

space of the Golden Temple or mobs hunting and killing men in front of their women and children, amounted to a 'violation of the home'. The fact that it was those to whom one ordinarily looks for protection, who actively participated in these assaults aggravated their sense of injustice even further. Quite clearly, the role of the army in Amritsar prefigured the role of the 'neighbour' in the JJ settlements of Delhi. Where neighbours actively helped save lives, it was significant that Sikhs had to *leave* their homes and take sanctuary. The need for refuge found political expression in the concept of Khalistan—a place where some families felt they could go and be safe permanently.

It would be a mistake however to think of the Sikhs as straightforward, fortuitous 'victims'. In a remarkable irony they stand accused of essentially the same crimes as are supposed to have been committed against them. The assassination of Indira Gandhi at the hands of two Sikh security guards, branded them collectively as people who had betrayed the trust of the nation and violated its sanctity and therefore deserved to be 'taught a lesson'. By killing their mother/leader (who they were sworn to protect) and then 'celebrating' or, more generally, by flaunting their physical and material might before their neighbours, they had clearly become too 'big', too ambitious and threatened the norms of brotherhood and decency. Like dogs gone mad, they could only be done away with by those who kept them. In the rumours that circulated at the time these sentiments were given collective expression: Sikhs were poisoners of water, rapists and killer-fugitives who turned upon the very people who had sheltered them. For the public at large, quite obviously, the Sikhs combine in themselves to an unacceptable degree, qualities of both the aggressor and the aggrieved, the feared and the fearful, the winner and the loser, the protagonist and the antagonist. It is this which contributes to their 'marked' character as mediators in the relations of violence that have come to characterise the modern nation-state and provide us with the means of questioning its legitimacy.

PUNJAB PROBLEM AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

In the days since the assassination, the Sikhs have emerged as challengers in the deadly game of ping-pong going on between religious separatism and the state. In a sense this was inevitable, since on the one hand, by granting religion the status of a universal or fundamental human right (equivalent in stature to the right to property and gainful employment), the secular Indian constitution unwittingly ensured its continuing even flourishing life in civil society; and on the other the Sikhs reflect to the highest degree the egoistic pursuit of interests—whether economic or religious—which has come to characterise the civil life-style of the modern state. Sikh fundamentalism or

religious ambition is not some relic of an irrational past but thrives on modernism and is entirely of a piece with the community's growing material and political ambitions for the much vaunted 'march into the 21st C: Just as more generally, communalism or the forcible and violent elimination of the *persons* representing the hated Other (howsoever this is defined) is only the perverted face of Humanism or the worship of Man to which the modern state is committed.

Viewed in this light, the formation of the Indian state was to begin with a 'communal' action since it freed Indians of their bondage by the *substantive* removal of the British who represented their slavery to them. By confusing the political with the human plane, communalism ensures its own fluctuating mortality within the confines of the modern state system. Doomed to remain forever frustrated and unsatisfied in achieving anything more than its immediate ends, it tends to appear again and again in different forms and on the slightest most irrational of pretexts. If then we agree with Marx when he writes about the secular state that "...religion develops in its *practical* universality only where there is no *privileged* religion..." and that "*anarchy* is the law of civil society emancipated from divisive privileges and the *anarchy of civil society* is the basis of the modern *public system*" ('The Holy Family', 1845), we see how it is that the Punjab problem and modern Indian nationalism have grown at each other's cost at the same time that they have been mutually determined.

To conclude, the book is not for the squeamish who will see in it perhaps a kind of pornography in that it reveals to some 'ulterior' purpose what is best left hidden

even from ourselves—the unreason of fear, the dullness of prejudice, the minutiae of killing, the pragmatics of survival, the violence of need, the confession of despair... But for the discriminating reader the 'obscenity' of the book is merely the symptom and the sign of the more general inversion of social order which prevailed in November 1984 to mark the passing away of a great leader. In the ghastly rites-of-passage that were performed unofficially before Indira Gandhi's last *samskara*, the weak killed, *khanjars* purified and criminals judged, the 'martial' race observed purdah and men not women were burnt in their homes. The 'privilege' of witnessing and later recording all this was itself a function of the total breakdown of structure which permitted a certain kind of gaze to be directed towards what would normally have remained hidden from view. As the authors testify, the November carnage dealt such a blow to their positive 'middle-class' sensibilities and existences that the only way they could achieve catharsis was through some programme of action of which the writing of the book was one.

As a collective representation of the more inconvenient truths of those 'three days in the life of a nation' and of the events that led up to and took over after them, the book silently encourages people to accept the punishment of knowledge on the road to personal and political maturity. My only fear is that given the almost unbearable degree of introspection and self-criticism this process requires, the book will inadvertently (and quite against the authors' wishes) have presumed its audience and convinced only those who are already convinced. It is certainly to be hoped that I am proved wrong in this.

An Ideology for the Provincial Propertied Class

K Balagopal

The Peasant Movement Today edited by Sunil Sahasrabudhey; Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986; pp xix + 224, Rs 150.

THIS collection of articles in English and Hindi is polemical in a rather uncomplimentary sense. Even those who agree with the arguments put forward in the articles will find it difficult to commend them for their competence either in argument or exposition. Perhaps the only exception is Kishan Patnaik's forthright and pungent article '*Baudhik Adhoorapan aur Kisan Andolan*'. Some of the other articles give us accounts of the 'peasant' movements of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana; some of them disclose in startlingly plain language the politics of these 'peasant' movements; and some of them expound their purported philosophy, ideology and theoretical presumptions with a simple-mindedness that would be charming in the right place.

If farmers who grow commercial crops or a surplus of foodgrains want remunerative prices—or more—for their output there is no reason for anyone to find it surprising or immoral. Being at the receiving end of what may be loosely but fairly described as monopoly in the purchase of their inputs, and at the giving end of what may be equally loosely but equally fairly described as perfect competition in the sale of their output, even a textbook economist cannot object if they find no choice except to agitate at both ends. The 'peasant movements' that constitute the context of this book are therefore nothing much in themselves to comment about. What makes them remarkable is the political and philosophical themes woven around them with varying degrees of realism, which means also varying degrees of

wishfulfilment.

Perhaps the most real and significant political theme is the notion of absolute and unbreachable oneness of the village. This is no 'peasant unity' against landlords, itself a much controverted concept; this goes further. The entire village is one; it is Bharat for Sharad Joshi and *bahishkrit samaj* for Sunil Sahasrabudhey (*Kisan Andolan ka Aitihāsik Sandarbha*), the editor of the volume. It is the internal colony of this country, exploited by the towns, variously described as India (with the accent on the whole word, if you get the meaning) or *pashchtmknt* (westernised) *samaj*. "The leaders and sympathisers of the movement see the basic cause . . . in the state of affairs which allow or perpetrate the exploitation of the peasantry by the urban industrial elite, of the competitive farm sector by the monopolistic industrial sector, of the raw materials in favour of the finished products, of the labour intensive sphere of "production in favour of the capital intensive sphere of production and of the indigenous people by the westernised few" ('Brief Summary', Sunil Sahasrabudhey). "The farmers' movement today is presenting a new point of view. The reason for our poverty is the domination of urban industrial India over the rural Bharat" ('Modern Science: A 'Universal' Myth', Ashok Jhunjhunwala). Girish Sahasrabudhey makes things a little more explicit: "in all the farmers' agitations that are today taking place in various states of the country it is explicitly recognised that the poverty of rural areas is based not on exploitation within but without the agricultural economy" (The New Farmers' Movement in Maharashtra', Girish Sahasrabudhey) The mechanism of exploitation is the payment of unremunerative prices for the output of Bharat "The movement has attempted to show that underpinning the agricultural produce is the chief mechanism of exploitation of the peasantry" ('Brief Summary', Sunil Sahasrabudhey) Sharad Joshi is much more forthright. "The post-independence economic development policies are essentially aimed at mobilisation of the agricultural surplus for the formation of capital necessary for the industrial development" ('Scrap APC—Demand Farmers', Sharad Joshi)

PROTESTING TOO MUCH

There are four implications that would follow immediately from the logic employed unanimously by all the contributors: (i) that there are no exploited or poor people in towns, (ii) that there are no exploiters in villages, (iii) that all the 'villagers' have essentially the same interest and that interest takes its economic expression in remunerative prices for that part of the produce that is sold in the market, and (iv) that the rural-urban divide is absolute and no 'villager' has urban interests. The contributors would have no difficulty with the first of these four, for though there is little explicit mention of the urban poor, it would in no way breach their

logic to admit them into Bharat; but of course the 'poor' are defined not as all those who sell or mortgage their labour power, for that would include the organised working class for which the ideologues of these 'peasant' movements have a particular disliking. Nor are they so vulgar as to define the poor in terms of income. They would perhaps include the workers of labour-intensive-technologically-traditional-unorganised urban industry in their Bharat or *bahishkrit samaj*. So far so good. The real difficulty comes with the rest of the implications. They are all so noisily vehement on the second and third points that one is forced to suspect that they are protesting too much. So much noise can only be a cover-up for a myth that is carefully sought to be built up and projected. And the pugnacity with which this projection is being attempted is such that they will not even allow themselves the convenience of identifying a comprador class or a fifth column for India inside Bharat. If capital intensive-industrial-westernised 'India' is plundering Bharat, then even a cursory glance at Bharat would reveal quite a number of quislings whose life and production styles are in no essential sense different from those of 'Indians'. In view of the ease with which radical critics could demolish this myth it would be the most natural thing for these ideologues to at least formally distance themselves from these, shall we say, compradors. If they have nevertheless resisted the temptation and persist in bluntly and repeatedly declaring that there are no class differences inside the village and, on the contrary, identify it as the cardinal point of difference between their 'peasant' agitations and the peasant struggles that have been in the past that while the latter were struggles *within* the village, between rural class and rural class, these are struggles between the village as a unit and the urban world, then that heroism tells a tale all of its own,

Could it be that the most vociferous of these *bahishknts* are precisely those who have one foot in India and one in Bharat? And—apart from these fifth columnists—the substantial core of these 'peasant' movements are those who would brook no talk of class differences, let alone antagonism, between those who produce a surplus of foodgrains and those who produce none or a deficit; much less between landholders and landless labourers. This forces the ideologues into a crude theory of village unity, against their own better judgment, one suspects. Of all the contributors, Surendra Suman (*Kisan Samasya Sabhyata Ka Sankat*) alone is honest enough to find the whole thing rather dubious; it is perhaps no accident that his region of study is Bihar, a state where it is the least possible to pretend that the whole village is one. He confesses that among the 'peasants' there are some who even possess aircraft of their own, a circumstance that should have led him and the other participants of the seminar to ponder a little whether the word 'peasant'

means anything at all, and if so precisely what. Instead, he invents the apology that "therefore it is not easy to grasp the reality of peasant problems on the basis of mere economic considerations", and goes on to postulate that it is a question of one civilisation against another, the dominant (urban) civilisation versus the dominated and rejected (rural) civilisation. This obviously takes us quite far from remunerative prices for marketed foodgrains, which is a mere 'economic' consideration, but then the mere a situation requires an ideology to mystify it the farther that ideology will be from the reality it mystifies. This is indeed the law by which cognition of reality loses its veracity to various degrees and becomes a piece of mystification

PIECE OF MYSTIFICATION

The truth is that let alone village unity, even the rural-urban divide makes only qualified sense in today's India. It makes sense for the rural poor for whom the urban world is often inaccessible, alien, and a source of plunder and oppression. It is a different matter with the rural rich, who are as class co-extensive with the urban trader-professional-financier-contractor class. It makes much more sense for purposes of political analysis to talk of this entire class as one—the provincial propertied class—notwithstanding all the differences and contradictions they contain among themselves, than to isolate one segment and call it the 'rich peasantry', much less to club this 'rich peasantry' with the rest of the village and talk of the village as opposed to the towns and cities. Knpa Shankar ('Should Agricultural Prices Be Raised?') need not feel surprised to discover that the rich farmers who agitate for remunerative prices have "by and large not directed the movement against the machinations and loot of the traders". Even a casual acquaintance with changing reality would reveal that a substantial part of (especially) gram trade has passed from the traditional trading communities to castes which are associated with landholding. Today's India is not the India of the Deccan riots of the mid-nineteenth century. The upper sections of the landholders are no longer unequivocally opposed in their interests to the urban traders.

A typical family of this provincial propertied class has a landholding in its native village, cultivated by hired labour, bataidars, tenants or farm-servants and supervised by the father or one son; business of various descriptions in towns—trade, finance, hotels, cinemas and contracts—managed by other sons; and perhaps a young and bright child who is a doctor or engineer or maybe even a professor at one of the small town universities that have sprouted all over the country during the last two decades. It is this class that is most vocal about injustice done to 'villages'. You can hear their irate declamations in the staff rooms of our provincial universities, though they mostly do not have

what it takes to tackle the traditional marxist or liberal intellectuals who live in Delhi or Calcutta. But soon, now that Rajiv Gandhi's Navodaya schools are coming up all over the country—precisely to convert the children of this class into at least good imitations of the metropolitan public school products—we may have a more sophisticated critique of India's domination of Bharat; if the critics are by then as *pashchimi* as the favoured children of India, then that will only expose the shallowness of this debate.

It is only an apparent paradox that it is precisely the rise of this class straddling rural and urban India that is the cause of all this India-Bharat fuss. The Indian state had itself created this class in an attempt to strengthen its support base. If we are to talk of appropriation of agricultural surplus to feed industry, then (to the extent that it is not a very partial depiction of reality) it is a phenomenon as ancient as industrialisation; if the reaction has nevertheless come up only in the post-1970 period, that is precisely because it is in this period that the attempt of industry to link itself with agriculture not just by taking over its products to feed its workers but also by providing inputs to increase that product, came to some kind of fruition. In other words, it is the (howsoever limited) success in incorporating a segment of Bharat into India that has led to the generation of this ideology of Bharat vs India as an absolute divide.

SOURCE OF OPPRESSION

This is no argument against the ideology as such, but it does tell us a lot about its politics. In some parts of the country these 'peasant' movements are taking up rural problems of quite a wide range and therefore appear quite democratic to observers. But if one is to go to the root of the matter, one must recognise in them—at least in one significant aspect if not their essential core—a potential source of suppression of the rural poor. This can be seen in regions where the rural poor are organising themselves militantly, in the viciousness with which ideas such as 'Milage unity' are put forward by gun-toting landlords; and the rage with which the concept of class struggle is opposed. One can also perhaps hear echoes of it in the last sentence of Kishan Patnaik's article (*Baudhik Adhoorapan aur Kisan Andolan*)-. can we not make bold to conclude that the activities of those who are thoughtlessly calling forth class struggle in the villages and dismembering village society actually help the interests of monopoly capital? Or one can see it refracted in the peculiar historiography of Sunil Sahasrabudhey (*Kisan Andolan ka Aitihāsik Sandarbha*) who sees the ancestry of these struggles of the alleged *bahishkritis*, not in the anti-zamindar, anti-landlord and anti-moneylender struggles of the peasantry in colonial India but exclusively in the Congress' nationalist movement of 1920-1947 ("The politics of *bahishkht samaj* entered

history with Gandhi"). It has perhaps not struck him as ironical that the class struggles of the peasantry of the past that he would rather not take recognition of are in many cases the quite literal genealogical ancestors of these 'peasant' struggles whose ideologue he has set out to be. Sharad Joshi's followers in Maharashtra will certainly count among their great grand parents participants of the anti-mahajan Deccan riots of the 19th century. That their preferred historiography chooses to disown this ancestry tells a tale all of its own.

Perhaps the village of Karamchedu in Andhra Pradesh testifies to this duality rather neatly. The village became known two years ago for one of the worst killings of harijans in recent times. In 1980 farmers of this rich tobacco growing village agitated for higher prices for tobacco and two youth of their families got killed in a police firing. It was youth of precisely the same tobacco farmers' families who assaulted the Madigas *en masse* in 1985, brutally murdered six men and raped three girls, all because the Madiga labourers had become uppity in recent years.

If this is the main political message that comes through from the pages of this book, there is an aside that a student of ideas will find interesting or at least amusing. This is the peculiar theology, mythology and even some poetry that has collected around this very mundane business of remunerative prices for farm produce, Gandhians vending *satyagraha* as the only mode of struggle appropriate to 'our' culture, critics of science as *per se* oppressive, and believers in an absolute form of cultural exclusivity, have rather oddly and most illogically found in these 'peasant' struggles a happy pasture for breeding their ideas. The farmers who want remunerative prices would themselves perhaps not be very much excited by most of these ideas, and indeed would even be hostile to some of them like the partiality for natural as against chemical fertilisers. Indeed the actual struggles of these 'peasants' have not been particularly Gandhian, whatever advice Ikhakur Das Bang (*Kisan Andolan ka Ran-Niti*) may be pleased to give them. And far from rejecting 'western' culture and science they are well integrated into a pattern of production based on chemical fertilisers, diesel or electric powered machinery and high-yielding varieties of seeds; and a pattern of consumption that imitates that of the *pashchimikrit samaj*—including TV sets, motor vehicles and all the rest of the trappings. Indeed the cultural determinism and exclusivity—leading to a critique of science as *per se* oppressive and exploitative—peddled by the neo-Gandhian disciples of Dharampal is simultaneously the dominant theme of this collection and also the most incongruous one. When Ashok Jhunjhunwala ('Modern Science: A Universal Myth') says that "the farmers' movement today is presenting a new point of view. The reason for our poverty is the domination of urban industrial India over the rural Bharat" he has all these

'farmers' with him. But when he goes on to add in the next paragraph that this point of view has raised many questions, in particular what has been the role of modern science in our country, and then goes on to answer that the role has been one of eroding the self-reliance of the village and concludes that the farmers' struggle may have to be "directed against the whole process of modernisation he is addressing an unsympathetic audience. The 'farmer' wants modern technology, all that he can get, and as cheaply as he can get it. The self-sufficiency of villages has no doubt been eroded by modernisation but as far as the rural rich are concerned it has increased their wealth and power. It is sheer nonsense to say that "our rural areas [have] hardly benefited materially" from agricultural modernisation. Whatever the gross figures may say—and even this remains controversial—the bigger landholders *have* benefited a lot. And the farmers' movement is as much an assertion of their new-found power as it is a demand for still greater benefits. Its authentic tone is that of Sharad Joshi ('Scrap A PC—Demand Farmers') who has no use for Gandhian *ran-niti*, cultural exclusivity or philosophical opposition to modern science and technology.

This is also perhaps the place to make a few comments upon the attitude of these ideologues towards what they call modern science. Science is many things simultaneously—a body of empirical knowledge, a corpus of techniques, an explanatory system, a method of cognition and an epistemology. It also carries with it a world-view. It has grown and developed within the pores of capitalist society, and carries the birth marks in the kind of facts it has discovered—and forgotten—and most importantly the techniques it has invented. But when these ideologues paint science as oppressive *per se* it is not this reality that they are depicting but a badly distorted version of it. When C V Seshadri and V Balaji ('Is Science Value-Neutral: A Study in the Notion of Concept as Value and Value as Concept') put the blame for a range of exploitative and oppressive practices and institutions—from eviction of tribals from forests to the manufacture of alcohol in preference to yeast and the replacement of manure by chemical fertilisers—on the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the absurdity of the distortion becomes patent.

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