Presentation at Vijayawada Seminar on mode of production, 2025

Comrades, let me start with some of the questions that have arisen here, especially the question of whether the Indian big bourgeoisie, being an industrial bourgeoisie, can be described as compradors, that is, they are involved in industry. I ended my paper with the statement that, as Mao Zedong wrote, ‘bureaucrat capitalism still continues, comprador, feudal, state monopoly capitalism.’ I think it is quite clear that this would include a bourgeoisie engaged in industry, production, etc. If that is not clear, there are many studies, not on today’s India, but on Mao’s China, which show how the big bourgeoisie of that country was involved in industry, banking, and the manufacture of all kinds of goods and built a huge empire, which is why Mao called it state monopoly capitalism.

Is there such a phrase, did anyone in the Marxist movement before Mao talk about comprador, feudal, state monopoly capitalism? I don't think so. So when Comrade Alok talks about a bureaucratic feudalism, it is quite possible. Why shouldn't he? So as Sanathan rightly pointed out, we should not look at the issue like that, as if someone had said it before or not.

On the contrary, does it describe what we see before us? Is it right or not? On the basis of concrete facts, the Maoist movement, the CPI(M-L) came to the conclusion that the Indian bourgeoisie is a comprador bourgeoisie. In those days, the struggle was with the CPM. They took the position that they were a big bourgeoisie that was collaborating more and more with imperialism.

Neither here nor there. If you raise the question about their relationship with imperialism, the answer is that did we not say that they were collaborating. If someone questions them from the other side, they will say, no, no, we didn't say it was a dependent bourgeoisie.

So they have constructed a formula that conveniently allows them to dodge all these questions and keep their revisionist position safe. Unfortunately, we are forced to discuss this question again. Unfortunately, we have to respond to criticisms against Suniti Kumar Ghosh that are not based on any facts.

You should pay attention to that. This criticism is not based on any facts. It is based on the choice of this word or that word.

That is not Marxism. It is not Marxism at all. It is just rhetoric.

You will get applause, you will stir up your sympathisers and supporters. Ah, look, we can finally claim that we have solved the problem. No, you are not solving anything.

Because Suniti Kumar Ghosh's work was based on solid analysis and research. He gave facts one after another to show how the Indian bourgeoisie emerged as a trading class under colonial rule and how it gradually went into industry. Not of its own accord but due to pressure from the imperialist rulers of the time.

He gave a very clear example of how the Tata Iron and Steel Plant was set up at the instigation of British imperialism and with the capital contributed by a feudal king. That is a fact. You cannot answer that fact or deny that fact by saying that a comprador cannot be an industrialist.

He was a comprador and he was also an industrialist. So let us not waste time discussing matters that have been settled in the past. It is a useless exercise, and it is very regrettable that pages are being written, large volumes are being written with this kind of nonsense.

That word has to be used, nonsense. Because there is not a single fact in that argument against the positions put forward at that time. Many studies have since come out on the historical conditions that existed here at the time of the entry of the East India Company and how things developed after the British imperialists directly took over, the role they played in developing industry here according to their needs, how the contradictions between the various sections of the British bourgeoisie gave these compradors space to enter industry and how they got their help.

There are many such studies. I have quoted some in my paper. They are all based on research.

They are not semantics that argue about whether the word comprador includes industry or not. They are based on hard research, which is what a serious student of Marxism should do. You have to start from the facts, you have to analyse the facts and come to conclusions.

A thesis is not based on semantic disputes, it is based on facts. That is what should be refuted, with facts. Here another issue has arisen. Some examples on this oil trade. What happened when Trump threatened to impose sanctions? What was the response of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson?

He said that we bought oil from Russia after discussing it with you and reaching an agreement with you.

That was the statement made by Modi's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson. Does that mean that they were going against American interests when they bought oil from Russia? Not at all. They wanted India to buy oil from Russia, so they did it as per their understanding.

If India had not bought oil, what would have happened? It would have restricted the global supply of oil, which would have raised the price of oil. So they wanted India to buy that oil at a cheaper price, and after refining, where did that oil go? It went to Europe. Didn't the European imperialist powers know that this oil was coming from Russia, and that crude oil was coming from there? Did Ambani do it secretly, did it come through the sea without anyone seeing it? No, it came by tankers.

Everyone knew it was coming. Everyone knew that Russian crude oil was being refined in Ambani’s factory in Gujarat and in the Naira factory, which has Russian participation, and exported to Europe. Did America object then? No.

They had asked India to do it. So, look, is there any basis for the idea that Modi is standing up to Trump and saying we will do what we want? Now, of course, he is bragging. Because they have to bargain, they want to somehow put pressure to get a better deal.

India is likely to continue buying oil from Russia despite the tariffs imposed by the US. Why? The European imperialist powers have an interest. They have conflicts with American imperialism.

So they are likely to say, you go ahead, we will take care of you. They may come up with a free trade agreement to alleviate the problems that Indian exporters face in the US. All sorts of things are possible.

Comprador does not mean complete subjugation, that is the point of semi-colonialism. India is not under the rule of any imperialist country. It is a semi-colony, so there are contradictions between the various imperialist powers, and the Indian ruling classes have always tried to exploit this, and being a large country, they can dot hat to some extent do that.

They have a big economy here, a big internal market here, so they have a geostrategic importance, which means that other imperialist powers also need them for various things. So all these are factors go in their favour. But there is a limit to it.

They can never go against the imperialist system. They can trade with this power or adapt to another, but they can never fight against the imperialist system as a whole. So let us not be misled by these views, by the headlines.

Go to the essence, look at what is happening below. What is the reality, then you can understand what is really happening in this world. In my paper, that is what I tried to focus on.

I will not go into the details of the paper, it is with you. For example, this argument on the question of tenancy, land rent, capitalist land tenure or feudal tenure. I have given some examples based on social research conducted in Keralam on various types of tenure systems. In Keralam, where land reforms have been carried out in a comparatively more comprehensive manner than in any other state in India, all three types of tenures exist today,

Labour tenure, where the rent is paid in the form of labour. Share cropping, where a share of the produce is paid as rent. Cash rent, where the rent is fixed in advance in money. There is also share cropping, where the landowner sometimes pays a part of the inputs and sometimes does not.

In some cases the rate of exploitation goes up to 70%. In a recent example that I investigated, a young farmer cultivates 50 acres of land, 10 of which is owned by him and his family, and the rest is leased. He said that almost all the work, including transplanting, is completely mechanised, except for a few things like repairing the bunds.

He was saying that the income he gets from these 50 acres is enough to sustain a middle-class life. That's what he said. The standard of living in Keralam is high. So when he says he maintains a middle-class life, does he mean a lower middle-class or something like that? He doesn't mean that, he means an upper middle class life. Like a rich man who has returned from the Gulf. But interestingly, he is talking about maintaining a certain standard of living.

He is not talking about the self-expansion of capital that Comrade Alok mentioned here. He is not able to create enough surplus for that. He is not able to create surplus for the self-expansion of the capital he has invested. Another example that I have cited, I have mentioned here in the paper.

A man who leases 10 acres of land. He cultivates the land on lease. But he says that this is not a profitable business. He has other occupations. He has a shop. He has a rental business and several other businesses. So I asked him, why are you doing this? He said that it is very important for social value. The fact that I have 10 acres of land on lease and I cultivate there gives me a special status in society.

Isn't that remarkable? This person is engaged in agricultural activities not on his own land, but on 10 acres of leased land, for social status. When he is already engaged in a business, he already has a shop. He already does some rental business.

And yet he sees social value in that. What does that indicate? Does it indicate a capitalist way of thinking? Again all his activities have been mechanised. So we have to go beyond what we see in front of us and go to the essence.

What is that logic that is at work there? Is it the capitalist logic that comrade talked about, about the self-expansion of capital, about it being accumulated and getting bigger? Or is it a feudal logic? In reality, value is not tied to assets or the value of assets or anything else, but to some other thing. So when we talk about semi-feudalism today, we have to understand it in this complexity. No, this is not the old type of semi-feudalism.

But what is this old type of semi-feudalism? Was there such a thing? I came across a PhD paper on the ryotwari system in northern Keralam under the British. Interestingly, the census conducted in Malabar district, a colonial possession of the East India Company in 1856-57, recorded that 25% of the population were not dependent on agricultural income. That is, by 1856, 25% of the population of Malabar district was not dependent on agriculture.

The census of 1871 recorded that 25% of the population were wage labourers. So when we talk about semi-feudalism, what is this? Is it feudalism? There were extreme forms of feudal exploitation at that time. You must have heard of the Malabar Rebellion, also known as the Mappila Rebellion, a peasant revolt in 1921. To be precise, because of extreme feudal exploitation.

There was a lot of feudalism then. But it was not the old feudalism. In fact, in the old feudal system, the feudal lords did not have complete control over the tenants, as in Bengal.

They could not remove them from the land as they pleased. They had to respect certain social norms and so on. The British imposed it after they took control, where they gave full rights to the landlord.

They could do whatever they wanted to the tenants. That actually intensified the feudal exploitation. On the one hand, there was a huge amount of ruin, and many peasants were forced to become agricultural labourers and landless.

On the other hand, the intensity of exploitation increased, which eventually led to that rebellion. So when you talk about semi-feudalism, I would like to point out that this too was semi-feudalism. From the moment the British entered, from the moment the British colonialists started entering the countryside, feudal relations began to transform. Moreover, in India, unlike many other Third World countries, changes had already begun to take place even before the British came, even before colonial rule had taken hold here. For example, in Mysore under Tipu and Hyder, as is recorded in Saki's book on the history of Karnataka, there were great changes in agricultural relations, the growth of industries, etc.

The same thing happened to some extent in Travancore. Not so much, it happened to some extent in Travancore. Even before the British were able to establish their political control.

So these things were already beginning to happen. Once they got in, it intensified. Because if rent starts being demanded in cash, naturally it becomes important for everyone to increase their cash income.

So naturally it affects the economy. It starts the process of monetisation. There is a corresponding transformation in the values and relations of land ownership. So this process has been going on since then.

Today, as I mentioned earlier, it is taking new forms. It is not visible. Everything is there. There is mechanisation, there is capital investment.

Then the question is raised, is it capitalist land tenure? I would say, it is not capitalist land tenure. Because ultimately that surplus does not go towards the creation of capital, towards the self-expansion of capital.

It goes towards the means of subsistence. That is what is most crucial there. I also noticed another situation, for example, Marx talks about differential lease.

What is differential rent? Differential rent means an additional rent that is paid for land that is more productive than other areas. So the rent given here is different from other areas. The landlord can demand a higher rent for more productive areas. In my investigation in Keralam, I noticed that the rent is lower in areas where productivity is higher.

It is the exact opposite of what it should be. Why is that happening? In that particular area, it is happening because there is not much demand for leased land. Why? Because there are many people there, landless and poor peasants, who have many other jobs.

So they are not interested in leasing land to cultivate. The demand for land is low, so the lease is low. But in another area, which is not at all productive compared to this place, where there is an extreme problem of getting water on time, the lease is very high. Why? Because there are no other jobs for the people there. So naturally they have to look for something.

The first thing they look for is land. They cultivate something and get some income from it. The demand for leased land is high there, so the lease is high there.

So what is the logic that is working there? Is it the logic of a capitalist agricultural system that has equalised average profits? No, it is not. It is extremely localised. The whole economy is semi-feudal, so it is extremely localised.

So what I am saying is, when you talk about semi-colonial, semi-feudal, all that, don't think about it in the old framework of what existed in China and what existed in the ‘60s. It has changed. For example, what is happening in Punjab today, a highly mechanised place?

The example of the tractor that comrade gave was one that came from Rajni Desai's study of Punjab, and it pointed out that even a farmer with only 1 or 2 acres of land buys a tractor. What will be the productive value of that investment? What is he going to do with 1 or 2 acres and a tractor? Obviously buying a tractor is linked to some other things.

He may be using it for transport, he may be using it as a matter of social prestige. Everyone has a tractor, so I should have a tractor too. Or someone may have offered him a loan. Don't worry, you can buy a tractor now by paying Rs. 1000 per month. Anyway, it is not an investment driven by the logic of capital. You think about the investment and the return you are going to get from it and then you invest something. That is capitalism.

So don't look at things superficially, whether there are machines, whether there are wage labourers, whether there is commodity production, try to understand it by going to the essence. So I think that is what we need to understand when we discuss this mode of production.

I think that this can be best understood by understanding the issue of bureaucratic capitalism in more depth, which is why I have specifically included it as the subject of my paper. The paper is before you, and now I will conclude and answer questions as they arise. I have not gone into all the details of the paper before you, but the basic point is, don't get caught up in the appearance, go beyond it and get to the essence.

Thank you.