

## The 'Peasant' in History: Evolution of the Concept and Changes in the Post-colonial Economic

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### Abstract

*The industrial revolution put forth the issue of transformation of an agrarian society to an industrial society and this is how the famed "agrarian question" was perceived in the initial period. The peasant question that formed the core classical agrarian question has become a subject of intense debate in the wake of globalisation. The category called 'peasant' has been conceived and defined in many ways and yet there is confusion around the seemingly 'simple' question – what constitutes a peasant. The dominant definitional categorization of the peasant more or less remained the same across the spectrum, classifying them as petty producers, located in a cultural cocoon with subsistence production as the primary activity and engagements with markets being quite rare. The receding peasant-farmer differences and limitations of the old definitions become extremely significant in the context of capitalist development in agriculture. This paper tries to trace the evolution of the term 'peasant' in past few centuries through a brief survey of the classical works and major debates around it. Towards the end, the paper tries to argue how onward march of global capitalism has rendered a number of past definitions meaningless, and attempts to make a contribution in updating it.*

As agrarian crises and ecological disasters become more and more severe, the attention of global scholars and policy makers is once again increasingly shifting towards one important category- the 'peasant'. But despite a history of intense debates around the term, covering various disciplines, continents, scholars and actors, there is still confusion or lack of clarity around the seemingly 'simple' question – what constitutes a peasant. The industrial revolution put forth the issue of transformation of an agrarian society to an industrial society and this is how the famed "agrarian question" was perceived in the initial period. During the initial period of the French revolution, the peasantry's role in the violent state of affairs due to the 'great fear' led people like Balzac to categorize it as the most regressive class, envious of the fortune of others, easy to

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manipulate and inherently wicked.<sup>1</sup> Later, because of its support to Napoleon, many termed the peasantry as a highly reactionary class whose only concern was to safeguard its little piece of land. Till the Russian revolution, peasants were not getting very sympathetic treatment from the Marxists but the question of revolution in China, and the role of peasantries in third world revolutions in the post war period changed this scenario.

Post war period is also the time when a number of anthropological studies on peasants came out. However, the dominant definitional categorization of the peasant more or less remained the same across the spectrum, classifying them as petty producers, located in a cultural cocoon with subsistence production as the primary activity and engagements with markets being quite rare. Towards the end, this paper argues why this understanding of 'peasant' needs to change.

### **Not a Class but a “Condition”: Locating Peasantry in Early Writings of Marx and Engels**

Marx's views on agriculture stemmed from his engagement with the impact of capitalism's development on agriculture, and the role of peasantries during various processes of social change. For Marx, the proletariat, not peasantry was the actor of change that would lead to destruction of capitalism, class-based society and private property. Hence his works are certainly not extremely complimentary towards the peasantry. The agrarian question to him referred to the transformation of pre-capitalistic societies and systems into capitalist ones. Being a pre-capitalist mode of production, peasantry and peasant agriculture according to him were bound to perish before the all-encompassing march of Capital, traits of which could be seen in the enclosure movement that ruined peasant agriculture in Britain and turned erstwhile peasants into proletarians.<sup>2</sup> While talking about the pitiable state of the French peasantry, Marx asserted that the reason for the same lay in the nature of peasant agriculture, e.g.-

*“...their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships... A few score of these make up a village, and a few score of villages make up a Department... much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes”<sup>3</sup>*

In his writings, Marx often criticized the inertia, egoism and attachment to traditions of the peasantry.<sup>4</sup> The French peasantry later became the main ally of Napoleon,

<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Honore de Balzac, *The Peasants* (Philadelphia: George Barrie and Son, 1899), <https://archive.org/stream/peasants00ivesgoog/n48/mode/2up> (Website accessed on 21 March 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Part 8, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867/capital.htm> (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, VII*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm> (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Duncan, *Marx and Mill: Two views of Social Conflict and Social Harmony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 128.

helping him in crushing the workers' uprising of Paris and consolidating power in his own hands. Marx saw this as a reactionary act of "a class harbouring conservative small property illusions" which helped Louis Bonaparte's accession to power in return of their property rights, while detaching "state from its old class roots and softened the edge of class collisions".<sup>5</sup> That is why he criticized the French peasants and the Napoleonic state as:

*"...clumsily cunning, knavishly naïve, doltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world-historic piece of buffoonery, and an undecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilized — this symbol bore the unmistakable features of the class that represents barbarism within civilization"*<sup>6</sup>

The above two statements are the most controversial and frequently quoted statements of Marx on peasantry, used by the critics (who try to portray him as an anti-peasant thinker)<sup>7</sup> to denounce the Marxist understanding of peasantry as demeaning.<sup>8</sup> However, scholars like Hal Draper rightly point out that they convey this sense for they are mostly quoted without clarifying their historical setting. The second one was not demeaning since Barbarism here means "standing outside the bounds of high civilisation", which in this case was bourgeoisie civilisation.<sup>9</sup> And barbarism was also used by Marx to signify colonial exploitation and ruin of civilisation as well, as a result of contention between classes.<sup>10</sup> Further, Draper stresses that Marx's approach in his writings about the French peasantry was more guided by an attempt to understand the "relation of the peasantry to the other classes of modern society" and the changes they were experiencing, rather than comparing peasants of today with those of yesterday or trying to explore or define the essence of the peasantry.<sup>11</sup>

The transformation of non-capitalist social relations to capitalist ones had not happened on expected lines in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and as European Marxist parties debated how to capture power, the issue of the persistence of peasant agriculture and peasant population made them worry. Due to its "property fanaticism" and reluctant attitude towards aligning with the proletariat in class action to overthrow the ruling classes, the

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ch02.htm> (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>7</sup> David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1951).

<sup>8</sup> Teodor Shanin even begins his *The Awkward Class* with Marx's quote about barbarism of the peasantry, to highlight Marx's 'anti-peasant' understanding, see Teodor Shanin, *The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. 2, The Politics of Social Classes* (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011), 345.

<sup>10</sup> John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, *Empire of Barbarism*, [www.monthlyreview.org/2004/12/01/empire-of-barbarism](http://www.monthlyreview.org/2004/12/01/empire-of-barbarism) (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, 2011, *op. cited*, 331.

peasantry was a hindrance in the path of European Marxist parties in their pursuit of political power. This political problem was the reason why Engels transformed the “agrarian question” into the “peasant question”. The peasant question, in essence was – how to overcome the political problem of peasant apathy and mobilise them behind the socialist parties? In his *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, Engels maintained that the leftist parties “must first go from the towns to the country” and “must become a power in the countryside”, if they wanted to capture the state.<sup>12</sup>

However like Marx, Engels maintained that the peasantry was not a unitary class in itself, but a combination of different classes, consisting “of quite different parts”, or “subdivisions of the rural population”.<sup>13</sup> Peasantry for both of them was not a class, but a condition, and the later Marxists also upheld this position. The Peasant Question in France and Germany was written in 1894, a time when the development of capitalism was already pushing pressures on the small holding peasant, “differentiation was proceeding apace” and “class relations were emerging far more clearly and sharply within the peasantry”.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the peasant question for Engels meant the enquiry into class differences within the peasantry to find out which “subdivisions of the rural population (could) be won over by the Social-Democratic Party”<sup>15</sup> In this quest, Engels identified small peasants and big-middle peasants as two significant divisions, with small peasants being “owner or tenant”.<sup>16</sup>

Engels suggested that socialist parties should win over the small peasants to their side, and opposed the “double opportunism” of these parties which tried to exploit the sense of property present in small peasants on the one hand (by making sham promises to them about protection of their petty private property despite knowing that it was bound to perish in front of capitalism’s forward march and later changes), and attempting to bring in the middle-big peasants and “other capitalist exploiters of the national soil” into their fold on the other.<sup>17</sup> He stressed that in place of this strategy, the socialist parties much prepare the small peasants for a transition of their private properties to cooperative ones, without use of force for this purpose.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the peasant question was “not a work of theory”, but “essentially a practical intervention”.<sup>19</sup> Engels’ engagement with the peasant question led him to initiate an exercise of differentiating classes within peasantry to determine the policy of socialist parties with respect to the peasantry, bringing it down, in essence, to the question of mobilisation. Lenin and Kautsky extended this exercise further, but with a different differentiation scheme.

<sup>12</sup> Fredrick Engels, *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, 1894 (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 2011), 458.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 457-59.

<sup>14</sup> T.J. Byres, ‘Foreword’, in Atiur Rahman, *Peasants and Classes: A Study of Differentiation in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), xii.

<sup>15</sup> Fredrick Engels, 2011, *op. cited*, 459.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>19</sup> Jairus Banaji, ‘Illusions about the Peasantry: Karl Kautsky and the Agrarian Question’, in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, London, 289.

### **‘Whom shall we Ally with?’ Peasantry in Later Marxist Writings, from Lenin to Mao**

Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (henceforth DCR) and Karl Kautsky’s *Die Agrarfrage (The Agrarian Question)* both came in the same year- 1899. Kautsky’s book dealt about development of capitalism in agriculture in the German context using data from Britain, France, Germany, and USA, while Lenin’s book was concerned about the same in Russia. The second part of Kautsky’s book “The Social Democratic Agrarian Policy”, clearly indicates its purpose- to arrive at an agrarian policy for the socialist parties.<sup>20</sup>

One of Kautsky’s finding is that with the development of capitalism in agriculture, a situation arises whereby rather than being dissolved due to the expansion of big farms, the small peasant farms becomes the source of cheap labour and other inputs for the large farms.<sup>21</sup> Along with this function, the family farms or small farms also engage in non-farm industrial activities, including wage labour, which allow them to survive.<sup>22</sup> This goes against the reading of Engels who believed that the small peasants “are doomed” in front of the big, capitalist farms. However, Bryceson says that Kautsky’s understanding was not fundamentally different from other Marxist scholars as he also maintained that over a long period, peasant agriculture and population will eventually disappear through migration to urban areas and increase in non-farm rural livelihoods.<sup>23</sup>

Other than being an enquiry into the development of capitalist relations in Russian agriculture, Lenin’s book was also motivated by the need to engage with the Narodniks, who considered that peasantry was essentially an archetypical whole, and class differentiation in it was never permanent, but a temporary phenomenon. The Narodniks had a legacy of scholarly engagements with the peasantry since the second half of nineteenth century and their works relied on rich statistics collected from the provincial government bodies in Russia called the *Zemstvo*; many of the *Zemstvo* statisticians were in fact Narodniks.<sup>24</sup> Based on the *Zemstvo* data, their studies refuted the claims

<sup>20</sup> See Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question: A Survey of the Tendencies of Modern Agricultural Policy of the Social Democracy*, <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1899/agrar/> (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Hamza Alavi, ‘Peasantry and Capitalism: A Marxist Discourse’, in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 192.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Rigg, *More than the Soil: Rural Change in Southeast Asia* (Essex: Prentice Hall, 2000), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Deborah Bryceson, ‘Peasant Theories and Smallholder Policies: Past and Present’, in Deborah Bryceson, Cristobal Kay and Jos E Mooij (eds.), *Disappearing Peasantries: Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (London: ITDH Publishing, 2000), 11.

<sup>24</sup> Utsa Patnaik (ed.), *The Agrarian Question in Marx and his Successors*, Vol. II (New Delhi: Left Word Books, 2011), 93.

of any significant development of capitalism in Russian agriculture, or its sustenance.<sup>25</sup>

After examination of the same Zemstvo data used by the Narodniks, Lenin showed that capitalism was already a dominant trend in Russian agriculture, and in terms of resources (carting-ploughing implements, land, draught animals etc.) there existed a huge gap between various sections of peasantry that resulted in class differentiation.<sup>26</sup> Alike any developing commodity economy, Russian peasantry was also experiencing pushes and pulls of forces like completion, land grab, concentration of resources in the hands of a minority, proletarianisation and rise of wage labour and property inequality etc., which were leading to “depeasantisation” i.e. a process which made old peasantries to disappear and brought in a new type of rural inhabitants in the countryside.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of these facts, Lenin differentiated the Russian peasantry into three strata, the middle peasants standing in the middle of its two extremes – “the peasant bourgeoisie” and “the rural proletariat”.<sup>28</sup>

Lenin also talked about two trajectories of capitalist development in agriculture – “from above” and “from below”<sup>29</sup>, with the former taking place in Prussia and the latter in the United States of America. The “from above” or Prussian path entails a process through which the Prussian feudal lords transformed themselves “into a class of capitalist farmers hiring wage labour”, becoming a “class for itself” while also crushing the Prussian peasants.<sup>30</sup> Lenin said that this path retains semi-feudal features for long, and since transformation to capitalism through this was far slower than the requirement, it also crushed the possibilities of development of the peasant economy as the productive forces grew slower under this process.<sup>31</sup> Opposed to this was the “from below” or North American path which was a more preferable path as it ensured “free development of the small peasant farming”, by removal of feudal vestiges and turned the whole agrarian system into a capitalist system.<sup>32</sup> Since, the “class for itself” action here was

<sup>25</sup> Nicholai Chernyshevsky was one of the most influential names of Russian Populism who asserted that capitalism had not commenced in Russia. V.P. Voronstov and N Danielson were two later Narodnik economists of the 1880s who agreed towards the penetration of capitalism in Russian agriculture but still maintained that Russian capitalism was unsustainable. In *DCR*, Lenin was primarily responding to these arguments of Voronstov and Danielson, whom he has referred to as Mr. VV and Mr. N respectively, in the course of the book. For more, see Gavin Kitching, *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective* (London: Methuen, 1982), 37-39; Atiur Rahman, *Peasants and Classes*, 1986, *op. cited*, 13-38.

<sup>26</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, 172-187, [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-03.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-03.pdf) (Website accessed on 15 March 2015).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-89.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-187.

<sup>29</sup> V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, *op. cited*, 32-33.

<sup>30</sup> Terence J. Byres, ‘Paths of Capitalist Agrarian Transition in the Past and in the Contemporary World’, in V.K. Ramachandran and Madhura Swaminathan (eds.), *Agrarian Studies: Essays on Agrarian Relations in Less-Developed Countries* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2002), 59.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>32</sup> V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, *op. cited*, 33.

done by the peasantry, it ensured that the peasant economy prospered while the roadblocks in the path of productive forces were removed and a home market thrived due to these developments; due to this the Marxists consider the second path more progressive than the first.<sup>33</sup>

Other than countering the Narodnik ideas of an archetypical peasantry, Lenin's schema of class differentiation actually served another purpose – the task of determining what role various classes of peasantry were expected to play in the revolution. Since the task of the Bolshevik Party was to do revolution in a comparatively backward country with a significant peasant population, the Soviets concluded that the *Kulaks* or the rich peasants were the class enemies, while *Batraks-Bedankyaks* (landless seasonal agricultural workers and poor peasants respectively) were true allies and the *Seredenyaks* or mid-income peasants were unreliable allies.

What T.J. Byres calls the 'second round of the agrarian question' began in the aftermath of the Russian collectivisation exercise as the geographical locus and scope of the issue widened from Europe to Asia, Africa and Latin America, in the context of national liberation movements and peasant revolutions.<sup>34</sup> Most of these countries that were going through national liberation movements or revolutionary movements were predominantly agricultural and hence, the question of finding the most revolutionary section of the peasantry became significant. Mao Tse-Tung emerged as the most influential exponent of the "poor peasant thesis" in this time.

Two of his writings – 'Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', and 'How to Differentiate Classes in Rural Areas' focus on the situation of class differences in peasantry in the Chinese countryside of 1920s, and formulate a strategy for intensification of revolutionary action.<sup>35</sup> Under the heading 'Vanguards of the Revolution', Mao states that while rich peasants remain inactive in such struggles, middle peasants vacillate and that it is only the poor peasants who constitute the main force of revolutionary struggles as they are not afraid to lose anything.<sup>36</sup> Mao concluded that this "great mass of poor peasants" that constituted "altogether 70 per cent of the rural population" was the real "vanguard in the overthrow of the feudal forces" which performed the revolutionary task that was pending since a long time.<sup>37</sup> Mao called the Chinese revolution a peasant struggle, giving the primary actor position to poor peasants in the revolution, unlike the proletariat in the October revolution. It was this

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed explanation on Lenin's treatment of these two paths, see T.J. Byres, *Capitalism from Above and Capitalism from Below: An Essay in Comparative Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 27-36.

<sup>34</sup> T.J. Byres, 'Foreword', 1986, *op. cited*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>35</sup> See Mao Tse-Tung, 'Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', 23-62 and 'How to Differentiate Classes in Rural Areas', 137-40, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), [www.marx2mao.com/PDFs/MaoSW1.pdf](http://www.marx2mao.com/PDFs/MaoSW1.pdf) (Website accessed on 18 March 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, 'Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', *op. cited*, 30-34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

section of the peasantry that would “rush forward along the road to liberation”, sweeping “all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants”, and “every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade” was to be put to test in front of them, so as “to be accepted or rejected”.<sup>38</sup> Mao’s views of poor peasants were later opposed from within the Marxist tradition by Hamza Alawi and Eric Wolf, as we will see later. But his insistence on class differentiation within peasantry became an important concern for later scholars.

### **‘Reactionaries’ or a ‘unique’ category: Peasantry in neo-Narodnik writings and the Russian Collectivisation Debate**

The Marxist ideas on differentiation of peasantry were severely challenged by the neo-Narodnik school, also called the ‘organisation and production school’, led by Russian economist A.V. Chayanov. Chayanov’s principle emphasis was to show that peasant family farms were an economic form which was primarily different from “capitalist farming even in an environment clearly dominated by capitalism”.<sup>39</sup> As the director of the Soviet Agricultural Academy, he initiated a formal debate on the question of the nature of the peasant family farm and peasant agriculture’s place in an economy with the Marxists, which reached its peak in the 1926 and was cut short by Stalin’s intervention in 1929 with the beginning of the collectivisation exercise.<sup>40</sup> Lost in the years of Stalinism, his *Peasant Farm Organisation* became available to Anglophone readers only in 1966, followed by the translation of *The Theory of Peasant Cooperative* in 1991. Despite this, his influence on peasant studies is unparalleled.

Chayanov insisted that the peasant family farms were based on the “nonwage family economic unit”, which was a non-capitalist form with categories like wages and prices being outside of their purview.<sup>41</sup> The significance of this specific type of economic production for Chayanov was huge, as among the six types of economies that he cited, one type is the “family economy”, with two sub-types of “natural” and “commodity” economy.<sup>42</sup> Maintaining that fulfilment of the family demand was the primary objective of peasant activities, he stressed that the degree of self-exploitation of labour, the

<sup>38</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, Quoted in Utsa Patnaik (ed.), *The Agrarian Question in Marx and his Successors*, Vol. II, 2011, *op. cited*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Teodor Shanin, ‘Chayanov’s Message: Illuminations, Miscomprehensions, and the Contemporary “Development Theory”’, in Daniel Thorner, B. Kerblay and REF Smith (eds.), *A.V. Chayanov: The Theory of Peasant Economy* (Irwin: Homewood, 1966), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Chayanov was later persecuted for his ideas that were contrary to the official Soviet line. His views that forcing peasant family farms to produce surplus won’t yield desired results were criticised by Stalin as a defence of Kulaks. He was tried three times, sent to exile and later sentenced to death in late 1930s. His family came to know of his death only two years after he was killed. He was later rehabilitated in the 1980s by the efforts of a number of intellectuals and academicians, including Teodor Shanin. For more, see Daniel Thorner, B. Kerblay and REF Smith (eds.), *A.V. Chayanov: The Theory of Peasant Economy*, 1966, *op. cited*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>42</sup> The other types of economies were capitalist, slavery, communist, feudal and the serf economy of Tsarist Russia. See *Ibid.*, xxii.

‘drudgery’, depended upon the demand satisfaction of the family farm – the more the family demand, the greater the drudgery.<sup>43</sup> Using farm size as the indicator of a family farm’s wealth, he argued that family farm’s size changed in accordance with the family’s life cycle, going on increasing when the family grew and its members matured into workers, and coming down when the members aged or when the family disintegrated.<sup>44</sup> What was economic, class differentiation for the Marxists was just demographic differentiation for Chayanov.<sup>45</sup> While smaller farms grew into bigger farms with growth in the family members, the bigger farms disintegrated in smaller ones, keeping the number of affluent and not so affluent sections of peasantry proportional, when seen over a long period of time.

These ideas invited severe criticism from the Soviet economists, who under the leadership of L.N. Kristman tried to show the deepening of capitalist relations and class formations within the peasantry, arguing that a small section of peasants prospered at the cost of many.<sup>46</sup> Later, to justify appropriating the surplus from the peasant economy to fund Soviet state’s industrialisation efforts, Evgenii Preobrazhensky argued for the need of a ‘primitive socialist accumulation’, to overcome its backwardness and ruins of the war, and achieve a significant improvement in its productive powers.<sup>47</sup> This meant moves to appropriate the property of *Kulaks* or forced collectivisation, which ultimately did take place on behest of Stalin; a Congress of Agrarian Marxists was urgently summoned to condemn the opponents of this policy, labelling them as traitors and the debate came to a forced end with it.<sup>48</sup>

However, in later years Chayanov’s line of reasoning was picked up by a number of scholars, most prominently Teodor Shanin and Daniel Thorner. Thorner said that as a “widespread form of organisation of human society”, the peasant economy holds extreme significance, and “it is essential to define peasant economy as a system of production”, as “a distinctive group” while distinguishing it from other historical systems such as slavery, capitalism and socialism”.<sup>49</sup> Talking about peasantry in the East and West Pakistan region, David Bertocci used the term “cyclical Kulakism” to argue that the position of rich peasants was never permanent in the agrarian system as the circulation of elites kept on happening as a result of the fluidity-flexibility of agrarian systems and rural strata.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>44</sup> J M Millar, ‘Reformulation of A V Chayanov’s Theory of Peasant Economy’, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 18, No. 2, January 1970, 220.

<sup>45</sup> See Henry Bernstein, V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov, ‘Looking Back, Looking Forward’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, Routledge (January 2009), 51-81.

<sup>46</sup> Terry Cox and Gary Littlejohn (eds.), *Kristman and the Agrarian Marxists* (New York: Frank Class and Company, 1984), 11-60.

<sup>47</sup> Evhenii Preobrazhensky, *The New Economics* (London: OUP, 1965), 80-124.

<sup>48</sup> Teodor Shanin, *The Awkward Class*, 1972, *op. cited*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Thorner, ‘Peasant Economy as a Category in Economic History’, in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, 1987, *op. cited*, 202-18.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Bertocci, ‘Social Organisation and Agricultural Development in Bangladesh’, in R.D. Stevens, Hamza Alavi and Peter Bertocci (eds.), *Rural Development in Bangladesh and Pakistan* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976).

The collectivization drive of Soviets drew huge criticism, while the Narodnik insistence on uniqueness of peasant economy inspired various schools like the substantivists and moral economists that emerged in the later years.

### **‘Nature’ of Peasantry re-visited: Continuation of the debate in Formalists-Substantivists and Moral Economists**

The formalist-substantivist divide is a result of the post war revival of the old, neo Narodnic-Soviet debate regarding the nature and traits of peasantry – whether peasantry was an a-historical, pristine ‘type’ of social existence that differed from others or not? Karl Polanyi asserted that the trade in pre-industrial societies was different from the same in industrial societies as rural producers functioned according to the logic of fulfilling subsistence needs rather than maximisation of benefits, a trait that was characteristic of the industrial societies.<sup>51</sup> In his article ‘Economic theory and primitive society’, George Dalton extended this argument, saying much of the contemporary economic theory was inapplicable to peasant societies of the past, as it differed from the present market economy “not in degree but in kind”.<sup>52</sup> Together, they argued against the evolution of economic systems and societies, from simple to complex, ascribing an essentialist position to the peasant societies. The substantivist school thus revived the Chayanovian understanding of defining the peasantry.

To some extent, this also gets reflected in works of the subaltern school.<sup>53</sup> Ranajit Guha, in the very first volume of the subaltern studies argued that the domain of the subalterns was completely distinct from that of the elites, having its own logic, culture, patterns of mobilization and layers of domination.<sup>54</sup> Through a study of peasant insurgencies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Guha tried to show this domain of the subaltern and its concepts in action, attempting to prove the unique manner in which the peasant insurgencies derived meaning and methods from their own resources.<sup>55</sup> Partha Chatterjee extended this argument further in his studies on the peasant movements in pre-Independence Bengal, highlighting the community centric, non-individual line of peasant reasoning.<sup>56</sup> However, most of the theorisation of this school was limited to peasantry in colonial days.

<sup>51</sup> See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 1957), [http://inctpped.ie.ufrj.br/spiderweb/pdf\\_4/Great\\_Transformation.pdf](http://inctpped.ie.ufrj.br/spiderweb/pdf_4/Great_Transformation.pdf) (Website accessed on 18 March 2015).

<sup>52</sup> George Dalton, ‘Economic Theory and Primitive Society’, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (1961), 1-25, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/667335.pdf?\\_=1467122619617](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/667335.pdf?_=1467122619617) (Website accessed on 18 March 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Subaltern school has been dealt with very briefly here, for more, see Partha Chatterjee, ‘A Brief History of Subaltern Studies’, in Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 289-301.

<sup>54</sup> Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I, Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 31-33.

<sup>55</sup> For a detailed treatment of the same, see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, in *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Robert Firth opposed this, insisting that peasants also employ rational choice in allocating scarce resources, and hence was not different from people in industrial societies.<sup>57</sup> Clubbed under the formalist school, Firth and likeminded economic anthropologists such as Michael Douglas and A.G. Dewey tried to break the “primitive-modern societies” divide, arguing that peasants also try to organise their resources with an intent to maximise their utility, but the absence of formal economic institutions like banks force them to do it in a slightly different manner. While the Moral Economy school took some inspiration from the substantivist school, arguing for the different nature of peasant societies, the formalist logic was picked up by Samuel Popkin, who tried to explain the behaviour of the peasantry using the rational decision-making model and tools of political economy.<sup>58</sup> Popkin insisted that the peasant is a rational actor, making choices for self-maximisation on the basis of a loss-benefit calculation influenced very little by the moral concerns.

In recreating the essentialist notion of a pristine, a-historical, homogenous peasantry, alike the substantivists, Moral Economy School also takes inspiration from the neo-Narodnics, though without acknowledging it. Works of historians like Eric Hobsbawm<sup>59</sup> and E P Thompson<sup>60</sup> are said to contain the traits of the moral economy but the most well-known proponent of this school is American anthropologist James Scott.<sup>61</sup> Based upon his fieldwork in Southeast Asian countries, Scott talks about a unique peasant culture and economy that runs on the logic of subsistence (called ‘subsistence ethic’ or ‘safety first’ principle), risk aversion, community and reciprocity, contrary to the industrial societies’ notion of profit maximisation and individualism.<sup>62</sup> Scott argued that the traditional structures of peasant societies and patron-client ties between the landlords and peasants provided a cushion against distress through ‘social insurance’ from the traditional elite and ‘distribution of risk’ in peasant society, making actual starvation rare in Cochin-China and Lower Burma (now Myanmar)<sup>63</sup>. Subsistence, thus, was a ‘moral claim’ of the peasantry over those whole ruled over it<sup>64</sup>, but the colonial

<sup>57</sup> See Raymond Firth, ‘Themes in economic anthropology: a general comment’ in Raymond Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967).

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Popkin, ‘The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Peasant Society’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (May 1980), 413. See also Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>59</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

<sup>60</sup> Thompson is credited with the usage of the term ‘moral economy’, See E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> For the works that inspired Scott’s idea of Moral Economy, see the first part of Marc Edelman, ‘Bringing the Moral Economy Back in...to the Study of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transnational Peasant Movements’, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 107, No. 3 (September 2005), 331-45.

<sup>62</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 13-55.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.

rule and economic policy decisions associated with it destroyed this traditional structure, forcing the peasants to rebel as last resort.

**‘Most revolutionary’ or No Longer Meaningful: From ‘Middle Peasant Thesis’ to Negation of the term ‘Peasant’**

Contrary to above-mentioned celebratory accounts, the initial anthropologist engagements with the peasant were either belittling, or at best essentialising. This could be seen from the example of A.L. Kroeber’s definition who said that peasants are those who constitute “part societies with part cultures, definitely rural, yet live in a relation to a market town” and though they are dissimilar to the tribal people as they lack the “isolation, political autonomy and self sufficiency of a tribal population”, they still “maintain much of their old identity, integration and attachment to the soil.”<sup>65</sup> Robert Redfield took inspiration from the ‘part culture’ orientation, and defined peasantry as a “little tradition”, while maintaining that “peasant society and culture” have “something generic” about them, thus producing “some similarities all over the world” in this unique “arrangement of humanity”.<sup>66</sup> Teodor Shanin, though not so patronising, also argued that the peasantry consisted of “small agricultural producers, who, with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families, produce mainly for their own consumption” along with the purpose of meeting their “obligations to the holders of political and economic power”.<sup>67</sup>

A revival of anthropological engagement with peasantry happened in the wake of post War period as developments in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which witnessed peasantry led revolutions and peasant uprisings against colonial rule, sparked the interests of both Marxists and the US-funded anthropologists. Marxist writer and ideologue of the Algerian uprising- Frantz Fanon said that “in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain”.<sup>68</sup> Fanon stressed that “the underprivileged and the starving peasant” who lives “outside the class system is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays”.<sup>69</sup> In his 1965 article ‘Peasants and Revolution’ which was a reply to Fanon’s generalisation about peasantry’s revolutionary potential, Hamza Alawi highlighted the need for differentiating between the nature and capabilities of various sections of the peasantry, coming up with his “middle peasant thesis”.

<sup>65</sup> A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 284, <https://archive.org/stream/anthropologyrace00kroe#page/n3/mode/2up> (Website accessed on 18 March 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 25.

<sup>67</sup> Teodor Shanin, *The Awkward Class*, 1972, *op. cited*, 204.

<sup>68</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, The 2004 Grove Press edition of the book mentioned above does not use the words ‘outside the class system’, but the 1961 Penguin edition does use these precise words to describe the starving peasant.

Using role of various sections of the peasantry in movements and revolutionary struggles in Russia, China and India, Alawi argued that the middle peasants, who were independent small holders owning land that they cultivated themselves and belonged to a “different sector of the rural economy”,<sup>70</sup> were “initially the most militant element of the peasantry”.<sup>71</sup> Alawi maintained that though his argument reversed “the sequence that is suggested in Maoist texts” as the poor peasants were “the least militant class of the peasantry” to him, it was “in accord with the Maoist practise”.<sup>72</sup> Eric Wolf supported this argument, by saying that “only a peasantry in possession of some tactical control over its own resources” could provide leadership and sustain “an on-going political leverage”.<sup>73</sup> Since the poor peasant lacked any tactical power as he depended “on the landlord for the largest part of his livelihood”, he and the landless labourer were “unlikely to pursue the course of rebellion” unless helped by an “external power” e.g. the Red army in case of China and the collapse of the Russian army in case of the October Revolution.<sup>74</sup> The rich peasants, being the local agent of powers, were unlikely to embark on a revolutionary course and hence only the “land owning middle peasantry” or the “peasantry located in a peripheral area outside the domain of landlord control” was able to “enter a sustained rebellion”.<sup>75</sup>

Going further, in *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, Wolf defines the peasants as populations “existentially involved in cultivation” and making “autonomous decisions regarding the process of cultivation”.<sup>76</sup> The category thus includes share croppers, tenants and owner cultivators, “as long as they are in a position to make the relevant decisions on how their crops are grown”, but excludes fishermen or landless labourers.<sup>77</sup> Differentiating between the peasant and the farmer, Wolf says that “the major aim of the peasant is subsistence”, often keeping “the market at arm’s length” while the farmer “enters the market fully, subjects his land and labour to open competition” and “explores alternative uses for the factors of production in search for maximal returns”.<sup>78</sup>

All these definitions indicate of a generic type of peasantry, engaged in petty production, and more or less alienated from the ‘market’. Further, all such definitions belong to the pre neo-liberal world and hence need an adjustment with the changed times. Echoing these sentiments, in the very first volume of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* Sidney Mintz called for the “need for middle-range definitions of peasantries and of peasant societies” which could lead to the “widest-ranging level of definitional engagement, adequate to describe” various “real peasant societies” that exist on the ground.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hamza Alawi, ‘Peasants and Revolution’, *The Socialist Register* (1965), 244.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Eric R. Wolf, ‘On Peasant Rebellions’, *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1969), 286-294.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), xviii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii-xix.

Despite this, Mintz refused to acknowledge landless agricultural workers as peasants, keeping the definition narrow.

But while many call for broadening the definition of ‘peasant’, others argue for abandoning usage of the term altogether. Anthropologist Anthony Leeds considered that peasant was “a folk term adopted into social science” while lacked any precision and hence he was critical of those who used it.<sup>80</sup> Marxist political economist Henry Bernstein argues that usage of the term peasant shall be limited to explaining the “pre-capitalist societies, populated by mostly small-scale family farms” as capitalism has led to division of peasantry into “small-scale capitalist farmers, relatively successful petty commodity producers and wage labour”.<sup>81</sup> However, a large number of scholars have abstained from making such claims while also recognising the “occupational multiplicity” and changes in the countryside.

Marc Edelman argues that “peasant is not just a role or a social structural position, but also a form of identity and self-ascription”.<sup>82</sup> Thus, he highlights the significance of invocation of this term and the situation in which it was done, giving importance to the role of the grassroots agrarian movements. Transnational agrarian organisation Via Campesina defines peasants as “the people of the land”, using common concerns like increased vulnerabilities due to globalisation, commodity markets and climate change as the factors that unite various groups of rural inhabitants – owner cultivators, sharecroppers, landless labourers, rural artisans etc. together. Edelman points out that the activist definitions have now embraced the inter changeability of terms “farmer” and “peasant” as a general practise.<sup>83</sup> This trend towards broadening the definition is also reflected in the efforts of the international organisations and institutions as the definition of peasant forwarded by the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council (UNO) is similar to Via Campesina’s definition.<sup>84</sup> Thus, while majority of definitions given by social scientists and anthropologists differentiate between the peasant and the farmer (sometimes also between both these and the agrarian labourer), recent practises in grassroots activist circles and international organisations use them interchangeably. Though interchangeable usage of both terms is something that has become necessary, the reasons for this lie in the sweeping changes that have happened in the world through forces of global capitalism. Let’s try to understand this in the specific context of India.

<sup>79</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, ‘A Note on the Definition of Peasantries’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1973), 92.

<sup>80</sup> Anthony Leeds, ‘Mythos and Pathos: Some Unpleasantries on Peasantries’, in Rhoda Halperin and James Dow (eds.), *Peasant Livelihood: Studies in Economic Anthropology and Cultural Ecology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 228.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Bernstein, *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Marc Edelman, ‘Transnational Organising in Agrarian Central America: Histories, Challenges, Prospects’, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 8, No. 2/3 (April 2008), 251-252.

<sup>83</sup> Marc Edelman, ‘What is a Peasant? What are Peasantries? A Briefing Paper on Issues of Definition’ (New York: Hunter, 2013), 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

**The Peasant in post-colonial *economic*: lessons from India**<sup>85</sup>

The 1960-70s saw an intense debate in India with Utsa Patnaik arguing that capitalism was emerging as the dominant trend in Indian agriculture, and opposed by a group of scholars including Ashok Rudra, A. Majid, B.D. Talib etc.<sup>86</sup> The debate ended in favour of Patnaik with majority agreeing that capitalist and semi-capitalist relations were indeed significantly emerging in the countryside at the cost of the feudal relations.<sup>87</sup>

The receding peasant-farmer differences and limitations of the old definitions become extremely significant in this context of capitalist development in agriculture, especially since the advent of Green Revolution peasant politics in India. Green Revolution in India produced a new category of peasants, who were adapt at making use of modern techniques and technology of agriculture, skilled in pressuring the state machinery in ensuring greater returns on produce and cheap input costs through united political action, and yet were culturally not very dissimilar to the notion of the old peasant. Nicknamed “bullock capitalists”<sup>88</sup>, their unions heavily influenced the politics of the 1970s and 80s across India, be it the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, Shetkari Sanghatna of Maharashtra, Karnataka Rajya Ryot Sangha (KRRS) of Karnataka or Tamil Nadu Agriculturists’ Association (TNAA) of Tamil Nadu. Keeping in mind these differences, Dipankar Gupta uses the term ‘farmer’ for owner-cultivators of post independent India, and ‘peasant’ for those of pre-independence period.<sup>89</sup> Making an attempt to explain the difference between them, he goes on to narrate what both terms denote. The notion of ‘peasant’, says Gupta carries political-economic backwardness, indifference to dynamism, rural idiocy with it<sup>90</sup>, while the ‘farmer’ is “conceived as a modern agriculturist who often hires labour, employs machines and other green revolution techniques, and who interacts with the market and with political institutions more intensely and knowledgeably than the peasant is understood to do”.<sup>91</sup> However, despite being farmers in this sense, the BKU mass base still retains a ‘peasant outlook’ in many ways and hence, Gupta coins a new term, the

<sup>85</sup> Due to limitations of space, only a few scholars who extensively wrote about Indian peasantry could be engaged here.

<sup>86</sup> Other contributors to the debate included Paresh Chattopadhyay, Hamza Alavi, Andre Gundar Frank, Ranjit Sau, Jairus Banaji, Pradhan H Prasad, Gail Omvedt and M.M. Mukhopadhyay. See Utsa Patnaik (ed.) *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The ‘Mode of Production’ Debate in India*, (Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1990)

<sup>87</sup> Pranab Bardhan, ‘On Class Relations in Indian Agriculture’, *Economic and Political Weekly* (12 May 1979), 857-60.

<sup>88</sup> Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Laxmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

<sup>89</sup> There are some exceptions as sometimes he uses the ‘peasant’ for post-independence owner-cultivators as well. But this usage is limited to small or marginal owner-cultivators who are clubbed as ‘poor peasants’. However, for categories like agricultural labourers and tenants Gupta uses the appropriate terms in both phases.

<sup>90</sup> Dipankar Gupta, 1997, *op. cited*, 23

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

‘peasant-farmer’ to signify this new age owner-cultivator, the *Kisan*.<sup>92</sup> While the ‘farmer’ part takes care of the economic roles aspect of the *Kisan*, the ‘peasant’ part “connotes the culture and ambience in which the farmer lives”.<sup>93</sup>

It is understandable to keep usage of the term ‘peasant’ to denote the cultural-social universe where the current day agriculturalists live. But Gupta does not explain why he considers the needs to use the word ‘farmer’ to denote the ‘economic roles’ aspect of the owner cultivator. Perhaps we could trace the reasons for the same in the traditional-anthropological definitions of the ‘peasant’ mentioned in previous sections.

The Chayanovian definition of the peasant as someone who engages in agricultural production on the family farm with family labour (in most of the cases) and produces mainly for sustenance, influenced a number of definitions of peasants that came up later, though with some differences. Hence, when the later Marxists differentiated peasantry on the basis of outside labour hired, or when Hamza Alawi put forth the ‘middle peasant thesis’ which was substantiated by the works of Frantz Fanon and Eric Wolf, or when the neo-Narodniks like Shanin and later the moral economists explained peasant rebellions in the third world, all of them had the previously defined notion of ‘the peasant’. Eric Wolf’s description of peasant is quite representative of this whole universe of scholars; he insisted, as mentioned previously, that the peasant is someone who is engaged in subsistence production and his engagements with the market are next to none. That’s why when someone like Gupta has to deal with peasants of the Green Revolution period, who are not just surplus producers but are deeply embedded in the market for supply of modern inputs and sale of their product, he feels the need to qualify the concept by adding ‘farmer’ to it to signify the ‘economic roles’ which in essence highlights a changed relationship with the market.

It is in this context that bringing in Kalyan Sanyal’s understanding of capitalist development becomes important. While expressing his understanding of the “post-colonial *economic*”, Sanyal differentiates between what he calls the “need economy” and the general capitalist economy, with the need economy being that realm of “non-capital” that is “annihilated by primitive accumulation but resuscitated by development interventions”.<sup>94</sup> This space of the “non-capital” is ruled by the logic of subsistence or fulfilment of needs and comprises small scale or petty owner-producer enterprise.<sup>95</sup> These could be a small roadside eatery in Kolkata or a furniture workshop operating from shanties in Durban. Sanyal asserts that these enterprises got popularised in the development theory discourse as comprising the “informal sector” since the 1970s.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Non land-owning categories such as tenants, agrarian labourers have been excluded as one who does not own land was not considered a farmer by Charan Singh and both BKU and Gupta maintain that understanding.

<sup>93</sup> Dipankar Gupta, 1997, *op. cited*, 26

<sup>94</sup> See Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 68-69.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-70.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-96.

Later, Sanyal goes on to differentiate his understanding of the need economy with that of the transition-development theorists. The latter, according to him view the need economy as guided by subsistence, non-surplus production meant for satisfaction of own needs, and thus the whole difference between it and the general capitalist production for them is that of “natural economy” and not commodity economy.<sup>97</sup> Sanyal asserts that both capital and non-capital comprising the post-colonial *economic* reside within the “commodity space” and hence the need economy or the natural economy is also engaged in surplus production and commodity production.<sup>98</sup> However, after production, the commodities are then sold in the market to “acquire money that will enable the producers to have access through the market to a bundle of goods and services” for satisfaction of their needs.<sup>99</sup> This he describes by the “Marxian commodity-money-commodity (C~M~C) circuit”.<sup>100</sup> Thus, in place of immediately consuming the use-value produced, or in place of its direct exchange with required use-values through barter like system, the need economy produces commodities that are sold in the market to acquire money, which then is used to buy the required consumption basket. Sanyal’s insistence is on the point that the monetisation of all transactions (and commodities) and the mediation of market in all such transactions has become the characteristic feature of global economy of our times, and even the need economy i.e. natural economy or the informal sector is not free of it.

Looking at the term ‘peasant-farmer’ in light of the above understanding reveals that the term has been rendered obsolete in light of the new developments in global economy. For what is the need of attaching ‘farmer’ with ‘peasant’ to denote ‘economic roles’ and increased interaction with the market when all forms of production (even those in the need economy) have already been subsumed within the market? If the ‘peasant’ is as integrated with the market as the ‘peasant-farmer’, what is the need of the second category? And if we subtract the later addition suggested by Gupta, what we have is the contemporary ‘peasant’ who is in no way less integrated in the market and monetary transactions than the ‘peasant-farmer’ or the farmer.

Even Utsa Patnaik- one of the biggest proponents of class differentiation in India, has also said lately that the principal contradiction in agriculture is shifting to that between “all the peasant classes in rural areas” on one hand and “imperialism with its local landed collaborators” on the other.<sup>101</sup> Certainly, internal divisions within peasants are expected to blur when the whole peasant community and agriculture goes through crisis as is the case currently in India. In light of this discussion, the insistence of Ploeg to not contrast ‘peasant farming’ with ‘entrepreneurial’ farming, but to see them in continuum makes more sense.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Utsa Patnaik, *The Republic of Hunger and Other Essays* (Gurgaon, Three Essays Collective, 2007), p. 226

<sup>102</sup> Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalisation* (London: Earthscan, 2008).