

# Caste Class and Identity

## The Complex Interface between Economics, Culture and Politics

Tricky dialectical questions from a snapshot of Haryanvi history



We are athletes not Robots: Vinesh Phogat

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## Dedication



### Hardeep and the Dialectics of Transformative politics

My first exposure to Hardeep was indirect  
 The hours he and Rajesh talked to each other  
 Dealing with philosophical questions that had long been answered.  
 That was the first time I realised the turmoil in my mind was not new  
 Many had been down that path  
 And found answers too.  
 Study class soon set up.  
 Hardeep's way of getting to the heart  
 One I admired  
 And then presentation on Das Kapital I made.  
 Hardeep was estatic  
 Could somebody explain it so simply  
 Gave me heart  
 Then Hardeep turned to Hegel  
 And Lenin on how communists had failed to understand him.  
 And when I thought I did  
 The 11 Theses of Feurbach came to haunt me for a while  
 Not long though as it settled that conciousness related to experience and actions undertaken  
 by individuals  
 So Hardeep changed my life forever.  
 A thing I do not regret  
 Could not lock myself up in a room for hours like he did  
 As learning from people and relating to books my way.  
 Farewell Hardeep  
 Your advice to be like the white ant  
 Making Capitalism hollow will stay with me  
 This unfinished task is now ours to complete  
 As exploitation we will defeat.

**Viren Lobo**

## **From Dr Chaitanya Dev Sharma**

He was one of my closest friends, residing in the deepest recesses of my heart.

Probably the only person with whom I talked for more than an hour nearly once every 2-3 weeks for the last many decades.

For lengthier discourses they used to come to Gohana so that my patients don't suffer. No less often I visited his home in Delhi on Sundays for whetting my theoretical appetite.

He came to enlighten our study circle members at the first call and instance without any reservation.

Probably, besides Prof. Bhaseen, he was the only person in my life with whom I could have very minute, in depth and rigorous discussion on every subject ranging from Political Economy to Sociology to Philosophy.

A man simpler than myself. He had minimal needs. He had to be asked twice for a cup of tea even.

He will remain one with me till.....

May he Live Long!!



Comrade Padmaja joined the communist movement at the age of 16 -17. A valiant fighter for women's cause both in society and inside the party. That has put her at odds with the party leadership all along. In the Usha struggle, that was the first victorious struggle against sexual atrocity against a woman in Kerala, she played the most leading role. She was a regular participant and activist in hundreds of such a struggles. She was in the fore front of the struggle against sand mining at Alleppey and became one of its faces. Since she developed cancer multiple times and undergone prolonged treatment, this activities continued. Later she developed many complications due to that. She was a very loving comrade to whose house any comrade can reach any time and stay and take food irrespective of the size of her rented accommodation at that time.

## BACKGROUND:

Following up on the question of value and its relation to the labour theory of value by Marx, it has been observed that there is a very strong connection between value of human being and value of nature. For the Capitalist both are to be exploited. Putting an end to devaluation of human beings and nature is therefore very much linked to putting an end to exploitation of both human beings and nature.

[https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Value-in-the-age-of-Imperialism\\_engaging-with-the-labour-theory-of-value-by-Marx.pdf](https://ielaind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Value-in-the-age-of-Imperialism_engaging-with-the-labour-theory-of-value-by-Marx.pdf)

Haryana was chosen to explore this linkage more carefully as the study of Tarun Kanti Bose highlighted how the 1857 war of Independence marked a qualitative shift in the nature of struggles till then. The common people of Haryana jumped wholeheartedly into the struggle. That this development alarmed the British can be evidenced by what transpired later.

- a. The British took over the East India company and placed the rule of India squarely in the hands of the Crown.
- b. Railways were constructed, criss crossing the country, both as a means to quickly transport the army as also to transport raw materials from this country to feed to growing hunger of the British textile and other industries.
- c. The growing conflict with the feudal forces of this country was quelled and in its place the British offered to share power with the feudal lords in return for their loyalty to British Crown.
- d. Barter system was replaced by a cash system that forced the landed classes to opt for cash crops like sugar cane, indigo, cotton while having the indirect impact of dismantling the then interdependence of the different castes through the barter mechanism.
- e. As a price to be paid to the Sikh Jats who help the British crush the mass uprising, the Land tenancy Act 1901, prevented Dalits from acquiring land in the State. It must be noted here that in 1818, the Mahar regiment defeated the Peshwas at Bhima Koregaon. This event was commemorated for 200 years till the fiasco in 2018 (marking 200 years since the event) where a concerted effort was made by the State to declare all those that commemorated this event as anti National.

That the 1857 war of Independence had a characteristically different flavour from the three defining battles at Panipat and the Prehistoric war at Kurushetra has been well brought out by Tarun Kanti Bose in his second Chapter on Haryana a summary of which will be carried here. Will this help explain why the Khap Panchayats (who had a glorious tradition of defending this country from invaders and even standing up to the oppressive rule of Aurangzeb) become rank reactionary and oppressive for women, dalits and minority communities in the last twenty/thirty years ? For now it will suffice to say that the compromise between the industrial bourgeoisie and the rural bourgeoisie of Punjab, Haryana, Northern Rajasthan and Western part of UP is in the main responsible for this. Is it then surprising to note that both Punjab and Haryana have the worst female to male ratios in the country.

That despite this, women of Haryana have made a name for themselves not only on the sports field but in other arenas as well indicates the growing contradiction within. The crackdown on the farming community in the form of the farm laws pointed to cleavage between finance and industrial capital with the former striving to get hold of comparatively safer investments in food, health and education. This is not without repercussions. Jats who formed the bulwark of the alliance between rural and manufacturing capital found themselves in the cross fire. It is therefore not accidental that in pockets, the Jat dominated Khap Panchayats lent their support to the women wrestlers, Dalits and Muslims in recent years.

While the deep seated distrust of Jats and upper castes have its roots in the long history of repression faced by Dalits, there is still a ray pointing in a direction characteristically different from earlier. The report of Tarun Kanti Bose dealing with various facets of the Caste, Class and Identity question tries to uncover the thread that has been knotted up due a number of confusions as to what Marxist theory and practise is all about. For now let us just say that though material conditions are primary and thought revolves around this, as thought influences the material conditions as well, unravelling thought from the material conditions is not as simple as was once understood. Engels has pointed out that though thought and action is the product of conscious human beings, it will follow the same laws as the material conditions do. To change thought, we need to change the conditions that gave birth to them (easier said than done).

## **The Economic, cultural , political and ecological backdrop of Haryana**

Haryana is divided into five natural topographic divisions, which are:

1. The Bagar and the undulating sandy plains-the sand dunes and the tals(230-350 metres)
2. The Alluvial Plain or the Ghaggar-Yamuna Plain comprising Bangar, Khadar, Naili and Bet (below 300 metres).
3. The Aravali outliers (300-600metres)
4. The Shivaliks-The hills (over 400 metres), and
5. The Foot Hill Zone-The piedmont plain (300-400 metres).

The description of each agro-ecological zone provided by Tarun Kanti Bose in the first chapter of his report is at variance with the administrative regions of the State. There have been numerous factors why the economic development of Haryana has not followed the distinct ecological patterns in some other parts of the country, proximity to Delhi, impact of economic development of agriculture and allied activities in the gangetic plains and periodic historical turmoil from external north western invaders being some of them. Nevertheless, the imprint of distinct patterns related to agriculture and pastoralism can still be found agro-ecological region wise. That irrigated agriculture has led to the dominance of the Murrah Buffalo in milk production and Industrialisation in the Haryana part of the National Capital Region of Delhi have led to a puncturing of the traditional ties between nature and livelihoods most of which next to impossible to track meaningfully as of now.

In the context of the increasing ‘unprofitability’ of Industrial based agriculture which has resulted in burgeoning costs of agricultural production the source of major anxiety of farmers at the potential removal of Minimum support price and the stable market that Government procurement provided, it is important to flag the different agro ecological regions of Haryana as providing a direction for rebuilding of the Nature people connection embedded in the cultural history, traditions knowledge and customs of each region. The separation of Haryana from Punjab while recognising some of these differences in terms of language and culture mostly keep in mind proximity to Delhi as the economic fulcrum. The resultant dichotomy in the culture, traditions and economics provides much of the basis for the later Chapters written by Tarun Kanti as we shall see shortly. For now it will suffice to say that the emergence of the dalits as an economic power and the resultant repression they face is very much linked to this dichotomy.

Given this there is a section that would like to disown the relevance of land relations and consequently the relevance Jats as the dominant caste defining the politics of Haryana but a deeper examination as has been done by Tarun would reveal that Caste, Class and Identity questions are very much rooted in the changing equations relating to land and industry which

blew up at the time of the nine month farmer struggle embracing a large part of North Western India.

### **The First War for Independence in 1857**

In the sections: Flames of 1857 uprising spread over Districts of Haryana and Heroes of the 1857 uprising of the second Chapter of his report, Tarun Kanti Bose explains in detail how local leaders and the masses joined whoeheartedly in the uprising. The following are important quotes from his report.

Karl Marx was almost the very first to grasp the true nature of the 1857 Sepoy Uprising. On June 30, 1857, he made the crucial point that the Indian Army just so happened to be "*the first general centre of resistance which the Indian people were ever possessed of*" to explain why the sepoys were the first to rise. He quoted Disraeli's statement that "*the Indian disturbance is not a military mutiny, but a national revolt*" with approval on July 28, 1857. Marx claimed on July 31, 1857, that what John Bull regarded as a military rebellion "*is in truth a national revolt*"

There are many justifications for the conclusion in the letters. "*Mussulmans and Hindus—have combined against their common masters;—the mutiny has not been confined to a few localities;—the revolt has coincided with a general disaffection—on the part of the great Asiatic nations,*" Marx wrote on June 30, 1857. On July 31, 1857, he wrote that the supposedly unaffected areas were experiencing "*a very queer sort of quiet,*" despite the fact that signs of discontent were still present there. "*As to the talk about the apathy of the Hindus, or even their sympathy with British rule, it is all nonsense,*" he said (August 14, 1857).<sup>14</sup> For, "*the great difficulties the English meet with in obtaining supplies and transports—the principal cause of the slow concentration of the troops—do not witness to the good feelings of the peasants.*" Marx saw correctly (September 15, 1857) that the British posts were like '*insulated rocks amid a sea of revolution*'.

Kaye was forthright in his conclusion that these were princes who helped the British in recapturing India after 1857 revolt. According to him, "*It was one of the most curious characteristics of the mutiny-war, that although the English were supposed to be fighting against the native races, they were in reality sustained and supported by the Natives of the country, and could not have held their own for a day without the aid of those whom we hated as our national enemies,*" he added.

The above observation taken in tandem point to a characteristically different assessment of the first war of Independence than was possible for Marx and Engels to make at that time namely the emergence of a class characteristically different from Caste and religion forcing both the British and Feudal Lords to align with each other. It was not surprising therefore that as observed by Marx and Engels, this class was disorganised and failed to resort to sustained guerilla warfare during the summer respite and rains. How the peculiar conditions of struggle and compromise with the British imprint the entire period of British rule in India leaving in its wake the famous divide and rule policy of the British that even today impacts the politics of this country needs to be properly understood.



## The Dalit Question with a twist

The case studies Dulina lynching, Gohana torching of houses belonging to Balmikis, Mirchpur and Bhagana violence referred to in Chapter 3 of Tarun Kanti Bose's report shows that the sharpening of the oppression against Dalits relate to the following

a. Attack on the upward moving dalit communities be it due to them acquiring land, getting jobs and in general posing a challenge to the traditional Jat hegemony over politics in the State. Chamar and Balmikis are among the major communities that have been targeted.

b. While in general Dalit struggles have made use of the SC/ST atrocities act, the Dalit leadership has been found wanting in many cases. The fact that the left too have generally not been able to engage meaningfully on specific questions related to Dalit atrocities. Dalits have reported that the farmer's agitation was dominated by Jats and left little or no space for Dalits to articulate their concerns. Upper caste leadership in left parties has also been responsible for Dalit issues not getting the attention they deserved. An extract from Tarun Kanti Bose's report will suffice to explain the issue.

*The majority of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act) 1989 case defaulters belong to Jat community. When there is a significant case involving the SC community, such as a murder, rape, or gangrape, the public becomes involved and puts pressure on the police to make an arrest because the evidence points to the perpetrators. However, scheduled caste officers are not even permitted to pursue the appropriate legal action; instead, other responsibilities are placed on them to keep them at bay. This applies to all officers in the SC community, including SPs, Deputy Commissioners, and SDMs. Instead, an attempt is made to reach a peaceful resolution so that the offenders are not punished and SC/ST Act is not made applicable.*

The electoral process has thrown up a peculiar situation where the BJP came into power on an anti Jat platform. Given the nature of twist given to class struggles in the State (converting them into Caste based issues), the BJP is now having to woo the Jats to continue pursuing its anti people agenda in the State. Fed up with the double speak of this reactionary party, Jats in pockets have come out strongly in support of Dalits, women and Muslims in some pockets though general distrust of Jats remain due to historical antecedents, the distinct possibility of a new form of democratic/ anti Capitalist coalition exists.

## Women, Slave, Concubine: Harking back to an era long forgotten

Tarun Kanti Bose's 4 chapter on Haryana, *Bride Trafficking or Marriage of Inconvenience turning women into Silent slaves* brings out the dark underside of Haryana which shot into the limelight with their sparkling performance in sports on the World stage. While there too, women have raised the # Me too slogan regarding sexual molestation in a still unfulfilled struggle for justice, the ramifications of the horrifying conditions facing women due to infanticide and other steps taken reflected in the lowest women to male sex ratio in the country brings back macabre image from a long forgotten era where women were traded/ objects of desire of conquering hordes.

In his third chapter on Dalits too, Tarun Kanti Bose has highlighted the plight facing economically upcoming Dalits women who have faced the wrath, been paraded naked by the upper classes primarily Jats for no fault of their own. However these very same Jats facing a shortage of women to marry within their own community have purchased brides primarily from the tribal regions of Jharkhand and North East. While fulfilling their duty towards carrying on the family name and tradition, their conditions are worse than slaves, being beaten, tortured and misused by all and sundry in the family.

The conditions facing these women reflect the dark underbelly of the beast within, one which modernisation has failed to correct. Considering the conditions leading to the farmer's struggle the reasons are not hard to find. With the upper class Jats facing an unprecedented economic crisis born from cultural restrictions ( which restrict the type of employment avenues they can seek), refuge is sought in asserting dominance of the women members of the household as also similar treatment meted out to upcoming Dalit communities described by Tarun in his earlier chapter on Dalits.

That the Jats have lost faith in the traditional regressive leadership of the State is reflected in the electoral results where a new type of alignment seems to be emerging. Given the traditional history of repression, other communities are still wary but a sliver of hope has indeed emerged. How this can be carried to its logical conclusion remains to be seen.

## **Mewat Study debunks popular understanding related to Hindu Muslim Identity**

The study of the recent communal violence in Nuh by Tarun Kanti Bose, debunks many popular beliefs, primary among them being forced conversions to Islam. The prevalence of Hindu customs among Muslims in Mewat and the traditional close ties with the Jats in the region point a more volutary form of conversion process in the region. One that is even alien to the idea of a mini Pakistan. Why then are these actions being perpetrated will need closer examination from a lens not used at present.

The stellar role played by The Meos of Mewat in the 1857 war of Independence, has also resulted in repression of this community since British time, not corrected even after Independence. The BJP took advantage of this situation to unleash an even fiercer form of repression using the communal card.

Tarun's study therefore helps us uncover many threads, even looking at the indigenous Renaissance period in India (predating British rule) which unlike Europe had a two religion flavour and reflected in the Sufi movement in this country. This lens helps us to put later observations on a more indigenous platform than the British educated reformists that only form a part of the larger process of change that was taking place in Indian society.

ABMKSS will leave it to Tarun's study to identify the immediate tasks seeking our attention, this is mostly to unfold the larger indigenous backdrop in which to place the Historical development of India, distinctly different from the one currently portrayed.

## **Adding a new dimension to India's left Movement:**

This chapter by Tarun Kanti Bose provides the turning point needed by ABMKSS to establish the principles of continuity and break. In this Chapter titled “ *Gohana's Shanti Hospital : Building up Health Care Facilities for the Marginalised and adding a new dimension to India's left Movement*”, Tarun Kanti Bose tracks the contribution of Dr C D Sharma and his wife Sunita Tyaga to building up a significantly different type of left movement in Haryana. As a doctor with a difference and a professor dedicated to provided quality science education to her students, both Dr C D Sharma and his wife Sunita Tyagi practised what they preached I the true spirit of a ‘service provider’ and educationist in a somewhat remote corner of Haryana.

This essential character provided the impetus for the movements they initiated into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and provided the basis for a Marxist grounding with Indian underpinnings by studying deeply the life and work of Shaheed Bhagat Singh. Having started with a relatively innocuous but mass appeal programme relating to a clean Gohana, the house to house contact helped to raise deeper issues like the protest on the tripling of House (Chula) Tax through a Gohaa Bandh. Jan Chetna Manch and Samatamulak Mahila Sanghatan combined effectively to penetrate deep into the psyche of a conservative Harayana, bringing the women out into the streets to protest issues like rape, bride trafficking and other atrocities.

Attempts were made to discredit both of them but solid homework and mass support for the democratic issues ensured that all such attempts failed. Having deep knowledge of Sanskrit and the Shlokas, Dr C D Sharma has been able to provide an effective rational counter to communal and half baked, politically motivated attempts to distort Indian history. The commemoration of martyrs and narration of their contribution to the Independence struggle provides the historic roots for the struggles being taken up today.

## **Faridabad's Krantikari Mazdoor Morcha – Turning the Tide for collective Action**

The chapter starts with an incident on Raksha Bandhan August 11<sup>th</sup> 2022. A 11 year old girl who went to defecate at night was found dead the next morning. In order to keep the Union Home Minister's statement that no open defecation is taking place intact, the community was asked to keep silent till after the Independence day celebrations. After a long struggle compensation was declared which could not be disbursed for technical reasons.

The next incident relates to the non deposit of PPF amount of 400 workers laid off from Lakhani Footwear Pvt Ltd. Here too after a long struggle PF of some of the workers were received, rest is expected shortly. Struggle for water supply in Azad Basti continues.

The creation of Mahatma Jyotibha Phule and Fatima Shiekh Library has helped engage workers on non economic issues which helps to mobilise them economically as well. Such consciousness has helped them protest in solidarity on incidents like Nuh, Bellsonica Auto Componenet India Private Ltd and participate in women' wrestlers sit in dharna at Jantar

Mantar and in the fact finding study on Nuh. Workers resolve disputes internally, organised campaign against drugs and criminals not supporting such practises. Police have realised that this is an organisation with a difference and now listen to them seriously.

## **Hospitals for the workers, to the workers and by the workers**

Low income workers are cured and treated, and today 500 of their sons and daughters have become doctors serving in Faridabad's ESIC Medical College & Hospital, having previously enrolled in its Medical College. From the brink of closure of the Hospital in 2014 to pave way for an Ambani takeover to the creation of the Medical College with modern medical facilities has been a long struggle for the ESIC doctors.

## **Kurukshetra's Jan Sangharsh Manch's arduous struggle in getting rapist godman Ram Rahim arrested and its ongoing involvement with the toiling masses....**

This chapter describes mass mobilisation work to get rapist godman Ram Rahim convicted, rights of MGNREGA workers and the need for a qualitatively different type of struggle to mobilise the masses distinguishing between economic struggles and mass issue based struggles.

## **The Way Forward**

The tapestry above indicates the necessity for getting into the specifics of each struggle providing the necessary character and backbone to support communities engaging in such struggles. What they have in common is the need for a larger framework inspired by Marxist ethic and culture to knit them together. Yet.. the specifics require focus on the local and the relation between this and the general not always clear to the masses. While Jan Chetna Manch and Samtamoolak Mahila Sanghatan have clearly made that transition, others are at different levels even as they engage in deeper and sharper contradictions on the ground which are very commendable. Clearly there is no one size fits all. The character of the struggles defined by the people leading it. This is no garden of roses but certainly there are sparks that shine through lighting the way for others to follow.

The Chapter describing the first war of Independence in 1857 provides us with an inkling of how the struggles then are related in some way to those we see now. Many unfinished tasks remain before the promised good days can be seen. The case studies however clearly indicate that the current regime has no intention of bringing those rather harking about the Good Old Days where caste differences were solidified.

The recent elections in Harayana point to a peculiar consensus between the dominant Jat leadership, OBCs and Dalits in favour of the BJP. The question we ask is why when recent events pointed to a consensus on class based issues related to violence, rape and employment

did such a consensus come about. All persons talked to, agree on the need for a qualitatively different movement to dispel the darkness gripping the working class and masses of the State. What the struggles point to is the need for diversity in unity and unity in diversity. Let a thousand flowers bloom is our call to develop struggles dialectically in manner that authoritarianism and fascism cannot even begin to fathom.