

The Comprador Bureaucratic Bourgeoisie of India

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“Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.” Mao Zedong

Clarity on the characterisation of the big bourgeoisie in the oppressed countries and the nature of capitalism being engendered and developed under imperialist domination was one of Mao Zedong’s important contributions. His work ‘Analysis Of The Classes In Chinese Society’ was the first step in this direction. The differentiation of the bourgeoisie in China into two classes — the comprador bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie—was noted there. This was written in 1926. Yet it took a long time for it to be accepted.

Though it was recognised that there were two sections within the bourgeoisie of the colonial, semi-colonial countries, though it was noted that one of them ‘directly serves the interests of imperialist capital’, both continued to be considered as part of the national bourgeoisie. In India, the leaders of the communist movement blindly toed this view, instead of addressing the reality before them. Mao, on the other hand, persisted with ‘concrete analysis of the concrete situation’. He went on to develop and deepen the understanding about the big bourgeoisie in oppressed countries.

However, this was largely ignored by the international communist movement (ICM). It came into prominence only in the 1960s, as a crucial aspect of the break from Khrushchevite revisionism. The newly emergent Marxist-Leninist parties, upholding Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought (as it was then known), applied this understanding in analysing the conditions of their respective countries and chalking out their Programmes. In India, this was a major issue in the ideological struggle against CPM revisionism, which led to the Naxalbari armed peasant rebellion and the foundation of the Maoist movement.

The CPM formulation of ‘big bourgeoisie increasingly collaborating with imperialism’ was intentionally phrased to provide room for its opportunist manoeuvres. It tried to misguide the rank and file into thinking that the ties of this class with imperialism was being taken into account, while insisting that it was independent. This ruse was demolished by Maoists with hard facts. They exposed the comprador-bureaucrat character of the big bourgeoisie. India’s continuing semi-colonial condition was conclusively established. It was shown that its dependence on the world imperialist system was structural. In its 1968 Declaration, the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) noted that, “... the contradictions in semi-colonial, semi-feudal India between the imperialist, neo-colonial powers and our people, between the feudal classes and the peasantry, between comprador-bureaucrat capital and the working class have grown sharper than ever. Today, U. S. imperialism, Soviet revisionism, the big Indian landlords and the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie are the main enemies of the Indian people, the four mountains that weigh heavily on the back of our toiling people.”

Instead of ‘seeking truth from facts’, the CPM based its view on the matter by picking on words. It argued that the compradors were a trading class, who acted as agents of imperialists. Since the Indian big bourgeoisie has industrial interests it cannot be a comprador class. Treating compradors as a trading class was indeed the understanding of the international communist movement in an early

period. Thus we see this note about them given in ‘Revolutionary movement in the colonies’, the 1928 document of the Comintern — ‘Native merchants, engaged in trade with imperialist centres, whose interests are in continuation of imperialist exploitation.’ The CPC led by Mao continued to develop its understanding about this class. Drawing on this, Mao pointed out, “During their twenty-year rule, the four big families, Chiang, Soong, Kung and Chen, have piled up enormous fortunes valued at ten to twenty thousand million U.S. dollars and monopolised the economic lifelines of the whole country. This monopoly capital, combined with state power, has become state-monopoly capitalism. This monopoly capitalism, closely tied up with foreign imperialism, the domestic landlord class and the old-type rich peasants, has become comprador, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism. Such is the economic base of Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary regime. This state-monopoly capitalism oppresses not only the workers and peasants but also the urban petty bourgeoisie, and it injures the middle bourgeoisie. This state-monopoly capitalism reached the peak of its development during the War of Resistance and after the Japanese surrender; it has prepared ample material conditions for the new-democratic revolution. This capital is popularly known in China as bureaucrat-capital. This capitalist class, known as the bureaucrat-capitalist class, is the big bourgeoisie of China.”¹ Evidently, it was no longer a class purely engaged in trade. Mao's definition was a synthesis of the studies carried out by the CPC. One of them was authored by Chen Po-ta. Titled ‘China's Four Big Families’, it gave an account of the various sectors of the economy they were controlling. This included banking, power plants, heavy and light industry, chemicals, textiles, iron and steel.²

Actually, the earlier characterisation of the compradors of China merely as a trading class by the ICM was itself partial. The colonial exploiters had to rely on them in their economic dealings. This allowed them to acquire expertise in capitalist methods. After a point some of them even founded their own enterprises in shipping, textiles, mining, glass works, machinery, banking and public utilities. They were also investing in imperialist firms. All of this had started taking place as early as the 19th century. According to a study, the position of compradors who remained mainly as traders had started to decline by the early decades of the Twentieth century.³ Whatever that may be, their entry into industry and other sectors was noted in Mao's writings. In the textbook ‘The Chinese Revolution And The Chinese Communist Party’, he wrote, ‘In fact, some merchants, landlords and bureaucrats began investing in modern industry as far back as sixty years ago, in the latter part of the 19th century, under the stimulus of foreign capitalism and because of certain cracks in the feudal economic structure. About forty years ago, at the turn of the century, China's national capitalism took its first steps forward. Then about twenty years ago, during the first imperialist world war, China's national industry expanded, chiefly in textiles and flour milling, because the imperialist countries in Europe and America were preoccupied with the war and temporarily relaxed their oppression of China.’⁴

Some, who specialise in spinning theories from words torn out of context, have pounced on the ‘national capitalism’ seen in this quote. They argue that this was about the national bourgeoisie, not

¹The Present Situation and Our Tasks, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_24.htm

²The deeper grasp about the compradors is reflected in the footnote inserted in Mao's ‘Analysis Of The Classes In Chinese Society’ — ‘A comprador, in the original sense of the word, was the Chinese manager or the senior Chinese employee in a foreign commercial establishment...’ (underlining added)

³The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China : Bridge between East and West, Yen-Ping Hao, Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970.

⁴https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm

the compradors. A look at how Mao described this capitalism further down in that essay would give ample clarification — ‘National capitalism has developed to a certain extent and has played a considerable part in China's political and cultural life but it has not become the principal pattern in China's social economy, it is flabby and *is mostly associated with foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism in varying degrees.*’⁵ Obviously, ‘national’ only meant Chinese in that context. It was not associated with a national bourgeoisie. The ‘association with imperialism and feudalism’ noted there would be repeated and amplified in his later characterisation of bureaucrat capitalism—‘comprador, feudal, state-monopoly capitalism’.

In the immediate years following Naxalbari and the emergence of the Maoist movement, the polemics about the big bourgeoisie was focussed on two aspects. One was the dependence of the big bourgeoisie on imperialism. The other was the refutation of treating compradors as mere traders, unrelated to industry. This was done through several studies that appeared in Maoist publications like the Liberation. As part of this, the nature of the state-owned sector of the economy, the public sector, was also probed. The revisionist CPI and CPM were characterising the public sector as something that would counterbalance the private sector. They conveniently downplayed the fact that the Indian monopolies had themselves called for state investments in heavy industry. In the initial period after the transfer of power in 1947, the Western imperialist powers were not keen to support the efforts of the Indian rulers in this matter. The Khrushchevite capitalist roaders who had seized power in the Soviet Union and turned it into a social imperialist country used this as an opportunity to penetrate the Indian economy. But for the revisionists this was ‘socialist aid without ties’. The Maoists had the task of exposing the real nature, the exploitative nature, of Soviet aid and technology. They did this, once again backed by hard facts. Along with this, the top echelon controlling the state sector was identified as a section of the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie.

In that period, and all the way till the 1980s, the rural scene retained most of the features of traditional caste-feudalism. The penetration of imperialist finance capital and bureaucrat capital into the countryside was not much or widespread. Perhaps that was a reason why the Maoist movement did not devote attention to the study of bureaucrat capitalism and the changes being brought about in the countryside by its promotion under imperialist aegis. The focus remained on exposing the comprador character of the big bourgeoisie and refuting revisionist views about this. Of course, that in itself was of great importance. The imperialists, ruling classes and revisionists were doing all they could to conceal the harsh reality of neocolonial control and exploitation continuing in India. The false consciousness of independence was an important aspect of the hegemonic consensus of the Indian ruling classes. Exposure of the dependent nature of the big bourgeoisie was essential in challenging its claims about leading the building up of an independent country. Two seminal works, ‘India Mortgaged’ by Nagi Reddy and ‘The Indian Big Bourgeoisie’ by Suniti Kumar Gosh, remain as valuable contributions in this regard. The former mainly exposed continuing dependency on imperialist finance capital and technology in the period following the transfer of power. The latter traced out the emergence and growth of the big bourgeoisie as a trading class during the colonial period, in close ties with imperialism. It revealed how this dependence deepened in the course of its entry into the industrial sector.

From the 1970s onwards imperialism started promoting bureaucrat capitalism and the penetration of imperialist capital in the rural areas of India. Initially this was restricted to some regions within some States. Over the years it has been expanded on a large scale. It has impacted agrarian

⁵Ibid, emphasis added.

relations in one way or the other all over the country. Along with that, the globalisation, liberalisation, privatisation neo-liberal agenda, imposed by imperialism from the 1990s, has led to the huge growth of the private faction of the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie. These developments have given rise to neo-revisionist views from within the broad range of forces who locate their origins in the Maoist movement initiated by Naxalbari.

The big bourgeoisie is grudgingly considered as 'dependent' by some. Some others declare it to be a 'junior partner of imperialism', yet neither comprador nor imperialist. One reason given for this is their investments in imperialist countries. But this is not unique to the Indian big bourgeoisie. It can be seen in the case of some other oppressed countries also. More often than not, these acquisitions are taking place in industries which are being abandoned by imperialist finance capital since it is no longer seen as sufficiently profitable. Suniti Kumar had clearly documented how this had been going on since colonial times itself. Besides, these investments are usually made with loans taken from foreign or Indian banks, not from the surplus they had accumulated.

The modern IT sector is celebrated as a great success story of Indian capital. The fact is that almost all of the profit made by the top twenty firms comes from outsourcing. That is, from jobs they carry out according to the designs and instructions of imperialist transnational corporations (TNC). India has a well-developed integrated circuit design sector. But it is located within TNCs. Design work done in India is transferred to their headquarters and many a times ends up getting manufactured in China. A recent essay in RUPE notes, 'Indian industry has failed to invest in research and development (R&D), and has preferred to go in for repetitive technology imports, all paid for in hard currency. India's R&D expenditure is a meagre 0.6-0.7 per cent of GDP; indeed it has been falling since 2010. Within this meagre spending on innovation, only 36 per cent is in the private sector – the rest is in Government labs. It is telling that the private corporate sector's R&D spending is about half of what India pays out at present on royalties to foreign firms... India's celebrated 'telecom revolution', near-universal coverage of mobile telephony, has come and gone, without India's private corporate sector making anything – neither the equipment nor the software nor even the mobile devices.'⁶ As for the recent entry into semi-conductor manufacture, both the technology and raw material are being supplied either by TNCs or their compradors in Taiwan.

The neo-revisionists claim that India is no longer semi-feudal. Their characterisation of agrarian relations range from 'distorted capitalism' to 'proper' capitalism. The Sonu clique is the latest addition to this crowd. They distort views expressed on this matter by the CPI (Maoist) and argue that capitalist development has taken place in the country. Along with that, 'widespread urbanisation' is presented as a reason for abandoning the Naxalbari path. This understanding about the spread of urbanisation is based on a superficial reading of Census reports. What its data show is an increase in 'census towns'. These are an analytical category defined by the Census authorities. A census town in India is defined as a settlement that has a population of at least 5,000, a minimum population density of 400 persons per square kilometre, and at least 75% of its main male working population engaged in non-agricultural activities. This sort of a configuration can come up for several reasons. For example, a new highway junction can easily transform into one within a few years. Such towns are included in the urban count by the Census. Hence the share of the urban goes up. But they are still quite rural. They cannot be taken as a criterion of the growth of capitalism.

⁶<https://rupeindia.wordpress.com/2026/05/15/whose-belts-will-be-tightened/>

To cut through all this revisionist fog we need to deepen our grasp of the Maoist concept of bureaucrat capitalism. Once colonial domination was consolidated, the old caste-feudalism no longer remained the same. It was subordinated and enmeshed in the worldwide imperialist web. This transformation had a dual nature. While many of its earlier features were eroded or even eliminated, some of them were strengthened. New ones emerged. This was accompanied most often by the demise of the old landlords and emergence of new ones. Similarly, the earlier traders were displaced by new sections, wholly dependent on the colonialist power. Throughout all of this, caste remained as a decisive socio-economic-cultural determinant. The transformation of caste-feudalism under colonialism is a widely admitted fact. However the specific nature of capitalism, bureaucrat capitalism, that was being engendered along with it is quite often missed. Transforming and engendering, both were aspects of a single process.

Caste-feudalism was made into the social base of imperialism precisely through such transformations. It was, simultaneously, the process of growth of bureaucrat capitalism. Caste-feudalism lost its leading role through the consolidation of colonialism. It was now dominated and moulded by imperialism to suit its needs, mainly through bureaucrat capitalism. New forms of feudal control and exploitation, new relations of caste and patriarchy, new methods of surplus extraction, were also engendered in this process all along. This continues even today. As pointed out by Mao, this capitalism, bureaucrat capitalism, is intertwined with both imperialism and feudalism. Once the concept of bureaucrat capitalism is correctly grasped, one can readily understand that its growth, promotion, under the aegis of imperialism is never going to eliminate feudalism. Hence, the need to persist in the anti-feudal struggle, the agrarian revolution. Hence the need to take it up keeping in mind new features and addressing the task in its contemporaneity.

With the transfer of power, the Indian big bourgeoisie gained power in the country along with the feudals. It transformed into the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie with the merger of comprador bourgeois capital with state capital. The bureaucrat faction is mainly composed of executives of government companies in industry, finance and trade. Till the 1990s they were the main, or even sole, players in some sectors of the economy. Since then the compradors from the private sector have become dominant. The bureaucrat faction is just as much comprador as the chieftains of private sector corporates. Being a distinct faction, it has its specific interests, different from those of the private comprador faction. However, the relation between both the factions has always been complementary. Even while pursuing their specific interests and having non-antagonistic contradictions with each other, the public and the private complement each other. They form two factions of a single class, the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie.

The comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie has the leading role in the ruling classes' alliance. This leading role was not gained on its own strength vis a vis caste-feudalism. It is not at all a matter of capitalism displacing or subordinating caste-feudalism. Caste-feudalism lost its leading role through the consolidation of colonialism. It is dominated primarily by imperialism, not bureaucrat capitalism. One of the concrete manifestations of the intertwining of bureaucrat capitalism with feudalism in our country is the continuing stamp of caste on it. The class engendered by it originated from savarna castes. Caste-wise they continue to dominate in the composition of the big bourgeoisie. Two thirds of the very big listed companies of the country are run by savarna families. Most of the public sector firms are run by those from savarna castes. The Indian comprador-bureaucrats speak the language of modernity but possess medieval ideas in thinking and practice. Brahmanism is inherent in the world outlook of the Indian big bourgeoisie.

The leading role of the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie was further strengthened and consolidated during the 1960s-70s spurt in the growth of bureaucrat capitalism. Corresponding to the needs of bureaucratic capitalist policy and imperialism the agricultural sector was moulded through the so-called Green Revolution. In these changing conditions the feudal lords could not continue their exploitation and hegemony like in the earlier period. However, the feudal forces were kept alive by providing opportunities for trade and other economic sources for intense exploitation, rural hegemony and control. For example, the cooperative sugar mills are on the one hand modern in their form of property and production techniques. On the other hand, they depend on most outdated, reactionary forms of exploitation. Due to the dual nature of this class — there is a change in the form of exploitation (wage labour), it is managing production in new forms (such as cooperative organisations), capitalist instruments of production such as pipe wells, various agricultural implements, tractors, threshers and harvesters, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and techniques are used, yet caste-feudal forms of control and exploitation continue— these new agrarian relations did not lead to the elimination of feudalism or the liberation of productive forces.

The landlords, rich peasants and a tiny section of middle peasants have entered into profitable avenues like commission agencies, trade in agricultural inputs, real estate agencies and small or medium entrepreneurship. By virtue of their socio-economic positions and political clout, they corner almost all government subsidies and gain the most from government schemes. They are well entrenched at all levels of the local administration. Caste/religions community networks spanning the whole state, closely intertwined with political affiliations, greatly enable them. Their ability to exert local domination is directly related to the links they have with the state apparatus through such networks. Control over local administrative bodies and co-operative societies helps them in strengthening and sustaining patronage webs in the villages. Violence, carried out with the silent support or even connivance of the local police, is employed to put down any challenge.

The big landlords have always had close relations with the big bourgeoisie. They were among the initial investors in comprador firms. They continue to do that. Moreover, some among them have also established their own enterprises. Their younger generations see these as their main field of activity, rather than agricultural operations. However they haven't abandoned it altogether.

This is mirrored from the side of imperialist finance capital and Indian bureaucrat capital, in their entry into agriculture. It is being done directly, by establishing their own farms, dairies, poultry farms etc. It is also being done through contract farming. In the latter case, multinational or comprador corporates enter into contracts with hundreds of peasants, coming from various classes. They provide inputs and finance and buy up the products at pre-fixed prices. Though this looks like a win-win relation it is actually quite precarious for the peasantry. When prices fall or there is a glut in the market, the corporates simply refuse to take the produce. The peasants are then left at the mercy of local traders and forced to make distress sales.

Thus, a certain degree of what can be described as 'hybridisation' is taking place among the ruling classes. There are members of the comprador-bureaucrat class who are also big landlords. Similarly, one sees members of the landlord class who are also comprador-bureaucrats. We need to take into account these growing interlinkages. A new counter-revolutionary alliance entwining imperialists and comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie, old and new landlords has emerged. Deepening crisis has made the imperialist powers even more desperate in their penetration and plunder of the oppressed countries. They have turned to protectionism to safeguard their own

economies. But they continue to aggressively push for liberalisation in the rest of the world. The comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie willingly submits to this. The Modi regimes farm laws, labour codes, concessions being made in trade agreements etc. are examples of this. As seen in the agitation against the farm laws, a wide range of class interests are being affected by these acts. The anti-imperialist and anti-feudal planks of the new democratic revolution are getting even more closely meshed together. This increases the potential for broad movements targetting the nexus of the ruling classes and their imperialist mentors. Suitable tactical slogans addressing the situation concretely, while maintaining the strategic orientation of agrarian revolution, are called for.
