**Agrarian Social Classes: Daniel Thorner and D.N. Dhanagare**

Daniel Thorner rejected the often-described classification of cultivators in rural areas in three categories: landlords, tenants, and labourers. This was on the ground that one and the same man can belong simultaneously to all three of these categories. A person can himself cultivate a few acres of land he owns, give some land on rent, and in emergency may work on other’s field as labourer. He has analysed agrarian relations by using three specific terms: Malik for agricultural landlords, Kisan for working peas­ants (including tenants), and Mazdoor for agricultural labourers.

The Malik derives his agricultural income primarily (although not necessarily solely) fromproperty rights in the soil, i.e., from a share of the produce of lands possessed by him. The share is realised in cash as well as in kind (percentage of produce). He may give his land either to tenant(s) or may cultivate it by hiring labourers. He may manage the hired labourers him­self or through a manager.

The Malik may also have subsidiary income from business, profession, etc. The Maliks are of two types: those who are absentee landlords and those who reside in the village in which they own land Kisans are the working peasants, who may be small landowners or tenants the difference between the Malik and the small Kisan is the size of the land held. The Kisan himself and one or more members of his family actually perform the field labour. Sometimes the income of the Kisan is so low that he himself or his family members(s) work as agricultural la­bourers.

Mazdoors are those landless villagers who earn their livelihood primarily from working on other people’s land. They receive wages in cash and sometimes in kind also. When they are not able to find work in villages, they migrate to other states either for working as agricultural la­bourers (as Biharis migrating to Punjab) or as construction or industrial labourers.

**Daniel Thorner has analysed agrarian social structure in terms of three classes on the basis of three criteria, viz.:**

(a) Income obtained from the soil (i.e., rent, own cultivation, or wages),

(b) The nature of rights (i.e., ownership, tenancy, sharecropping and no rights at all), and

(c) The extent of fieldwork actually performed (i.e., doing no work, doing partial work, doing total work, and doing work for others).

D.N. Dhanagre (in Desai, 1983) has suggested a different model of agrarian classes. He has proposed five classes: landlords, who derive income primarily from land- ownership by collecting rent from tenants, sub-tenants and share croppers; rich peasants, i.e., small landowners with sufficient land to support the family and who cultivate land themselves, and rich tenants who have substantial holdings and have to pay a nominal rent to their land­lords; middle peasants, i.e., landowners of medium size holdings and tenants with substantial holdings and paying higher rent; poor peasants, i.e.,

(a) Land-owners with holdings insufficient to maintain a family, and therefore forced to rent others’ land,

(b) Tenants with small holdings,

(c) Sharecroppers, and

(d) Landless labourers.

The rich peasants and the trader moneylenders exploit the poor tenants and the landless labourers so much that relations amongst them are al­ways sour. The former two classes wield considerable economic, social, and political power. The emergence of cooperative and credit societies in the villages have no doubt affected the power of the Maliks, yet they con­tinue to be strong.

Two things are to be noted here: one, cooperative societies have not been much successful in villages, and two, private trader continues to op­erate successfully. People with vested interests want to maintain the status quo.

Even land reforms have not reduced the power of Maliks and money­lenders. Unless economic, social and political progress takes place in the countryside, unless a movement is born which leads to more even distri­bution of productive resources, greater economic strength on the part of the smaller units leading to ability to withstand pressures from either the top cultivators’ strata or the moneylender trader classes, no great success can be achieved in improving class relations.

The problems of landless agricultural labourers are more economic than social. We do not deny that their place in the social structure is of great importance but we hold that the problem of employment opportu­nity to them, and the problem of their wages are more crucial.

Employment opportunity is related to the growth of agricultural econ­omy and incentives to artisans in the villages. In the Agricultural Labour Enquiry, an agricultural labourer was described as a person who worked as an agricultural labourer for more than one-half of the total number of days on which he actually worked during the year. On the basis of this definition, about 30 per cent workers were identified as agricultural la­bourers, one-half of them being without land and the rest being in possession of a little land (say one bigha or so).

As many as 85 per cent of agricultural labourers get only casual work during times of harvesting, weeding, preparation of soil, and ploughing. Today, the average wage of an agricultural labourer varies from Rs. 30 to Rs. 60 per day. The extent of employment varies under different conditions in various parts of the country, the average being about 200 days.

Thus, there is work for wages for about six months in a year, total unemployment for rather more than three months, and some kind of self-employment for less than three months. In this way, their (agricultural labourers) average income is hardly about Rs. 10,000 a year. They, thus, live below the poverty line.

The Agricultural Labour Enquiry was concerned primarily with cer­tain economic aspects but the social disabilities and low social position of the bulk of agricultural labourers are in themselves no small part of the problem. The vast majority belong to SCs, STs, and OBCs.

Some of their social handicaps might have diminished because of the government’s anti-dis­criminatory and reservation policies, yet their economic and social status has not much improved. They are not considered a part of social life in a village.