.

3½ decades back when the united peasantry started its organised struggle against very powerful feudal lords, this consciousness was clouded by liberal, caste and charismatic considerations. Thereby there was no need for a clear and critical analysis and ideological commitment to develop in either the ranks or the leadership of the *Ryot Sangha*. Their struggle was led by populist slogans and spontaneity.

This influenced the character and content of the peasant economy that evolved in the taluk. Opportunism masked under a liberal argument of the united peasantry emerged and the upper middle class rich peasants dominated the countryside in land and wage relations as well as in village and taluk level politics after destroying the feudal lords' base.

The taluk intelligentsia which came from this rising class and was tempered by anti-feudal struggle fell victim to this opportunism and chose to ignore the existence of classes within the ranks of the politically united peasantry and the strong antagonistic class contradictions that began to surface in the countryside. As a result, a theory based on the reality of the objective conditions, capable of understanding and leading the peasantry did not arise. This ensued in the *Ryot Sangha* eroding a sizeable portion of its militant base.

Only one shrewd bourgeois force, the ruling party, was able to understand this changed political economy of the region, more out of cunning than through any analysis, and react quickly, projecting itself as a champion of the poor peasantry for selfish electoral purposes of its own.

Still unable and even unwilling to come to grips with the new reality the peasant leadership began to attribute coarse motives for the poor peasants' disgruntlement, further alienating them and in actual effect furthering the cause of the ruling party which was capitalising on the confusion.

Very soon the loose opposition in the taluk started unwittingly taking a very dangerous reactionary position with the ruling party pretending to support the progressive, repressed productive forces in the countryside. This became a national phenomenon and Bagepalli taluk was not spared in spite of the Left leading the opposition here.

At the same time the ruling party was incapable of (and did not even remotely wish to) offering the theoretical leadership to entail the coolies to emerge as a force capable of shattering the peasant economy and positing a serious challenge to capitalism and its bourgeois rule. Neither were organisational structures provided to channels and discipline the disgruntlement of the coolie class in any constructive way.

Upstarts in the coolies revolted but once again failed to come up with an overall class analysis and offer a programme to the coolies. This was partly because their very sincerity could be questioned. Their affected concerns were soon exposed when the organisation they created

started collaborating, first covertly but very soon openly, with the bourgeois ruling party and the ruling party started using them as safety valves for disgruntlement while purposely pursuing a policy of accentuating social antagonism in the countryside.

In their utter frustration and inability to come to grips with the new changed reality the older generation of the taluk's intelligentsia started offering valid but hopelessly incomplete slogans based on macro realities, emphasising the greater truth that capitalism and its ruling class, the bourgeoisie, were the true enemies of the peasantry. This was more in the form of justifications rather than as a serious attempt to understand. So the slogans failed to bring the small and poor peasantry under the Left led opposition's fold.

To a large extent this malady existed in the whole country. In Bagepalli taluk the leaders still dwelt in the memories and nostalgia of past experiences and past realities of at least 2 decades old and began to grow bitter towards contemporary realities.

After the Emergency, in the late '70s, the ruling party's till then subtle attempts to court the minorities became very blatant. A new generation of rural intelligentsia started emerging. They intuitively knew that while the older generation's analysis was not wrong, it was neither complete nor applicable.

At this historical stage in the political development of the taluk ADATS was formed. ADATS became a forum for this new generation to meet, discuss, act and reflect. Very soon a new analysis of the taluk, recognising the peasantry not as a united mass of 'people' but as fractured into classes and polarising into 2 main classes – the rich and middle peasant classes on the one side, and the small and poor peasant classes on the other – emerged. At the same time the elders' stand recognising the bourgeoisie as the main enemy of the middle, small and poor peasant classes was not refuted.

For the first time the discontent of the coolies (small and poor peasantry) could take a constructive course in struggle since a critical analysis was being offered to their class in relation to the rest of society – i.e. in relation to the middle peasants, the rich peasants and the bourgeoisie.

The relevance of this analysis and its acceptance by the wisdom of the masses accounts for the grass root evolution and ready acceptance of the 3 working principles of economic contradiction, social neutrality and political unity between the *Ryots* (middle peasantry) and the coolies, as well as the rapidity with which the call to form Coolie Sangha Units in the villages caught on.

The organisational structure suggested by ADATS was village level CSUs as opposed to the *Ryot Sangha's* taluk level, broad based, informally structures, sporadic 'unity at times of need' and this received a ready acceptance because of the particular and peculiar nature of *Ryot-Coolie* contradictions that differ in form, content and extent from one village to another. Also since the vigil of the coolies is more constant and continuous than that of the *Ryots*, the mass organisation for them had to be more active on a day to day basis.

This new analysis led to another major change from the previously held view in its application. Propounders of the *Ryot Sangha* had unquestioningly accepted the leadership of the upper middle rich peasantry. But we departed radically in recognising that it is the coolie class which has to give leadership to both, the coolies as well as *Ryots*, and that we the intelligentsia have a role in making this coolie class aware of its potential and historic role. We will elaborate on the material base to substantiate this position in the next part of this analysis.

Today the coolies are beginning to feel the need for an apex taluk level body but without in any way infringing on the importance and role of the village level CSUs which will continue to analyse and tackle problems at a grass root level. ADATS had recognised this need as

early as 5½ years back when we declared one of our important objectives to be the setting up of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA.

But there inevitable has been a time gap between the consciousness of the masses on the one hand and that of the intelligentsia on the other. While we can foresee and accelerate the pace of realisation, only when these 2 consciousness meet on specific issues can there be a translation into effective action.

Yet another issue on which ADATS was clear for the past 2 years was the need to expand and cover all the villages of Bagepalli taluk. Today this need is being felt by the coolies now that they are seriously involved in the task of building up the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA. Most of the cadre in these 30 villages see a dangerous gap between the class consciousness that is developing in the taluk's coolies and the village level structures (the CSUs) which exist in only about 30 villages of the taluk's 200 and odd.

From January 1986 ADATS plans to start working in another 60 villages of the taluk.

2. RECENT TRENDS IN THE TALUK'S ECONOMY

ADATS has maintained that the mode of production in the countryside is a peasant economy in transition from feudalism to capitalism. We now see definite signs of this transition being completed with a form of 'primitive accumulation in the countryside' taking a course very different from the classical example of Europe. Here industrialisation is not necessarily spurred by a release of capital and manpower from the village alone. However the net result will be the same pauperisation of the broad masses of the peasantry, accompanied by a polarisation of property in the hands of a few rich capitalistic farmers or land owners, and misery and abject poverty being the lot of the vast majority. This, like all major economic changes, will be accompanied by a heightening of social tensions in the villages.

The experience of India and other III World countries with a colonised history shows us that industrialisation does not necessarily mean the killing of feudal relations in the countryside. So to look forward to a bourgeois democratic revolution with an automatic and immediate weakening of the feudal grip along with a growth in industrialisation would be futile. Imperialism and the easy access to capital and technology through international transfer have made the development of towns relatively unattached to the break-up of old ties in the villages. The villages appear to develop on their own, influenced but not determined by the towns. We are not suggesting the existence of 2 modes of production within the Indian nation state, but elaborating on a practical manifestation of the law of uneven development.

Today, 38 years after attaining independence and more than a decade after India entered the industrial world map to become the ninth most industrialised country in the world, there are some signs of the bourgeoisie making final efforts to alter land and production relations in the villages, but at the same time preserve feudal vestiges of oppressive political relationships. We will now share our observations which lead us to this conclusion:

Having more or less broken the back of the feudal lord class through progressive social laws like the land reforms and tenancy acts, the state now seems to be serious about supporting capitalistic farming and the economy is running a course leading to the pauperisation of the vast majority of small and poor peasants and concentration of all property in the hands of a few.

What other motives can we ascribe to the government's all out efforts to dish out crores of rupees every year under purposeless schemes like the national IRDP and the state's *Anthyo-daya* without security, without follow up, and with only one objective of trying to surpass their own set targets? What is going to happen 3 years from now when these same thousands of beneficiaries per taluk per year are called to repay? Why are the fiscal planners encourag-

ing a situation where absolutely no new wealth is being created in the rural economy in spite of such massive expenditures? Apart from the obvious unpopularity it will create, why are the various national bourgeois parties not exposing and condemning the entire fiasco? If the government is rich enough to afford writing off these huge amounts all over the country as just an electoral gimmick, then why did they go in for the IMF loan in the first place?

To us the answer to all these questions is pretty clear. The ruling bourgeoisie has finally decided to enter into the countryside in a big way by pumping massive capital in a manner calculated to make available all those thousands of millions of acres of land now lying fractured and non viable in the hands of thousands and millions of small, poor and even middle peasants, for themselves. At the same time the bourgeoisie want to give the rural poor, for political reasons, one last fling – a feast before the slaughter. And this plan of the ruling party has the approval of the entire Indian bourgeoisie.

At the same time, substantial capital and know how is being made available for the rich peasants to improve their agriculture and subsidiary activities. While in total quantity the amounts earmarked for these package deals are much bigger than the IRDP, *Anthyodaya*, etc. these loans are being given quietly without any fanfare.

Capitalism is justified by an atmosphere of seeming free enterprise, competitive hard work and the jungle law of survival of the fittest. These are values very alien to the countryside. But they are being subtly introduced into the villages in order to absolve the ruling class of all blame when the vast majority of those ‘helped’ suddenly wake up to the fact that it did not all work out in their favour. The press and other spokespersons of the urban middle class will hail the effort as a sincere attempt that didn’t work and the nation’s conscience will be clear! What happens next to the bulk of the pauperised peasantry will all be blamed on “their own fault for not squandered away a golden opportunity, for not having availed the fair deal...”

Forgotten and ignored will be the fact that the quantitative definition of capital has increased and the Rs 4,000 each doled out in the mass loan programmes and the loan *melas* is just not enough, even if utilised properly, to solve anybody’s problem in any appreciable manner. Forgotten will be the fact that the distribution of cattle, sheep and other livestock seems to be the fashion when the existing veterinary infrastructure is already overburdened, understaffed, under equipped and under-supplied with even the most basic drugs. Forgotten will be the haste with which these loan sprees are being implemented without giving the slightest chance for the beneficiaries to even understand what is happening.

Bad weather conditions with recurring drought and famine in regions like ours are only contributing to accelerating the pace of this pauperisation-polarisation process. This means that there will be a vast time lag between the completion of this primitive accumulation and the capitalisation of agriculture because investors will come to these poor soils last. This delay will accentuate the misery of the people caught in a limbo because their costs of production will be far higher than that of other capitalist farmers cultivating better soils with better technology and irrigation. This high cost of production of the peasantry will not determine market prices because their produce will be only a very small, negligible fraction of the total food produce.

Alongside, the market price system for agricultural inputs and produce – the price scissors – supported by the state in order to serve the merchant bourgeoisie and appease the urban middle class, has all along contributed to the ruination of the countryside.

Strained Coolie-*Ryot* relations are proving to be another fetter on increasing peasant production. Many middle peasants, citing their inability to deal with labourers, have switched over to eucalyptus growing, giving up traditional food crop cultivation, knowing fully well that this will lead to massive unemployment for the coolies and a change of occupation for themselves.

Quite naturally the entire *Ryot* class cite labour problem as their primary and most fundamental issue; preceding even the rains and the drought, because they are more recognisable and attackable in despair and frustration. We see the middle peasant class slipping to the ranks of the coolies, and this process is going to be rapidly speeded up in the coming years, furthering their fears and insecurity which will be let out on the coolies.

Here we have a very serious role in preventing these irrational outbursts from becoming caste impediments on coolie's class unity through very mature and dextrous handling of village issues and developments. The principle of social neutrality (even between *Ryots* and Coolies) has an added validity these days and under no circumstances can we allow caste and communal tensions to develop.

All these above signs point to a peasant type of transition and the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture seems to be following the broad American pattern with first a break-up of large feudal holdings through bourgeois state and legislative intervention followed by a polarisation of landed property into the hands of a newly created land owning class, who will in turn rent it out to the capitalistic farmers. This is already being observed in large tracts of Karnataka where the soils are richer and irrigation infrastructure vastly developed.

But once again we see a variation from the classical peasant type of transition from feudalism to capitalism in agriculture in Bagepalli taluk.

Here the signs are that this new land owning class will not be directly created. A stratum of the upper middle class rich peasants will be given an opportunity to convert themselves into capitalistic farmers. They will own the land and also exploit hired labour without paying absolute or differential rent. In this way they are going to become extremely rich in the next few years.

It is inconceivable that this will last for very long because the high super profits that capitalist agriculture would then yield these rich peasants/capitalistic farmers will act as a brake on increased productivity. Lethargy and complacency that will ensue these high unearned incomes will eventually pave the way to their renting out the lands to capitalist tenant farmers from the cities, themselves transmuting into a parasitic land owning class.

At the same time, peasant cultivation by a large number of middle peasants starving and depriving themselves of the most basic necessities in order to eke out a sub human living will also coexist along with capitalistic farming in these regions.

It is clear that the monopoly in land is going to be retained in this country by the ruling bourgeois class. The land reforms act explicitly prohibits city capitalists (non cultivating families) from purchasing agricultural lands in the villages. This means that after killing the feudal lord class a new parasitic land owner class is going to be entrusted with keeping the broad masses of the peasantry under control by preserving feudal like political relationships alongside capitalistic production relations. The political leadership of bourgeois class rule, which has upto now come from the feudal lord class, will from now on be increasingly drawn from the climbing upper middle rich peasantry and eventually from the land owning class.

It would be silly for ADATS, a group dedicated to accentuating development, to come up with moral judgement on economic trends and happenings. We only take a very strong position that the coolies have to made conscious of their role after critically understanding this process. It is then left to them, and to petty bourgeois intellectuals like us who have opted to accompany them, to decide on our next course of action with the sole object of retaining our humanity and dignity, and bargaining for the highest price and the best conditions at which to sell our labour power.

Our analysis and the strategy we have drawn up from this critical understanding will continue to have validity for a very long time to come. However sectarian our approach might appear

on the surface (distinguishing between 2 exploited classes – the *Ryots* and the *Coolies* – and being biased on the side of the latter) it is not so in essence.

On the other hand, a *Ryot* approach accepting the leadership of the rich peasantry and talking about a united peasantry for the sake of short term political gain will unconsciously and unwittingly draw the theoretician towards supporting the newly emerging capitalistic and land owning classes in the countryside.