

**Process of Collectivisation in the USSR  
As Reflected in  
Sholokhov's 'Virgin Soil Upturned'**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Shyam Singh**

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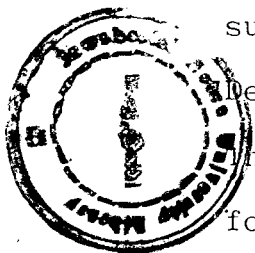
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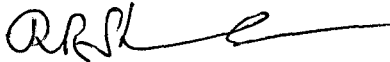
CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled  
"PROCESS OF COLLECTIVISATION IN THE USSR AS  
REFLECTED IN SHOLOKHOV'S 'VIRGIN SOIL UPTURNED'",  
submitted by Shyam Singh is for the award of the  
Degree of Master of Philosophy of this University.  
This dissertation has not been previously submitted  
for any other degree of this or any other University,  
and is his own work.



We recommend that this dissertation may be placed  
before the examiners for evaluation.

  
PROF. D. KAUSHIK  
(CHAIRMAN)

  
PROF. R.R. SHARMA  
(SUPERVISOR)

.....dedicated to

amma & babuji.....

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

The present work was conceived at a moment of acute financial and intellectual crises. To cap it all, the weather remained muggy throughout.

Many faces known and unknown contributed their bit towards the constitution of the problematique.

Encouragement and friendly advice was given in ample abundance by Prof. R.R. Sharma and Prof. K.S.Dhingra. I wish to record my gratitude for the same.

And finally to those who just happened to be around belongs this dissertation : Sipra, Aqil-----.

*Shyam Singh*  
(SHYAM SINGH)

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## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

Collectivisation of agricultural farms in the USSR and its aftermath represented a social upheaval of momentous nature. Though the oppression and exploitation of the poor peasants by the kulaks surceased, yet it can not be denied that its implementation was arbitrary, authoritarian and in many cases quite tardy. Hence, the gyrations of such a phenomenon can not be sketched schematically, serious problems cropped up in the wake of collectivisation and those who opposed it on any ground were systematically purged and liquidated.

It is arguable whether a violent uprooting of ageold traditions and conventions in a nascent social state was a matter of sheer necessity or plausible options other than coercion available?

The historical background of collectivisation, the process, method and problems of collectivisation and their reflection in Mikhail

Sholokhov's "Virgin Soil Upturned", form the subject matter of the present study. The present study analyses the whole process and problems of collectivisation in the welknown novel "Vergin Soil Upturned".

The dissertation has four chapters :

- i) Introduction.
- ii) Problems of Agrarian Transformation in the USSR : A Review.
- iii) Collectivisation : Process & problems
- iv) Collectivisation as charecterised in Popular Literature of the Period : A Physiognomical Study of Sholokhov's "Virgin Soil Upturned."

The second chapter starts with a review of the impact of the 1861 reform on the life of the Russian peasantry and follows it up with a survey of various other reforms carried out during the pre-revolutionary period. It also discusses the impact of the Great October Revolution on rural life and reviews such policies of the Soviet Period as farm - produce requisitioning and farm - produce taxing.

The study of this historical background is essential for understanding the conditions in which the process of collectivisation took place.

The Third Chapter is devoted to the study of the actual process of collectivisation, the methods used for this purpose and the problems faced during the early period of collectivisation. Besides describing the essential features of collectivisation, particular attention is paid to such aspects as the class struggle in the village, the role and place of the middle peasant in this struggle, the role of the working class and the Communist Party in the process of collectivisation, the mistakes committed during the early period,

While the Third Chapter is based on socio-political and historical facts and figures, the Fourth Chapter is based on the study of fiction M. Sholokhov's novel "Virgin Soil Upturned". This study gives us, in particular, the psychological and 'human' aspects of the process of collectivisation, since Sholokhov's novel is the most authentic



literary masterpiece on the subject. Though the writer describes the event in a particular village in the Don Region, it is commonly accepted that the events depicted in the novel are typical of the process of collectivisation at other places in the USSR as well. This typicality makes the novel a unique literary document on the subject. The study of this document reveals to us the psychology of the various sections of the old peasant society and its reaction to the idea of collectivisation, the change brought about by collectivisation in the thinking of the common peasant. Since the novel focuses on the depiction of the masses, the study of the behaviour of these masses helps us to understand the reaction of the people to the actions taken by party and government on this issue. Incidentally, a comparison of the facts in the Second Chapter with those depicted in the novel, gives us an idea about the factual authenticity and typicality of the novel.

CHAPTER - IIPROBLEMS OF AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION IN THE  
USSR : A REVIEW

The collectivisation of agriculture marked a very crucial stage in the process of the construction of a socialist society in the USSR, which put an end to the oppression and exploitation of the poor peasants by the kulaks and others in the villages and gave them the status of equality. It was however, a complicated process, characterized by several serious problems in its implementation. These problems occurred particularly during the crucial period (1928-1935) of collectivisation.

This massive collectivisation of agriculture was unique in the history of mankind. "This was a revolution" pointed out Stalin; which "liquidated the old bourgeois economic conditions in the village and created new social conditions"<sup>1</sup>.

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1. J. Stalin - Marxism i Voprosy Yazykoznaneya  
(Gospolitizdat, 1950).

To understand the dimensions of this agrarian transformation it is important to look into the history of Russia starting from the emancipation of serfs in 1861. The background of the Russian peasantry will provide a key to an understanding of their-socio-economic conditions during the reign of the Tsars. The root of the causes of the peasants' unrest can be traced in the background of the Russian peasantry.

#### EMANCIPATION OF SERFS (1861)

After the death of Nicholas I, his son Alexander II assumed power at the beginning of 1855. Just one year after assuming power he stated in a speech delivered in 1856 to the Moscow nobility that "it was better to emancipate the serfs 'from above' than wait for them to start freeing themselves 'from below'".<sup>2</sup>

He was not keen to emancipate the serfs, but the increasing peasants' unrest and the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War forced him to do so.

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2. History of the USSR, Part - I (progress publishers, 1977,) p. 233.

He was a person who never took any measures that tended to curb the rights of the gentry and yet historical circumstances placed upon him an inevitable task which he had to carry out if he wished to save his realm from total catastrophe"<sup>3</sup>

The reforms of 1861, although responding to pressure from the masses and to the deep rooted problems, were carried out not by representatives of the nation, but by the bureaucracy, assisted by some progressive statesmen. The edict abolishing serfdom in Russia was an act of grace from 'above' though "important economic and social changes in Russia forced the government to abolish rather than to 'improve' the institution of serfdom"<sup>4</sup>

When the need of emancipation became inevitable, it fell upon officialdom with its government appointed committees, the membership of which was bureaucratic and conservative, to elaborate

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3. Anatole G. Mazour - Russia : Tsarist and Communist  
(V. Mostrand Compy., Princeton ) p. 253

4. Ibid, p. 256.

and execute the plans. In carrying out this plan the peasantry was not consulted, on the contrary, the nobility was well-represented and its interests were well-guarded. But a considerable section of the nobility favoured emancipation for fear that farm management and free labour would be too difficult to organise in a country like Russia. They preferred to rent their entire land to the freed peasants and thereby preserve their estates intact.

The landlords in the south, where the black soil was fertile and more profitable to farm, were against land allotments. "The basic principle of the emancipation was that the serfs on private estates were to be left in possession of approximately the same amount of land as they had occupied previously."<sup>5</sup> And the government also opposed emancipation without land, because it might have caused disturbances and social relocation. A very serious problem arose on the question of land allotment. There was a serious difficulty in carrying out the principle that the peasants should be entitled to the holdings they tilled before 1861

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5. Maurice Dobb - Soviet Economic Development since 1917 (Routledge & Kegan, London, 1948) p. 50.

as there was no uniformity in land-holdings before that date. It became necessary to set up a certain principle determining the amount of land each freed serf was to be allotted in the entire area wherever the emancipation was put into effect.

Land was distributed among the peasantry according to their previous holdings. Whenever the holdings of the peasants prior to 1861 exceeded the maximum norm, the landed nobility was entitled to take off the excess; On the other hand, if these holdings had been below a third of the maximum norm, constituting the minimum, the landlord had to add from his estate to meet the required need. Thus the Editing Commission, from the very beginning of its work, planned to leave to the peasant all the land he utilised, but cutting it back if it was larger than a designated norm and adding to it if it was smaller. when the process was completed and also after concessions to the nobles were made the total area left to the peasant was..... four percent less than they had before. This loss was, however, a final figure. There was not

only much variation, but the better land tended to remain in the hands of the landlords."<sup>6</sup>

The land the peasants had received was to be redeemed by redemption payments (vkupniye platezhi). The peasants who received the land were to pay or redeem through annual payments until 1910. In addition, they had to perform manual labour of many types on the estates in return for permission to graze and water their animals and to chop firewood. Such reciprocal arrangements were commonly known as otraboki. There were other types of arrangements besides otraboki which were contracted between the administrator of an estate and neighbouring peasants societies. With their growing population, peasant societies had an increasing need for the use of estate ploughland. This need occasioned the creation of a whole network of leasing arrangements. The noblemen leased large sections of their estates for a certain period to middlemen who parcelled up these large sections into smaller plots. These smaller plots were then leased to peasant societies for one harvest

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6. A.A. Skerpan - The Russian National Economy and Emancipation, in A. Levin & Ferguson (eds.) Essays in Russian History (Archon Books, Handen, Connecticut, 1964) pp. 187-188.

or for one year at extremely high prices.

After the practice of leasing estate land became widespread, it waned in some areas quite suddenly. The nobles began leasing less land in order to expand their own agricultural pursuits. This caused a corresponding decline in the well being of peasant societies and a rise in the cost of land. The serfs freed without allotments had only one solution for their subsistence : to join the slowly swelling ranks of the town and city industrial workers. As Alec Nove puts it,--"The freeing of peasants caused an ever growing flow into the towns, and this was naturally speeded up by the Stolypin reform ....."<sup>7</sup>

Thus even after the reforms a peasant did not become an individual property owner, or possess full civil rights, but remained subject to the authority of the commune, commonly known as mir or obschina. The serfs freed from the authority of the gentry were tied to the newly established social organisation, instead of being tied to the land of his master. Thus,"The

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7. Alec Nove - An Economic History of the USSR (penguin Books, 1969) p. 25.



peasant did not achieve equality before the law, or real personal freedom. Their land was held not by them, but by the village community."<sup>8</sup>

The land granted to the peasants was given not individually but to the commune - the village or an aggregation of villages. The commune then distributed the land among its members in accordance with the size of the family. The peasant was compelled to render his allotment to the commune as grazing land; he had <sup>to</sup> obey the dictates of the commune concerning crop rotation; he had to accept his holding in the form of strips, frequently far apart and extremely narrow, allowing only lengthwise ploughing. Tolstoy observes in his notes that the "commune is restrictive to such a degree that any member of it, should he rise just a little above an animal existence, strives to leave it, " and again, more cryptically he observes: "The proletariat existing in the commune (is one) concealed by force."<sup>9</sup>

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8. See, Alec Nove, No. 7., p. 21.

9. See A.A. Skerpan, No. 6, p. 190.

Thus, in real terms the peasants became dependent upon those bureaucratic government agencies which concerned themselves with peasant affairs.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s the expropriative measures and tactics of the state administration became more and more refined and due to this relations between peasants and nobles worsened. Peasant labour was often contracted with an advance payment in winter, the time of the poverty of the peasants, for work to be done the following summer. The wages paid under such contracts were lower than those contracted immediately before the start of the scheduled work season.

Peasants' land hunger and the role of the peasants' Bank, created by Sergei Witte, added a new dimension to the problems of the time. Soon after emancipation it became clear that most of the former serfs were in need of additional land. The resulting land hunger of the former serfs was, first of all, expressed by Zemstvos,

newly established institutions. But the financial status of the Zemstvos was very limited and they could do nothing more than offering a short-term credit to the peasants in small amounts. The Zemstvos could not take any substantive measures toward enlarging peasantry landholdings, because they were powerless. A large number of Zemstvos started petitioning the Central Government to establish some type of credit institution for the peasantry.

The peasants' Bank began operating in April of 1883. The bank originally made loans for almost the full price of the land sold to the peasants.

According to the Ukaz, published on 3rd November, 1905, the peasants' Bank started assisting land-poor peasants in expanding their land holdings. Until this time, the peasants' Bank had acted mainly as a broker between the peasants and the landed nobles where the peasants purchased estate property. The Bank, since its establishment in 1883, had

granted long-term loans to peasant societies in order to enable them to purchase estate land. The Bank had also been in the business of purchasing estate land directly from the nobility in order to resell it to peasant societies.

Thus, the Ukaz issued on 3rd November 1905 did not comprise an agrarian policy which could settle the peasants' problems positively.

It did not take long for the peasants to abandon hope in the programme proclaimed by the Ministry of Finance. It became clear to them that the government not only had no intention of expropriating estate land but that it had proved itself incapable of bringing current land prices down to anywhere near the level which could <sup>be</sup> considered fair and just.

Thus the emancipation of serfs in 1861 was a bluff to the peasantry and it could do nothing more than putting the peasantry into further trouble. "...Emancipation in certain respects created problems almost as serious as those it

resolved, and by itself it made only a limited final contribution to the development of Russian economic power."<sup>10</sup> Expressing his views on the peasant reform of 1861, Lenin, in the article entitled "Krepostnicheskaya Reforma", wrote: "1861 gave birth to 1905. The pro-serfdom character of the first 'great' bourgeois reform has hampered the development".<sup>11</sup>

When we look into the various stages of the development of agrarian reforms from 1861 to 1905, it becomes clear that the peasant problem was one of the most burning problems of the period which always put the tsarist government into trouble. The 1905 revolution was an outcome of the same problem, as V.I. Lenin wrote on this issue in his article entitled "Zemelnii Vopras V Rossii" : "the movement of 1905 is historically characterised especially by the fact that a huge majority of the population in Russia, especially the peasantry, put forward

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10. See A.A. Skerpan No. 6, p. 197.

11. V.I. Lenin. Pol. Sobran. Sochinenii, Vol.20 p.177.

the agrarian question in the very first place."<sup>12</sup>

One of the important factors in the agrarian life of Russia was the rapid economic development which followed the emancipation. "Private initiative of both Russian and foreign business men played a role of paramount importance in the rapid industrialisation of Russia from the 1880's on"<sup>13</sup> Till this time agriculture was the foundation of Russia's economic life. The area which fell under cultivation was increasing steadily. "The average annual harvest of grain in European Russia in the decade 1861-70 was half a ton per hectare. In the decade 1901-10 it increased to five sixth of a ton per hectare."<sup>14</sup>

The second factor in the agrarian life of Russia was the rapid economic differentiation in the villages. This economic differentiation paved the way for the formation of Kulak class

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12. V.I. Lenin - Pol. Sobran. Sochinenii, Vol 25, p.238.

13. George Vernadski - A History of Russia. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) p.247.

14. Ibid., p.242.

and the rural proletariat. "The outstanding feature of the Russian reform was that instead of a class of landless labourers, it had firmly established a landowning peasantry and had taken social precautions to keep the peasants attached to their land."<sup>15</sup> Following the reform of 1861, the ownership of land in Russia underwent drastic changes. Peasants not only retained the old land which they had got following the 1861 reform, but also received new land by purchase. "Thus; simultaneously with the growth of the area under cultivation in Russia during the fifty years preceding the First World War, a radical change in the social structure of the agricultural population took place."<sup>16</sup>

Soon after the emancipation it became clear in the public mind that all was not well with emancipated rural Russia. Paradoxical though it may seem, Russia during that time had become one of the leading exporters of grain and other

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15. A. Gerscherkron - Problems and patterns of Russian Economic Development in Cyril E. Black (edt). The Transformation of Russian society. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960).p.44.

16. See George Vernadski No. 13, p.243.

foodstuffs. The Stolypin policy, which was the tsarist regime's answer to the events of 1905, was designated "to develop in the village a class of capitalist farmers, producing for the market with the aid of hired labour."<sup>17</sup>

#### STOLYPIN'S AGRARIAN REFORM

Stolypin belonged to the landed gentry and was quite familiar with the agrarian problem but the solution he sought reflected the interests of the class to which he belonged. He was well aware of the fact that suppressing the people's movement by military units would not be sufficient. Thus he was compelled to undertake a number of measures related to the peasantry.

As a result of the 1905 revolution, a constitution of limited scope was established in Russia and a House of Representatives, called the Duma, created. This was followed by

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17. See Maurice Dobb. No. 5, p.54.



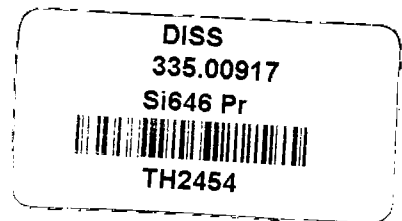
important social reforms. The peasants' redemption payments were discontinued and, at the initiative of Stolypin the peasants were allowed to leave the commune and their ownership of individual farms was greatly encouraged. "Peasants were now free to leave their communities, to consolidate their holdings as their property, to buy land or to sell it, to move to town or to migrate."<sup>18</sup>

It was a momentous political manoeuvre intended to create a safeguard against further agrarian disturbances by consolidating a conservative petty-bourgeois landowning class. It used the bourgeois-minded peasant to counter-balance the socialist-minded proletarian of the city. By introducing these reforms Stolypin also thought that a new class of peasantry would come into existence, which would be prosperous and loyal to the government.

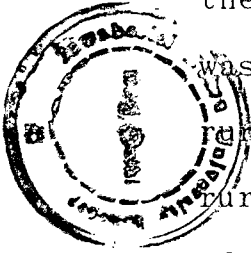
One of the main aims of Stolypin was to assist only well-off peasants, who would carry off the best portions of the land, leaving the

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18. Alec Nove - An Economic History of the USSR. (Penguin Books, 1969) p.22.



commune. Thus, the chief aim of the Bill was to forge a political weapon rather than to solve an important economic problem. In the village economy a social differentiation was emerging because of the formation of a rural proletariat on the one hand, and of a rural bourgeoisie on the other. And because of this the old economic forms of the village were disintegrating.



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Lenin also was aware of the growth of capitalism in Russia and he maintained that it had its roots in the rural economy itself. He believed that capitalism would play a vital role in the development of the rural economy of the country and "this role he summed up in two postulates: increase in the productive forces of social labor, and the socialization of labor."<sup>19</sup>

Though the Stolypin reform increased the production of grains and speeded up commercial agriculture, it also increased the

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19. Maurice Dobb, Soviet Economic Development since 1917 (London, 1948) p.63.

peasants' land hunger. The landless peasants were given a choice of either remaining in the villages and leading a pitiful existence or migrating to the city where they were to be absorbed eventually by the urban working class. Thus, the attempt by Stolypin to repair the shortcomings in the reform of 1861, and to create in Russia a new class of small landowners to form the basis for the reformed state required many years to produce lasting results.

Thus the peasantry passing through various bourgeois agrarian reforms undertaken by the tsarist government suffered a lot and could not find a proper way out.

#### AN ERA OF MAJOR REFORMS : (1917-1928)

After the October Revolution of 1917 the peasant age-old dream came true: they received for their free use land confiscated from the landlords the Tsar and his families. This land was distributed among the peasants on an egalitarian basis, i.e., according to the size of their families. It was what the peasants had wanted.

The Soviet government was perfectly aware of the fact that the egalitarian distribution of the land held out little promise for the future because the small peasant households could not end the dire poverty of the peasantry. "An important factor affecting agricultural productivity was the land Reform of the 1917-18 had achieved, not only the break-up of the large estates, but an equalisation of peasant holdings themselves and also a considerable increase in the number of peasant forms."<sup>20</sup>

The decision taken by the Party to distribute land among the poor and landless peasants gave an impetus to grain production. But during the period of the Civil War and foreign military intervention, the economic policy of the state was geared to one goal, i.e., defeating the enemy. The peasant had no right to sell his food surplus but was obliged to turn it over to the state at fixed prices. The peasants were armed with a weapon that could be effectively used against the government and the fate of the state depended upon the good-will of the peasantry. Seeing this,

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20. See Maurice Dobb, No. 19, p.208.

the government took steps to raise the standards of scientific cultivation, improve relationships between the city and the village or the proletariat and the peasantry, and raise the general cultural level of the countryside.

But the peasants were not satisfied with the government's requisitioning policies during the war and, because of their dissatisfaction the production of grain had come to a standstill.

"The peasant retreated into a subsistence economy, and had no incentive to produce surpluses which would be seized by the authorities."<sup>21</sup>

Although during the war the peasant did not oppose the policy strongly, after the war was over they demanded the right to do what they saw fit with the surplus grain and other grain produced on their farms. The peasants sought a free market for their produce. The economic policies of the war period could not bring about the necessary balance between the interests of the socialised industries and private agricultural production. And such

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21. E.H. Carr, The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin (1917-1929) (The Macmillan Press, London, 1979) p.31.

a balance was necessary in order to restore the war ravaged economy, to strengthen the alliance of the working class and the peasantry to secure all the socialist gains of the country.

Realizing this, the Soviet government permitted "the peasant, after the delivery of a fixed proportion of his output to state organs (a "tax in kind"), to sell the rest in the market."<sup>22</sup>

Now the peasants were free to dispose of their surplus produce after paying the taxes. This new approach created an important incentive and made the peasants put to good use the land which had once belonged to landowners and which had been abandoned during the war years. "The introduction of tax in kind meant that: it was the personal responsibility of every peasant and also his right to dispose of the surpluses of farm produce, and that it was his right to choose what he regarded as the most rational ways of development of his farm, use of implements, and so on. This not only established the legal responsibility of the peasant before the state but also ensured

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22. See E.H. Carr, No. 21, p.32.

his right to economic independence and initiative."<sup>23</sup>

The further expansion of grain production at a higher rate was however impossible because of the lack of modern agricultural tools. The peasants were handicapped by the small scale of their operations and their primitive organisation and as compared to the rapid progress being made in socialist industry, the lower growth rates in agricultural production were particularly striking.

In such a condition Lenin was willing to make a sharp turn in his policy. He was prepared to adjust his plans to the realities of the time, "We are in conditions of such poverty, ruin and exhaustion of the productive powers of the workers and peasants", said Lenin in a speech at the Tenth Convention of the Communist Party in March 1921, that every thing must set aside to increase production." Thus came the New

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23. Vladimir Duritrienko, NEP and the control of socio-economic processes in the countryside in problems of contemporary world. ("Social sciences Today", USSR Academy of Sciences Pub., Moscow, 1976) p.50.

Economic Policy or NEP. However, since the NEP permitted a measure of private trade, for many people it was a step backwards. As M.N. Roy puts it, "Those who had believed that the victory of the revolution under the leadership of a working class party would mean the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the direct beginning of the construction of socialism, regarded the new policy as a deviation from the programme of the party."<sup>24</sup>

The application of Communism under the existing conditions was out of the question. Examining the political and economic difficulties of the Soviet land which arose early in 1921, Lenin stated in his report to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International that "The reason for it was that in our economic offensive we had run too far ahead, that we had not provided ourselves with adequate resources, that the masses sensed what we ourselves were not then able to formulate consciously but what we admitted soon after, a few weeks later, namely

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24. M.N. Roy, The Russian Revolution, (Renaissance Pub., Calcutta, 1949) p.27.



that the direct transition to purely socialist forms, to purely socialist distribution, was beyond our available strength, and that if we were unable to effect a retreat so as to confine ourselves to easier tasks, we would face disaster."<sup>25</sup>

On the purely practical side the NEP had only one goal to attain at all costs: economic reconstruction within the shortest possible time. If it could have been achieved without resorting to capitalism, Lenin and the party would have been happy. Since this was practically impossible he was ready to compromise with capitalist elements. The main aims of this step were to increase the volume of production, to bridge the widening gulf between city and countryside, to control the practically unleashed capitalistic forces in the socialistic state.

Under the New Economic Policy, as mentioned earlier, the former method of requisitioning the

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25. Mikolai Kuzmin, The Economic Policy of the Communist Party in the First Soviet Years in Problems of Contemporary World ("Social Sciences Today", USSR, Academy of Sciences, Pub., Moscow, 1976) p.41.

entire surplus of grain was abandoned and a food tax was introduced. This naturally legalised the profit motive and new trade. Land was still considered state property but was given to the peasants for cultivation. The peasant could not sell his land, hire labour or own cattle or rent or acquire agricultural machinery.

Thus, "a large section of the peasantry which had acquired new land holdings, and which had been freed from the awful economic burden of rents and debts, was gradually getting transformed into what was called Srednyaks, i.e., middle peasants, who numbered nearly 65 per cent in 1925".<sup>26</sup>

And also on the point of hiring labour, owning cattle, renting or acquiring agricultural machinery the differences of opinion within the ranks of the party were sharp, since many feared that it would cause the rise of the rich peasant, i.e.,

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26. R.R. Sharma, Social Structure and social change in Soviet society in Zafar Imam (ed.) The USSR: Sixty Years: Economic, social & Political Development, (Tulsi publishing House, M.D. 1981) p.30.

the Kulak who would dictate his own terms. "The Sixth Congress of the Communist International, therefore, forewarned that the bourgeois compromise with "pitiful" agrarian reforms could result in the "gradual" conversion to semi-feudal landlordism.."27

But the government was not blind by any means. It was aware of such a possibility and that is why it formulated the land code of 1922, which intended to remind the peasantry once again that the land remained the property of the state, although the tillers of the soil could exploit it freely. The law forbade private land transactions in the form of purchase, sale, mortgages or gifts. Another measure resisting the potent peasant individualistic sense of ownership was the encouragement of agricultural cooperatives. The hope of the government was that these agricultural cooperatives would aid poor peasants and prevent the rise of Kulaks - the bitterest enemy of socialism.

NEP drew the peasants into the construction of socialism by strengthening economic ties between town and country and also by developing socialised

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27. See R.R. Sharma, No. 26, p.30.

forms of farming. In this way, the NEP contributed to the consolidation and the development of the socialist sector of the national economy both the town and the country, as Lenin emphasised the "importance of NEP for strengthening the alliance of the working class and the peasants."<sup>28</sup>

This 'alliance' developed the productive forces of town and country, strengthened the socialist sector and enhanced its influence on the peasantry and drew the latter into the building of socialism.

Stimulating agricultural production, the New Economic Policy brought about two salutary consequences. Firstly, the expansion of export enabled the Soviet Union to reequip its industrial plants by importing new machinery and this improved manufactured commodities, demanded by the peasants in exchange for their produce; secondly, the increase in the volume of agricultural produce brought down the prices of foodstuffs.

"The harvest for that year and for 1923 were excellent, and appeared to herald a revival of

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28. Yuri Polyakov, NEP and the Building of Socialism in the Soviet Union in Problems of the Contemporary world (Social Sciences Today", USSR Academy of Sciences Publication, Moscow, 1976). p.7.

soviet agriculture: small quantities of grain were actually exported."<sup>29</sup>

By this time the Kulak had become a key figure in the village economy. The poor peasants' condition was still poor, because they could not produce a surplus for the market, and whatever they produced they consumed themselves.

By the terms of division of labour and economy of in a socialist state, the policy/NEP was fanning class struggle in the village, as village community was divided into three groups: rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. The difficulty was that each category shaded into the other. The poor peasants had some land, but so little that the members of the family spent much time working on others' farms. The middle peasant also did not have enough land and he or members of his family too hired themselves out. Kulaks being rich were producing a surplus and selling it in the market. The number of the Kulaks grew every year:

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29. E.H. CARR, The Russian Revolution: From Lenin to Stalin (1917-1929). (Macmillan Press, London 1979). p. 36.

Percentage of total house- holds	<u>1922</u>	<u>1923</u>	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925</u>
Leasing Land	2.8	3.3	4.2	6.1
Employing Labour	1.0	1.0	1.7	1.9

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Source: Alec Nove, An Economic History of the USSR  
(Penguin Publishers, 1969) p.108.

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The communist party's decision of fanning the class struggle in the village and its "guidance of the whole course of the class struggle during the NEP period was the decisive factor that made possible the subsequent signal victories and gains of the working class and the working people of the USSR".<sup>30</sup>

Lenin's understanding on the issue of the class struggle and the growing number of rich peasants was very clear and he saw the solution in large mechanised cooperative and he put emphasis on socialisation and nationalisation of land belonging to rich <sup>in</sup> very certain terms. He understood well the growing social contradictions in the existing society, that "the old structure of contradictions inherited from the past and retained in the early

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30. Ivan Trifonov, NEP and the class struggle in problems of contemporary world ("Social Sciences Today", USSR Academy of Sciences publication, Moscow, 1976). p.97.

period of transition was rooted out for the first time towards the end of 1920s, i.e., after the massive campaign for industrialisation and collectivisation of agriculture was operationalised."<sup>31</sup>

The whole of agrarian problem had become very complicated. Proprietary relations laid a heavy burden on the majority of the rural population and retarded the development of the agricultural sector in the national economy. It was urgently necessary to decide, which road agriculture should take.

Thus, at the XV Congress of the Communist Party held in December 1927, the Party set a course towards total collectivisation to agriculture. This was the most complex social and economic task, which is discussed in the following Chapter.

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31. See R.R. Sharma, No.26, P.32.

CHAPTER IIICOLLECTIVISATION : PROCESS & PROBLEMS

The collectivisation of peasants, in USSR constituted a social upheaval of a totally unprecedented nature. It was one of the most remarkable events of the present century and it has a history as long as soviet power itself.

Despite the fact that the revolution had brought peasants more land, the enormous increase in their population led to a large - scale subdivision of peasant holdings. The grain crisis was an outcome of the increasing population and with the increase in the population and the development of industrialisation, the cities and towns were growing as a consequence of the continuous exodus from the rural areas.

The problem of marketed grain production was also one of the reasons for grain crisis, because, "the gentry's estates, which had been the basic source of marketed grain were liquidated. Then the years of Civil War significantly diminished kulaks' farm both in size and in number, and they never regained their pre-revolutionary level despite the introduction of New Economic Policy."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Roy, A. Medvedev, Let History Judge : The origin and consequences of Stalinism, (Macmillan, London, 1972) pp. 72-73.



The number and scope of operations of the kulaks were reduced by the revolution, whereas revolution greatly added to the middle and poor peasants. The introduction<sup>of</sup>/NEP also gave impetus to flourishing private property and, "the hold of the feudal ideology, and also that of the small native agricultural bourgeoisie was perpetuated with considerable social force at the time of the agrarian reforms in 1925 ----- And thus, their final elimination was imperative from the standpoint of developmental social change."<sup>2</sup>

To eliminate these elements, it was necessary to generate among peasants the sense of (collective). The collectivisation derives its basis from the Lenin's idea of "Cooperative", and this idea was also a stable step to advance and enrich the agriculture of the country. Lenin believed that the "Cooperation would wean the peasant from individualism",<sup>3</sup> that breeds capitalism.

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2. R.R. Sharma, A Marxist Model of Social Change : Soviet Central Asia : 1917-1940 (The Macmillan company of India Ltd., Meerut, 1979) pp.113-114.

3. Alec ove, An Economic History of the USSR, (Pelican Books, 1972) p. 109.

As it has been discussed in the previous chapter that in 1924 when the tax in kind was replaced by money tax, the government became more interested in buying grain at low prices. And peasants did not want to sell their grain at low prices, and as a result they started accumulating grain.

Thus grain crisis became inevitable and it became necessary for government to procure grain from the kulaks and better-off peasants. But it was not an easy task, as "in 1928 the peasants demonstrated their ability to organise effective resistance when the Soviet State tried to collect grain forcibly and at prices unfavourable to the peasants."<sup>4</sup>

After 1926 difficulties with procurement reached its heights. Private trading was still surviving and peasants tried to sell the grain on free market, instead of selling to state procurement agencies. They started to hold grain in expectation of higher prices. Thus, it became difficult to feed entire population residing in cities and towns. To overcome the procurement and grain crisis

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4. Edward, C. Thaden, Russia since 1801 : The making of a new society (John Willy & sons, inc., New York, 1971) 534.

the Fifteenth Party Congress decided to unite scattered peasant farms into large farms. Along with this the Congress also showed the way collectivisation was to be carried out. A draft plan was evolved for the extension and strengthening of the collective farm network and for a further offensive on the kulaks. In 1928, Stalin spoke that "it was necessary first of all to strike hard at kulaks and speculators -----"<sup>5</sup>

Massive collectivisation formed the basis for liquidation of kulaks as a class. The peasants instigated by kulak elements, particularly refused to cooperate. Faced with government-fixed prices, or inability to buy consumer goods, the kulaks withheld their grain from market and kept waiting for better days. Targets for the grain procurement were not only kulaks , "but any peasant who had grain that might be thought of as surplus to his own needs-- reacted to campaign by elaborate measures of concealment and by frantic efforts to sell on the free market"<sup>6</sup>

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5. M.Dobb, Soviet Economic Development since 1917 (Routledge & Kegan, London, 1948) p. 220.
  6. E.H. Carr, The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin (1917-1929) (Macmillan, London, 1979) p. 153.

Because of a number of reasons, peasants did not want to surrender their surplus of grains, " for one thing, there was the poor harvest and the scarcity of fodder, coupled with shortages in the regions which had suffered climatic reverses, and in the non--grain producing regions; there was also a general tendency to hold back until the prospects for the coming harvest became clearer."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the decision taken by the party to liquidate kulaks was not appropriate at such a time when there was no parameter to differentiate between kulaks and better-off peasants. Tikhonov has stated : "This, to my mind, is the most unexplored problem in our post revolutionary history. There is no trustworthy statistics. There are no criteria either to define which peasant holding should be identified as that of a kulak." He further pointed out that " in the old days kulak actually meant one who traded in grains, a sort of village merchant. Later during the revolution, the term acquired a new meaning and anyone who hired labour was called a kulak.-----Moreover, at the time of collectivisation, argued Tikhonov, about 80 per cent of grain production was by medium sized peasants who had received the land after the revolution."<sup>8</sup>

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7. M.Lewin, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power, (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1968), p. 387.

8. Dev Murarka, special article : Changing Soviet Consciousness -1 (Mainstream, Vol. XXV, No.41, 1987)

Thus, before issuing any instruction to expropriate or liquidate a kulak, it became necessary for the government to make a criteria, by which a kulak can be identified. Following features by which a kulak farm might be identified were presented by sovnarkom :

1. farm which regularly hires wage labour for employment in agriculture or artisan factory.
2. A farm possessing an 'industrial undertaking' viz. a butter-making establishment, a pearling and a hulling mill, a wool combing installation (sherstobitici) or plant for the pulping of sugar beet (terochnoe zavedenie) or for dehydrating potatoes, vegetables or fruit-wherever these were powered by motor, or even by wind-mill or water-mill.
3. A farm which hires out, on a seasonal or permanent basis, premises intended for use as a dwelling-house, or by an enterprise.
4. A farm whose members are involved in commercial activities, or in industry, or who have other incomes not deriving from work this category includes the priesthood."<sup>9</sup>

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9. See, M. Lewin, No. 7, p. 490.

But these definitions are not sufficient to specify the character of a kulak, and the law seems quite vague. The aforementioned categories to define nature of a kulak can cover any better-off peasant. It was quite difficult to figure out the exact number of kulaks.

This was the scenario when the party launched the movement for total collectivisation and elimination of kulaks as a class. The movement took place all of sudden in 1928 and became sharper in 1929 involving the whole population of the soviet union for turning the dream of collectivisation of agriculture and elimination of kulaks into reality. This revolutionary movement was not a constant mobilisation of the people to fight against the existing system, but it seems that, silently and secretly, Stalin and his friends ordered local officials in a few selected areas to try out mass collectivisation by whatever means were handy"<sup>10</sup> whereas Stalin has pointed out that "this revolutionary upsurge took place not in the way of

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10. Alec Nove, An Economic History of the USSR (penguin Pub., London, 1969). P. 161.

a sudden explosion, or overthrow of existing power and creation of a new power, but on the initiative of the existing soviet power and through the support of the peasantry. The whole power of the Soviet state, and whole structure of the working class and party were mobilised for the resolution of the problems of collectivisation of agriculture and liquidation of kulaks as a class. Alongwith that this problem was solved on the basis of mass movement of the working peasantry"<sup>11</sup>

Collectivisation was carried out quickly and everywhere, whatever hinderance was coming in its way, was wiped out. But in the wake of total collectivisation, peasants suffered a lot due to extreme measures taken by the leadership and its so-called enthusiastic workers. Proper plan was not drawn and appropriate method was not applied, and because of this", collectivisation went hand in hand with dekulakization with half disguised robbery. Poorer peasants seized their neighbours' goods in the name of the class struggle, or with no excuse at all, and the officials found themselves instructed to 'win

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11. A.N. Burjalov, SSSR V Period Borby za kollektivizatsiyu selskovo khozyaistva (1930-1934) (Vyschaya Partinnaya Shkola Pri Ts K VKP(B), Moscow, 1950) p. 9.

support of poor peasants' and were then blamed 'for allowing the distribution of kulak property among the poor and landless, in contravention of party directives."<sup>12</sup>

There were so many incidents where, liquidation of kulaks was carried out using administrative measures without participation of masses whereas Leninism teaches that "every effort of forced collectivisation, every effort to start collectivisation as a system of force might give only negative results, might throw peasants away from the movement."<sup>13</sup>

The movement for collectivising the agriculture gave a chance to lower echelon of the peasantry to plunder the wealth of richer peasants with the active and massive support of the authority. The higher echelon of the party, who were aware of the act committed by the poor peasants, did not take the matter seriously, thinking that this is the requirement of the time. "First arrest and then investigate"<sup>14</sup> had

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12. See Alec Nove, No. 10, P. 167.

13. Stalin, I.V., Voprosy Kolkhoznovo dvizheniya (Partizdat, Moscow, 1933) pp. 14-15.

14. Lazar Volin in Cyril E Black (edt.) The Transformation of Russian Society (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960) p. 306.



become a kind of rule for the officials concerned with the task of collectivisation. Any official could arrest any peasant according to his own will.

If proper discussion on the question of method of collectivisation had taken place, many mistakes would have been avoided. The collectivisation of agriculture was something which was quite new, and indeed foreign to the working masses, and to the unions which had been set up for entirely different purposes. In any case no one had ever instructed them to set about putting the peasants into the kolkhozes. "Despite apparently precise directives and instructions, many raion and village authorities went their own way, interpreting the kulak category broadly to embrace middle and poor peasants, who were opposed to collectivisation (and) evicting kulak families with Red Army connections...."<sup>15</sup>

The difficulty was not only with rich peasants but middle peasantry was also being treated in the

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15. Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, How the Soviet Union is Governed (Harvard University Press, London, 1979) p. 150.

same way. The collectivisation movement put serednyki in a dilemma, because this was the only class among the soviet peasantry which did not come out to decide its own fate. And at the same time it was not only difficult, but impossible to differentiate kulaks from the middle peasantry, and yet "most of the middle peasants were still wavering, while the kulaks were not yet neutralized and isolated from middle peasants, especially the more prosperous ones. In such a situation the call for total collectivisation unavoidably led to perversions in the collective farm movement, to administrative pressure on the peasants, to the use of force on middle peasants."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, instead of making a difference, the authority was applying the same yardstick to measure kulaks and serednyaks both. The fact remains intact that the duality in economic and social condition led serednyaki to political dilemma.

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16. See, Roy, A, Medvedev, No.1, p.84 .

Pointing out this especiality, V.I. Lenin writes that "when we come across to this lair, as middle peasantry, than it seems that this<sup>is</sup>/the class which is in dilemma."<sup>17</sup> The middle peasants' role had to be an important factor in the socialist construction of kolkhoz, because middle peasantry constituted a vast majority in the village. Serednyak was the control figure in the village and they had to suffer because of their apathy and lack of confidence in the collectivisation of agriculture.

To carry out the movement by hook or crook, a "considerable attention was paid to organisation; military terms like "brigade", "headquarter", and "staff" were in use. All concerned received elaborate briefings. In some places courses of instructions were set up for peasants. But few of those responsible had any experience of the country side, or of peasant life or mentality, the instructions themselves were confused and contradictory; and excess of zeal in interpreting them seemed a venial fault. The proclaimed intention not to apply compulsion to middle or poor peasants was soon frustrated. Since no mercy could be shown to the 'kulak', who was treated as an enemy of the regime, any peasant resisting

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17. V.I.Lenin, Sochinenii, Vol. 38, p. 196.

collectivisation was liable to be branded as a 'kulak', or as being hand in glove with the 'kulaks subjected to the same penaltion.'"<sup>18</sup>

These extreme measures taken by the party and kolkhoz workers led the peasantry to retaliation. The socialisation of small livestock, like pet birds, small cattles, aroused anger among the peasantry. Such policies set the peasantry at variance with Soviet Power. And due to these mistakes committed by the party organs, in so many areas appeared dangerous signs of dissatisfaction among peasantry and "the tough and resourceful though they were, the peasants could not effectively resist so ruthlessly<sup>an</sup> onslaught. They retaliated by murdering officials and by burning their crops, as also by slaughtering their cattle and horses - on such a scale that agricultural livestock was reduced by about a half between 1928-1933."<sup>19</sup>

Contemporary to the period of collectivisation Michail Sholokhov has described the incident realistically :

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18. See E.H. Carr, No.6, p. 159.

19. Ronald Hingley, A Concise History of Russia (Thams and Hudson, London, 1972) p. 172.

"stock was slaughtered every night in Gremyachi Log. Hardly had dusk fallen when the muffled, short bleats of sheeps, the death squeals of pigs, or the lowing of calves could be heard. Both those who joined the kolkhoz and individual farmers killed their stock. Bulls, sheeps, pigs, even cows were slaughtered, as well as cattle for breeding. The horned stock of Gremyachi Log was halved in two nights. The dogs began entrail about in village; cellars and barns were filled with meat. The co-operative sold about two hundred poods of salt in two days, that had been lying in stock for eighteen months. 'kill, it is not ours any more -----'kill, they will take it for meat anyway -----' 'kill, you won't get meat in the kolkhoz -----crept the insidious rumours."

Thus, as a protest against the government or in order to escape classification as kulaks, they systematically reduced production, slaughtered their movable property. The wholesale destruction of cattle, and the surrender of only under fed and worthless stock to the collective farms became truly alarming. For round figures, this is what happened to the livestock population in a few years.

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	<u>1929</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1933</u>
Horses (million)	34	30	15
Cattle	67	52	38
Sheep and goats	147	108	50
Hogs	20	13	12

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Source : Anatole G. Mazour, Russia Tsarist and communist (V. Nostrand Compny, Princeton) p. 667

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Seeing the danger of tremendous loss and after getting so many signals, CC-All-Union CP(B) corrected the situation. On 2nd March, 1930, an article, entitled "Dizzy with their Success," written by Stalin in strong words criticised the reactionary approach to form kolkhoz by applying force and negating the basic principles of Lenin" not to hamper the development of mass, not to establish a mass movement by Decree, not to be alienated from mass, but to move with the mass and make them move ahead by taking them nearer

to our slogans and generate a conviction in them that our slogan is correct."<sup>20</sup>

In so many places rules of Soviet government about the tempo of Kolkhoz construction were violated. So many workers had lost their ability to understand reality of the situation and thought that they would solve the problems of kolkhoz with a stroke of pen. These workers had artificially speeded up (or were instructed to do so) the tempo of collectivisation without taking into account the conditions of different surroundings and doing so they violated Lenin's principle: no allowance had been made for diversity of local condition in connection with kolkhoz construction.

Some of the people holding key positions in the party, were inciting collective farm workers to speak against kolkhoz movement as, " chairman of the Slovodski agricultural committee, (Elizarski circle) Zuvachov mobilized a group of likeminded people and told them to speak against kolkhozes when meetings will take place, - he told his supporters, you people shout against kolkhoz. I should not go

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20. Stalin, Voprosy Kolkhoznovo Dvizheniya (Partizdat, Moscow, 1933) p. 16.

against as I hold power in the village."<sup>21</sup>

There were people within the party, who were opposed to collectivisation. There is another group of mistakes, which is more coarse and dangerous. The basic form of kolkhoz, according to party programme, was agricultueal artel. In pplace of artel they started organising commune, and thus, not only the basic means of production were socialized, as it has been discussed earliar, but other small householdings, like, dwellings, small cattle, pet birds etc. were also socialised, and due to this middle peasantry also became the victim of liquidation of kulaks. "It was stalin's fault, therefore that the decree of 5 Janaury, 1930 contained nothing to suggest to ill prepared and confused local cadres that they were not to go ahead and collectivise all peasant property down to chickens, rabbits, hoes and buckets. To make their confusion worst and to ensure the mildest excess, the head of the party's agitation and propaganda department, - G.Kamenski, declared in January 1930 " if in some matters you commit excess and you are arrested, remember that you have been arrested for your revolutionary

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21. Kommuna, 19th Feb. 1930.



deeds."<sup>22</sup>

But in spite of all those mistakes committed by the members of different party organs, the communist party played an important role in the construction of forced or urged kolkhoz.

The construction and development of heavy industry, capable of providing advanced agricultural tools and enriching the economy of USSR, was the requirement to realize the dream of collectivisation. Enrichment of agricultural technology was very necessary for the kolkhoz movement, because, firstly, peasants wanted to get rid of primitive agricultural tools, and secondly, only the rich agricultural technology could increase the production of grain as V.I. Lenin had written that "the only material basis of socialism can be large mechanised industry, capable of reorganising land with the aim of high production."<sup>23</sup>

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22. See Alec Move, No.10, pp. 164-165

23. V.I.Lenin, Sochinenii, Vol. 32, p. 434

But the problem was that necessary knowledge and experience in this field was lacking and properly trained people in this particular field were not available. And there were also people with primitive ideas by whom "tractors were sometimes denounced as the work of Anti-Christ."<sup>24</sup>

Realising the necessity of industries, Stalin formulated the plan of socialist industrialisation of USSR.

Criticising the people who were reluctant to implement the programme of collectivisation with the help of advanced agricultural tools, in May 1929, Kalinin addressed to these people: "Anyone who thinks that all this can be achieved without effort, by primitive means and without the aid of engineers and highly qualified specialists, is neither a marxist nor a communist but merely a petty bourgeois in outlook, a man with the limited vision of peasant."<sup>25</sup> And on the same occasion Rykov remarked : "Any attempt to set up a kokhoz on the basis of the sokha would reflect nothing but discredit on the whole

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24. See E.H. Carr, No. 6. , P. 154.

25. See, M.Lewin, No.7, pp. 359-360.

task of socialisation and would in practice be a certain recipe for failure"<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of 1927, the party achieved decisive success in the realisation of the programme of socialist industrialisation. With the development of industry production of agricultural tools and machines, production of grain also increased. Rapid growth in industry which were producing agricultural tools created basic conditions for technical and socialist reconstruction of agriculture.

Other organised acts of the party and government also played an important role in the movement of collectivisation of agriculture. The party mobilized 25 thousand workers (dvadtsatpititysi-chniki) to work in the villages and assist collective farm workers. These people were nominated to village councils and MTS etc. The main task of these progressive workers was to organise peasants, to generate class consciousness in their minds, and to maintain discipline and solidarity by taking the task of collectivisation in their hands. Thus, this was one of the best exemplary support to peasants from the side of working class.

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26. See, M.Lewin, No.7 , p. 360.

In Feb. 1930, these workers were already in their places and had started their work. But from the very first day of their arrival in village, kulaks started spreading slanderous rumours about them.

With the aim of curbing these dangerous acts of kulaks, the Central Executive Committee and Council of Peoples' Communisariat, USSR" authorised regional executive committees to deprive of using land and confiscate cattle and agricultural tools of those kulaks who are exciting and/or forcing others to do the same"<sup>27</sup>

Thus, an official report states: "In several places dekulakization was carried out without any regard to collectivisation. Many officials neglected the work of collectivisation and the task of consolidating the kolkhozes, and set about liquidating kulaks" in a conspiratorial manner," without the co-operation of the mass. Naturally, the result was a number of "scandalous cases", such as the dekulakisation of former Red partisan who had been the original organiser and champion of the soviet regime in the locality, and similar treat-

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27. See, A.N. Burjalov, No. 11, p. 7

ment to people, who were widely known to be bednyaks or batraks."<sup>28</sup>

Massive collectivisation caused a great harm to the movement of collectivisation. During the collectivisation, most of the peasants who became victims of dekulakisation, in fact were the peasants, who were allotted land after the October Revolution. These peasants had started their farming with nothing more than that of allotted land. They had established their farm by toiling in it the whole day and night.

Stalin probably believed that the required transformation could be brought about in the space of a few months, if only a sufficiently powerful and compelling means could be devised for driving the mass of the peasantry to join the kolkhozes. This idea paved the way to dekulakisation.

Ofcourse, to put the idea of collectivisation into practice was not so easy task, because there were different stratas among the peasantry, like,

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28. See. M.Lewin, No.7. P. 499

rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. And because of these different economic and social differences, a sharp class struggle was going on in the soviet villages.

The method of implementing collectivisation was supported by the peasants, but a particularly strong section of the peasantry was deadly against it. The so-called kulaks, who were opposed to collectivisation were putting massive resistance to it, and as a consequence of this the authorities adopted the policy of 'liquidation of kulaks', which was followed by heavy loss of stock and equipments as well as human loss.

The decision taken by the party to collectivise domesticated animals caused a big harm to the movement. This policy was a gross mistake of the party. Peasants are generally emotionally attached to their animals, and when they came to know about the decision of collectivising them, they preferred to slaughter and eat them themselves, than giving in collective farms.

In the same way use of force against those peasants who were just thinking of joining kolkhozes

was also not appropriate at that crucial juncture. Most of the collective farm organisers who were factory workers, did not understand the psychology of peasantry and were unfamiliar to the place, where the movement took place. And thus, they were just following instruction given by the leadership of the party. They were thinking of accomplishing collectivisation as fast as possible and because of this, instead of convincing the peasants, they were applying force on them. These incidents have been discussed in the next chapter based on sholokhov's novel "Virgin Soil Upturned."

CHAPTER IVCOLLECTIVISATION AS CHARACTERISED IN POPULAR  
LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD : A PHYSIOGNOMICAL  
STUDY OF SHOLOKHOV'S "VIRGIN SOIL UPTURNED"

Mikhail Sholokhov is universally acknowledged as one of the best soviet writers. The Nobel prize to him has further helped to make his books known world over.

Even the Western propagandists, despite their personal convictions, despite their anti-soviet and anti-communist approach agree that "no other Soviet writer contains an account as candid as Sholokhov's".<sup>1</sup>

M. Sholokhov in his novels depicts the great turning points in the history of the Soviet people. Thus, for example, the Great October Revolution and the Civil War form the main theme of his epic, "And Quiet Flows the Don," whereas "They fought for their Mother land", and "The fate of a Man" deal with the period of the Great Patriotic War.

Another turning point in the history of the soviet people, particularly, the rural life, was the

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1. Mihajl Mihajlov, Russian Themes (Macdonald, London, 1968)p.194.



collectivisation of agriculture. Sholokhov's novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" is devoted to the depiction of this process of collectivisation of agriculture in the late twenties.

The novel "Virgin Soil upturned dealing" with the events of the winter of 1929-30 in a village Gremyachi Log, begins with the arrival of Semyon Davydov, a worker from the Putilov Plant, Leningrad. He is one of the Twentyfive thousand workers, who were mobilised by the Party to help the agricultural districts of consolidate the Kolkhoz system. Sholokhov describes the various stages of collectivisation, carried out under the leadership of Semyon Davydov: dispossession of Kulaks, cases of extremes to which policy was carried, the collectivisation of all live-stock, the first sowing campaign of 1930, and the struggle against the opponent of the collectivisation.

Mikhail Sholokhov sincerely and powerfully describes the whole process of collectivisation of agriculture. He was dedicated to the Party heart and soul all his life and was a true believer in communism. His novels therefore symbolise his controbution to the struggle for socialism. Though

in retrospect we may find errors in his depiction of reality, but one can not doubt the sincerity and conviction of the author and these errors may at best be described as the errors of judgement.

Historicism in depiction of phenomenon of reality and character of a person was one of the main principles of Mikhail Sholokhov. M. Sholokhov tried, rather successfully, to depict the social and cultural background of the peasantry living during the period of collectivisation. The peculiarity of M. Sholokhov lies in the way of his depiction of any incident or character historically. He examines roots of the incident to decide its nature. As L.Yakimenko says: "Mikhail Sholokhov - philosopher, thinker and poet --- tried to depict not only the conditions of those people living in the thirty, but he tried to understand them historically, in the perspective of massive movement of people for their future."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the novel "Virgin Soil upturned" is a vast study of the historical and socio-political background of the peasantry, as well as mirror reflection of collectivisation movement.

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2. L. Yakimenko, "O Podnyatoi Tselinye Mikhaila Sholokhova" (Sovetskii Pisatel, Moscow, 1960). p. 16.

The novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" of M. Sholokhov is a historically authentic, thorough and still unsurpassed narration of that time, when the history of socialist village had just started. When in spite of all resistance by Kulaks a new stability entered into the mode of life in big as well as small villages. The novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" may have less literary merit than Sholokhov's other novels, but, it is considered as a reliable document on the whole process and problems of collectivisation of agriculture. In the novel, the epoch of revolutionary mobilisation in the village has been depicted in detail and the author has not simplified the complicated process of formation of Kolkhozes.

Initial stage of collectivisation was a very crucial stage in the history of Soviet Union. Russian peasantry was divided into three main categories: rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants as it has been discussed in previous chapters. Poor peasantry was leading an extremely difficult life, whereas the Kulaks were enjoying the best of everything. Thus, Kulaks were obviously not ready to surrender their land and personal property. Middle peasantry was in dilemma, as it did not know,

whether the collectivisation would be beneficial to them or not. They did not want to take risk by surrendering their land and property. That's why the arrival of Davydov and his agitation for the organisation of kolkhoz in Gremyachi Log got approval of poor peasantry and only some middle peasants. As it is known, poor peasants of the village voted for the creation of kolkhoz. They were only thirty-two people. But this was only the beginning of the decisive change in the life of village. After the meeting of poor peasants, writer depicts a general body meeting where there is no unanimity. Only sixty seven house-holds joined kolkhoz and 150 people did not join, because they wanted to see the achievements of those who had joined it. People depending upon their place and role in village life had different approaches to kolkhoz.

The role of middle peasantry in the construction of kolkhoz was of vital importance as they were in the majority in the village. In view of the vacillations of the middle peasantry, it was potentially no less dangerous than kulaks. Middle peasantry had imposed a pernicious threat to the collectivisation movement by their silence over the question of kolkhoz.

Davydov realized this fact, and therefore wanted the majority of the middle/peasantry to join the kolkhoz. But the problem was that the middle peasant was strongly attached to his private land and livestock. Here is the portrait of Kondrat Maidannikov, a middle peasant who enters the collective farm voluntarily, although he still longs for his own property:

"Kondrat has long since ceased to believe in God, and now he believed in Communist Party, which was leading the toilers of all the world towards freedom, towards sunlit future. Formally he had been occupied from dawn to dusk. In the morning he would feed the bullocks, cow, sheep and horses and take them down to drink; at dawn he once more scraped up hay and straw out of the threshing-floor, afraid of losing a single stalk. And later he had to tidy up again for the night. Even during the night he would go out several times into cattle yard to see that all was well..... His heart rejoiced in his work as a farmer. But now his yard was empty and dead. There was nothing to go out to attend to."

In Kondrat Maidannikov's portrait Sholokhov makes visual the psychology and character of middle peasantry. They are busy in their own work without taking care of anything happening around them. Middle peasantry did not see better future in the collective farms and that's why they wanted to keep themselves aside and see how life works in collective farms, as Nikolai Lushnya, a middle peasant expresses himself

in the meeting:

"How do you mean? May be that's just what I want to do? Or are not we allowed to speak against your opinion? What I say is this, the collective farm is a voluntary business, if you want to join, join; if you don't you can look on. Well we want to look on."

"Who is we?", Davydov asked.

"Why, the farmers".

"Speak for yourself, man, Everyone here has a free tongue and will speak for himself."

"Well I can speak for myself, too, infact, that's just what I am doing. I want to look on for a bit and see how life works in a collective farm. If it's good, I will sign up, if it is not, why should I get mixed up in it? It's a daft fish that looks for the net itself."

This argument is reasonable for the middle peasants as they had means to earn their bread, but when we take poor peasants into account, then this argument becomes invalid, and in such conditions mildforce had to be used while dealing with a part of the middle peasantry opposing collectivisation. The point is that a chunk of land is dearer to a farmer than anything else and no farmer would like to surrender it easily. The very thought of 'my land, cow and property', the very natural attachment to their property, never allowed middle peasants to join collective farm at first call. Kondrat Maidannikov, having decided to join the kolkhoz, says;

"And I shall too, and let them feel it! You are against the collective farm because you can not see anything but your own cow and your own coopy little farm. It may be rotten, but it's my own you think."

And again:

"Don't you want to join collective farm- Davydov asked, "So it's true what comrade Maidannikov said?"  
 "We don't feel like it!" A woman's voice.  
 "Your Maidannikov can't tell us what to do!"  
 "We have always lived....."

M. Sholokhov very minutely observes the psychology of the middle peasantry through the Kondrat's wife's attachment to her cow, which she does not want to give to kolkhoz, as she says:

"It's only the cow I am sorry about, Kondrat dear. I agree, but my heart aches, that it does; she said, smiling and wiping her tears on her apron".

During collectivisation middle and poor farmers were being misled by kulak elements. The farmers were being told that seed grains collected from them will be exported to foriegn countries, and thus, poor peasants were not ready to give their grain for storage in the collective farm-office. Here is the portrait of Bannik who distrusts the soviets:

" Now come of that, comrade Nagulnov, Bannik grinned carelessly, stroking his fair moustach." That little tale won't work! I'm not giving you any grain....

You will gather in our grain, then send it away in ships to foreign countries, won't you? You want to buy them motor-cars for your Party members to go joy riding with their short-haired women? We know what you want our grain for! That's your equality!"

Thus, it was very difficult to find a solution to the problem of middle peasantry. Mikhail Sholokhov wrote to Maxim Gorky about the middle peasantry: "I think, Alexei Maximovich, the question of relations with middle peasantry will remain unsolved for sometime more for us, as well as for other communists of those countries, which follow the path of our revolution."<sup>3</sup>

By this, Sholokhov means that it is difficult to ascertain the nature of middle peasantry. Not only Soviet Union, but other socialist countries following the policy of Soviet Union on the question of agriculture will face the problem of the uncertain attitude of middle peasants.

But problem was not only with middle peasants. Some of the poor peasants also had become the victim of sweet poison of kulaks. These peasants were pleased with kulaks and did not want to go

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3. V. Surganov, "Chilavyek na Zemlye" (Istoriko-Literaturnii Ocherk Sovetskii Pisatel, Moscow, 1975) p. 223



against them, because kulaks time to time, used to help these poor peasants. Doing so they kept poor peasants in their favour when Davydov with the help of other Party members was sorting out the names of kulaks, a poor peasant, Timofei Borshchov refused to acknowledge Frol Damaskov as kulak. On the question of punishment to Damaskov, several hands went up except Timofei's. He abstained:

"I am not voting", a quite unimposing Cossack answered shortly.  
 "Why not?" - Davidov insisted.  
 "Because he is my neighbour and I have had a lot of good from him. That's why I can not raise my hands against him."

Though, these few people in favour of kulaks, were nice at heart and were willing to support the kolkhoz movement, kulaks used their influence to take other poor peasants in confidence. Psychology of poor peasantry is very clear in the novel:

"Why talk to me about collective farm? Hamstring the kulak, then we'll join! Give us his machines, his oxen, give us his power, then there will be equality! All this talk about destroying the kulak; but he keeps on growing every year, like burdock blotting out our sun."

The step taken by the Party to destroy kulaks as a class was very relevant for the kolkhoz movement. This policy gave some sort of impetus to poor peasants

and brought them out of the fear of kulaks.

Davydov satisfied poor peasants by confirming this policy:

"That is the policy of our Party! Why are you knocking at open door? The kulak is to be destroyed as a class, his property will be given to the collective farms, that's a fact!"

At first Davydov wanted to use force to destroy kulaks, but he changed his mind, because to take administrative measure was, firstly, against Party norms, and secondly, the collectivisation had just begun and use of force could have a negative effect.

Spirit of a true worker can be seen in Davydov, who belongs to working class and has come to organise collective farm in village. He deals with peasants very coolly without being irritated and loosing temper. He tries to settle the problem through convincing in the case of middle and poor peasants, whereas in the case of kulaks his attitude is very firm. Davydov, as a representative of twentyfive thousand workers plays an important role in making peasants conscious enough to understand their socio-economic conditions. The working class,

deputed in villages educated poor and middle peasantry to unite them together and launch a movement against kulaks, who were considered the most dangerous enemy of the common people as well as of the Soviet State.

For example, in order to educate the poor peasants and convince them about the advisibility of joining the collective farm, Davydov which addressing the meeting of poor peasants, says:

"Comrades, I am a worker from the Red Putilov works in Leningrad. I have been sent to you, here, by our Communist Party and working class to help you organise a collective farm and destroy the kulaks, as our common blood sucker. I won't say much, you must all unite together in a collective farm, nationalise the land and all your tools and cattle....

The Party is planning complete collectivisation so that it can hitch you up to a tractor and haul you out of your poverty. What did comrade Lenin say before he died? The only solvation from poverty for toiling peasant is collective farm. Otherwise he is done for..... In alliance with the workers, the collective farms will settle the hash of all kulaks and enemies of the people. I am telling you the truth....."

Here, one notices not only an attempt to make the peasants politically conscious through the talk of the class enemies and the necessity of the unity of working class and peasantry, but also

an attempt to attract the poor peasants by promising the use of advanced technology in the collective farm. It's interesting to note that, though Timofei Borschov was under the influence of Kulaks, he was willing to join the kolkhoz primarily because of the perspective of the use of machines in the kolkhoz.

One thing more important here is that the peasantry (poor and middle) wanted some proof for the benefit of joining kolkhoz. Poor and middle peasants were fed up with primitive agricultural tools. Primitive agricultural tools for ploughing and harvesting were not of any use to increase the production of grain. Therefore consolidating agriculture through collectivisation alone seemed ridiculous to poor peasantry, as Pavel Lubishkin interrupts Davydov:

"Why try to give us all propaganda about Soviet power, you daft fellow! During the war it was us who set it up here, us who put our shoulder under it to stop it falling. We know what a collective farm is and we will join it. Give us machines..... A tractor is fine thing, no one doubts it, but you, workers, don't make enough of them, that's what we have got against you. There is nothing for us to grip hold of that's the trouble. We can go on driving our oxen with one hand and wiping away tears with the other without joining any collective farm.."

As mentioned above, Davydov tries to solve problems of poor and middle peasantry through dialogue and by convincing them, as he did with Timofei Boroshchev, about whom he jotted down a brief note on his pad:

"Timofei Borshchov under the influence of class enemies. Get to work on him."

The attitude of Makar Nagulnov, the former secretary of the party cell, is just the opposite. He prefers to take extreme measures in similar situations and thus represents a different style of functioning of leadership. Nagulnov's extreme attitude sometimes leads to a negative result. When Boroshchov expresses his view against collectivisation of cattle, Nagulnov becomes furious:

"You should better break up the collective farm then! There is not a household in the village that has not killed some thing!" - Boroshchov shouted. Nagulnov roared at him, shaking his fists, "Shut your mouth, you kulak greases! We can manage the collective farm without your help".

But, there is no answer except Makar Nagulnov, to people like Bannik, who prefers to give his grain to pigs, instead of giving it to the collective farm-office for storage for coming sowing.

"As soon as I get home, I'll throw that grains to the pigs. I'd rather they gobbled it up than you, you spongers!".

There is no remedy for such people except Nagulnov's manner of handling:

"At first they only jabbed him lightly and cursed at him, then, growing angry, because he kept laughing and joking all the time, they began to beat him up properly".

The difference between Davydov's and Nagulnov's method comes into light openly, when policy of collectivising every small household was introduced, which was neither fair nor feasible, particularly, at this crucial stage. All the people in the village had not yet made up their mind on the question of joining the kolkhoz and even those who had joined were not willing to give their small domesticated animals to the kolkhoz. The collectivisation of cattle led to their slaughter by the peasants on a mass scale in order not to give the cattle to kolkhoz:

"The devils!" the scar on Razmytnov's forehead glowed purple. "Building a giant collective farm, are you chairman! Well, it's your own collective farmers, who're killing their cattle, that's who! And the individual farmers, too. They have gone mad! They are killing every thing wholesale, even the oxen."

And here Nagulnov's method to tackle the problem is different from Davydov's. Nagulnov, though a devoted communist, sometimes exposes himself as an extremist. His attitude toward those slaughtering cattle is devoid of restraint and pragmatism. He says:

"They are slaughtering the cattle, the swine! They'd guzzle themselves sick rather than give it into the collective farm. This is what I propose: get the meeting to pass a resolution right away asking permission for the worst cattle slaughters to be shot!"

And Davydov's reaction to the proposal made by Nagulnov is different:

"There you go again, taking things too far. You are a terror, you know Makar. How can we shoot people for killing of cattle? There is no such law, fact?"

Extreme measures taken by some collective members caused a great harm to the movement. Poor and middle peasants, in particular, should have been handled softly. This was the requirement of the time.

But Nagulnov, in some respect was a typical product of the twenties, because during that period many people sincerely believed in the inevitability of the use of extreme measures, while tackling the people who disagreed with them.

"Conflicts between Davydov, Razmyotnov, Kondratko, on the one hand, and Nagulnov, on the other", writes L.Yakimenko, "had not only moral, ethical character, but they often became political discussions about the methods of leadership". He further elaborates that the "historical importance of these conflicts becomes obvious if we remember the 20th Congress of the CPSU, restoration of democratic norms of life, overcoming of harmful consequences of the personality cult."<sup>4</sup>

Truly, while going through novel we find that some people in whose hands the reign of Party power had been given, are to some extent arrogant and misusing their position, as it has been discussed in III Chapter also.

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4. L.Yakimenko, "O Podnytoi Tselinye Mikhaila Sholokhova" (Sovetskii Pisatel, Moscow, 1960). pp. 34-35.



And in the same line to liquidate kulaks was a firm decision of the Party, and none was spared, be they ex-partisan or life-long kulaks. An ex-Red Partisan Tit Borodin turned kulak and now he is no more considered as an honourable man:

"He was partisan once—all honour to him for that; now he has turned kulak, an enemy — he must be crushed. What is their to discuss!"

But, Tit Borodin had started his farming with nothing more than that a chunk of land allotted to him. He himself toiled in his farm day and night and developed it. He himself earned his belongings without anybody's help. To put him into category of kulaks is not correct, as Titok himself argues:

"And my hiring of labourers is legal:  
I have got a sick wife!"

Sholokhov has depicted the reality on the basis of the facts of real life. He knew well all the facts related to process and problems of the movement. Those days when "Virgin Soil Upturned" was being written, 26 year old writer went around every kolkhoz in the North-Caucasian

region. He went there because he could not remain indifferent to the collectivisation movement going on in his country. He went uncaring in spite of allegations being levelled against him that "he was politically illiterate and knew nothing about Russian people and village."<sup>5</sup>

"I had to, Alexei Maksimovich, show the negative side of dekulakisation and infringement of kazak-middle pesantry...."<sup>6</sup>

"Work on "Virgin Soil Upturned" helped the writer to understand deeply the incidents, which have been written in the 3rd and 4th volume of "And Quiet Flows the Don", writes one of the most contemporary specialists on Sholokhov--L.Yakimenko. "Bitter turn of class struggle, liquidation of kulaks, kolkhoz construction - all these took place as a natural development of those historical incidents, which Mikhail Sholokhov had depicted in "And Quiet

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5. See V. Surganov, No. 3, p.222.

6. See V. Surganov, No. 3, p.222.

Flows The Don."<sup>7</sup>

In "Virgin Soil Upturned" collectivisation is shown as a process of transformation of old society into a new one. One factor in the alteration of peasantry in "Virgin Soil Upturned" - is their rapport with the leaders. Sholokhov strongly believes in peoples' strength. Man in the "Virgin Soil Upturned" is the highest being. In "Virgin Soil Upturned" man co-exists with the new power under conditions of rapid historical change. An energetic character in this novel is depicted as who believes in the historical changes taking place. By depicting collectivisation as a process of breaking away previous old forms of life, the socio-political and moral reeducation of the peasantry under the conditions of dictatorship of proletariat, Sholokhov exposes the actual complications and all other conflicts, with which Bolsheviki often had to clash with the peasantry. Even the working class could not realize the essence of each and every person as people were of different kinds with many complications. The former Red Partisan Tit Borodin turned into a kulak, poor

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7. L. Yakimenko, Tvorchestvo M.A. Sholokhova, (Sovetskii Pisatel, Moscow, 1964) pp.123-124.

peasants Khorpov and Boroshchov turned into supporters of kulaks, and as a result Makar Nagulnov casts a hostile look at the most cultured Davydov. For Davydov, khutor is a complicated motor of new construction, and with great efforts he tries to understand it better, and learns the operation of each and every part. He listens to every misfire every day in the complicated machine.

The most important fact shown in the novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" -- is farmers understanding of the idea of the socialism. Difficulty arose due to the inexperience of leadership--their subjectivism and administrative measures lacked political maturity and perhaps, due to enemy's provocation.

That is why to find suitable forms and methods of realisation of socialistic ideas and to work these out correct forms of leadership were of utmost importance. Capable and experienced leaders were more important than anything else for this movement. Thus the problem of people and leadership was one of the main problems of that particular time. And it was altogether a different type of leadership --the

communists.

In the novel, contradiction amongst the people can be divided into three categories : the first group is the basis of the party, i.e. poor peasants. The second category is the anti-people elements, which conscientiously and systematically resist the kolkhoz movement. Kulaks belonged to this group. Third group consisted the peasants, who were temporarily confused. The last group was politically immature and easily gave way to kulaks provocation and propaganda.

These three groups influence the inter - relationship between the Party and the peasantry in the novel. With the first category things worked out easily and simply. Farmers of this type became the most active volunteers of Davydov. With the anti-social elements too, things were <sup>as</sup> confused. The most complicated matter was with the third group. It was necessary while working with them to put into practice both the components of Lenin's principles-- strictness and flexibility.

It is important to take into consideration the role played by the masses and the leadership

respectively. The leadership had to present that material, without which nothing can be built, i.e. the main line, and the masses must take the initiative to put this line into practice in real life. Especially, people and their initial participation in works became the creative force of the revolution.

The problem of leadership and mutual relationship between leadership and mass requires diligent study. Sholokhov introduces not only one but "three" most beneficial personalities of leadership of collectivisation movement: Makar Nagulnov, Semyon Davydov, Andrei Rajmyotnov, each complimenting the other. They march together on a firm soil. One comments, the other supports. They criticise each other. All three leaders are of different mood, but believe in the same ideology. They are like three important components of a machine--communism.

Thanks to the work of party and revolution they are united together. Neither differences over political questions, nor imagined power in various conditions could create a hostile environment between them.

The novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" became one of the most lasting works of world revolutionary literature. Sholokhov with great literary acumen shows the historical, social and human values of the collectivisation period. He draws the attention toward the inner awakening of the people.

During the process of massive collectivisation of agriculture the middle peasantry again started showing their possessive character. The problem of middle peasantry again became a burning question to be grappled by the party. Mikhail Sholokhov pays more attention to this problem as he writes: 'Figure of middle peasantry joining the kolkhoz--- will be the vanguard----'.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Izvestiya, 10th March, 1935, Page 3.

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