

The CALA 2020 Proceedings Paper 13 - 3

Text, Context, Entextualization, Paper 3

**Vanishing Landlordism in Madhes, Nepal: Missing
an Opportunity for Development of Capitalism**

Shyam Sundar Prasad Yadav
Tribhuvan University of Nepal, Nepal

Vanishing Landlordism in Madhes, Nepal: Missing an Opportunity for Development of Capitalism

Shyam Sundar Prasad Yadav^a

^a*Tribhuvan University of Nepal, Nepal*

Abstract

This research examines the misinterpretation of feudalism and its protective qualities over families in *Madhes* with large amounts of land. The misinterpretation of feuds between families invited mistreatment, and as a result, the Nepali state imposed land-reform program policies in 1964, more so due to pressure by the communist movement. This pushed the feudal farmers into poverty. The study highlights historical ways of failure of development of organic capitalism in *Madhes*. Contemporary work in Marxism, especially in *Madhes*, tends to focus on interpretation, and understanding of feudalism/landlordism among communist leaders, scholars, workers and activists. Marxist discourses and precepts have reflexively impeded the development of capitalism in *Madhes*. This paper thus highlights the interactions of Marxist discourse and the issues among *Madhesi* families in Nepal.

Keywords: Capitalism, communist, feudalism, landlordism, madhes, marxism, misinterpretation, organic capitalism

Introduction

This paper is an ethnographic study of the *Madhesi* landlord (*zimidar*) of *Rautahat* and Bara district of Nepal. It investigates the process of vanishing landlordism in *Madhes*. This study also provides information on the failure of development of capitalism in *Madhes*.

In the European context, landlord families have contributed to the development of capitalism. Yanagisako (2002) in her study of the capitalist families of Italy states,

Bourgeoisie 'economic' actions, like all culturally meaningful actions, are incited, enabled and constrained by sentiments that are themselves the products of historically contingent historical processes. The Como silk industry is the result of continuous generation and regeneration family capitalism by people whose desire for capital accumulation have been incited by sentiments of family unity and communalism, but also by the sentiments individualism and competition. As sentiments in play at different moments in the development of histories of family firms, firm competition and the creation of new firms. They are on one hand, products of the working of Italian family capitalism. However, they operate as force of production of Italian family capitalism.

More so, as Sugden (2013) suggests, to facilitate transition to an equitable economic formation is not 'more capitalism.' Nepal requires a deeper structural transformation, directed by social mobilization against capitalist and pre-capitalist class contradictions at multiple geographical scales on economic and political levels. If a state

attends to its structural transformation towards a dynamic economy, then a nation could develop its own organic capitalism. Despite this, there has been no research on how misinterpretation of feudalism is possible on wider scale and as a result, how hardworking farmers were pushed into poverty by imposing the land reform program 1964.

For the purpose of this article, I am concerned with how generalized concerns around *Madhesi* landlordism manifest in their real lives, which is quite different to the definition of feudalism. To this end, this article contributes to greater understanding of the misinterpretation of feudalism regarding the so called *Madhesi* landlord.

This study observes how the state-led land reform program 1964 diverted *Madhesi* landlord's toward poverty, and at the same time, how Nepali Marxists, non-Marxists scholars, communist leaders, workers, activists, Nepali media and the Nepali state itself, is defining normal and poor *Madhesi* peasants as real landlords/feudal.

In the Nepali context the term 'feudal' is defined as an individual who loses his property on religious festivals, weddings and funereal ceremonies, including for the purpose of aristocracy, which is quite different to analysis by renowned scholars of feudalism. In Nepali communists, workers, activists, both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars, are defining landlordism as based on their own opinion rather than on real definitions of landlordism. Lenin (1960: 504) states,

The capitalist class includes persons whose remuneration may come nominally in the form of a salary, but which is in fact due to their position in the capitalist class (e.g., the directors of large companies). It also includes persons who are not employers, but who serve the capitalist class in *high* administrative positions.

While analyzing the capitalist class in the *Madhesi* context through a Lenin lens, it is difficult to find a family associated with the likes of directors of large companies or those in high administrative positions. As such, work on Nepal is on capitalism rather than Nepal in the age of capitalism. As Sugden (2013: 21) states,

levels of employment and wages rates remain at levels that competition for tenancies remains high despite industrial development, favoring landlords. In this context, tenants' necessary labor time is carried out on both the land and in the non-farm sector.

Methodology

Over a two month period, I visited the houses of three zimidars and two other landlords in the Rautahat district, and the house of one zimidar and one other landlord in the Bara district. In addition, students and Patwari were interviewed about the perspective of zimidars and landlords families toward their own community, toward landless people and toward poor peasants. Zimidars and other landlord families were questioned about their relation with and access to the state, and about the impact of the land reform program 1964 over their families. They were also asked questions about their families attitude toward the poor peasants and landless people. Key informant interviews including a case study conducted with family members of the zimidars and landlords. Students were asked about roles, responsibilities and investments of the zimidar families for school construction and education.

State-led Land Reform Program 1964 and its Impact

In the early eighteenth century, the development of capitalism slowly expanded and succeeded in capitalism, an opportunity which *Madhesi* landlords missed. Mis-interpretating feudalism, both Nepali Marxist scholars and non-Marxist scholars defined *Madhesi* big farmer and hardworking landlords, who were politically powerless as landlords, which played a catalytic role for missing the opportunity to enter to *Madhesi* landlord into capitalism. The land reform program 1964 was taken as an instrument of departure toward industrial development, but due to the imposition of the land reform program on Madhesi landlords, their mentality moved away from gaining more property, as they questioned themselves as to why they accumulated more land through hardwork. Mishra (2013, 2015) suggests that a state which was a leading exporter of rice till early 1960s is systematically importing foodgrain beginning in the 1980.

Many landlords agreed to that the passion of farming was terminated by the imposition of land reform. As a result, landlords left their lands barren for many years and at the same time, started to sell their farming lands rapidly for unproductive work such as dowry, feast and festivals. Just after activating the land reform act, another act named "*Dhanahi*" was imposed. The taxation discouraged landlords to not invest. Due to the dhanahi taxation, landlords began to leave their farming lands barren.

After the imposition of the so called land reform, all landlords and peasants lost their land mainly due to two factors. First, the government announced that farming land cultivated by peasants would become peasant land, but later, the government announced that those peasants who did not have citizenship could not cultivate these land. The land captured by peasants and landlords came under the control of the state. Because of the hill-culture-oriented definition of citizenship, Nepalese tenants tended to be people of hill origin.

Zimidariship was a periodic authority sold by state on agreement between landlord and state, but with the state's choice, rather than with the choice of landlords. So, all Madhesi landlords were not zimidar. On the day of tax collection, the officials of the state would come in order to collect the land tax collected by the *zimidars*. Many zimidar's families accepted that although they were nominally being benefited by their *zimidariship*, they were buying *zmidari* for their social prestige.

Misinterpretation of Feudalism

The term 'feudal' has determined the fate of the *Madhesi* landlords. The defeat of the Nepal Communist party is often attributed to its handling of Feudalism. The communist idea of feudalism is instrumental, as a way of garnering votes from the poor, turning feudalism into an electoral strategy rather than an ideal. The communist adherence to feudalism is seen more as pseudo-feudalism, a form of political correctness, and a ritual of table manners. The term 'pseudo-feudalism' is working wonderfully for the Nepali communist party as the whole debate on feudalism must be transformed into a debate on fairness and history so that development of organic capitalism in *Madhes* would be possible. A misinterpreted feudalism, apologetic or snobbish about itself, is not matching for the so called *Madhesi* feudal lords in which majority of *Madhesi* feudal lords are victims of the Nepali state. Feudalism has been mis-interpretated by both the Nepali state and scholars since the eighteenth century, which has become an obstacle for the development of capitalism in *Madhes*. In this period, largely owing to the barrenness of each the farming land, escapist peasants failed to pay land tax and were willing to pass their lives, thus remaining as laborers and peasants.

The number of *Madhesi* farmers as landlords declined, becoming a major obstacle for the development of organic capitalism in Madhes, Nepal. There was surplus land for accumulation by all people, as there were not

restrictions for accumulation of land, where people were always being encouraged by the state to accumulate land. Regmi (1978, 164) argues that India nationals were invited by the state and given free allotment of agricultural land, in addition to a homesite, and free supplies of building materials. Non-resident Indians were permitted to cultivate land in the Tarai region of Nepal, and including zimidariship.



Picture 1. Order of Gorkha Dakshin Bahun provided by Late king *Birendra* to *Satahi* Devi wife of landlord *Ramcharitra Jayswal*



Picture 2. High school constructed by late landlord Ramcharitra Jayswal



Picture 3. A temple and water tank constructed by landlord Ramcharitra Jayswal.

References

- Archive.annapurnapost.com, *Madhes Aandolan ra Vastabikta*. 15 kartik-2072.
- Dhakal, Suresh, 2011. *Land Tenure and Agrarian Reforms in Nepal A study Report*. Community self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Indrapuri Residency, Dhapasi-8, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Dhamala ko Hamala with Upendra Yadav* [Himalaya TV], 22 November – 2015.
- Gaige, Fredrick H., 1975. *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal: With an Introduction by Arjun Guneratne*. The University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, and Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, Delhi.
- Gujar and Gold, Ann Grodzins and Bhaju Ram, 2002. In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: *Nature, Power and Memory in Rajasthan*. Duke University Press.
- Guneratne, Arjun, 1996. *The Tax Man Cometh*. Vol. No. 1, June 1996, A Mandala Book Point.
- Guneratne, Arjun, 1961. *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*. Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York 1485.
- <https://www.onlinekhabar.com>, *Madhes Dubda Madhesi Neta Kathmandu maa*, October 2017.
- Rai, Janak, 2013. *Owning Land was so Much of Dukha in the Past: Land and the State-Adivasi Relations in the Tarai, Nepal*.
- Jr, William A Darity, 2008. *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, @2008.
- Karki, Subekshya, 2014. *A Study on Dowry Related Violence in Nepal*.
- Karkvliet, Benedict J. Tira, 2009. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820487>. *The Journal Peasant Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2009. 227 -243.
- Lieten, CK, 1976. Depeasantisation Discontinued Land Reforms in West Bengal. *Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/675029>. Source: *American Anthropologist, New Series. Vol. 78, No. 1 (Mar., 1976). Pp. 45 – 58*.
- Marx karl, and Engels, Friedrich, 1948. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. New York: International Publishers.
- Mishra, Chaitnya, 2013. *Capitalism and Nepal*. Phinix Books Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Mishra, Chaitnya, 2015. *What Led to the 2006 Democratic Revolution in Nepal?* Himal Books, Himal Kitab Pvt Ltd, Lazimpat, kathmandu – Nepal.
- Nagarik News, *Ajhai Haruwa Charuwa*, 29 August, 2013.
- Rai, Janak, 2013. *Owning Land Was So Much of Dukha in The Past: Land and The State – Adivasi Relations in The Tarai, Nepal*.
- Regmi, Mahesh C., 1978. *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th Century Nepal*. Adroit Publishers Delhi (INDIA).
- Regmi, Mahesh C., 1977. *Landownership in Nepal*. Adroit Publishers Delhi (INDIA).
- Rivers, W.H.R., 1913. *Kinship and Social Organization*. London Constable and Co Ltd, 1914.
- Roseberry, William, 1976. *Rent, Differentiation, and the Development of Capitalism Among Peasants*. Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/675029>, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Mar., 1976), pp. 45-58.
- Schneider, David M., 1984. The Relationship Between the Facts of Sexual Reproduction and Cultural Constitution of Kinship, Introduction to Part 3: *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Seiser, Gertraud, 1996. On the Importance of Being the Last One: *Inheritance and Marriage in an Austrian Peasant Community*. Routledge, New Fetter Lane, London EC4P, 4EE.
- Singh, Hira, 2002. *Caste, Class and Peasant Agency in Subaltern Studies Discourses: Revisionist Historiography, Elite Ideology*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 3091, 91 -134, DOI: 10.1080/03066150412331333252.

- Thapa, Shankar, 1951. *Beginning of the Peasant Movements in Nepal*. Tribhuwan University Journal, Vol, xix, No. 2, Dec. 1996.
- WWW.madhesiyouth.com/political/representation. madhesis - in - Nepal – police – apf – nepal – army. *Representation of Madhesis in Nepal Police, APF, Nepal Army – sept 27, 2017, Puru Sah.*
- Weber, Max, 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and Sprit of Capitalism*
- Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko, 2002. Producing Culture and Capital: *Family Firms in Italy*. Princeton University Press, 3 Market Place, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1SY.
- Zaman M.A., 1973. *Land Reform/Tenancy/State/Administrative Structure/Evaluation/Agrarian Structure*. Published by: Planing, Analysis and Publicity Division, Kathmandu, Nepal. Land Reform Department Ministry of Land Reform, His Majesty's Government of Nepal.