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- ☐ Political 'Empowerment' of Women : Some Conceptual Issues
- ☐ US Policy Towards Eastern Europe : A History Revisited
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- ☐ Reform and Reformers in Soviet Russia : From Lenin to Gorbachev
- ☐ Some Dimensions of the Feminist Critique of Liberalism
- ☐ Symposium on 'India's Nuclear Explosion and Its Consequences'



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## **POLITICAL "EMPOWERMENT" OF WOMEN : SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

**Aparna Mahanta**

The women's movement of the last three decades and the growing consensus throughout the world upon the issue of gender equality has brought into focus new questions regarding women's role in society. Among the most important of these questions is that of women's political role. It is now becoming increasingly clear that the state and the political processes associated with it is a major factor in determining the roles and status of women in any given society (Lerner, 1986). In particular the systematic exclusion of women from the state and its policies throughout recorded history has served to marginalise and render women invisible in all aspects of social, economic and political life. The root of women's powerlessness in history is therefore the state itself. It is thus a piquant situation to see the state taking the leading role in modern times in setting the agenda for gender equality.

The Indian state has been seen as a front runner in this respect. Even before independence, equality of rights for Indian women had been ensured in the 1931 Karachi session of the Congress. The Constitution of free India unequivocally committed itself to gender equality in all aspects of the civic life along with a mandate for positive discrimination, if need be, in favour of women, along with other disadvantaged sections of the society (Kasturi, 1995, p.6). Later when it became clear that despite absence of any sex discrimination in the constitution, Indian women lagged far behind, a Parliamentary Committee to study the Status of Women in India was instituted (CSWI). The report of this committee, which included eminent women politicians and academicians, *Towards Equality* (1974), opened the eyes of both the official machinery and concerned women to the sorry state of women in India even 25 years after independence and provided



a direction for future course of action (Kasturi, p.18). The subsequent National Policy on Education (1986) which envisaged a 'positive interventionist role' for education in the 'empowerment of women' (NPE, 1986, 4.2), a National perspective Plan for Women (1988) and the setting up of a National Commission for Women (1992) were all intended to remedy the situation. At the same time other policy statements in the post - 70ies decades, from the 6th Plan onwards began increasingly to include the gender dimension. This is also in line with global policies as initiated by the U.N. and other world agencies since 1975. This is all to the good. But the question still remains. Why, despite all the good intentions and the active intervention of the total state machinery, is the pace of change so slow? Obviously the problem exists at a conceptual level and it has to be tackled here.

The answer to the question raised above, for feminists and many others, is the basically patriarchal nature of the Indian state. Today the state is being confronted by the forces of change, of which the increasingly visible participation of women in all areas of life is an important factor. On the one hand it has had to acknowledge the link between women and development, for instance (see Dreze and Sen, 1995, pp.175-176), and frame policies accordingly. These include emphasis on female literacy, maternal health, women's employment and conditions of work and so on. Similarly under pressure from the women's groups and rising consensus on the issue, legal changes have been made to provide for greater gender equality. Finally to ensure implementation of these policies the need has been felt for involving women more in the policy making process and in the various state institutions implementing these policies. Towards that end the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bills, 1992 (Panchayati Raj Bill) have been passed, allowing for 33% reservation for women in local government. The 81<sup>st</sup> Amendment Bill, 1996, giving 33% reservation to women in Parliament and legislative assemblies is also mooted though it is yet to be passed. Since it is the state which is initiating these policy measures, albeit under pressure from women and other concerned groups, the overall gender bias of the state will obviously be reflected there. Hence a basic contradiction arises between the inherently patriarchal institutions of the state and its commitment to gender



equality. This is so because true gender equality will need basic changes in the structures of power prevailing in society and the state, which it is not prepared to make. Despite the new and fashionable rhetoric of gender equality and particularly the catch phrase, "gender empowerment" the Indian state remains unchanged in its patriarchal character in 50 years of independence (see Mahanta, 1994).

Since it is the preferred language of the state and uniformly reproduced in all recent documents let us begin with a deconstruction of the term 'empowerment'. Some feminists have used the term because of its ego-enhancing image of women's power deriving from its traditional Indian association of female 'shakti' or goddess worship. A leading feminist publishing firm calls itself 'Kali for Women', and women groups have names like Mahila Jagaran and Stree Shakti Sangathan, all suggesting images of women's power. Indian officialdom's liking for the word however may derive from its Gandhian associations. It was Gandhi who in the course of freedom movement formulated the concept of women's moral power which could be channelised for the freedom movement. While it is true that he thus provided political space for women's active participation in the movement, it was well within the boundaries of the patriarchal order (see Kishwar, 1985, Patel, 1988). Gandhi, representing the male-dominated order empowered women temporarily for a specified purpose, in this case participation in the freedom struggle, as the gods in Hindu mythology armed goddesses as like Durga and Chamundeswari with their own powers to fight specified demons. On completion of the task women were expected to return to their domestic roles as before, as happened after the attainment of independence. It is surely in this sense that the word 'empowerment' has gained such favour with the bureaucracy, politician and policy makers, not to speak of writers on development. It carries the connotation of sanctioned or legitimatised power, in which the sanctioning authority is firmly in the hands of the state. In this way the most vital issue of female agency is totally bypassed.

When the issue of women's rights entered the state discourse in the late 70ies after the much publicised United Nation's sponsored International Women's Year and subsequent International Women's



Decade, one of the persistent fears of the women's movement, which had done much to make this state of things happen, was that of co-optation of the movement by the process of legitimisation and incorporation into the state discourse. This had happened in the past, more recently during the freedom movement. The many independent efforts by women for gender equality in the course of the struggle had been totally erased<sup>1</sup>, and women's overall role legitimatised via its incorporation as part of Gandhian strategy, and as 'recognition', a small section of elite women had been given token representation in parliamentary bodies. Now at the end of the 90ies it is clear that the feared co-optation has occurred through the use of the word 'empowerment', with its connotations of sanctioned, and thus limited, power which is mediated through the giver agency, in this case the state. To take one instance of how this has come about the issue of female literacy can be considered. During the freedom movement many women's organizations struggled for women's education for the self development of women. After independence women's education was made a policy issue of the new state, being mentioned in the first Five Year Plan (Mahanta, 1994). Despite this, women's literacy continued to drag much below men's, a fact noted by the CSWI report of 1974 as a main factor in women's overall backwardness. The NPE (1986) stresses the urgency of the situation by unequivocally linking female literacy to population control. It states, "The growth of population needs to be brought down significantly over the coming decades. The largest single factor that could help achieve this is the spread of literacy and education among women" (NPE, 1.13). The Women in Development (WID) literature has taken up this theme enthusiastically (cf. Dreze and Sen, 1995). Thus it is in the context of the state's needs that women's education becomes a matter of state policy, not otherwise.

The containment of women's issues within an economic framework is a recent development. The classic Marxist standpoint had been that women's entry into social production will liberate women. On the contrary it appears only to have opened a new mode of exploitation of women, with the concept of a double 'burden'. It is now clear that for the perpetuation of patriarchy the exclusion of



women from the sphere of politics is more important than their exclusion from social production. Studies on the origins of patriarchy suggest that the subordination of women, which is the foundation of patriarchy, begins with the rise of the state and more specifically the consolidation of state power through militarism (Lerner, 1986, pp.56-57). Nearer home a study of pre-state societies in the North-east and particularly of the process of their incorporation into state societies such as the British colonial state and the Indian state clearly shows the relation between the development of state power and institutions of state power with the subordination of women and their marginalization in political life. It is well known that women in most tribal societies have a predominant role in production, which is evident in the state societies of the region too, such as Manipur and Assam. It is so even now after the impact of modernisation. At the same time women's participation in the political life of the region is negligible. This is explained in terms of customary laws which prohibit women's participation in the all-male tribal councils. The reasons given for such prohibitions are very interesting as they show in a concrete way the growth of patriarchal systems of male control over women through their exclusion from political life. As that is the subject for a separate article only the points will be enumerated here. One reason given is that earlier tribal councils were only concerned with war in which obviously women had no interest (Pegu, 1981. P. 73). Another more cogent reason was that the style of political discourse in such councils was alien to women. The Ke bang or tribal council was usually held in the Morung or boys dormitory where women were denied entry. The deliberations were time-consuming for which women usually had no time, and were further carried on in an oratorical manner which women had no practice in, unlike the men who spent hours in such discussions (Elwin, 1964, pp. 157-160). Justifying modern political behaviour in terms of what happened in the past is not the intention in making these references, but rather to stress the origins of patriarchal structures that influence the political behaviour of men and women even today, not only in so-called 'backward' region of the country but within the modern state itself. Given such wide-spread notions concerning political behaviour it is easy to understand the repugnance of men and some women to the idea of women's large scale participation in



political life. No patriarchal state, which the Indian state basically is, can welcome the entry of women *en masse*, apart from a few token representatives, into the sacred male dominated portals of parliament and the state legislatures, as is shown by the repeated rejection of the 81<sup>st</sup> Amendment bill. Why then was the bill mooted in the first place? Was it due to the pressure of women M. P.s and women's organizations, in order to placate and woo a large vote bank, or because the legislators were swept away by the populist rhetoric of women's empowerment? Most women and women's organizations seem to welcome the bill as providing an entry to women to the political process and training in parliamentary procedures. However some women, and interestingly, women with a long history of involvement with the women's movement and women's issues are not happy with the idea of reservations for women in parliamentary bodies in the form presently suggested. These include Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association) and Madhu Kishwar, editor of *Manushi* (Chakravorty, 1997, Kishwar, 1996). This is not to say that they oppose women's active involvement in politics. However their reasons for having doubts about women's reservations are worth considering and taking note of as they raise the same basic questions of women's role in politics which are being addressed here. In the first place the experience of 50 years of reservations for other disadvantaged sections has not been encouraging. Without basic structural changes in society, social justice is a chimera.<sup>2</sup> The fact also cannot be ignored that after fifty years of independence women have only 7% representation in parliament. The causes have been often analyzed (Dutta, 1992, Mahanta, 1998). These include the reluctance of established political parties to give seats to women candidates, women's lack of financial and other resources to contest and succeed as independent candidates, and women's reluctance to enter 'dirty' politics. These however only mask deeper and more fundamental reasons.

One major fear voiced by many regarding women's reservation is that of proxy representation, in which the elected women will only be stand-ins for their husbands, fathers or other influential male relatives, the so-called *biwi-beti* brigade. Given the nature of Indian, in fact South Asian politics with its strong kin affiliations this cannot



be over-ruled (Jahan, 1987, p.37). That is probably the reason for the OBC and SC leaders' demand for reservations for these particular groups within women's reservation. Again the issue goes deeper than appears in the surface. The actual problem arises out of what has been described as 'male-identification' by women. This is defined as "internalising the values of the colonizer and actively participating in carrying out the colonization of one's self and one's sex. Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the women may bring to the situation. Interaction with women is seen as a lesser form of relating on every level" (Kathleen Barry, in Rich, 1986, pp 47-48)<sup>3</sup>. South Asia in particular has seen the phenomenon of powerful women leaders who gained their position by strong identification with powerful fathers or husbands (Jahan, p.36). Their male identification is not only in the minds of the people whom they led but in their own minds too. They acted as men do and represented male interests, the essence of male identification being the total acceptance of male superiority in all matters and belittling of matters relating to women as trivial and inessential. Hence they could be and were accepted by patriarchal society as basically upholding its values. Subversive women, that is women strongly representing female interests and leaders of active women organisations have never been accepted and are likely to be rejected as potentially disruptive (Mahanta, 1998, p.175). With a male majority setting the agenda it would not be difficult to ensure that only complaint women were elected to parliament who would merely act as rubber stamps. Even if the women are nominated by political parties, the selected candidates would be male controlled, given the present set-up of all political parties which are overwhelmingly male with the women's wings acting as mere appendages for poll work and so on (Jahan, p.41). To induct more women into political parties and give them more, about 50 %, of the responsible posts as party functionaries are some of the measures suggested (Bhatt, quoted in Chakravorty, p.2) if reservation for women is to be meaningful. This would ensure that only politically active women are nominated as party candidates rather than wives, daughters or widows as is invariably the present practice.



Another matter of concern in this connection is that regarding the functioning of the women's organizations and the development of the women's movement in general. While the women's movement seems to overwhelmingly support the women's reservation bill, it appears to be doing very little to advance women's meaningful participation in politics. The women's movement has been in the forefront of fighting patriarchal practices by direct action against some of the worst manifestations of patriarchal oppression like rape and family violence and for women's legal and other rights as also by creating and disseminating knowledge on women. However it does not appear to be itself free from patriarchal influences particularly as regards the wide prevalence among sections of women, including feminists of certain perceptions of women's role in politics. These perceptions appear to fall into two categories and seem to reflect a certain 'psycho-biological' approach (Samita Sen; in Chakravorty, p.17). The first argument is that women are not suited to the hurly-burly of politics, particularly in its present association in the popular mind with corruption and criminal elements and so-called power-mongering. The second argument which is parallel is that women's entry into politics will purify it from such influences. While it may be true that women as a group have less contact with corruption and criminal activities, the fact is that politics only reflects the social reality. With a more active and participatory democracy such tendencies can be better curbed than by women's mere presence. The idea of women as a purifying force seems to echo the old 'empowerment' idea, that women's entry into politics will destroy the demons of corruption and criminality, as if that is their primary function as moral guardians of society. The biologist argument that women are constitutionally not suited to power-mongering and dirty politics is potentially most dangerous as it keeps many women activists involved in the women's movement as well as with other social issues away from contesting in elections (Kishwar, 1996, p.2871). They thus lend support to the patriarchal argument that politics is not suited to women and that therefore they should keep away from it.

Women's entry into political life will be meaningful only with an independent political agenda that is not just woman-oriented but which is socially oriented in the broadest sense. This may sound trite,



but the only effective politics can be a goal oriented one which has a clear perception of the desired ends. So far the women's movement has not been able to go much beyond local, issue-based campaigns and think in a truly national or even regional sense. The autonomous women's movement has been confined to immediate pressing issues taken up in an ad hoc manner. On the other hand mass women's organizations connected with political parties and mainly of the Left have had to follow the party agendas. A brief overview of the women's movement since the late 70ies shows that its concern have been overwhelmingly economic and social, such as violence against women, women's health, and employment (Shah and Gandhi, 1992, Karna, 1998). Even when women have participated in larger peoples movements including those with overtly political aims like the Telengana movement, the Srikakulam or the AASU led Assam movement, they have done so for economic reasons or for reasons of group solidarity, rather than from direct ideological commitment or understanding of the political issues at stake. Also they have rarely concerned themselves with organizational or political decision-making in the course of the movement or sought leadership positions, being content with subsidiary roles (Ilina Sen, 1990, Sangari and Vaid, 1989, Mahanta, 1994, 1998(a), 1998(b)). Thus women as a constituency have had no experience of organizing a political movement, or even of independent political decision-making. Even as active members of political parties, they have rarely had decisive decision making powers, backed by a support base of women. This is compounded by the fact that in the major political parties like the Congress, the BJP and the Left parties the men's and women's wings are quite distinct, with women leaders rarely functioning equally in both wings. The lesser importance given to the women's wings means that women leaders of the women's wings are low in the party hierarchy. In the special case of women leaders of the mainstream political parties like Jayalalita, Mamata Banerjee and now Sonia Gandhi, it can be seen that they speak for men and to men primarily. In such circumstances women as a constituency are yet to formulate a coherent and viable political agenda to sustain a mass entry into the political arena. Without such an agenda or the capacity to frame one, women's presence in



parliament will be symbolic rather than effective. Political mobilization of women on political issues and the conscious political education of women, are, needless to say, the essential prerequisites for any effective political participation. Given the present dismal state of women's literacy (39%), high fertility rate, low female-male ratio (927), high maternal morality, poor working conditions, low social status, such a hope seems a distant dream. In truth it is a vicious circle, because these very conditions can be removed only by women's participation in the decision making process and actively intervening for women's agency for shaping their own life and that of society.

One of the most effective instruments of patriarchal domination is women's internalisation of the very patriarchal values which subordinate them. This has taken the form of women's complicity with patriarchy in exchange for limited status and power as with upper caste and upper class women (Lerner, p. 218). More generally it has meant consenting to the subsuming of gender interests to what are perceived as the larger interests of the society or the community which are defined invariably by the dominant male group<sup>4</sup>. This is particularly evident in the modern upsurge of identity or group based or communal politics. Much has been written recently on the role of women in Hindutva politics of the right (Sarkar, 1991, Sangari, 1995) where women actively co-operate in communal politics directed against minorities. Much less note has been taken of the subsuming of gender interests in ethnic based identity movements (Mahanta, 1997). The patriarchal concept of women as representing the group's honour comes to the fore here, calling for greater protection from the side of the men and a corresponding subordination from the women within the movement and in society at large. This may even go against the prevailing ethos of such societies and help in the spread of patriarchal ideas (Mahanta, 1997). Often through politicization of rape women are cast in the role of 'victims' leading to further protectionism and consequent erosion of the idea of female agency. In both cases women's co-operating for the sake of perceived community interest becomes complicity in their own subordination.

The political empowerment of women within the present limits of the proposed 33% reservation of women seems to have come up



against the hard rock of patriarchal resistance to giving women even such minimal representation. The case seems to be somewhat different with women's reservation in the Panchayati Raj institution. Though it is yet to be implemented in all the States, the experience in some of the states where it has been implemented appears to be mixed. It has enabled more women undoubtedly to participate in local self government. Though there is patriarchal resistance and obstruction in curtailment of its resources and in actual day to day functioning (Mukhopadhyay, 1966, p.6) the issues concerned with local self government, particularly at the village level, and to some extent in municipalities, such as provision of drinking water, drainage, street lighting, primary education, health services seem to be peculiarly related to what is popularly perceived as 'women's work'. Hence there would be little resistance to women carrying out such work which earlier had been considered insignificant and demeaning to the men panchayat members and as often as not neglected. The lack of financial resources of the panchayat may be another reason why there is less resistance to women's reservations here or even to having all women panchayats. All women panchayats are particularly popular in Maharashtra(13) and Madhya Pradesh (7) (Mukhopadhyay, p.43), states where women's work participation is high. In the case of Maharashtra there is further a strong women's movement. The case is different in urban municipalities where there are possibilities for tax collection. Though studies are not available, personal observation of one such municipal body has revealed that here too women commissioners are relegated to the above mentioned municipal duties and more vital matters like allocation or collection of resources are handled solely by the male commissioners, leading to much frustration among the women members<sup>5</sup>. This only goes to prove that the most vital issue of politics, access to and control over resources is likely to remain a preserve of men if the Panchayat experience proves any thing, even after 33% reservation for women in Parliament bill is passed. Unless there is an assurance that women can share in such power of control over and access to social resources the kind of empowerment for women envisaged by the 81<sup>st</sup> (now 84<sup>th</sup>) amendment bill is likely to remain paper legislation as is the case with many of the legal measures for the empowerment of women such as



the Hindu Marriage and Hindu Succession Acts . This is so because such empowerment, which is given , and hence conditional, ultimately weakens the notion of self agency of women and their desire to struggle and fight for their own rights and is thus harmful in the long run. In their present state of powerlessness and social and economic disadvantage, women's agency, may be initially weak, and as against the power of men, may be insignificant, but it is their own , unalienable and growing. As one strong woman of India (not strong in the Indira Gandhi sense) who has established herself as a leader of women, Ela Bhatt, says "Empowerment has to happen within us as well as outside us" (in Chakravorty, p.3).

#### Notes :

1. The Indian Association of Women's Studies has commented on this apparent silence by subsuming in a seminar on women's contribution to the freedom movement held to commemorate fifty years of independence (IAWS Newsletter, Winter, 1997).
2. It may be mentioned here that in 1947 the subcommittee on 'Woman's Role in Planned Economy' set up by Nehru had rejected political reservation for women (Kasturi, 1995, p.12).
3. Male identification is particularly strong in the realms of religion and politics where women have traditionally been excluded in patriarchal society (cf. Lisa Battaglia Owens in *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 4.3.1998,p.36), and women in both domains are hence at a position of ideological and practical disadvantage, being in alien territory , as it were.
4. This was very evident during the freedom movement when women's interests were shown as being identical with the national interest (see writings of Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post colonial Histories*, OUP,Delhi ,1994).
5. Dibrugarh Municipality which has implemented women's reservation from 1998. Personal observation from discussions with female ward commisisoners.



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## **US POLICY TOWARDS EASTERN EUROPE A HISTORY REVISITED**

**Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed**

American foreign policy towards Eastern Europe is fraught with an unresolved question : did the military strategy of the Allied power during World War II lead to the Western acquiescence to a prolonged Soviet advantage in Europe. There is no precise answer to the question. As the war was drawing to an obvious end, it became clear that the former Nazi satellites would now fall in the Soviet sphere of influence. The available documents as well as exhaustively analysed books on the post-War arrangements and agreements convincingly present the fact that at the critical moment of historic transition, the United States remained uncertain about its future relations with these countries falling under Soviet control. On November 21, 1944 the then Secretary of State Cordell Hull, while handing over his office to Edward Stettinus, recorded that "the question of our future relations with satellite countries are still under discussion."<sup>1</sup> At that time President Franklin D. Roosevelt paid priorities to the maintenance of the unity of purpose among the partners of the 'grand alliance' and the success of the efforts to the establishment of the United Nations over other issues at least till the end of the war. The fear of the West of the reemergence of Germany within a foreseeable future coincided with the historically proved Soviet fear of the use of Eastern Europe once again as a corridor invasion; all these eventually led to the Soviet advantage in the region.<sup>2</sup> It appeared that while the Soviet Union was clear about its position in Eastern Europe, the United States suffered from vacillation.

This realisation was immediately striking after the death of President Roosevelt. However, the Truman Administration could not afford to renounce the US commitments to the war-time agreements. He told the US Congress that his Government "does not regard the treaties as completely satisfactory. Whatever their defects, however,



I am convinced that they are as good as we can hope to obtain by agreement among the principal wartime Allies".<sup>3</sup> At the same time he decided to confront Soviet 'expansionist' thrust in Asia and Europe. This resulted in a series of developments beginning with the pronouncement of the Truman doctrine, followed by the Marshall plan, the formation of NATO and the US participation in the Korean War. But the whole spectrum of US policy neither threw any light on the possibility of intervention in Eastern Europe nor acceptance of the *status quo* position there.

Dismissing the effectiveness of suggested trade restrictions against Eastern Europe, the United States considered that the anti-communist propaganda could serve as a moral force generating ideas of freedom among the peoples of the region. As the normal channels of contact between Americans and East Europeans were eliminated by the Soviet backed governments there and as the operation of the Western information services was almost completely snapped by the active Soviet vigilance, the United States found that only through anti-communist propaganda it could effectively communicate to the peoples of the region about the Western desire to see them liberated. In 1948 the Voice of America geared up its propaganda programme to convey to the 'captive peoples' the message of freedom.<sup>4</sup> The Radio Free Europe went on the air on July 4, 1950 with the objective of propagating the ideas of freedom and these broadcasting agencies were glorified as "prophets of early liberation".<sup>5</sup> Later on it was found that these agencies incited massive rebellion against the Soviet domination and as these 'captive peoples' revolted thrice within a short period time (1953-1956), there was no US or Western aid when the need for such help was felt desperately.

### **The liberation policy :**

The 1952 Presidential campaign ushered in a great foreign policy debate in the United States. Although the containment policy provided the philosophical basis for a diplomatic offensive against the Soviet-led socialist world, a strong of the American public, more particularly, the isolationists and the Republicans launched a frontal attack on it saying that it stood on a 'defensive and immoral' foundation as it



accepted the *status quo* in Europe. Such criticism offered an alternative formula to the US foreign policy-makers. It was Walter Lippmann who initiated an academic debate on the viability and containment policy. His criticism originated in his misreading of George F. Kennan's article.<sup>6</sup> Lippmann argued that it was wrong to formulate US foreign policy on the basis on assumption that the Soviet Union would eventually collapse on its own weight of inherent weakness. The containment policy was considered to be a negative policy and it could not be expected to produce positive results.

Meanwhile, a number of developments like the communist take over of power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the Berlin blockade of June 1948, the Soviet testing of nuclear bomb in September 1949, Mao Zedong's victory in mainland China on October 1, 1949 and finally the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 were witnessed. These developments provoked the American public to question the validity of the containment doctrine. Serious criticism on the policy levelled by conservative-isolationists like Senators Robert Taft and Alexander Wiley turned the academic debate to a political campaign issue as the process of the presidential electioneering began. Dismissing the containment as a merely 'pantywaist' diplomacy they urged upon the Government to encourage the peoples of Eastern Europe to revolt against the Soviet domination. Senator Wiley suggested that his country should sponsor a "commando-type program of psychological and revolutionary penetration, including the use of 'silver bullets'-money".<sup>7</sup> Such criticisms and observations were not the product of objective assessment of the situation in Eastern Europe where the Soviet Union already achieved military consolidation by stationing 1.5 million highly trained and committed soldiers and also political consolidation by helping the communist parties of form governments in the region. The proposed commando-type subversion would be totally ineffective in the face of the total consolidation of Moscow's sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Even a US led military intervention to free the people of Eastern Europe would be too costly to conceive. So, American policy in seeking liberation of Eastern Europe was based on erroneous perception and dangerous miscalculations. Testifying before the House Committee Congressman Charles J. Kerston argued that the US should



adopt a series of steps, such as, withdrawal of recognition of all the communist Governments in Eastern Europe, mobilisation of the members of the United Nations to expel these countries from the world body, and granting political asylum to the East European refugees and with them form an armed force to liberate Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union. These suggestions, though totally unrealistic, were well received. He made a highly emotional statement :

... let the people behind the iron curtain know that we will do *everything* we can to work for their eventual liberation .... and when the time is opportune we should actively assist the people behind the iron curtain to liberate themselves.<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)

Kerston's proposals, which came to be known as the Kerston Amendments, were approved on October 10, 1951 as an integral part of the Mutual Security Act. Under the Kerston Amendment a military assistance fund of \$100 million was created to organise an armed force with the escapees from Eastern Europe to foment "some trouble for Jee Stalin in his back yard". While the Soviet Union sharply assailed the Kerston Amendments as 'aggressive acts' and gross interference in the internal affairs of other countries<sup>10</sup>, most Americans found a ray of hope in these steps. The Truman Administration, however, did not seem to be enthusiastic about them as it believed in the *status quo* position in Eastern Europe. There were reasons for this. The presence of more than 1.5 million Soviet soldiers in Eastern Europe was a guarantee against any step to upset the *status quo* in the region. The Soviet presence and advantage in Eastern Europe did not pose any direct threat to America's global interests. To the Administration, the fate of the "captive people of Eastern Europe" was nothing more than a moral platitude and it merely kept the hope of liberation alive. President Truman's last address to the US Congress is a testimony to such a moral stand :

During the coming years, we must not forget the suffering of the people behind the Iron Curtain. In these areas, minorities are being suppressed, human rights violated, religion persecuted. We should continue and expand the activities of the Voice of America, which brings our message of hope and truth to these peoples.<sup>11</sup>



Such a vague statement provoked the Republican party and Truman critics to begin the great debate of the 1952 Presidential election campaign making the liberation of Eastern Europe as the central foci of alternative to the containment policy of the Truman era. The name of John Foster Dulles came to be associated with the new theory of liberation of Eastern Europe as a logistic alternative to the old concept of containment.<sup>12</sup> The Dullesian policy of liberation, which became the key issue of the republican party's Presidential election plank, included a programme of action, viz, declaration of peaceful liberation of Eastern Europe as an important objective of America's foreign policy, creation of a 'task force' of the dependable escapees from Eastern Europe who could develop a freedom programme for each of the 'satellite countries', snapping the US diplomatic relations with the Governments of Eastern Europe. He, however, did not mean to instigate an armed revolt in the region.<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles maintained ambiguity in their statements on the nature of the US support if and when the liberation struggle would take place in the 'satellite' world. Eisenhower, who had an outstanding military background, realised that the liberation of Eastern Europe was an impractical idea, and appeared to have been reluctant to make a concrete statement on the issue.<sup>14</sup> He made only a passing reference to the US support for a 'peaceful liberation'. For example, at the American Legion convention in New York, he said: "the American conscience can never know peace until the millions in Soviet satellites are restored again to be the masters of their own fate".<sup>15</sup>

The liberation policy did not go unopposed. On August 27, 1952 in his prepared address before the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association held in Buffalo 1952 as Dulles spelt out the plan for the liberation of Eastern Europe in the form of encouraging peaceful revolution using 'quiet' methods like passive resistance, non-cooperation, discontentment, slowdown and industrial sabotage, stepping up anti-communist propaganda through the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe and extension of America's moral support for the cause of liberation. Averell Harriman, the Mutual Security Director, who also addressed the Association, opposed the idea of liberation and said that it was a trap prompting revolt in Eastern Europe resulting



in ruthless massacre.<sup>16</sup> President Truman joined Harriman and launched severe attack on the exponents of liberation policy and accused them of playing 'gutter politics' in a delusive effort to gain an edge in the presidential election campaign at the risk of an atomic war in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Both Dulles and Eisenhower were aware of the possible consequences of a US incited massive rebellion in Eastern Europe and also of the limitation of US in matters of extending material assistance to the rebels in these 'satellite' states, and therefore, preferred a 'peaceful Tito-type' evolutionary course of action which might one day lead to peaceful liberation.<sup>18</sup>

Despite its vagueness, the polemics of liberation of Eastern Europe gained popularity during the Presidential election campaign. As a result, despite the fact that at the initial stage the Democratic party candidate Adlai Stevenson warned against the dangerous consequences of liberation ideas, predicted that the United States would not be able to extend any concrete help to further the cause of liberation and favour a reconciliation with the existing *status quo* position in the region on the basis of 'give and take' policy<sup>19</sup>, later on decided to pursue the liberation policy. He said that the question of liberation "should never be an issue among the Americans, for we are all united in our desire for their liberation from oppression and in confidence that freedom will once again be theirs".<sup>20</sup>

The West European reaction to the liberation theory was of anguish and apprehension. London *Economist* made a correct assessment of the campaign. "Unhappily 'liberation' applied to Eastern Europe", it commented, 'meant either the risk of war or it meant nothing'.<sup>21</sup> General Gruenther, the Chief of Allied Headquarters, said it was necessary to keep up the hope of liberation of the 'captive peoples' but he warned: "I do not believe that we could liberate them without war. There is no question of launching such a war".<sup>22</sup> Similarly, *Washington Post* wrote that Europe "will discover Mr. Eisenhower cannot change the grim facts of international life and therefore cannot appreciable change the foreign policy of the United States".<sup>23</sup> Most of the West European states understood the impracticability of liberation policy without a military confrontation with the Soviet Union



and considered it as mere vote catching device rather than a serious foreign policy issue. Americans too saw the hollowness of the liberation gimmicks. Critics like Walter Lippmann wrote that the Republican proposal was dangerously misleading and the vague support for liberation was an incitement to revolt by unarmed people who could be crushed by the Soviet troops stationed in the region. He was in favour of a policy which would encourage Titoism in the Soviet satellite world.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Post-election liberation programme :**

The idea of liberation of Eastern Europe continued to be the core of the foreign policy of the President elect, as Eisenhower reiterated in his new year message to the people :

I want to assure them ['the captive peoples'] they are not forgotten. I know many of them fought bravely in the underground against Nazi tyranny and that tried to build up representative governments after the war. So long as the spirit of freedom lives in the youth, the future is one of promise.<sup>25</sup>

A few of the statements of both Eisenhower and Dulles on liberation policy deserve attention in the context of the subsequent developments pertaining to the revolts in Eastern Europe and US role therein. President Eisenhower appeared to be firm in this commitment to repudiate the Yalta agreement which alleged to have given away Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union. In his first address to the US Congress he said :

Our policy, dedicated to making the free world secure, will envisage all peaceful methods and devices - except breaking faith with our friends. We shall never acquiesce in the enslavement of any people in order to fancied gain for ourselves. I shall ask the Congress at a later date to join in an appropriate resolution making clear that this Government recognizes no kind of commitment contained in the secret understanding of the past with foreign governments which permit this kind of enslavement.<sup>26</sup>

John Foster Dulles, the author of the liberation policy, remained steadfast to his commitment to his policy as evident from his testimony



before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which conducted hearings to approve his nomination as the Secretary of State. He said:

These people who are enslaved are people who deserve to be free, and who, from our own selfish standpoint, ought to be free because if they are the servile instruments of aggressive despotism, they will eventually be wedded into a force which will be highly dangerous to ourselves and to all of the free world.<sup>27</sup>

As the Eisenhower Administration started to function the attitude towards the idea of liberation began to undergo gradual change. The repudiation of the war time treaties, which had led to the 'enslavement' of Eastern European, as the first step towards liberation of the region was the election pledge of the Republican party. But when the US Congress introduced five separate resolutions to that effect<sup>28</sup>, both the President and the Secretary of State did not agree to the idea of repudiation. President Eisenhower's letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on February 20, 1953 ignored the question of repudiation<sup>29</sup> and Dulles was in favour of burying the "realm of controversy" over the secret treaties of the past and requested the US Congress not to debate on the past but to "unitedly move on to mould the future" in which the United States would "do what we peacefully can do, in order to revive the hopes of those now enslaved"<sup>30</sup>.

Why did the new Administration try to bury the "realm of controversy" associated with the Yalta agreements by way of putting off the 'repudiation' pledge? Eisenhower wrote in his autobiography that he "refused to do what extremists asked: repudiation in their entirety the Yalta agreements and thus endanger United States rights in Vienna and Berlin, affirmed at Yalta"<sup>31</sup>. At any rate, the repudiation resolution did not come through the US Congress and the news of the death of Marshal Stalin on March 5, 1953, as Sherman Adams wrote, led to the end of the debate over the repudiation theory and it offered immense relief to both Eisenhower and Dulles.<sup>32</sup> But the idea of liberation continued to dominate America's policy towards Eastern Europe. This impression worked as an encouragement to the peoples of Eastern Europe. Anti-communist revolts took place in East Berlin, Poland and Hungary during the Presidency of Eisenhower and the US decided to remain a silent spectator of the entire proceedings of ruthless suppression of these revolts and as Bennett Kovig writes that the liberation policy was "never really translated into operational policy, survived and endured as a dangerous myth"<sup>33</sup>.



### Revolts in eastern Europe :

The East Berliners were the first to revolt against the communist regime on June 17, 1953. The western accounts on the uprising hold a number of factors for the sudden outbreak of revolt, viz, the failure of the Soviet model of collectivisation, cultural russification, lower benefits to the workers and rise of prices of essential commodities.<sup>34</sup> The long standing dissatisfaction of East Berliners were articulated by the workers of the prestigious Stalinalle project who eventually led a massive demonstration in front of the Marx-Engels Plaza on June 17. The demonstrators moved to the Brandenburg gate, tore down the red flag and shouted anti-Soviet and anti-communist slogans and then became violent. A series of clashes took place in different sectors of the city leading to the death of 22 persons. By the end of the day the uprising was controlled by the Government forces.

A careful examination of US response to the short-lived East Berlin uprising tells of the inapt and dismal show of America's false commitment to its policy of liberation. One might argue that the uprising was so sudden that the United States was caught unaware and hence could not offer any help to the participants of the revolt . There were clear symptoms of a violent rebellion in the city, as James B. Conant, the US High Commissioner for Germany, wrote saying that the situation was explosive and the Allied forces stationed in the other part of the city, i.e. West Berlin could have taken timely measures to assist the rebels.<sup>35</sup> It was more shocking that the US sponsored media, Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) had been inciting the workers to revolt which made the rioters to believe that the United States would come to their aid in view of the speedy measures taken by it during the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49 . The impression was definitely a miscalculation as the RIAS did not say anything of the possible US aid and the broadcasts were merely senseless incitements. Just as West German Chancellor Adenauer took four days to react after the rebellion had been crushed, President Eisenhower took one more day to express optimism only. He said :

This inspiring show of courage has confirmed our belief that years of oppression and attempted indoctrination cannot extinguish the spirit of freedom behind the Iron Curtain. It seems clear that the repercussions of these events will be felt throughout the Soviet satellite empire.<sup>36</sup>



Dulles remained satisfied with optimism and correctness of his 'diagnosis' of eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. He believed that the urge for freedom would one day dislodge the Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. He argued :

The unquenchable spirit of the people were dramatized in East Berlin where unarmed youths tore up paving stones from the streets to hurl in defiance at tanks. Such a spirit can never be suppressed, and this love of freedom is more and more manifesting itself through the captive peoples.<sup>37</sup>

As the wounds of East Berlin uprising started healing with the passage of time, Dulles became more emphatic in propagating liberation of Eastern Europe. In his address to the UN General Assembly on September 17, 1953 he said : "It is not in the interest of peace, or the other goals of our charter, that they can no longer live by their traditions and their faith", but the USA "did not call for exporting revolution or inciting others to violence".<sup>38</sup> He made a similar statement before the House Committee of Foreign Affairs at Hearings on the Mutual Security Act of 1954 :

It is very clear and continuing policy of this Administration not to accept as definitive rule of the Soviet over their captive peoples. We are, through various media, principally through the Voice of America, and private agencies such as Radio Free Europe, carrying on a very active campaign of education, bringing news, bringing hope to these peoples.... I may say there is no relaxation of the feeling of the United States Government that there cannot be real peace for the United States as long as that captivity exists.<sup>39</sup>

There are dozens of similar statements made by responsible officers of the US Administration to convey that the US policy towards Eastern Europe was rested on the idea of liberation. James Reston wrote that the liberation of Eastern Europe continued to remain as a part of 'psychological gimmicks'.<sup>40</sup> It remained as a rhetoric which was monopolised by Dulles until it proved to be too dangerous as evident from two more revolts, one in Poland and the other in Hungary.

Poland was real trouble spot in the Soviet back yard in the Cold War era. The allegations that the Soviet Union massacred thousands



of Polish officers and soldiers and buried them in the Katyn forest<sup>41</sup> in April 1943 and that the Soviet army from a close range watched the massacre of the civilians in Warsaw city committed by the retreating German army at the time of the Warsaw uprising<sup>42</sup> in February 1944 generated a strong anti-Soviet feeling in the minds of the Polish people. In the backdrop of such an over-all dissatisfaction prevailing in Poland, the Poznan riot took place on June 28 1956. The Western accounts on the episode reveal that a large section of the workers in the industrial city were unhappy over the spill over adverse consequences of over-industrialisation, too much of bureaucratisation, and the rise of prices of essential commodities. They demanded a liberal political atmosphere on the line of what Nikita S. Khrushchev argued in his secret speech delivered in the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. On June 28, 1956 the workers of Poznan heard a rumour that the delegation to represent their case at a higher level were reportedly rounded up by the police. This made them violent and a widespread riot took place in the industrial city which lasted for three days until the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist uprising was crushed by the government forces. At the end of the bitter fighting between the rioters and the troops, 53 were dead and some 300 were wounded.<sup>43</sup>

The only US reaction to the suppression of Poznan uprising, just as in the case of the East Berlin riot, was an expression of optimism that the Soviet Union would not be able to sustain its control over the 'captive peoples'. To quote Dulles: "It is not a matter for this year or next year, but I believe that this second post-war decade...will see these new forces take charge of the situation and that we can really hopefully look forward to a transformation of the international scene".<sup>44</sup>

The year 1956 saw another but massive uprising against communism which offered a testing ground of the US policy of liberation. It was also the year of the presidential election campaign. The Democratic party took the opportunity to assail the Eisenhower Administration for its failure to redeem the liberation promise of 1952. It condemned "the Republican Administration for its heartless record of broken promises to the unfortunate victims of the communism" and stated that 'Candidate Eisenhower's 1952 pledges to 'liberate' the captive peoples have been disavowed and dishonoured."<sup>45</sup> But the



Republican party reiterated its commitment to the policy of liberation and distributed widely a pamphlet entitled *Republican Policy of Liberation to Turn the Tide against Communism*.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 was not the result of a sudden development. Khrushchev's secret speech provided the intellectual debate in Hungary favouring a liberal political atmosphere in the country. The dissident Hungarian communist elite led by the ousted premier Imre Nagy established Petofi Circle (named after Sandor Pitofi, a Hungarian poet and revolutionary killed in the battlefield in the Hungarian struggle for independence) in the city of Budapest in March 1956 and it soon became the centre of an articulated demand for a political change in the country, which could be ensured, as the dissidents argued, by replacing the 'Stalinist hardlines' like Matyas Rakosi and Enro Gero, withdrawing from the Warsaw pact and sending back the Soviet troops.<sup>46</sup> The debates in the Petofi Circle which began in June in casual manner eventually generated massive participation of the students, workers, intellectuals, writers and common citizens of Budapest demanding a liberal political atmosphere that culminated in a silent rally on October 6, 1956 and then a violent demonstration on the night of October 23-24. The installation of Nagy as the new premier on that fateful night did not pacify the demonstrators who took arms in order to liberate Hungary from the Soviet Union. It was followed by the Soviet intervention on October 24 and then in the night of October 31, and by November 4 the Soviet troops crushed the revolt. Later on Nagy was arrested, tried on the charge of high treason and sentenced to death.

The US response to the Hungarian revolt was of total dismay. It tried unsuccessfully in the face of Soviet veto to use the UN Security Council to condemn the intervention. At that time the UN was preoccupied with the Suez war and US Administration too was fully engrossed with it and by the time US was successful to pilot a resolution in the General Assembly condemning the Soviet action, the Hungarian revolt was crushed and a new regime led by Janos Kadar was installed.<sup>47</sup> The US granted asylum to 21,000 Hungarians as a "practical effect to the American desire to help the victims of Soviet oppression"<sup>48</sup>.



The US inaction to aid the Hungarian rebels in the peak period of revolt was justified by the American policy makers. Some of their statements deserve attention. Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy argued that there was 'no advance information about the uprising', and therefore, the US had "no plan of action". He wrote:

I must admit that I did not expect that an anti-Soviet revolution would spread through Hungary like a forest of fire, but I never doubted that if a revolution did break out, the USSR would use every means no matter how brutal to suppress it.<sup>49</sup>

President Eisenhower too told the CBS on November 23, 1961 that the uprising "started in such a way .... that everyone was little bit fooled".<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to be convinced by such an argument as the US media itself had been reporting on the political unrest brewing up in Hungary since July 1956. Herman Finer wrote latter on that the State Department was aware of the 'winds' of the uprising and Dulles himself was very happy over the outbreak of the uprising on being informed at 7 p.m. of October 23 but decided not to act despite the Administration's declared policy to liberate Eastern Europe from Soviet occupation.<sup>51</sup> President Eisenhower after consultation with Dulles on the next day issued a carefully worded statement :

The United States considers the development in Hungary as being a renewed expression of the intense desire for freedom long held by the Hungarian people...The United States deplored the intervention of Soviet military forces which under the Treaty of peace should have been withdrawn and the presence of which in Hungary is now demonstrated is not to protect Hungary against armed aggression from without, but rather to continue an occupation of Hungary by the forces of an alien government for its own purposes.

The heart of America goes out to the people of Hungary.<sup>52</sup>

Eisenhower's reminiscence of the Hungarian events bears testimony of America's preordained stand on the crisis, i.e. not to pursue the liberation policy too far to start a war with the Soviet Union<sup>53</sup>.



His statement making reassessment of the Hungarian revolution soon after his reelection deserves attention.

Nothing, of course, has so disturbed the American people as the events in Hungary. Our hearts have gone to them and we have done everything it is possible to, in the way of alleviating suffering. But I must make one point clear : the United States doesn't now and never had advocated open rebellion by an undefended populace against force over which they could not possibly prevail.<sup>54</sup>

He later on wrote that the twin problem of Hungary and the Suez war occurring at the same time complicated the international situation. He could not expect the support of two major NATO partners, Britain and France. Even in the absence of the Suez crisis he would not have gone for a war with the Soviet Union on the issue of liberating the 'captive peoples'.<sup>55</sup>

Similar conclusion can be drawn from a major foreign policy statement of Dulles issued on October 27 which clearly stated that the US could do no more than expressing its sincere desire for the freedom of the 'captive peoples'.<sup>56</sup> Robert Murphy later on recorded that during the time of the Hungarian revolt "everyone in the United States wanted to help the brave Hungarians, and the State Department was inundated with proposals ranging from outright military action to plans for welcoming thousands of refugees" but he considered that American military action would have provoked the "powerful Soviet armies to further massacre". Further, he argued that it was not possible to send US forces violating the land and air space of Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Yugoslavia. He concluded : "American policy of promoting liberation of captive nations always stopped short of war and this was well known"<sup>57</sup>

There was a visible change in the tone of Dulles as he spelt out the US policy towards Eastern Europe after the Hungarian fiasco. On December 2, 1956 he said that the United States would adhere to an 'evolutionary process' of liberation.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that the US policy towards Eastern Europe was either guided by an emotional misconception or by a vote catching motive. It was predictable that the USA would not confront the Soviet Union militarily for a cause not directly affecting its vital interests. It was a



dangerous idea to incite defenceless people to rise against a mighty power as that involved the grave risk of exposing them to ruthless killing. Hungary in 1956 set a lesson for all in this regard. Dulles too realised that towards the last stage of life and pleaded for 'gradualism' as the core of US approach to Eastern Europe. This eventually guided President Kennedy's policy of 'peaceful engagement' and President Johnson's policy of 'building bridges'. Such policies probably compelled the United States to maintain a low profile during the unsuccessful experiment of 'communism with a human face' by Alexander Dubcek in 1968. More importantly, the policy of 'gradualism' eventually made it easier for the peoples of Eastern Europe to come out of the Soviet domination in 1990-1991 without slightest fear of the application of the Brezhnev doctrine.

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49. Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York, Garden City : Doubleday, 1964, 1964) p. 428.
50. *New York Times*, November 24, 1961.
51. Herman Finer, *Dulles over Suez* (Chicago : Quadrangle, 1964) p. 338 and 433.
52. *Public Papers of Eisenhower*, pp. 1018-19.
53. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace : The White House Years 1956-1961* (Garden City, New York ; Doubleday, 1965) pp. 63-67. Expressing rejoice at "these historic events" he said "we cannot, of course, carry out this policy [liberation policy] to resort to force... we did help to keep alive the hope of these peoples for freedom". See *Public Papers of Eisenhower*, p. 1061.
54. *Public Papers of Eisenhower*, p. 1096.
55. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, pp. 88-89. Five years later in an interview with the CBS on November 23, 1961 Eisenhower defended his decision of inaction and said : "I don't think that the United Nations would have supported our intervention, which would have been followed by an open war... The tragedy was inevitable. And even today I don't think that the United States or any other country would have risked a major war for that cause." *New York Times*, November 24, 1961.
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## **MARCUSE'S IDEAS OF TECHNOLOGICAL RATIONALITY**

**Girin Phukon**

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) was a co-founder of the Frankfurt School with Rosa Luxemburg, Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno of Germany. In order to render the new situations posed by late capitalism while retaining the essentials of Marxism, the Frankfurt School received their philosophical and scientific training from outside the Marxist tradition. By making this theoretical leap, Marcuse greatly extends the critical scope of Marxism. Like other members of the School he opens his redefinition of the socialist transition by recasting 'Marxism' as critical theory or as 'Marxism' without the proletariat. He maintains that Marxism as the practical science of proletarian revolution, must undertake the task of redefining the conception of the transition to socialism and of the strategy in this period. Although Marcuse was influenced by a number of streams of thought such as the Hegelianism, Freudianism and Marxism, he refined and polished them in order to conform to his creative thoughts. Thus intellectual progress of Marcuse is independent of the classical Marxist framework. As such he is one of the prominent propounders of the new left of the twentieth century. He projected a new philosophy in terms of new reality of the developed capitalist society and emerging socialist society as well. He put forward his original contribution to protect the human freedom from the clutches of advanced industrial and totalitarian societies. In such societies, Marcuse believes, 'Technological Rationality' is achieved where the domination over man is not felt, because it changes the reason. Thus the idea of 'technological rationality' is one of the distinctive contributions of Marcuse in the realm of socialist philosophy which acts as an inherent instrument of exploitation in



an advanced capitalist society. This paper is an attempt to deal with the problem of technology in the contemporary period and to understand various dimensions of Marcuse's concept of 'technological rationality'.

## II

Both Marx and Marcuse had emphasised on technology as one of the dominant instruments of social change. For Marx technology consists of the productive forces which, in turn, determines the relations of production. These two elements create the material (economic) base of society on which the super-structure of politics, religion, culture, philosophy and ideology etc, is depended. Similarly, for Marcuse the progress of technology results in technological rationality which conceals reasons of dominance. According to him cultural, economic, political and social life is moulded and shaped in a way that an individual has to adjust his hitherto critical capabilities to technologically imposed conformity.<sup>2</sup> Though he is not determinist, like Marx, Marcuse showed faith in the importance of economic factor. He acknowledges the relevance of Marxist idea of class domination, exploitation and need for a revolution which would destroy the old inhuman structure of society and bring freedom for man.

Marcuse is of the firm opinion that capitalist society is dominated by technological rationality and repression of freedom reducing man's inner self. In such society, he argues, irrationality is seen as rationality by the masses who have been conditioned by society's perversion of reason. Consequently man loses his free and creative nature. The domination of technological rationality and delailment of reason culminates in one dimensional thought and an one dimensional society resulting 'one dimensional man'. As a consequence, man possesses a 'false' needs and 'true' needs.<sup>3</sup> False needs are those, superimposed upon the individuals by a particular social interest in order to repress. Surprisingly, such needs are considered by the people to be their 'true' needs. Thus man is the victim of the advanced industrial society, but unfortunately he is completely ignorant about it. Hence Marcuse



observes that this is the most astonishing feature of advanced industrial civilization.

As a matter of fact, Marcuse sketches out the core theme of 'One Dimensional Man' as 'technological rationality'. He asserts that the social mode of reasoning under state-corporate capitalism (i.e. technological rationality) is contrasted to the liberal-bourgeois mode of individual reasoning in the state of entrepreneurial capitalism (i.e. individual rationality). Under this system, the individual rationality, with its inherent premises of individual autonomy, critical self-reflection and self-interest become increasingly 'irrational'. As the open market and civil society are brought under the centralized bureaucratic control of the technologically grounded apparatus, the state-corporate alliance destroys the objective foundation of individual rationality. Confronted by the planned organization of cultural, economic, political and social life, the individual adopts and adjusts his hitherto critical capacities to technically enforced conformity.<sup>4</sup> Having destroyed the material basis of individual freedom, technological rationality strives to efface psychic freedom as well. Thus Marcuse maintains :

The apparatus to which the individual is to adjust and adapts himself is so rational that individual protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational. The system of life created by modern industry is one of the highest expediency, convenience and efficiency. Reason, once defined in these terms, becomes equivalent to an activity which perpetuates this world. Rational behaviour becomes identical with a matter of factness which teaches reasonable submissiveness and thus guarantees getting along in the prevailing order.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, scientific - technical rationality and its apparatus, Marcuse believes, threaten man in their everyday living because technological reason works as an a priori - it predetermines experience, it projects the direction of the transformation of nature and organises the whole.<sup>6</sup> Thus Marcuse observes that "so called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have



created a second nature of man which lies him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form".<sup>7</sup> As scientific technics becomes the universal form of material production in the phase of modern industrial civilization, it projects an entire culture, it shapes psychic forms and even organizes the political structure converting the technological a priori into a political a priori.<sup>8</sup> Marcuse, thus argues that :

Technology and techniques applied in the economic process are more than ever before instruments of social and political control. The satisfaction of needs (materials and intellectuals) takes place through scientific organization of work, scientific management, and scientific imposition of attitudes and behaviour patterns which operate beyond and outside the work process and pre-condition the individuals in accord with the dominant social interests.<sup>9</sup>

The repressive nature of industrial society, Marcuse asserts, is the result of these processes. For the purpose of effective domination of men, nature and utilization of its resources, technology and science are organized. Realization of man is handicapped by this repression and as a result he lives in a world of what, Marcuse calls, 'unfreedom'.<sup>10</sup> Thus man loses ability to distinguish between true and false consciousness as he is dominated by the establishment, the ruling class and made to believe that his servitude is freedom. In fact man is indoctrinated by mass advertising and made to assume a false way of life. As such, there has been an inherent invasion of mass media and social institutions on the minds of the people. Consequently, many of the perceived needs of modern man are imposed from the outside, by way of ideology advertising, propaganda alienating circumstances of life. The man, therefore, believes that he is congruent with what he really wants to be and ignorant of the restriction of his one-dimensional existence. Marcuse characterises it a new kind of slavery which is neither determined by obedience nor forceful labour but by being an instrument and reducing man into the status of a thing.<sup>11</sup> Men, he argues, have become passive instrument of the system. They have become by being instruments, things to be dominated and manipulated by vested interest. But such domination



and manipulation are legitimised and unfreedom of man is rationalised through technological rationality. Thus Marcuse observes :

Technology provides the great rationalization of the unfreedom of man and demonstrates the 'technical' impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one's own life. For this unfreedom appears neither as irrational nor as political, but rather as submission to the technical apparatus which enlarges the comfort of life and increases the productivity of labour. *Technological rationality thus protects rather than cancels the legitimacy of domination* and the instrumentalist horizon of reason opens on a rationally totalitarian society<sup>12</sup>

As such it appears to Marcuse that in the advanced capitalist societies the proletarian class fail to constitute itself as a revolutionary class. The causes of this failure, in turn, are to be found in scientific-technical rationality, which imposes new forms of social control and domination through the productive capabilities of modern technics. Thus in his book, 'One Dimensional Man', Marcuse attempts to show how misled, indoctrinated, ignorant and corrupted are the people. For him consensus is used to repress and dominate. It is achieved partly by affluence, by satisfying men's needs and removing major cause of dissent, protest and revolt. Men, he argues, have become happy and content and passive instrument of the system. They want to preserve the system and agree on the consensus demand for increased productivity. Thus men become an one dimensional man in accepting the existing pattern of thought and behaviour due to lack of a "critical awareness".<sup>13</sup>

It is, therefore, obvious that according to Marcuse the productive apparatus manipulates desires by creating the false needs. Satisfaction of consumers rather than all classes make class struggle outdated. This system tends to a loss of self resulting loyalty to the system and the acceptance of status-quo demonstrated by resistance to change. Thus individual has been absorbed and assimilated into the system of domination producing one dimensionality in thought and an 'one dimensional man'.



## III

In the political sphere democratic unfreedom prevails because of the oppressive capabilities of the state. Pluralism is only a false reality, the state dominates the individuals. Freedom, Marcuse argues, becomes illusory and therefore it is completely destructive. As such, he asserts that modern democracy is a system of totalitarian domination based on technology. Marcuse complains that freedom is also denied in socialist system. He accused that Soviet Marxism was not revolutionary as they had accepted the ideology of the status-quo rather than that of social radicalism.<sup>14</sup> The proletarian class had already lost its revolutionary spirit. It merely led to a new form of repression. Similarly, Marcuse is of the opinion that the socialist countries are following the western model of development of industrialization and consumerism. So far as individual freedom is concerned, Marcuse views that it is restricted in socialist countries as is evidenced by a socialization of privacy and politicization of ethics in which individual conscience has been repressed and supplemented by the authority of a coterie of the top party leaders. According to Marcuse both capitalism and communism are equally destructive of human personality. Man under all social system continually faces defeats and frustration in his search for happiness. But Marcuse would place the blame less on individuals or institution, whether capitalistic or socialistic, and more on the forms of consciousness which have taken the modern man under their grip. Under such circumstances, he believes, Marxist doctrine of class conflict has become inapplicable to modern society. Modern industrial society i.e. technological rationality has made man victim of specific ideology and surprisingly the irony of it is that he is unaware of it completely.

## IV

Marcuse asserts that man has now obtained so much of control over nature, and productivity has been expanding to such an extent, that it is no longer necessary for the individual to keep on working most of the time of his life. In the age of affluence in which we are living, Marcuse argues, production should be treated



as a by-product of labour and the performance principle should be replaced by the pleasure principle. The time has come, he pleads, to build up a non-repressive civilization, a civilization in which individual can give expression to his creative and competitive impulses and built up a higher form of culture based on harmony between man and nature. Man is however not allowed to do so, Marcuse claims, by the capitalistic desire for profit which gives expression to what he calls, "surplus repression". It means a kind of repression in excess of what is necessary for the preservation of civilization. According Marcuse, "surplus repression" can be eliminated by eliminating scarcity and liberating man from the clutches of the 'performance principle' which has so far dominated human thought. It is the capitalist who makes man to work more than necessary and keeps his personality under complete suppression. Thus Marcuse considers the repression of the modern industrial state as "repressive tolerance". He argues that "true tolerance" would call for extension of intolerance towards prevailing politics, attitude and opinion which is suppressed.<sup>15</sup> In fact Marcuse believes that the tolerance of the existing society is a tolerance of domination and repression. As the people are indoctrinated, they are subjected to the repressive tolerance of the system. He further believes that once surplus repression elements of modern industrial society are removed, human instincts would be transformed their destructive features so that basic repression would be unnecessary.

## V

The views of Marcuse noted above indicate that liberal society is based on domination. What is claimed to tolerance is, in fact, oppression. The human nature of those inhabiting in industrial society is moulded by it into conformity, the inhabitants cannot voice their true needs as they do not know them. Marcuse's main concern was to liberate man from unpleasant situation and lead him to a free life. For this purpose, "domination" and "repression" the two evils of industrial civilization need to be removed through instinctual revolution he asserts. He suggests that development of "true" as opposed to "false" consciousness is the only means of



freedom. More importantly, in order to establish non-repressive civilization it requires to abolish surplus repression. He suggests the elimination of labour in favour of pleasure as a solution to the problem. Free satisfaction of man's instinctual needs involves the free pursuit of pleasure. But as the scarcity is the fact of nature, civilization should be based on some basic repression of human instinct so that human resources could be moulded for the purpose of socially useful activities. Therefore, preservation of human race and civilization involves the imperative need to work and maintain restraints and self discipline.

In case of Marcuse's strategy for the socialist transitions, it may be noted that he is in favour of violent means and encourages leftist movements.<sup>16</sup> He spearheaded the student's movement in the sixties aiming at transforming the attitude, instincts and values of institutions and human being. He believes that students movements is a harbinger of revolutionary pursuit which is necessary for the purpose of (i) inducing revolutionary attitude among the younger generation; (ii) imparting training for future leadership. Although Marcuse talks of revolution, he has not formulated strategy indicating any definite means. However, Marcuse advocates for local and regional political action against specific demands in stead of a large, centralized and co-ordinated movement. But surprisingly he is not in favour of setting up of a revolutionary centralized mass party for revolution as he finds all political parties fall victim to the general and totalitarian political corruption. Therefore, he advocates for an entirely overt organization diffused concentrated in small groups a kind of political guerilla force around local activities.

Marcuse believes with concern that the working class which consists of highly salaried employees and technicians occupying a decisive position in the material processes of production has lost its revolutionary urges and it cannot provide any solid mass base for a revolution. A large part of its majority, is to a great extent, integrated into the well-functioning and cohesive system of a highly developed technically advanced industrial society. Therefore, seizure of power in old model under the leadership of a centralized and authoritative party and setting up of a new government is



seemed to be unrealistic. The alternative to this state of affairs, he asserts, "is socialism, neither of the Stalinist brand nor the post-Stalinist brand but the 'liberarian socialism' which has always been the integral concept of socialism."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, unlike Marx, Marcuse advocates for superstructural change in stead of basic change of the society on the plea that social progress does not depend on material basis. In view of this, he suggests for a kind of cultural revolution in which a radical alternation in men's consciousness (not class consciousness) to be taken place without any basic change in the ownership of the means of production or the existing relation of production.<sup>18</sup> Thus it appears that Marcuse "utopianism" is a repudiation of marxism, materialism in favour of a system, what he calls, "Technological Rationality".

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5. *Ibid*, p. 421.
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13. R.K. Silk ; *Socialism Since Marx*, p. 320.
14. See Marcuse ; *Soviet Marxism : A critical Analysis* (London 1958).
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## **MARXISM AFTER MARX**

**S.N.Rath**

Marxism after the death of Karl Marx has to be considered and understood in the context of developments in capitalism and the vital changes which occurred in the twentieth century in the international and domestic situations of nations.

Following Hobson's study of Imperialism Lenin traced the post-Marxian development of capitalism through the stages of monopoly capitalism, finance capitalism to imperialism which Lenin characterised as the highest stage of capitalism. In this phase of imperialism, capitalism, according to Lenin, becomes a world chain of which capitalism under Tsarist Russia was the weakest link. This weakest link has to be hit hard and broken in order to bring about a revolutionary change of the whole capitalist order and replace the same by the socialist order of society as envisioned by Karl Marx. On the basis of this analysis Lenin justified the Bolshevik Russian Revolution of 1917 by the Russian proletariat led by the vanguard Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).

The post-Lenin development of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the Soviet Communist Party led by Stalin raised several issues of theory and practice which attracted the attention of European scholars who gave a fresh look at Marxism in order to reinterpret the fundamental tenets of Marxism in a new light.

Under the Soviet experiment carried out by Stalin in the post Bolshevik Revolution decades the Marxian conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat gradually culminated into the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Russian Communist Party under the authoritarian dictatorship of Stalin. The outcome was the emergence of the totalitarian state capitalism. Serious Marxist scholars outside Soviet Russia considered this to be a development never conceived and foreseen by Karl Marx.



The collapse of the pre- 1914 world order and systematic Marxism of the Second International, the philosophy of the Communist International and the development of the totalitarian state under the monopoly of the Soviet Communist Party called for radical thinking in respect to the central Marxist concepts. These were historical materialism and class struggle ; the dictatorship of the proletariat; the nature of proletarian democracy; the role of the state in the transformation of capitalist order of society into the socialist order of society and so forth.

Austro-Marxists such as Otto Bauer and Hilferding had pointed out how finance capital of the Banks and Cartels needed a strong state to protect the interests of finance capitalists in controlling sources of raw materials as well as external markets. However, they did not give attention to other important issues thrown up by the post First World War developments.

George Lukacs, in his *History and class Consciousness*, was unable to accept the doctrine and reality of Soviet model of Marxism and attempted a reexploration of the essence of Marxism . Influenced by the Hegelian philosophy of the dialectical process of evolution, Lukacs attached much importance to history and the role of class consciousness of the proletariat in the transformation of human history. Lukacs was critical of 'economism' or mere trade union mentality of the working class. According to him, the "ascribed" class consciousness of the proletariat can alone make the proletariat conscious of its historical and revolutionary role in changing the complex capitalist system into the socialist order of relations of the post-revolutionary period. The shared interests of the proletariat with the social whole can be achieved not under Communist Party monopoly of political and economic power but under a form of proletarian democracy which Lukacs would characterise as "Council Communism".

Like Lukacs, Karl Korsch in *his Marxism and Philosophy* (originally published in German in 1923) emphasised the importance of Marx's philosophy of dialectical materialism in grasping the significance of Marx's theory of social revolution. According to Korsch, Marxian economic analysis of the working of the capitalist



system was an elaboration of his philosophy of dialectical materialism. This dialectical philosophy should be applied to determine on Marxian lines, the relationship between the State and proletarian revolution. Such dialectical analysis would strengthen worker's consciousness that would find political expression in the formation of worker's councils of economic and political management of the affairs of the society.

In contrast to the fatalistic Marxism of the Second International, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a leading Italian Marxist, reaffirmed the subjective, creative side of the Marxist thought. Drawing on his experience of the Factory Council Movement of Turin in the post-First World War years, Gramsci regarded the Factory Councils as the appropriate agencies of proletarian revolution. According to him proletarian revolution could not be identified with political parties and trade unions which arose out of bourgeois democracy and political liberty. The revolutionary process must start in the factories where the workers did not enjoy either freedom or democracy and had to undergo oppression and exploitation. The Factory Councils, composed of delegates of the workers in the various factories, would take up the task of changing the attitude of the mass of workers from an attitude of dependence to one of leadership. The real nature of the proletarian revolution would be revealed through the Factory Councils which would educate the workers in administrative and technical skills and which by rejuvenating their unions would lay the basis for a new workers' state.

Subsequently, while writing in the prison his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1936), Gramsci enunciated two concepts, namely, 'organic intellectuals' and 'hegemony,' which were germane to his reformulation of Marxism. These two concepts are important in understanding Gramsci's analysis of the superstructure and its relevance to the organisation of the social revolution of Marx's conception.

Intellectual activity, according to Gramsci, cannot be properly conceived in terms of the narrow, traditional distinction between mental and manual labour. "All men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals", wrote Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks*. Each man, outside his professional activity, creates



some form of intellectual activity ; as a philosopher, an artist, a man of taste , he participates in a particular conception of the world , has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it , that is, to bring new modes of thought.

Each social class "creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in economic but also in the social and political fields" (*Prison Notebooks* ). According to Gramsci, intellectuals of a society may be 'traditional' or 'organic'. Traditional intellectuals were those who survived the demise of the mode of production that gave them birth; they were linked to historically moribund classes.

'Organic intellectuals' articulate the collective consciousness of their class in the political, social and economic sphere. In relation to the proletariat the task of the organic intellectuals was to draw out and make coherent the aspirations and potentialities already inherent in working class activity. The party, which identifies itself with the revolutionary consciousness and role of the proletariat in the transformation of the capitalist order to socialist order, is the organisation of the intellectuals most organically related to the working class. So organised, the organic intellectuals constitute the germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total. In expounding the role of the organic intellectuals, the centre of interest of Gramsci was less on the economic substructure of society than on the means by which the proletariat could attain to an understanding of the socio-economic relations of capitalist society and on the political means necessary to overthrow it . Like Marx, Gramsci advocated a return to the original Marxian dialectical unity between materialism and idealism a unity of theory and practice. Gramsci emphasised the importance of 'will ' in political activity in changing the capitalist system of relations to socialist socio-economic relations. In short, Gramsci tended to analyse the base through the superstructure, and was well aware of the very mediated sense in which historical materialism should be interpreted.

After having explained the meaning and role of organic intellectuals in the process of social revolution Gramsci introduced



the concept of 'hegemony' to assert one of the main functions of the intellectuals. In addition to ensuring the economic organisation and political power of their class the organic intellectuals would preserve the hegemony of their class over the society as a whole by means of a justifying ideology of which they were the agents.

Every progressive class as a torch-bearer of revolution has to create ideological hegemony in order to win over other subordinate groups and maintain social solidarity. Gramsci noted the failure of the Second International as stemming from the inability of the working class movement to resist the penetration of bourgeois ideological hegemony. The bourgeois maintained a cultural hegemony by representing their own interests as those of society as a whole. In this way the bourgeois managed to perpetuate its domination through consent rather than coercion. Those Marxists who believed in economic determinism and inevitability of revolution were erroneous in their belief. The working class intellectuals must create an ideology, which would spread its hegemony over the whole society. In order to establish its own hegemony the working class must do more than struggle for its narrow sectarian interests : it must be able to present itself as the guarantor of the interests of society as a whole. The need for a counter - hegemony can be fulfilled by the active participation of the intellectuals of the working class. Even a party committed to the ideological and cultural struggle of the proletariat would be able to provide a counter-hegemony in the industrialised countries of the West . Such a party would work as an educational institution offering a counter-culture whose aim was to gain an ascendancy in most aspects of civil society before the attempt was made to capture state power. Control of state power without hegemony in civil society was an insecure basis for a socialist programme. The party and factory Councils both must train the workers in the assumption of control over their own lives and thus anticipate post-revolutionary situation.

### **Critical theory of Marxism :**

The rise of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s added a new dimension for critical study of Marxism. The members of this school had no experience of actual politics of the working class movements. But as members of the Institute of Social Research (founded in



Frankfurt in 1923) they tended to discard the reformism of the Social Democrats as well as the increasingly ossified doctrines of Moscow-oriented Communism. They devoted themselves to a critical re-examination of the Marxist philosophy and tenets.

Horkheimer, the Director of the Institute in 1930 and Adorno, a leading member of the Frankfurt School, attempted to integrate into Marxian analysis Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. According to them, the technical mentality of monopoly capitalism ignored the subjective and psychological dimensions of human life. They conceived their work as a contribution to the clarification of the opposing forces at work in society and thereby raising the (class) consciousness of the exploited and providing them a weapon in their struggle for emancipation. The real function of the theoretician was not only to present the societal contradictions of the concrete historical situation, but to point to the force within it to stimulate change. The modalities of the new society are to found in the course of its transformation.

The critical analysis of the Frankfurt School was continued in the writings of Herbert Marcuse. In *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse pointed out how the radical component of Hegel's dialectical philosophy found a restatement in *Philosophy and Economic Manuscripts* of Marx whose philosophical concepts were social and economic categories. Hegel's emphasis on the category of labour was altered to that of the alienated worker. Labour under capitalism was understood as that activity which creates surplus value in commodity production, or which produces capital. Since other kinds of activities were not regarded as 'productive labour', free and universal development is denied to the individual who labours. In *Eros and Civilisation* Marcuse discussed the psychological obstacles to liberation. The repression of instincts of the individual was produced by tensions of a class society. With advancement of technology society might be able to do away with surplus repression by abolishing alienated labour. The critical insight of Marcuse finds stronger expression in his *One-dimensional Man*. In this work Marcuse records that in the industrial society later capitalist development has so altered the structure and function of the two basic classes, the capitalists and the proletariat, that "they no longer appear to be agent of historical transformation." Both have become interested in the preservation of



the institutional status quo as a result of which "the very idea of qualitative change recedes before the realistic notions of non-explosive evolution."

Jurgen Habermas is the most impressive of the 'second generation' of the Frankfurt School. The context in which he looked at Marxism was that of late capitalism. In his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (London, 1972) Habermas attempted a basic reformulation of historical materialism. He accepted like Marx that labour was a fundamental category of human activity ; but he also noted implicit in Marx a distinction between labour and interaction. The first was purposive rational action on an external world ; the second involved communication between subjects. These two were related dimensions of social evolution. In the sphere of labour as human activity, as an important force of production, the criterion of rationality was extension of technical control. In the sphere of cultural development rationality involved the extension of forms of communication free from distortion and domination. Technological society could be rational if its policies were subjected to public control. In the sphere of interaction through communication, discussion and opinion had to be free from manipulation and domination. All members of society must have the chance to participate in the discussion by which communicative competence of each member can be enhanced. This was the goal of social emancipation.

In his *Legitimation Crisis* (London, 1976) Habermas examined the chances of emancipation at all levels. Habermas identified four types of crises in contemporary society ; an economic crisis ; a crisis of rationality ; a crisis of legitimacy ; and a crisis of motivation. An economic crisis in late capitalism is not inevitable due to the steps taken by the state to avert it. But state intervention entails a crisis of rationality because of contradictory demands on state intervention. Since state intervention meant opening up the question of control and choice, it creates a crisis of legitimacy. Growing public intervention lessens the scope of private sphere and thereby creates a crisis of motivation. All these demand a new set of norms which would involve communicative competence and the appropriate socio-economic organisation.



One important school of Marxism in the later half of the twentieth century was the structuralist interpretation of Marxism, the major figure of which was Louis Althusser, a French philosopher who elaborated his ideas in the 1960s. According to Althusser Marx's early and later writings contained two distinct *problematics*. The early Hegelian writings of the young Marx concentrated on the concepts of alienation and species-being, and thus displayed an ideological problematic of the subject. But later writings of Marx, the three volumes of *Capital*, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* etc. contained a problematic that allowed the foundation of science. This foundation can be found in the structure of relations of production and political and ideological social relations. In his *Reading Capital* (jointly authored by Althusser and Balibar) Althusser elaborated the importance of these structures in the process of history thus :

The structure of relations of production determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never more than the occupants of these places, in so far as they are the 'supports' of these functions. The true 'subjects' are herefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearances the 'obviousness' of the 'given' of naive anthropology, 'concrete individuals' 'real man' - but the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true subjects are those definers and distributors : the relations of production [and political and ideological social relations]. But since these are relations, they cannot be thought within the category of subject.

The structuralist interpretation of Althusser fails to bring out the Marxian analysis of contradictions between productive forces and productive relations which takes the form of class struggle under different modes of production, and in particular, a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeois under the capitalist system. This emphasizes the Marxian view of the human element in shaping the change of human history. Gramsci and other Marxists had the merit of emphasising the importance of class consciousness and the role of hegemony of the working class that would have an active role in the conscious transformation of twentieth century capitalism.



### **Mao and the cultural revolution :**

Mao who had been influenced by Marxism differed from classical Marxism in many respects. In view of the insignificant number of the Chinese proletariat the revolution was mainly of the peasantry led by the ideological Communist Party against the dominance of the feudal landlords and war lords. But the revolution did not end with the seizure of power by the Chinese Communist Party. There was the need of another revolution, which would bring about a change in the attitude and mindset of the party-men and the people in moving towards a communist order of society. This, according to Mao, provided the justification for a Cultural Revolution, which during 1966-68 involved the Red Guards, the Red Army and the masses.

Mao observed that after seizure of political power most party-men displayed like the capitalists an attitude of enjoying the material fruits of power. In Mao's words they became the "capitalist-roaders". Unless this mentality is changed there could be no progress on the road to a communist society free from exploitation and oppression. This change called for a cultural revolution which attached importance to human and oral factors. According to Mao a mere transformation of the economic substructure could not bring about the social revolution of the communist vision. A change in the moral and ideological superstructure was equally important. This in turn called for a revolutionary change in moral and political attitude. This is what was intended by the Red Guards who moved among the masses to make them aware of the collective interest and involve them in the new movement of the Cultural Revolution. The strong emphasis on ideology in the Cultural Revolution implied that the struggle was a superstructural one and the attack on the 'capitalist-roaders' referred more to ideas and relations among the people than to any specific mode of production. In his criticism of Stalin's book, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Mao very precisely put his views on the importance of a second phase of revolution,



namely, the Cultural Revolution, in the following words :

From the beginning to the end of this book Stalin does not say a word about the superstructure. He gives no thought to man, he sees things but not the people.... The Soviets are concerned only with the relations of production, they do not pay attention to the superstructure, they do not pay attention to politics, they do not pay attention to the role of the people. Without Communist movement it is impossible to reach Communism.

It may be observed here that like Gramsci and other European Marxists of the inter war years Mao also emphasizes that a mere change in the mode and relations of production would not automatically bring about a change in the superstructure, unless a cultural revolution is launched to spread among all classes of people a new socialist outlook and consciousness.

### **Marxism in the post-colonial era :**

It is natural to believe that the end of colonialism and imperialism in the post Second World War years has brought about a change in the attitude of capitalism and as such has rendered the Marxian mode of analysis irrelevant. But several serious scholars of post-war development of capitalism and its attitude and behaviour towards liberated countries of the developing nations have noted a trend towards recolonisation.

Geoffrey Kay in his *Development and Underdevelopment : A Marxian Analysis* (1975) has noted that the colonial mindset and practice has not yet changed and the division of the world to developed and underdeveloped categories is still viewed as a natural phenomenon.

The capitalist countries of the West which are characterised by the development of multinational corporations have the same old mentality of exploiting the natural resources of the Third World countries and appropriating the surplus of the periphery for the gain of the metropolis. This is a process of recolonisation very well summed up by Chakravarti Raghvan (1991) in the following words :

By granting foreign capital internationally assured privileges in investment, intellectual property and services, its monopoly of knowledge and technology is sought to be perpetuated... In economic terms, it will take the Third World back 'to its colonial days and stifle development.



M. A. Oommen has very ably summed up the means and methods by which the developed capitalist countries are successfully carrying out the process of recolonisation in the Third World countries.

First, under threats of trade retaliation and punitive measures India and other Third World countries are compelled to protect the interests of foreign capital and foreign nationals.

Second, by invoking intellectual property of global private interests the TNCs have now near monopoly of bio-technology in the world.

Third, the G-7 countries are carrying out ideological and institutional manipulations under US leadership.

Fourth, the United States is able to manipulate the control and direction of the world's trading, monetary and financial system through WTO, IMF, and the World Bank.

Fifth, through allurements of loans the Third World countries are pulled into Debt Traps.

In two of his recent studies of contemporary global capitalism Samar Amin has very forcefully argued for a strategy of decolonisation to be adopted and implemented by the Third World countries. These two notable works are *Delinking : Towards a Polycentric World* (1990); and *Capitalism in an Age of Globalisation* (1997). In order to counter the process of recolonisation by a process of decolonisation Samar Amin would suggest polycentric regionalisation, breaking the debt traps and fighting out the five monopolies carried out by contemporary developed capitalist countries.

Through development of high technology the industrially developed countries of the West have entered upon the phase of global capitalism under which large multinational corporations are able to wield predominant economic power and control by means of five types of monopolies. These are technology monopoly; financial control of worldwide financial markets; monopolistic access to the planet's natural resources; monopoly of media and communication channels; and monopolies of weapons of mass destruction. Under the United States leadership these highly industrially developed systems are trying to push their ideological hegemony in the guise of democracy, human rights, and a market economy of free competition. Underlying the ideology is the same old capitalist mentality of subordinating the economies of the developing nations to their own capitalist system.



of production and free market so that their system of exploitation of underdeveloped nations can be perpetuated. The process of decolonisation involves the task of fighting the aforesaid monopolies. (Oommen, 1998).

To conclude, the Marxist approach to the analysis of contemporary global capitalism has still a relevance to expose its monopolistic and exploitative attitude and intentions and to make developing nations aware of the need of an alternative strategy of development for stalling the recent process towards recolonisation.

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## **ON INSTITUTIONALIZATION : A RECONSIDERATION OF THE ASSAM MOVEMENT (1983-1985)**

**Samir Kumar Das**

### **I**

This paper seeks to understand the last phase of the Assam movement –more particularly, the period between 1983 and 1985, with the help of the category of institutionalization. In simple terms, the movement as I shall argue here, was seemingly passing through a phase of institutionalization during the period under review. This understanding goes against two of the major assumptions that are otherwise central to the historiography of the Assam movement : First, most of the researches - if not all, tend to look upon the movement as a single continuous process that culminated in the signature of the Accord in 1985 and led to the ascension of the Asom Gana Parishad in the same year. Such a view is not only facile but oversimplistic in the sense that it does not take note of the rise and fall or the ebbs and tides of the movement. One way of understanding these complexities is to accept 1983 as the watershed in so far as it marked the beginning of a new phase of institutionalization.

Secondly, an adequate understanding of this phase draws our attention to some aspects of the movement which are not only unfamiliar to us but are sometimes difficult to accept for some of us on the ground that it does not readily fit into our fondly-cherished image of it. The image of the movement that most of us carefully nurture in the depth of our minds is albeit one (i) of an inexhaustible bundle of energy (ii) unleashed by a closely-knit, unborken and may we say, unbreakable community of people against the illegally settled 'foreigners' and (iii) one that brought to the fore an overwhelmingly social (and therefore not - political) issue of the loss of language and culture of the 'Assamese' people without showing any intention of being caught in the whirlpool of 'nasty' party politics and factious



conflicts. The persistence of this image even after what in strict cost-benefit terms, would appear to be a debacle may in a large measure, be attributed to the necessity on the part of those involved in the movement and their sympathizers, of revamping their collective self and investing it with an element of pride and boastfulness. Ironical yet true, the greater the debacle, the more was the necessity felt. The phase of institutionalization forces us to reconsider some of these dominantly-held views. Since this is an analysis of a particular phase of the movement, it leaves little – or may be no scope whatsoever, to be extended to other phases of the movement. Hence, it should not be confused as a history of the entire Assam movement. Its objective is limited : It warns us against the recent attempts at characterizations of the movement in blanket terms. The movement on the contrary, was too complex to be characterized in such blanket terms.

## II

The concept of institutionalization has a chequered career in the history of social and political theory. We do not feel it necessary to delve into its intricacies at this point. Instead, we propose to concentrate on Rex D. Hopper's 'frame of reference' to institutionalization of social and political movements :

...the out-group must finally be able to legalize or *organize* their power ; they must become the in-group of the structure of political power.<sup>1</sup>

Hopper's frame thus sensitizes us to two of the underlying processes of institutionalization : One, to legalization or organization of power of the movement and two, the process whereby the movement out-group *becomes* "the in- group of the structure of political power". Hence, institutionalization first of all, refers to an attempt on the part of the movement at organizing its power and giving it a concrete shape of a political organization - either a political party or pressure group. An unwieldy mass of enraged people thereby grows into a more or less disciplined political organization. That is how, a "revolutionary sect" according to Hopper, transforms itself into a "political denomination". It must however be kept in mind that these changes (though they may be extraneously induced) take place necessarily



within the contours of the movement itself. But, institutionalization also refers to certain changes that tend to transcend its contours so much so that the movement out-group "becomes" an ingroup of the structure of political power. That in fact shows how the movement gets gradually assimilated into the prevalent structure of political power. The second process in simple terms, implies an effacement of the cultural contours of the movement out-group. Both these processes operating from within as well as from without are central to our understanding of the institutionalization of the Assam movement during 1984-85.

Organization of power passes through four relatively distinguishable stages. In a given situation, it might not be possible to clearly identify them. Sometimes, one overlaps into the other. But nonetheless, it is conceptually convenient to make such distinctions. First, there is the stage of exhaustion. As the movement takes its toll people are made subject to hardships, misery and torture; signs of fatigue can clearly be traced not only in the ordinary participants but also in those who are at the helm of affairs. Fatigue is likely to be coupled with impatience. It partly grows out of an eagerness to secure quick results. But in part, impatience is born out of a common tendency to exaggerate the strength of the movement. To the extent strength of the movement is exaggerated, to that extent it buckles down to the pressures coming from the other side of the fence and pessimism sets in. Exhaustion and pessimism always go hand in hand. All Asam Students' Union (AASU) sometimes was obsessed with the problem of stemming the fast-growing disenchantment of the people with the movement. Tens of letters were published in the editorial columns of *The Assam Tribune* and *Dainik Asom* as early as in 1979 (just after the movement was taking off) hoping that the movement would not be continued for far too long at the expense of students' studies and precious academic years. That the Assamese mood was beating a retreat is evident from a survey conducted by *Prantik*, a pioneering Assamese fortnightly on 1 July, 1984<sup>2</sup>. It collected a sample of 2,000 readers not only from inside Assam but also from outside (e.g. Arunachal Pradesh). It came out with the interesting finding that 81.75 percent of the sample thought that non-violent measures ought to be resorted to, to create pressure on the government. While 3.35



percent believed that negotiated settlement with the government was the only appropriate solution, 2.9 percent felt that violent protest was the only alternative left open to the Assamese people. On the other hand, 53.8 percent decided to stay away in case elections were held in 1985 while 29.3 percent had already fixed up their minds to participate in them. 10.8 percent of the sample in question were found to be still indecisive in their responses.

Exhaustion and impatience also nourish the tendency to blame others and to find fault with them. Invectives were hurled against AASU and other political forces on the firing line like PLP (Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad) and AJD (Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal). For instance, it was alleged that ASSU was like the allegorical Abhimanyu that knew only to enter into the trappings of politics but did not know how to steer clear of the mess and be a proud winner.<sup>3</sup> The Jorhat Convention of January 1984 (to which we will make a reference only later) put ASSU to task on the ground of shirking its responsibility of fighting the elections in 1983 and solving the problem by way of coming to power.

### III

As a sequel to it, the movement passes into a stage of disintegration of its own ranks<sup>4</sup>. All-Assam Gana Sengram Parishad was formed with much fanfare in 1979 and it could not sustain itself in any effective manner beyond 1983. Here, we may restrict ourselves to an analysis of three very episodic cases of disintegration since the first quarter of 1983.

It seems that ASSU-AAGSP combine was continuously riddled by differences and factional conflicts. Even an all-embracing popular and nearly consensual movement like this could not cement the divergent factions. Let alone the conflicting sections of the 'Assamese' people. The tension between the Assamese Varna-Hindus and the Muslims came to a sorry pass in the wake of fratricidal communal riots of February-March 1983. This has cast a shadow on the internal politics of AASU. Nurul Hussain, one of AASU's Vice-President along with many of his colleagues in the Executive Committee (who perhaps not without reason were all Muslims) were expelled from the Union on



the ground that they had engaged in anti-organizational activities. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President of AASU once charged "the Muslim members of AASU" of secretly convening a meeting on 12 April, 1983 in violation of the AASU-Constitution without the knowledge of All-Guwahati Students' Union leave alone, the Executive Committee of AASU.<sup>5</sup> The meeting, according to Nurul Hussain, was however full in conformity with Clause (e) of Art. 6 of the said Constitution that set forth the provision of holding meetings with students as well as the general public to find out suitable means and pull in hitherto untapped resources in order to put the goals and objectives of AASU into practice.<sup>6</sup> This secretly convened meeting adopted a 15-point charter of demands "in protest against the torture on the Muslims". When asked why the Muslim students found it imperative to call a separate meeting, Nekibur Zaman, ex-President of AASU (Kamrup district) advanced three main reasons – each relating to the cause of the Muslims: (a) The Muslims of Assam feel hurt at the way they had to lose their lives and properties in course of the movement so much so that it has now become impossible for the Muslim representatives to penetrate into the Muslim society and make any impression on it. Nurul Hussain's father for instance, is denied entry into mosque to offer his namaz. He is forced to offer it outside its premises. (b) Since the inception of the movement, the Executive Committee has, for some queer reasons, not been convened at all. It has for all practical purposes, become defunct. This is solely due to the fact that a "lobby" dominated by Zoiinath Sarma and a few of his associates has taken over AASU and exercises control over its crucial policies and decisions. The purpose of the "lobby" is in consonance with "a pro-Hindu mentality". (Zoiinath Sarma however denies the charge and throws up the challenge saying that he is prepared to resign from AASU if ever his connexion with RSS is proven.<sup>7</sup> (c) AASU does not seem judiciously to act on the complaints of insult meted out to the Muslims. Mr. Habad Ali of Mirza for instance, was taken out of a running bus and his head was shaven. Muslims are killed "on the very ground that they are Muslims". AASU has not done anything to alleviate the fears and anxieties deeply embedded in the minds of the Muslims.<sup>8</sup>



Similarly, in the early part of 1985, a number of representatives (drawn from as many as 51 colleges of Assam) tendered their resignation from ASSU and formed Sadou-Asom Nirbachit Chhatra Santha and they organized a Convention in Guwahati on 12 March, 1985. The Convention accused ASSU executives of embezzlement of funds. Dudu Datta was elected as the President of the 11-member Executive Committee<sup>9</sup>. It submitted a memorandum to Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, expressing its disagreement with the offer of allowing the "foreigners" coming between 1961-71 to stay without however giving them voting rights. It further adds that the people migrating to Assam during 1955-71 would number around 22,000 and to allow them to stay in Assam means creation of another "Dandakaranya" in Assam. The memorandum also reiterates the demand for 70 percent reservation of seats and jobs for the autochthones.<sup>10</sup> It appears that Sadou-Asom Nirbachit Chhatra Santha did not make major departure from ASSU's original charter of demands submitted in 1980. As AASU began to moderate its demands and soften its stand, the Santha chose to traverse a tough line reminiscent of the early days of the movement.

Apart from the dissension within the ASSU ranks, two critical issues seemed to have constantly kept PLP apart from other constituents of AAGSP including AJD and ASSU. They were : First, PLP insisted on broadening the movement across the narrow confines of Assam so as to encompass various ethnic groups of the north-east facing the same threat of losing their identity and culture in the wake of 'illegal' immigration of the 'Bangladeshis'. PLP was formed in 1977 and it upholds the ideology of "Scientific Nationalism" that vows to free Assam from "the colonisation of Delhi" that according to it, only replaces "the colonialism of Great Britain". The Central Executive Committee of PLP during the deliberations of 28-9 July, 1979 adopted an important resolution that called upon ASSU to make a platform in common with other like-minded forces of the north-east. With this aim in mind and as a first step, AAGSP was formed at Kanoi College Dibrugarh on 27 August, 1979. PLP organized a conference of the regional parties of the north-east on 14-5 November, 1983 and established an Action Committee comprising 15 leading regional parties. On 5 April, 1984, PLP and AJD succeeded in coming



together and forming a common platform viz. Anchalik Gana Morcha. It by PLP's own admission, made little 'satisfactory progress'. True to its commitment to pan-north-eastern fraternal unity, PLP organized a number of meets with the regional parties in different parts of the north-east throughout the year.<sup>11</sup> The third meet that was held in Imphal during 19-20 October, 1984 became (as we will see later) a bone of contention between it on the one hand and ASSU on the other. All these consecutive meets and parleys are organized with the obvious intention of establishing a common political platform that cuts across the differences that otherwise rid the states of the region in question.

This was incompatible with AJD's quest for drawing in more strength from local quarters instead of broadening its support base. For AJD, nothing succeeds like success and the movement that has already started in Assam has first of all, to prove successful in order to be a source of inspiration in the region. A broadening of the movement, according to it, at that stage, might have thrown it out of gear. We have already referred to the controversial third meet in Imphal. While AAGSP on 8 April, 1984 resolved to show "indifference"<sup>12</sup> ASSU on 13 August in the same year felt that establishing common platform beyond the confines of Assam would only "dissipate the strength of the people".<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, AJD's strategy of contesting the elections and beating the Congress-led government at the Centre in its own electoral game ("catching the elephant with the help of the elephant" or *Hati-dhara khel*) stood in sharp contrast to PLP's assertion that there cannot be any valid election worth its name if there is still a single 'foreigner' left who is yet to be struck off from the electoral rolls of Assam. PLP in fact went a step further and suspected a deal clandestinely executed between ASSU and the Centre and according to which ASSU was liable to accept the 'foreigners' migrating to Assam during 1961-71. Pabindra Deka of PLP for instance, angrily asks : "What could be greater concession than this from the point of view of the movement ?"<sup>14</sup> Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhirgu Kumar Phukan however in a joint statement, discarded it as a malicious "disinformation campaign."<sup>15</sup>



## IV

Be that as it may, these differences obviously were cutting into the very muscle of the movement. AAGSP found it necessary to resolve them at the earliest. It is surprising to note that AAGSP's realization that these differences need to be resolved at this juncture was simultaneous with its realization to resolve them through discussions and deliberations, through negotiations and arbitrations. This led to a considerable subsidence of conflicts and marked the third stage of accommodation of various groups otherwise threatening to disintegrate the ranks of the movement.

It seems that the politics of ASSU-AAGSP combine has turned a full circle. The way it handled the conflicts during 1979-83 had scant regard for discussions and deliberations. In the early years of the movement, the Assamese middle class in general and the combine in particular took resort to force, coercion and such other intimidatory methods, to resolve these differences and conflicts.<sup>16</sup> The "command politics" of the early years gave way to a more democratized form of accommodative politics during the period of institutionalization.

The first National Convention was organized in Jorhat in January, 1984 to take stock of the changed situation. Dr. Binay Kumar Tamuli moved a resolution that seriously felt the need for establishing a common political platform (albeit within Assam) through constitutional means that would aim at securing political power by winning elections and entrusting such power with some "honest, sincere and efficient people who would love Assam" and "enjoy the confidence of the people at large." The resolution was seconded by Padum Baruah of *Ganga-Chilani Pakhi* fame. It was passed by the Convention (Resolution-VIII) in a revised form that asked AASU to create an atmosphere conducive to the purpose of 'positively organizing' the Assamese people and with this end in view to continue hectic parleys with other regional parties of Assam.<sup>17</sup> The political wing of Jatiya Karmasuchi Pranayan Sala in its workshop held at Birinchi Kumar Baruah auditorium within the premises of Gauhati University during 9-12 April, 1984 resolved to reconstitute India into a federal unit to put an end to 'colonial and feudal oppression' and it also called for dismantling the distance of 'foreign capitalists' and converting their



estates into public properties. A federal government will only have the tasks of defence, foreign travels, foreign trade, currency, communications and economic coordination at its disposal. India will have full control over her mineral, soil and forest resources. Significantly, it reiterates Resolution-VII of First National Convention in order to make Assam a "healthy, strong and successful component" of a "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic."<sup>18</sup>

ASSU recognizes the importance of negotiated settlement of disputes right from the beginning of 1984. In February, 1984 for instance, after a review of the proceedings of the First National Convention, ASSU argues that the diverse sections of populace living in diverse parts of the state have gathered diverse experiences and "the Convention has given a beautiful opportunity to exchange them without any hesitation". Since the Union wanted to be enriched by them, the Executive Committee decided to assume the role of a "silent spectator" during the days of the Convention.

The Second Jorhat Convention was held during 21-23 November, 1984 and it was attended by 864 delegates. As *Dainik Asom* observes, the question of forming a regional party has incessantly occupied the delegates' attention.<sup>19</sup> Of the three resolutions passed by the Convention, the third is specially relevant to our purpose. It openly denigrated PLP and accused it of turning an Assamese dream into a nightmare for stubbornly refusing to act in unison with other constituents of ASGSP. On the other hand, it noted the role of AJD as "encouraging". However, the Convention did not want to alienate PLP either. It gave AASU a fresh lease of time to arrange for the formation of an umbrella-like regional organization by the end of December, 1984.<sup>20</sup> The dilemma that AAGSP was facing all through was : It was not all too happy with PLP; nor could it get away with it. That this was so bears testimony to the accent on what we called, negotiated settlement of disputes towards the closing years of the movement.

In pursuance of the authorizations of two consecutive National Conventions, AASU went on with its responsibility of levelling off the differences within the ranks of AAGSP. While doing all this, AASU did not fail to mention three of its self-imposed qualifications : (i) it would not join any of the existing political parties; (ii) it would not



lose its "apolitical" character (as perceived by itself) as "Independent Students' body" and (iii) it vowed to resolve the problem relating to "the foreigners" in a political way.<sup>21</sup> A series of meetings was held between September, 1984 and February, 1985 to resolve the differences and unify the forces under a single political platform and AASU in fine came up with a carefully drafted resolution that sought to keep the activities of the party to be initially confined to the geographic limits of Assam but gradually engulf the entire north-eastern region by way of entering into meaningful dialogues with the like-minded forces.<sup>22</sup> The revised draft was more of a verbal jugglery to appease the contending parties.

The Second National Convention also constituted an 11-member Preparatory Committee with Brindaban Goswami and Dineswar Tacha as its conveners. Its objective was to pave the way for unification. It finally acknowledged its failure on 13 March, 1985 and gave up the pursuit. It also lamented that the repeated parleys and talks could not make any headway in the expected direction.<sup>23</sup> All of them ended up in fiasco.

In sum, we may say that the need for establishing a common political platform was two-fold; First, such a platform would level off the differences within the ranks of AAGSP and help in preparing the movement's leadership to successfully contest the elections. As time passed on the emphasis shifted from the first to the second. Thus, the nature of the much-needed common political platform was clearly understandable - it was meant above all to be a political party capable of winning elections and its appearance marked the final stage in the organization of power.

A political party needs to be formed at all costs. It might work with a minimum programme inspite of having sharp differences amongst its various partners. Three of the compelling reasons advanced by the two consecutively held National Conventions and one Jatiya Karmasuchi Pranayan Sala in support of the establishment of the so-called common political platform in order to win elections may be noted here : (a) In the given political set-up of the country nothing can be achieved without capturing political power (obviously through elections). The entire strategy was likened to the process of "catching elephants with the help of elephants". It aimed at defeating the Congress



party that ruled the Centre in the parliamentary game. It is however to be noted that utmost caution should be taken to outplay the opponent in the game that it is adept with. One should not employ "lame or weak elephants" to catch the elephants. But surprisingly the propriety of the strategy to fight elections was never doubted. (b) The decision to boycott elections might repeat the same communal fall-outs of early 1983 that accompanied a similar decision taken at that time. (c) A common political platform would keep the Assamese electorate united and intact. Negatively, in the absence of a common political platform, the objectives of the movement might be frustrated as none of AAGSP's constituents might be able to come to power in isolation.

The Assam Accord of 15 August, 1985 signed between the movement's leadership and the Union government was somewhat premature as the issue of establishing a common political platform could not be settled. A Third National Convention was held during 12-14 October, 1985, this time in Golaghat in a final bid to establish one. In view of the general consensus arrived at the Convention, both the AJD and PLP finally agreed to merge with the newly formed party despite their reservations. Thus, a new regional party namely, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came into being on 14 October, 1985. It embraced in its fold organizations most of which were constituents of AAGSP which along with AASU had led the movement. A 7-member Committee under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was formed by the Convention to give final shape to the Constitution of the newly formed party. The Constitution Sub-Committee as appointed by the Golaghat Convention held a series of meetings and submitted the report containing several amendments to the draft. The Central Executive Committee in its meeting held on 2-3 September, 1986 in Guwahati accepted the recommendations.

It is always interesting to look into the nature of the relationship between the movement and the search for a common political platform subsequently coupled with the decision to contest elections. No conflict was envisaged between them. Dr. Binay Kumar Tamuli who moved the resolution that highlighted the need for establishing a common political platform, for instance, was firm in asserting that the movement was complementary to the efforts at the electoral transfer of power.<sup>24</sup> Both Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhirgu Kumar Phukan, President



and General Secretary of ASSU respectively, in their joint statements repeatedly pointed out that there was no question of withdrawing the movement. In one of such joint statements related to the process as late as on 7 January, 1985, they affirmed that "the movement will continue unabated".<sup>25</sup> But nevertheless, the decision to contest elections was "conditional": On the one hand, Bhirgu Kumar Phukan asks the AASU branches to be organizationally prepared to help in finalizing electoral rolls. He directs the students (from class IX to the post-graduate level) to abstain from classes during 19-28 November, 1984 and to closely monitor the entire process.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, AASU argues that it retains the right to oppose the elections in case electoral rolls are not revised.<sup>27</sup> It is now safe to conclude that by 1984, the movement was wholly subordinate to the objective of winning elections. This stands in sharp contrast of boycotting elections to carry on the movement in 1983. As such, the character of the movement in 1984-85 was bound to change. A perceptive comparison of the state of the movement during 1979-83 with the one of 1984-85 leads us to an appreciation of the following points of difference: First, a movement of longer time-span such as this for understable reasons cannot retain its continuity all through. But what surprises us is that the breaks and discontinuities, ruptures and fissures become both prominent and frequent during 1984-85 so much so that either AASU has to come forward with a clarification that the movement is on or it has to pledge to "re-start" the movement on several occasions thereby acknowledging that it has broken off and needs to be "re-started". Secondly, the programmes of the movement were intended to reduce participation of large number of masses. The *gana satyagraha* of November, 1979 marked the high point of popular participation in the movement. Compared to it, the decision to offer *satyagraha* by 4-member groups on 13 and 14 February, 1984 in a disciplined manner was a much sanitized and tame affair. The changeover from the one to the other was part of a greater design to contain the masses and keep them bound by the electoral rules of sobriety. Thirdly, the emphasis of the movement was then laid on self-assessment, introspection and organization. The AASU-AAGSP combine seems to be obsessed with the concern for setting its own house rather than anything else. The movement was inwardly directed to cleanse it of the unwanted



elements. Lalit Rajkhowa, one of the eminent leaders of the movement for instance, conducted a state-wide tour to take stock of the situation in June, 1984.<sup>28</sup> A cycle procession was undertaken during 23-28 July, 1984 to mobilize public opinion in favour of the changed status of the movement. On 23 July, the leaders went on fasting in front of Indian Parliament.<sup>29</sup> These measures were not in any way obstructive to the day-to-day functioning of either the government or the industrial establishments - both private and public. They do not go hand in hand with the obstructive activities undertaken during the early years of the movement - say, stopping the flow of oil or preventing the government servants from entering their offices etc.

Next, we may refer to the process whereby a movement out-group "becomes" an in-group of the structure of political power. As the out-group makes its entry, its distance from the in-group already entrenched in the very structure of political power gets increasingly bridged. This can be seen if we point to some of the important milestones that drew them closer to each other and ultimately led to an effacement of their boundaries. Complete merger it must however be kept in mind, is more a myth than a reality.

The decision to go to the polls was perhaps the most important of all the milestones under consideration here for it involves the observance of elaborately set-out rules and regulations which not only have a sobering impact of any movement let alone, the Assam movement but which also spell out the uniform guidelines to move to the heart of political power.<sup>30</sup> AAGSP's decision in this regard was not an easy affair. It took an unusually prolonged series of discussions and deliberations, arbitrations and negotiations. But nevertheless the decision could be taken at last and it was facilitated by a combination of three important considerations : (a) deep-seated realization that the election is the very means through which the objectives of the movement could be accomplished; (b) an eagerness to give the government "a chance" to prove its wisdom by way of thoroughly revising the electoral rolls;<sup>31</sup> (c) a hidden fear that any attempt on behalf of the government to "forcibly" conduct the elections (inspite of the opposition) would be disastrous as it might repeat the same communal fall-outs of February-March, 1983. The decision to contest elections in fact brings



about a change in the very character of the movement so much so that a movement hitherto remaining recalcitrant, obstinate and stubborn putting a formidable challenge to the state gets "domesticated".

The bridging of the distance can be seen from the self-restraint observed by the contending parties in the closing years of the movement. The degree of state terror is clearly on the wane presumably because it has already served its purpose by quelling the popular emotions of 1979-83. This is not to say that the state terror came to a stop. Quite the contrary. Its intensity and extent were only declining. And such a gesture was favourably reciprocated by ASSU circles. Ostracization, social boycott and many other forms of social punishment were very powerful instruments for enforcing the disciplines within the ranks of the movement and also for punishing the adversaries (like the Leftists, the government employees, the security forces and their families etc.). But since early 1984, it becomes clear that such punishments hitherto scrupulously enforced are gradually withdrawn so much so that by mid-1984, AASU declares that no social punishment is in force any more.<sup>32</sup> These measures to our mind went a long way in mitigating mutual hostilities and bridging their gulf.

## V

The entry of the out-group also involves a considerable de-ethnicization of its demands. Let us see how. Any movement presupposes an opposition and so does the Assam movement. It harps on an authentic opposition between "the citizens and the foreigners". The movement's leadership was keen not only on upholding it but on preventing it from sliding into any of the adjacent but necessarily distinct oppositions like, those between natives and outsiders (*bahiragats*), Assamese and non-Assamese ; Hindu and Muslims, tribals and non-tribals so on and so forth.

But nevertheless, the opposition between natives and outsiders was particularly strong . Till 1980, the term "foreigners" was either not used at all or was used simultaneously with the term "outsiders". It was only in 1980 that Asom Sahitya Sabha came forward and changed *bahiragat* into *bideshis* (foreigners). It was a significant



move. For while outsiders may be bonafide Indian citizens foreigners are not. As T.K. Oommen argues.

The foreigners are alien citizens who migrate in search of better economic opportunities to another country... the outsiders are fellow citizens who are perceived as intruders by locals from other administrative units or cultural regions within the nation-state.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the opposition between citizens and foreigners is necessarily different from that between natives and outsiders. They do not necessarily correspond to each other. The opposition between natives and outsiders is likely to ethnically divide the Indian citizens and has no legal basis whatsoever (barring a few cases) while that between citizens and foreigners is well-recognized in legal discourse -both national and international.

Yet, the opposition between natives and outsiders cannot easily be wished away. It was one of those oppositions that was deeply embedded in the cultural scenario of Assam. The Assamese term for outsiders (*Bongal*) has been synonymous with the Bengalis - "The Bangali Hindus" in particular whether foreigners or not for it is from them that the Assamese perceive a potent threat to their language and culture. As Homen Borgohain argues :

The native people do not seem to apprehend any cultural danger from the Muslim outsiders... the problem to most of the Assamese outsiders on any count is the problem of Bengali - Hindu. Because all the Assamese believe that their cultural danger can only come from the Bengali-Hindus.<sup>34</sup>

It is not necessary at this point to look into the complex processes implicit in the construction of the *other* in Assamese perceptions. But suffice it to say here that as a result of the amendment proposed by Asom Sahitya Sabha, the supreme literary organization of Assam that the new danger of re-classifying the outsiders mainly the Bengalis, as the foreigners receded.<sup>35</sup> But anyway, that such an amendment was proposed at such a crucial point of time is a standing proof of the movement's deeply felt need for self-justification and at least on paper is a remarkable step towards its de-ethnicization.



The other side of de-ethnicization was compromise. That such compromises had to be made is evident from a critical comparison of the Memorandum that ASSU submitted to the Prime Minister on 2 February, 1980 and the final text of the Assam Accord signed on 15 August, 1985.<sup>36</sup> For one thing, the Memorandum insists on 1951 to be the cut-off year for the detection of the foreigners. The first two proposals of it are :

1. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951 should be made up-to-date by including the additions to the number of each family since the time of the compilation of the Register.
2. The comparison of the NRC with the successive electoral rolls since 1951 may also be helpful in making it up-to-date.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, the final text of the Assam Accord of 1985 does not contain any reference to 1951. It divides the immigrants into three categories : Citizens, permanent residents and non-citizens (or foreigners). That is to say, citizens are those who have migrated to Assam by the end of 1965. It implies, as Paragraph 5 of the Accord argues, that 1 January, 1966 shall be the cut-off date for the detection of foreigners and deleting their names from electoral rolls. Immigrants coming to Assam on or after 25 March, 1971 will be treated as "foreigners". Their names will be struck out from electoral rolls and they will be deported following the due process of law. The permanent residents constitute a unique category. As Chattopadhyay writes :

Thus by signing this Accord, the Union government has accepted the proposition that in this country, apart from aliens there may be a group of people who are citizens without voting rights.<sup>38</sup>

In simple terms, permanent residents are those who have come to Assam between 1st January, 1966 and 24 March, 1971. They will at first be deprived of their voting rights but after a lapse of ten years, will be re-enfranchized and regularized as citizens of India. According to Chattopadhyay, their number will vary from 0.2 million to 1 million.<sup>39</sup> Thus although the Accord formally declares 1966 to be the cut-off year, for all practical purposes 1971 remained the cut-off year



for purposes of detection, deletion and deportation. That is precisely what the government wanted it to be.<sup>40</sup>

It seems that the Assam Accord was more close to the government's offer in April, 1980 to make 1967 as the cut-off year than the AASU-Memorandum of February, 1980. On 1st April, 1980, four leaders of AASU and an interpreter met Governor L.P. Singh in Shillong on urgent summons. There Sri Singh suggested that 1967 be accepted as a compromise date for identifying and deporting the foreigners. This, he felt, would also cover the flow of refugees who came to undivided Assam from East Pakistan following the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war. According to Mahanta and Phukan, Singh's proposal was not only to identify foreigners since 1967 but the actual deportation was to begin from 1971.<sup>41</sup> ASSU disagreed and *The Assam Tribune* correspondent reported that Mahanta and Phukan put forward an alternative date, a climbdown from their previous insistence on 1951. After the talks, *The Assam Tribune* quoted Mahanta as saying that his group had put forward 1961 as the cut-off year for identifying foreign nationals. The Gana Sangram Parishad, he reportedly said, had also agreed to change.<sup>42</sup>

The AASU leaders immediately turned down the government's offer. On 2 April, 1980, Mahanta and Phukan issued a joint statement that laid down the reasons why the offer was unacceptable to them :

The latest proposal of the Governor of identifying the foreigners on the basis of the 1967 electoral rolls and 1971 as the base year for deportation is in effect the same as the initial offer. It meant that the foreigners migrating before 1971 will continue to stay in Assam. . . . Hence, the Governor's proposal cannot be acceptable to the people of Assam.<sup>43</sup>

Phukan's letter to the Governor written on 5 April, 1980 reiterates the same position, albeit in greater details :

The population of Assam in 1961 (Census Report) was 1,08,37,329 registering a phenomenal growth rate of 34.90%. For the period 1961-71, all India average growth rate was 24.80% which would have been valid for Assam also had there been no influx of foreigners. At this growth rate the population of Assam in 1971 would have stood at 1,35,24,987. But the 1971 - Census reported the population



to be 1,46,25,152 indicating an excess population of 11,00,065. This increase is definitely attributable to the inflow of foreigners as in the previous 1951-61 decade. Against this figure the number of foreigners detected in the same period, according to the State Government, was only about 2,40,000 out of which about 5,000 could not be deported. Therefore, a huge number of foreigners (more than 7 lakhs) remain undected.<sup>44</sup>

At hindsight, the question that seems to be most disturbing of all is : Why did AASU accept offer in 1985 that it had refused strongly to accept in 1980 ? Indeed, the available sources do not indicate any convincing reason. One answer could be that with the progress of the movement and as the state terror was unleashed by leaps and bounds, AASU seemed to believe that it was quite impossible to continue the movement with the same volume and intensity. People were getting thoroughly disillusioned over the years and differences were threatening rapidly to disintegrate the ranks of AAGSP. In its midst, AASU-AAGSP combine was terribly in search of an offer -whatever it be, to take the movement to a face-saving end. But, a more cynical view elicited during interviews holds that AASU's refusal in April, 1980 was understandable for most of its leaders were then underaged as they did not fulfil the minimum age requirements that would enable one to be a legislator or for that matter, a minister. They had to wait for a few years and hence to keep the movement alive for it was certain that the movement would launch them into corridors of power in Dispur. While evidences in favour of the first argument are of circumstantial nature, the second view is conjectural and apparently without substance. But whatever be the reason, the compromise of AASU to our mind *ipso facto* amounts to complete turn around and AASU acknowledged it in part when it proclaimed that the Accord was signed in the spirit of a "give and take".

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3. Bishnuram Baishya, 'Chharrasanthar Babe Gabhir Paryabekshanar Samay' (in Assamese), *Dainik Asom*, 9 January, 1985.
4. Cf. In 1956, the states were reorganized along linguistic lines, an action preceded in 1953 by the formation of Andhra Pradesh out of the Telugu-speaking country of Madras state. With the loss of its Telugu and Malayalam areas, Madras became one with Tamil Nad. The Dravida Kazhaghham aleged that people of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Mysore were indifferent to Dravidistan. Dakshina Pradesh thus transformed into Dravida Nad or Tamil Nadu. Robert C. Hardgrave jr., *Essays in Political Sociology of South India* (New Delhi : Usha, 1979) Chap. 1.
5. 'Sadou-Asom Chhatra Santhat Bhargon Ne ?' (in Assamese) Gautam Sarma interviews Nurul Hussain, Nekibur Zaman : Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, *Ranghar*, 3(4), July, 1983, pp. 3-8, 52-3.
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21. 'Jatiya Abhiwartin', *Dainik Asom*, 21 november, 1984.
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25. *Dainik Asom*, 7 February, 1984.
26. *Ibid.*, 8 January, 1984.
27. *Ibid.*, 20 November, 1984.
28. *Ibid.*, 20 December , 1984.
29. *Ibid.*, 14 June, 1984.



- 30 Cf. EVR Ramaswamy Naicker who gave a call for secession on the eve of Independence, rallied even less than eight years after, his black-shirted followers to the support of a newly elected Congress ministry under Kamaraj Nadar and declared opposition to DMK, an opponent of DK. It was pleaded by him that the Congress was increasingly "Tamilized". In the general Elections of 1962, the DMK emerged as the strongest opposition even to challenge Congress Party in Madras ; it captured 50 Legislative Assembly seats and seven in Lok Sabha. See, Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (New Delhi : Orient Longman, 1970), pp.219-21.
31. *Dainik Asom*, 8 July, 1984.
32. See the joint statement of Bhriagu Kumar Phukan and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta in *Dainik Asom*, 30 November , 1984.
33. T.K.Oommen, *State and Society in India : Studies in Nation-Building* (New Delhi : Sage, 1990), p. 67.
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35. See, Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *History of the Assamese Movement* (Calcutta: Minerva, 1990), pp. 109-11. The same point is argued by Amalendu Guha. See, Amalendu Guha, 'Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist : Asom's Anti-Foreigners' Upsurge ; 1979-80', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XV (41-3), October, 1980.
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41. Amiya Kumar Das, *Assam's Agony : A Socio-Economic and Political Analysis* (New Delhi : Lancers, 1982), p. 84.
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## **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

**N. L. Dutta**

As in many other countries of the world, in India also women are under represented in political institutions of the Country. They remained insignificant even after fifty years' of country's independence although they constitute 48.10 percent of Indian total population. The dream of the Fathers of the Constitution to build up a just socio-economic and political order was pushed to the background due to the lack of positive policy initiatives and reluctance on the part of the stronger sex in sharing power with women. Besides, women's participation in politics has been restricted by various traditional factors like caste, religion, feudalistic attitude and family status.

Empowerment of women, therefore is one of the basic objectives of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of Indian Constitution. The empowerment of women in its simplest form means manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. It is both a process and the result of a process. In India, it is for the first time in its political history that one third of the total seats in the local self government institutions have been reserved for women. The legislation has several important implications regarding empowerment of women. The Act, thus ushers in a silent revolution for women to improve their status.

The present paper focuses on some significant developments that led to empowerment of women, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and women, the operational variations and constraints in the process of empowerment.

### **(I)**

In 1952, the United Nations adopted a resolution aimed at granting and protecting women's right all over the world. The United Nations declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1975-85 as the Women's Development Decade. Thereafter, United Nations World Conferences for Women from time to time emphasized the need for increasing women's participation in the formulation of plan for integrated rural development, introduction of legislation to encourage new and more positive images of women's participation in the family, labour market, social, public life and in decision making process.<sup>2</sup> The fourth United Nations World Conference on Women



was concluded in September, 1995 at Beijing finalising an action plan to be concretised and implemented in each country. The theme of the conference was equality, peace and development.<sup>3</sup>

In India too, women's decade for development was observed during 1975-85. Women started mobilising and activating for getting redressal of their centuries old problems of gender discrimination. All these culminated the appointment of a committee on the status of women in India in 1977, by the Government of India. The committee stated that any progress for women's welfare and development must have an integrated approach. The committee also suggested for the establishment of statutory women panchayat with a view to increase political participation of women. The Sixth Plan (1980-85) for the first time emphasised the need for the opening-up of opportunities of independent employment and income for women because the low status of women in large segments of Indian society cannot be raised without the economic emancipation of women. The plan document further stated that improvements in the socio-economic status of women would depend to a large extent on the social change in the value system, attitudes and social structures prevailing in the country<sup>4</sup>. The National Plan of Action for Women was formulated outlining various administrative, legislative and other measures to promote women's development. Later, a National Committee with the Prime Minister as its head was set up. In 1992, a national commission for women was constituted. As a cumulative effect, a National Perspective Plan for women for 1988-2000 was formulated.

Thus, the question of women's participation in politics in general and rural politics in particular assumed importance following the formulation of the National Perspective Plan for Women. It was argued that political power and access to decision-making and authority are important pre-requisites for women's equality in the nation building process. However, it took more than four years for the first step to be taken in this direction. In 1992, 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Bill was introduced in the Parliament and was adopted in the same year. In 1993 the Act came into operation.

## (II)

In so far as the empowerment of women is concerned, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act provides :

- (1) "Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved



for SCs and STs in every panchayat shall be reserved for women belonging to SCs or STs".

(2) "Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to SCs and STs) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat".

(3) One-third of the total number of offices of Chairperson in the Panchayats at all levels is also required to be reserved for women including women from SCs and STs.

The other important provisions of the Act are (a) The Gram Sabha still be the life line of panchayat, (b) Panchayats are considered as political institutions in a decentralized structure, (c) a uniform three tier structure of panchayats at village, intermediate and district levels (d) direct election to members of panchayats at all levels, (e) a tenure of five years to all panchayats and holding of election within a period of six months in case of earlier dissolution (f) adequate funds to the panchayats (g) separate election commission and also (h) a separate finance commission<sup>5</sup>.

It has also been provided that the state legislatures should bring in necessary amendment to their panchayat Acts within a period of maximum one year from the commencement of the Act so as to conform to the provisions contained in the Act. Thus, the states should complete the process of enacting fresh legislation on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1994. The task has been achieved fairly well.

Totally there are 2,17,300 village panchayats existing in 25 states and 7 Union Territories covering 96 percent of 5.79 hundred thousand villages and nearly the whole of the rural population<sup>6</sup>.

### (III)

Although the legislative formalities have been completed in all the states, yet at the operational level, there is large variations. Orissa was the first state to implement 33 percent reservation of seats for women in Panchayats. The state has now about 25,000 women's representatives in 5,263 Gaon Panchayats and 314 Panchayat Samitis. Orissa government has however, made it statutorily mandatory that wherever the Chairperson is male, the Vice-Chairperson's post would be reserved for a woman<sup>8</sup> which goes against the spirit of the Act. West Bengal was second in this direction. In 1993 panchayat



election in West Bengal, 24,799 women were elected to the different tiers. According to an estimate, about 36 percent of the total members in the panchayat bodies in West Bengal are women<sup>9</sup>. In Karnataka, there are about 44 percent women representatives (about 36,000) in the panchayat Raj institutions and quite a significant number of them (about, 2,000) are holding decision-making positions at all the three tiers.<sup>10</sup> In Kerala, it has been found that a large number of women had fought non-reserved constituencies against men and won 34 percent. However, quite contrary to this in Punjab, it was found that while the SC and OBC's were well represented (37.77%), women were not. Though the participation of women was 60.38 percent, the gram panchayats were male dominated (89.62%).<sup>11</sup>

Some states like Rajasthan, Haryana and Orissa have debarred candidates for having more than two children from contesting in the election with a view to controlling population growth. In reality, given the low marriage age of girls, they would have crossed the two child norms by the time they contest for election. Moreover, some other states like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh & Haryana have the Provisions of Naya Panchayats to settle the disputes at all the three levels although there is no provision for Naya Panchayats in the new act.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, although the process has started for empowerment of women, it suffers from various socio-economic constraints. As reported, it was difficult for women members to attend meetings of panchayats because of their heavy domestic commitments.<sup>13</sup> Another study revealed that a factor that had throughout hampered their functioning as elected member was their traditional status in society Vis-a-vis men.<sup>14</sup> It has been pointed that women in villages of Orissa suffer from a lower self image due to social subjugations, lack of economic independence and formal education. They are also afraid of being isolated in the family where traditional notions about the role of women still persists.<sup>15</sup> The illiteracy rate of rural women is also more than urban women due to poverty, illiteracy of parents, social taboos and non-availability of educational institutions. About 70 percent of rural women are illiterate as per 1991 Census. Women have also no control over economic resources and they lack decision making power. They cannot contest election on their own free will without the consent and cooperations of male sponsor. Since fighting



an election is a costly affair, it is difficult to get the consent of a male sponsor to invest in favour of a women contestant. Many elected women members in rural panchayats reported that they have to look to their male members even for bus fare to attend meetings of the panchayats. Sometime male members accompanied their female members not only for security but also to see how effectively they pleaded their cases in the meeting. They even attended panchayat meetings on their behalf.<sup>16</sup> The political parties too never bother to give party tickets to women. The only criterion of political parties for selection of candidate is the election merit. For this reason, many genuine and active candidates have been deprived and brought inactive women relatives of male politicians to the forefront. Some proxy women are forced into politics by their family even against their own wish. Added to these, elections have become internal wars due to the strong nexus between the polity and the criminals. Without money, muscle power, caste base or criminal records it is difficult to get party tickets. In this situation, the plight of women is quite pathetic. The traditional attitude of male members towards women are still not changing even in urban situation. In Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation, when mayor's post was reserved for women in 1996, the post of deputy mayor was also given to women because no male corporate was willing to work as a deputy under a women mayor.<sup>17</sup>

In the above circumstances, whether the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment would be able to bring a significant change regarding empowerment of women is still an open question. It seems that women have to cross many hurdles before becoming effective partners in the decision-making process.

To conclude, the process of empowerment encompasses several mutually reinforcing components, such as, knowledge and awareness of one's self, society, needs of people, legal rights etc. Beside, the other important component is access to and control over economic resources. Moreover, culture of gender equality is all the more essential. In fact, these are the prerequisites in the process of political empowerment of women. Otherwise, mere rules, regulations and procedures would not facilitate empowerment of women. Since in the existing set-up, women have not succeeded to get their due share in political and economic fields, there is urgent necessity for reservation of polity for women.



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## **PROBLEMS OF PLANNING IN THE NORTH-EAST INDIA**

**Siddhartha Kr. Lahiri**

To locate the problems of planning in the North-eastern fringe of Indian demography is to understand the laws of social dynamics in a semi-feudal semi-colonial enclave society during the era of maximum growth of finance capital. This can be done only by situating the matter in the backdrop of the historical development of capitalism.

### **A demistifying bid of the 'planning' jargon :**

"A plan is essentially a political programme that requires a sequence of clear cut political decisions."<sup>1</sup>

In our discussion we'll accept this definition put forward by Gunnar Myrdal as the asterisk mark, the beginning point which encapsulates in itself the historical experiences of many political upheavals, war and peace, ups and downs of human civilization. A political programme should represent the social agenda which deals with the development of natural resources with the singular objective of maximising human resources development. But, in a class divided society, a political programme represents the social agenda which deals with maximum development of natural resources and development of human resources to that optimum level which is compatible with maximising the hegemony of the ruling class.

In spite of many debatable issues such as leadership, bureaucracy, means and paths of struggle etc. from different corners about the great October Revolution, there is perfect unanimity among most of the scholars that the event which shook the very backbone of capitalism during the first quarter of this century, ushered a different type of value system, hitherto unseen in the entire history of mankind. And the fast rate of changes which took place in different societies as a consequence of the revolutionary changes, forced the giant states to



introduce "Planning" directed towards pacifying the rapid growth of revolutionary nature of working class consolidation. Monopoly capitalism, true to its character never practised laissez-faire but the growing internal crisis forced to loosen its political control over the erstwhile colonies or accept the demands of higher level of local autonomy specially in the matters of sharing booty with the indigenous agents in the bureaucracy. Different societies were at different levels of socio-economic development. Common catchwords, irrespective of the stages of development were introduced by the ruling nexus in the global scale. 'Planning' is one such term.

Again, to quote Gunnar Myrdal,

Economic planning in the western countries has been a *consequence* of industrialisation and the social, economic, and institutional changes related to the emergence of a more mature industrial society. In the underdeveloped countries of South Asia, planning is, instead, applied *before* or at a very early stage of industrialization. In South Asia, furthermore, planning in principle and in approach, is thought to *precede* organized acts of control and interferences with markets. Planning cannot be left to grow pragmatically, as in the Western countries, by a 'natural' process. Planning in South Asia is thus not the result of development, but is employed to foster development. It is envisaged as a pre-condition -indeed, is motivated by the assumption that spontaneous development cannot be expected. The under developed countries in the region are thus compelled to undertake what in the light of Western history appears as a short-cut.<sup>2</sup>

Clarity in a sequence of political decisions represents the effective assertiveness in the part of the ruling class to establish its hegemony over other classes and results into certain changes in the basic structural framework of the socio-economic fabric of the society which may not be preordained but is bound to happen. In turn, we may say, if over a considerable length of time, a society does not witness any fundamental structural change either in the qualitative or quantitative sense, there is overall stagnation in the economic growth, low level of class struggle in the political plane, lack of consciousness in the intellectual milieu, widespread morbidity in the cultural creativity and definitely represents either absence of planning or its ineffectiveness.



### **Attitude of colonisation and planning :**

That merely the merits of a planning scheme in terms of its resource based approach does not qualify it as an obvious choice for the planners if it can not maximise the ruling class hegemony is substantiated by the British planning in Assam. David Scott, the agent to the Governor General (1825-31) on the north east frontier of Bengal suggested encouragement in the production of mulberry and muga silk taking into consideration the available local resources and skills. "Although the cultivation of mulberry silk had shrunk to an insignificant level by 1830, Scott was optimistic about its revival. For in his times the mulberry silk of Bengal already enjoyed a good market in Europe. But also convincing for him was the fact that sericulture had a widely diffused base in Assam. Because the inhabitants of Assam are already so universally acquainted with the analogous operation of winding the silk called 'Moogah', he observed, "there is every reason to think that they would soon become competent to prepare the ordinary rawsilk in a manner superior to what can be expected from the cotton-clothed native of Bengal".<sup>3</sup> But this plan was rejected and the tea plantation scheme forwarded by Francis Jenkins, (1834-66) was favoured by the British Government even before the feasibility of tea culture in Assam was firmly established. In the debate over 'Silk or Tea', the later got favourable response because it included the idea of introducing foreign enterprise, capital and skill in agriculture which could and in fact did accentuate colonization motif more ruthlessly.

### **Capitalistic planning of societal restructuring - the historical experiences :**

In changing the society after its own image, the classical western capitalism was very brutal. It refused to recognise in earlier societies any type of planning and declared unilaterally its aims and objectives as the final essence of 'civilization' and anything other than that mere 'barbarism' or simply dead and that is why liable to be weeded out. Whether it was in Britain or America, the modus operandi of its assertive hegemonistic plays had very close similarities and common contents. Many important works are available to know the chain of



events which shook those formative years. The famous American novelist John Steinbeck gave a very moving account in his classic novel 'The Grapes of Wrath'. We can have the feeling of that monstrous onslaught in the following passage, a piece from the story of a dispossessed community, driven from its bit of land in Oklahoma by the implacable march of industrial progress.

The moving, questing people were migrants now. Those families which had lived on a little piece of land, who had lived and died on forty acres, had eaten or starved on the produce of forty acres, had now the whole West to rove in. And they scampered about, looking for work ; and the highways were streams of people, and the ditch banks were lines of people. Behind them more were coming. The great highways streamed with moving people. There in the Middle - and South-West had lived a simple agrarian folk who had not changed with industry, who had not farmed with machines or known the power and danger of machines in private hands. They had not grown up in the paradoxes of industry. Their senses were still sharp to the ridiculousness of the industrial life. And then suddenly the machines pushed them out and they swarmed on the highways. The movement changed them ; the highways, the camps along the road, the fear of hunger and the hunger itself, changed them. The children without dinner changed them, the endless moving changed them. They were migrants.<sup>4</sup>

What was conveyed by John Steinbeck through his lucid narratives is substantiated by cold statistics by John Bellamy Foster,

The percentage of English agricultural land that was *enclosed* by stone walls and hedges - so as to be more systematically monopolized by rural landlords - rose from 47 percent in 1600 to 71 percent by 1700. A further 6 million acres were enclosed in the eighteenth century. By the end of the seventeenth century, 40 percent of the English population had moved out of agricultural employment mostly into industrial pursuits. By the end of the eighteenth century, nearly half the cultivated land in England was owned by 5,000 families, while nearly 25 percent was owned by a mere 400 families.<sup>5</sup>



If there was large scale eviction of the indigenous people from the agricultural land, side by side massive deportation was also going on.

Between 1451 and 1600, some 275,000 African slaves were sent to America and Europe. In the seventeenth century, this number rose to an estimated 1,341,000, largely in response to the demand of the sugar plantation in the Caribbean. It was the eighteenth century, however, that was to be the golden age of slaving, with the forcible exportation of more than 6 million people from Africa to the Americas between 1701 and 1810.<sup>6</sup>

There was a general tendency in the capitalistic mode of production to create enclaves. In the European countries as well as America, first of all industrial enclaves or monoculture based agricultural estate like enclaves came up amidst the ocean of job seeking labourers, forcibly evicted from their agricultural land so that the general wage level could be tied up at the subsistence level.

In the higher stage of development of capitalism when it reached the level of imperialism, rich from experiences, it tried to avoid large scale confrontation with the local inhabitants of the colonies. This was not out of generosity but due to the bitter experience of the past. To substantiate our argument we may look at the fate of the Red Indian Iroquois tribe in the Ohio country.

In the 1650s a French Jesuit priest observed : "No poorhouses are needed among them, because they are neither mendicants nor paupers .... Their kindness, humanity and courtesy not only makes them liberal with what they have, but causes them to possess hardly anything except in common.

The territory dominated by the Iroquois (particularly the Ohio country) was the core of a region coveted by both the French and the British, and the Iroquois confederacy became adept at playing the two colonial powers off against each other - until the French were forced out of North America by the British in 1763. With the disappearance of the French from the North American scene, the fate of the Indians, who could no longer play off one colonial power against another, was sealed. In the Revolutionary War of 1776, the Iroquois were divided, with some nations supporting the British and some the



colonists. In retaliation for Iroquois attacks, General Washington, who later referred to the Indians as "beasts of prey", ordered a campaign of total destruction. On May 31, 1779, he commanded General Sullivan

The expedition that you are appointed to command is to be directed against the hostile tribes of the six nations of Indians ... The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible. It will be essential to ruin their crops now on the ground, and prevent their planting more ....(p)arties should be detached to lay waste all the settlements around, with instructions to do it in the most effectual manner, that the country may not be merely overrun but destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

If that was the scenario in the colonies, even in the heartland of the heaven of capitalism, the condition of the working class was not much better. In 1845, Frederick Engels gave the following first hand account of living conditions in industrial Manchester :

In a rather deep hole, in a curve of the Medlock and surrounded on all four sides by tall factories and high embankments, covered with buildings, stand two groups of about two hundred cottages, built chiefly back to back, in which live about four thousand human beings, most of them Irish. The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement ; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions ; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys ..... The race that lives in these ruinous cottages, behind broken windows, mended with oilskin, sprung doors, and rotten door-posts, or in dark, wet cellars, in measureless filth and stench, in this atmosphere penned in as if with a purpose, this race must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Spectre of 'Planning' in the Northeast India before 'Independence':**

Any value system which can lead the working classes to the lowest stage of humanity, something better cannot be expected from it when its tentacles are spread to the alien soil. It is true, the British policy adopted for the Northeast was much softer than its policies towards its own people. But in order to fulfil its end, the crooked policy of colonisation adopted, created complexities and confusions



of much higher order. Fearing strong reprisals from the local inhabitants and in fact getting its taste at a number of places, it preferred to construct its capitalist heaven encouraging labour migration from the labour surplus neighbouring as well as remote areas and chalk out enclaves in strict segregation from the existing rice economy based society in a highly regimented form.

As narrated by Sir Edward Gait,

There are very few landless labourers in Assam and people who have land naturally prefer the independence and ease of their position as cultivators to the discipline (Read, coercion and torture-Author) and regular labour (Read, forcible extraction of labour to the last drop of life-Author) of the tea gardens. It was thus found necessary, at a very early stage, to seek for tea garden coolies elsewhere, and in 1853 the Assam Company had already begun to import labourers from Bengal. This involved legislation; and from 1863 to 1901 a series of enactments were passed ..... The gardens gave employment in 1923 to 527,000 labourers.<sup>9</sup>

So, a system of production came into existence which was not a product of local needs. Local inhabitants were not taken into confidence for this kind of developments. Rather 'developments' were 'planned' in the form of tumors at different parts of the socio-economic body with the force of guns and the democratic rights were like ointments to reduce inflammation. When capitalism is planted into a feudal (or, more backward setup) soil, the poisonous percolation of it into the body politique gives rise to semi feudalism. The degree of detachment of this tea-enclaves can be judged from the following account, reported in 1919 by N.C. Bardaloi, a lawyer-politician as well as a petty planter himself.

A tea garden is like a small town by itself, with the barracks for labourers and their assistants. Nobody, not even the policemen can enter this kingdom without the manager's permission. A manager may assault a labourer, insult him, and take girl after girl from the lines as his mistress, yet there will be none to dispute his action or authority. It is only at sometime when the manager's cruelty surpasses all bounds that the labourers set upon him and assault him. Had it not been for the fear of Britishers and the guns and pistols they possess, and the fact that at their beck and



call all the constabulary and magistracy of the district would come over there and punish the labourer, rioting would have occurred pretty frequently in these small dominions.<sup>10</sup>

As this description suggests, we do not find respect for democratic values in these types of modern estates. In fact, a concoction of feudal socio-cultural practices and capitalist mode of production were brought together for the growth of capital. Clerical stuffs and the managers were very often appointed from the local elites. This in turn resulted into disrespect for manual work in the society. Education system was not meant for producing efficient workers but for strengthening the bureaucracy. Even technical education was not meant for innovation and entrepreneurship rather its role was confined to 'manage'. Practically, very little change took place in the agricultural sector other than tea even after side by side practice for hundred years which shows clearly neither there was any 'natural motivation' for changing the production relations nor the production system thrust from above had any urge to proliferate the change as a general social phenomenon. Tea garden workers, though ethnically had many different shades but in the new social circumstance were treated as a different caste rather than a class. Of course, this did not happen with other industries like oil, coal, plywood, cement etc.

### **'Planning' after formal independence :**

In the international scenario, after second world war, as because capitalists of the advanced countries concentrated more on producing means of production and thereby earning super profit, it was not a very attractive proposition for them to exercise direct control over labour intensive industries. Besides other reasons, this was a major one which drew less attention from the political scientists that ultimately prompted the erstwhile colonisers to award 'Freedom' or formal independence to their trusted agents, the feudal-bourgeoisie-bureaucratic nexus. Before power transfer, the North Eastern fringe of the subcontinent drew attention from the foreign masters mostly due to tea-oil-timber and from the military point of view, this area represented the natural boundary of the 'Mainland' from Sino-Tibeto-Mongoloid belt from which side the prospect of invasion was very bleak.



After the event of power transfer in 1947, China played a vital role for the ruling class in determining the state policy for the North East. It was mainly the spectre of communism which haunted the ruling class. In the economic sector the basic thread of colonial policy remained intact. However, bureaucratic institutions and their network were enlarged to a considerable extent. 'Agents' of the mainland gave more emphasis on creating 'Subagents' rather than developing independent entrepreneurship. So far as export promotion and productivity was concerned, it was not the productivity of labour rather productivity of dollar/pound (That is, how much commodity 1 dollar or 1 pound could buy) was more important to the planners (because, then only more foreign investment could be attracted and hence more commission.) which was implemented by the devaluation of rupee from time to time, keeping the wage level low, encouraging unemployment (specially the skilled ones) and increasing the number of contingent workers, thereby denying even the basic facilities like medical, maternity leave, housing, life insurance etc. As cheap labour was available in plenty, hardly any modernization was introduced because due to low wage even then the total volume of production could very easily be multiplied considerably according to the demand of international market. In actuality, per capita productivity suffered. So far as human resources development was concerned, the state of the economy was more or less stagnant and that spell continues till today.

Due to stagnation in the industrial growth, with increase in the number of indigenous population as well as migration from the neighbouring areas, pressure on land was growing very fast but there was no way to snap ties from the agriculture. This growing pressure on land, side by side age old tradition of denigrated attitude towards manual labour, gave ample scope to opportunism for spreading its tentacles. Substantial increases in formal education was increasing the 'Middle class aspirations'. Based on, who will enjoy the major bulk of bureaucracy, get sub-agencies, many nationality and ethnicity based political struggles reared their heads. So long as their political agenda addressed issues like preservation of cultural heritage, recognition as a schedule caste or schedule tribe, job reservation, more federalism under constitutional supervision etc. they got



encouragement from the state but whenever certain basic economic questions were raised say the questions like ownership of the natural resources, better condition of living for the working classes and their participation in the political decision making, distribution of social wealth on an egalitarian basis, the state did not hesitate to adopt violent measure of repression.

As observed by Gunnar Myrdal, "India's democracy has proved remarkably stable, but it is largely the stability of stagnation, certainly in regard to the needed reform of the country's rigidly inegalitarian structure."<sup>11</sup>

It is this state sponsored and supported stagnation (one of the reasons for causing abnormal rate of inflation, i. e., 'Stagflation') in the interest of the global finance capital which represents the most primary problem of planning in the Northeast India which is equally true for other regions as well but causes still acute crisis for this area due to its enclave heritage and its continuation.

### **Future of 'Planning' by the 'Planners'**

To conclude,

1. As the Northeast India got itself entangled with the global capitalism long back and according to Samir Amin, "To destroy the conquests of the working classes, to dismantle the systems of social security and employment protection, to return to poverty wages, to bring certain of the peripheral countries back to their outmoded status as providers of raw materials while limiting the opportunities of those who have become relatively industrialized by imposing the status of sub-contractor on their productive systems, and to speed up the squandering of the resources of the planet : such is the program of the currently dominant forces."<sup>12</sup> 'Planning' whatever might be its direction is difficult to take off in this region in the immediate future.

2. The Indian state, a tool of finance capital as well as the indigenous feudal-bourgeoisie-bureaucratic nexus, is very violent in fulfilling its coveted task of maintaining faithful 'Agent' character and pays least respect towards the democratic rights of the citizens of the land. As a result, 'Planning' in the foreseeable future is bound to remain a game of official statistics and bureaucratic brinkmanship.



3. The local appendage of the Indian state and the 'Sub-agents' do not only suffer from miopic vision but they equate economic activity to mere squandering of money. So, for them planning means keeping official records in proper order. Starting from this assumption, they practise lots of acrobatics and are ready to join any side wherever the share is maximum.

It is this kind of jungle rule in which the common toiling masses are not only supposed to search for a breathing space in the enclave society of Northeast India. The fate of 'Planning' is obvious.

#### Notes :

1. Gunner Myrdal, *Asian Drama* (Pelican Books Ltd, England, 1977) p. 115
2. *Ibid.*, p.118
3. Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam-Society, Polity, Economy* (KP Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1991) pp. 146-147.
4. John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Penguin Books Ltd, England, Reprint 1967) p. 259.
5. John Bellamy Foster, *The Vulnerable Planet* (Monthly Review Press, New York, Indian Reprint 1995) p. 51.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
8. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Chicago : Academy Chicago, 1984) pp. 93-94.
9. Sir Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, Assam, fifth edition 1992) pp. 340-341.



10. Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj*  
(People's Publishing House, New Delhi, Reprint  
1988)  
p.106.
11. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama*  
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12. Samir Amin, '*Spectre of Capitalism*'  
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p. 37





## REFORM AND REFORMERS IN SOVIET RUSSIA : FROM LENIN TO GORBACHEV

Archana Upadhyay

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev was not the first Soviet leader who attempted to make a radical change in the functioning of the Soviet Union. There were others before him who made efforts to escape from the legacy of the past. To understand his efforts, it is useful to look back historically at other such "reform" periods in Soviet history. For this purpose, it is best to begin with a brief view of Soviet history since the end of 1917. That history can be divided into six main periods.

- First, there was the period of *War Communism* for about three years, from 1918 to 1920.
- Second, the first reform period of the *New Economic Policy* or NEP for about Seven years, from 1912 to 1928.
- Third, the Stalinist period of about twenty five years, from 1928 to 1953.
- Fourth, after a brief struggle for succession, the second reform period under Nikita Khrushchev, for about nine years, from 1955 to 1964.
- Fifth, the period headed by Leonid Brezhnev, for eighteen years, from 1964 to 1982.
- Sixth, after a brief interregnum headed by Andropov and Chernenko, the third reform period inaugurated by Gorbachev in March 1985. This period lasted till 1991.

One thing may be noted immediately. The two full reform periods of the NEP and Khrushchev lasted from beginning to end for less than ten years. The periods that followed them, headed by Stalin and Brezhnev, lasted much longer, from eighteen to twenty-five years. In effect, the past reform periods did not succeed in making themselves irreversible; in fact they were rather easily reversed and for lengthy periods.



The New Economic Policy or NEP, which was to become a source of inspiration and legitimacy for Gorbachev, is irrevocably linked with the name Lenin. He introduced it in March 1921 and defended it to his last breath. The reason for which NEP was adopted was similar to that of subsequent reform periods, namely, the country was faced with a serious crisis situation. In the case of NEP, the crisis went back to the previous period of *War Communism*. The economic system of *War Communism* was, as Lenin put it, "a direct transition from the old Russian economy to state production and distribution on communist lines".<sup>1</sup> It was a system which provided no outlet for private initiative and profit motive. At the root of the crisis was the refusal of the peasantry to produce a surplus to feed the rest of the population. The peasants went on strike protesting against the confiscation of surplus produced by them. The crisis was so acute that "the revolution", as Lenin put it, "is on the brink of a precipice which all previous revolutions reached and recoiled from".<sup>2</sup> The precipice was marked by famine, drought, large scale banditry, peasant revolt, abandonment of factories and finally the Kronstadt rebellion.<sup>3</sup> The economics of War Communism was not the only cause of the crisis; the country had gone through three years of civil war and foreign intervention.

The NEP was Lenin's strategy for withdrawing from the precipice to safer ground. It began with a reform of agrarian policy. Confiscation was substituted with a tax in kind. The surplus produced by the peasant was subject to a small tax in kind; after paying which he could sell the surplus at a profit and keep the profit for himself. This shift in agrarian policy was the foundation of the NEP. Other innovations like the joint enterprises between the Soviet and foreign businesses, were a later introduction. However, throughout the NEP period, freedom to trade was limited to small-scale producers and the state retained a monopoly of large scale or heavy industry.

NEP may be called "reformist" because that was just the word used by Lenin.<sup>4</sup> It was a tactical retreat to enable the Soviet regime to go on the offensive again at a later time when reform had exhausted its usefulness. Lenin put it this way: "We are retreating, going back, as it were; but we are doing so in order, after first retreating to take a running start and make a bigger leap forward."<sup>5</sup> The NEP period was



foreseen by Lenin as quite long. He pointed out that NEP would give way to a new fully communist society "twenty years earlier or twenty years later".<sup>6</sup> Towards the end of his life, Lenin had come to believe that the basic solution to the economic problem lay in the organization of cooperatives. He lamented that the culture of the people was so low that it would take "a whole historical epoch" for a cooperative economy to take hold in the entire country.<sup>7</sup>

Economically, NEP did serve the immediate purpose for which it had been introduced. It rescued the Soviet regime from the danger of possible disintegration and collapse. The peasantry soon began to produce surpluses of grain and food. The famine was relieved and by 1925, agricultural production had approached the prewar level.

There were two faces to the NEP - the economic and the political. One opened the Soviet regime to temporary, limited economic experiments of a quasi-capitalist nature, the other imposed a full totalitarian monolithic political order by officially driving underground all types and degrees of political opposition. The Tenth Party Congress was a milestone in the development of the power machine. The resolution adopted stated in no uncertain terms that factions, groupings, independent platforms, clusters of opinion or any other manifestations of deliberate aloofness and separatist activity in the party would not be tolerated. The Central Committee was given penalties, up to expulsion from the party. In regard to the members of the Central Committee "their transfer to the status of candidates and even as an extreme measure, their expulsion from the party!"<sup>8</sup>

The Leninist legacy of reform was both complex and double-edged. Its essence was to use capitalists and capitalist methods against capitalism. Lenin's reasoning went as follows: The necessary condition for a full communist economy was the growth of large-scale industry, which in turn was the necessary condition for a growing proletariat. The only way the new, weak Soviet state could get large-scale industry was to get capitalists, Russian and foreign, small and large, to create it for the ultimate benefit of the Soviet state. This was the rationale for inviting foreign capitalism into Soviet Russia in the form of mixed enterprises and economic concessions. Lenin put it



this way :

Get down to business, all of you. You will have capitalists beside you, including foreign capitalists, concessionaires and leaseholders. They will squeeze profits out of you amounting to hundred percent ; they will enrich themselves, operating alongside of you. Let them. Meanwhile, you will learn from them the business of running the economy, and only when you do that will you be able to build up a communist republic.<sup>9</sup>

However, it was made very clear that all this freedom to trade and develop a limited amount of capitalism was temporary and provisional. Lenin actually warned that the day of retribution was coming. In 1922 when conditions were showing signs of improvement he already had planned the post reformist stage :

Permit me to say this to you without exaggeration, because in this respect it is really 'the last and decisive battle', not against international capitalism - against that we shall yet have many 'last and decisive battles' - but against Russian capitalism, against the capitalism that is growing out of the small peasant economy, the capitalism that is fostered by the latter. Here we shall have a fight on our hands in the immediate future, and the date of it cannot be fixed exactly.<sup>10</sup>

It was left to Stalin to decide on the date and method. Stalin owed his victory, at least in part to the political system Lenin had put in place. Lenin legitimated the monolithic party with a monopoly of power in the country, and Stalin took the next step of giving himself a monopoly of power in the party and, through it, in the country.

The NEP, then, was peculiarly two-faced in its economic policy as well as in its political policies. It was to be a period of undetermined duration during which certain freedoms were officially encouraged. It was also a period that looked forward to the day when the decisive battle would be fought against the very same peasants, small scale manufacturers and traders, factory managers, and foreign and domestic entrepreneurs. Without any doubt, the NEP proved that the Soviet system was far from being rigid and inflexible as it was often thought to be. Lenin showed how much it could compromise, twist, retreat and advance without losing its essential character. That is why every subsequent reform period has gone back to the cult of



Lenin against that of Stalin, not so much because Lenin was a permissive communist and Stalin was not but because the conditions that faced Lenin demanded a strategy of flexibility, compromise, concessions, indirection, partial retreat, and a breathing space. Finally, the NEP anticipated future NEP type reforms by generating a fierce intraparty factional struggle.<sup>11</sup> All opposition within the party was brutally put down and by 1929 Stalin had emerged as the supreme leader. His policy of increased collectivization and rapid industrialization put to end the short, happy life of NEP.

Khrushchev will probably always be remembered for two things - his Secret Speech at the Twentieth Congress in 1955 exposing the crimes of the Stalinist epoch, and the liberation from the gulag and its camps of hundreds and thousands of prisoners, many of them former party members.<sup>12</sup> But this does not absolve Khrushchev of the charge of being inconsistent. By extricating the party from the dead hand of Stalin's vengefulness, Khrushchev gave party members a new sense of security from terror. But he also upset the party by attempting to tinker with it. At the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, he pushed through changes in the statutes to provide that top officials could hold their jobs for maximum of fifteen years and middle - ranking officials for only six years. This sort of party reform apparently created a sense of threat in the ranks and later served to turn the whole party against him from top to bottom.<sup>13</sup> Khrushchev left enough of the system intact for Gorbachev to do his bit.

Gorbachev's reforms, from a historical perspective was neither original nor innovative. In economic policy, which was the main arena of the reforms, Gorbachev's changes were remarkably reminiscent of the NEP. In theory much of Gorbachev's program was put forward as early as 1965, soon after Khrushchev's overthrow, by Alexei N. Kosygin, then the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Kosygin proposed the decentralization of management, the simplification of central planning, the improvement of productivity and efficiency, with the increasing use of such economic levers as profits, prices, incentives, bonuses, loans and credits.<sup>14</sup> The essential Gorbachev ideas for the Soviet economy was hardly new or original. What was new was the urgency with which it was being advanced. The reason given by Gorbachev was that the Soviet Union fell back disastrously during the Brezhnev era. Gorbachev himself said : "One cannot help seeing



that since the early 1970s certain difficulties in economic development have begun to make themselves felt."<sup>15</sup>

Needless to say, Gorbachev's reform movement was not like any other reform movement of the past. It went further than anything Lenin or Khrushchev ever thought of proposing. The roots of this sense of urgency can be traced to the developments of the 1970s that caused the rising generation of Soviet leaders to become acutely apprehensive of the future. The rate of economic growth had been continuously falling since the 1970s. In the January of 1987, Gorbachev disclosed: "Over the past three five-year plans the growth rates of national income declined by more than 50 percent".<sup>16</sup> The lesson that the leadership had learnt was that extensive, quantitative exploitation of resources, natural and human would have to be replaced by intensive qualitative development. A realization crept in that the scientific and technological revolution that had taken place in the rest of the world had bypassed the Soviet Union. Soviet Russia had failed to meet the competition of what Gorbachev referred to as "the capitalism of the 1980s, the capitalism of the age of electronics and informatics, computers and robots".<sup>17</sup> It was not simply that the Soviet Union had fallen behind the United States or Western Europe in the new technology; it could not produce even what Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were turning out in mass production and with which they were flooding world markets.

Once the urgency of the task had sunk in it was realized that there was no shortcut to the new era. Gorbachev needed *glasnost* to accelerate the country's technological development. In Gorbachev's political parlance, *glasnost* would trigger *perestroika* (restructuring), a synonym for Lenin's "Socialist Construction". This was as Gorbachev put it "linked with the improvement of social relations, the restructuring of thinking, the cultivation of a new mentality, and the establishment of dynamism as a way of life, as a norm of existence".<sup>18</sup> He pointed out that the economic management system which had taken shape in the thirties and forties had gradually begun to contradict the demands and conditions of economic progress. Its positive potential had been totally exhausted. *Perestroika*, he believed would set new tasks for policies and social thought. As Gorbachev put it "It included putting an end to the ossification of social thought,



in order to give it wider scope and to overcome completely the consequences of that monopoly on theory typical of the period of the personality cult".<sup>19</sup>

The impetus for this extraordinary sense of crisis did not come from below. There is no evidence to suggest that the Soviet leadership of that time was responding to mass unrest. On the contrary, efforts were made by the leadership to stir up the masses and to make them more responsive to change. A major transformation from top to bottom released huge energies hitherto held back by enfeebled leadership and enervated bureaucracy. Once the masses got the idea that they had been released from automatic party tutelage they did not hesitate to take things in their own hands. Sudden increase in the level of political participation entailed a disintegrating effect on politics. In retrospection Gorbachev's reforms proved to be too costly to the Soviet Union.

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## **SOME DIMENSIONS OF THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM**

**Alpana Borgohain Handique**

Feminism is a concern with the social role of women in relation to men in societies past and present, animated by the conviction that women suffer and have suffered injustices because of their gender. It has its roots in Liberalism which can be traced to the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). They argued that women needed legal, economic, civil and political rights to protect themselves from the oppression of patriarchy and become free. Feminism, the baby of liberalism has today turned volte face and questions liberalism itself. This paper is an attempt to draw out some of the dimensions of this critique. It will also try to unveil a new perspective of individual freedom, rights and relations between the genders in the private and public spheres.

### **I**

#### **The social contract, a sexual contract**

A good portion of Liberal thinking believes in a social contract<sup>1</sup> agreed upon or entered into by the individuals to create the state and civil society and to ensure the rights of life, liberty, health and possession. Feminists such as Carole Pateman (1988), has argued that civil society as conceived by liberalism is based on a *fraternal pact* that is a brotherhood of men<sup>2</sup>. In the liberal tradition, it is a fraternity of equal and rational individuals bound together by their search for autonomy and freedom. The society that the contract creates, Pateman asserts, is an association rooted in a previous subordination of women and rests on sexual access.

There are two central claims in this argument. First, the brothers that sign the social contract that creates the liberal society are already heads (patriarchs) of households, that is, they already possess women. One of the principal aims of the contract is to secure that possession. Pateman has rightly renamed the contract as *sexual contract*.



The second claim is that the fraternal pact is by definition, a pact among equals-men and brothers. It denies difference, *different* groups particularly woman and racial minorities, must be excluded because the desire for wholeness that motivates this community can only be realised among equals.<sup>3</sup>

## II

### The individual : A connected being

The contract ensures the liberty of the individual, without specifying its gender. The individual according to the liberal tradition is a subject who is rational, autonomous and disembodied which are solely masculine characteristics.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, feminists have argued for a subject that is connected rather than autonomous, constituted by the necessary conditions that bind us (that is embody) as human beings to those around us which constitutes our social life.<sup>5</sup> They have also given the subject the dimension of gender. It is circumstances that creates or conditions the individual.<sup>6</sup> The different circumstances, which includes education and the process of socialisation, leads to different psycho-analytical development of boys and girls. Thus while men are able to develop separate identity, women are dependent on others but can easily form intimate relations. As a result women, unlike men, become connected subjects, subjects constituted by and through their links to others. Feminists are trying to create a discourse that can treat women and men as embodied without subordinating women, where both the genders can choose their social roles.

## III

### Equality Difference paradigm

Feminist theorists have argued that the continued subordination of women in the liberal society is due to the fact that both *citizen* and *worker* are conceived as masculine and specifically, male heads of households.<sup>7</sup> It does not take into consideration that the worker could be a female who could become pregnant and who will need special consideration. The feminists should fight for special privileges only in the context of their biological process. They should not on the one hand champion equality and on the other talk of reservations. According



to Mackinnon, discrimination against women is set within the *sameness difference paradigm*. She comments, "socially, one tells a woman from a man by their difference from each other but a woman is legally recognized to be discriminated against on the basis of sex only when she can first be said to be the same as man."<sup>8</sup> Under the *sameness* standard, women are measured according to their correspondence with men, on the other hand, under the difference standard, women are measured according to their lack of correspondence with men. In other words, masculinity or maleness, is the reference for both views. Feminists argue that women have an identity different from men like any ethnicity and she cannot disembody herself for the sake of equality.

#### IV

##### Public private distinction

Two dominant themes of liberty in modern political thought is *positive liberty* and *negative liberty*. Isaiah Berlin equates negative liberty with a *right to privacy*, which is associated with a *high mark of civilization* that he dates from Renaissance or Reformation.<sup>9</sup> It tries to carve out a space or vacuum within which the subject - a person or a group of persons is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference from other persons. The wider the area of non-interference, the wider will be the individual's freedom.<sup>10</sup> The space is the private space and the space outside it is the public. Liberals believe that normal, rational human beings will spontaneously recognise and honour the personal frontiers of liberty.<sup>11</sup> Berlin's free individuals are without gender. To him and the other liberals state coercion within the limits of law is legitimate in the public sphere, while liberty is something to be enjoyed within the private domain.

This public/private distinction has been criticised by the feminists. There are different dimensions of this critique. The first is that public control of private coercion is needed because the family is frequently the site of domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> Both Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill insisted that women needed civil and political rights to protect them in the domestic realm. Susan Moller Okin is of the view that feminists should not run their backs on the idea of a



protected realm of privacy. In other words, private space should be opened up for state interference, which will reduce crime against women.

Secondly, feminists have also come up with a large literature on *ethics of care*, which suggests that public life might benefit the sort of interpersonal relations and values typically associated with women and the family. Definitions of women's nature has been used by the masculine theories for millenia to exclude women from the public sphere. Women were defined as dependents incapable of independent and rational decisions. In recent decades, feminists have employed the *essential women* argument to valorize rather than devalue the role of women. They argue that women are morally superior to men and that their experiences of motherhood, nurturing and caring nature provides them a superior morality.

Thirdly, feminists insists that private coercion is political, since it rests upon structures of patriarchal power which are public in nature and manifests in the experiences of everyday life. This claim has been fundamental to feminism since Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* appeared in 1970. Power imbalances exists in the relations between men and women. In the family, man exercise this power over his wife which increases the oppression and decreases the status of women.

These feminists look beyond - to the negative consequences of assigned sex-roles. Child care and household chores is the responsibility of the women in the family. They believed that the very existence of sex roles ensures the perpetuation of sexual inequality. Susan Moller Okin argues that justice requires the adoption of principles and policies by the state that would be shared equally between female and male members of the family. Such an egalitarian distribution of responsibility is necessary to overcome the relations of dominance and submission that characterises relations between men and women. Okin argues that a genderless family must be a part of a genderless society. Liberty and equality guaranteed by the liberal state irrespective of sex will only ensure formal equality. The culture of the society which benefits some kinds of human beings (men) and oppresses others (women), needs to be changed. Feminists argue that it is culture which internalises the attitudes of both the genders.



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## **DELIBERATION OF A SYMPOSIUM ON "INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES"**

The Department of Political Science organised a symposium on 'India's Nuclear Explosion and Its Consequences' on 21st May 1998. It was a unique event as scholars from physical sciences, life sciences and social sciences deliberated on different aspects of a problem. Here we reproduce the observations of a few scholars expressed in that symposium.

**H. Goswami** : Economic Sanctions and Their Impacts  
on Indian Economy

Sanction means penalty intended to restore respect for international laws, rules and agreements. National laws of many countries also stipulate sanctions against those countries which violate human rights, misuse children, pollute environment, endanger democracy, commit aggression, encourage or support international terrorism, practise apartheid on grounds of colour and creed, produce or store banned weapons, proliferate nuclear weapons, etc.

Hence the declaration of economic sanction against India by a few developed countries as a backlash of India's recent (11th & 13th May, 1998) nuclear tests is not a mere show of anger at India's action. Such sanctions are invoked in adherence to the provisions of their domestic laws. They are legally constrained to do so. For example, America's Foreign Assistance Act, 1961 and the Non-Proliferation Law of 1994 stipulate that a nuclear explosion by a non-nuclear country (as defined by the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1st July, 1968) disqualifies the latter from all direct economic and military aids from America.

At this stage (21st May, 1998) one cannot say what would be the nature and extent of sanctions to be imposed by these countries against India. Because none of them has yet specifically notified the areas and extents of sanction. It is however, clear by now that most of



the sanctions would come from the USA, Japan, Australia and New-Zealand. It is also obvious that the immediate area of sanction would be the direct foreign aid in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and loans from official agencies of these countries.

India's dependence on foreign aids is not very high in terms of proportion of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). But such aids are essential for India's rapid economic development. Because aids from developed countries usually come in the form of improved technology & skill which are necessary for our rapid development. To ensure a near-full-employment, by say 2010, our economy has to grow at the rate of 6 to 7% per year. This requires an investment of 35 to 40% of our GDP. The present saving rate of India (therefore domestic investment rate) is 24% of GDP. Therefore we still have a saving-investment gap of nearly 10 to 15 percentage points of GDP. On our own we can fund only a part of our investment requirements. India also suffers from two more gaps - the technological gap and exchange-gap. We are still far short of modern technologies required for rapid development. We cannot also waste time in inventing such technologies by ourselves. Therefore we are to import them from developed countries. India's foreign exchange receipts from exports can cover only 90% of our foreign exchange payment for imports.

To fill-up all the three gaps - saving investment gap, technology gap and exchange-gap, India needs foreign funds which usually come through three broad channels - (a) as foreign aids, (b) as foreign private investment and (c) as trade surplus.

(a) The term foreign-aids covers all grants and soft loans extended by foreign governments, foreign government agencies, foreign private banks and international multilateral organisations. Foreign-aids can be classified into the following categories.

(i) Official Development Assistance (ODA) : This component of foreign aids would be the first casualty of the sanctions. However, the proportion of average annual flow of ODA to India is now less than one percent of India's GDP (which is of about 387 billion dollar value).



(ii) Loans by official agencies of foreign governments : The second target of sanctions would be this category of foreign aids given by several foreign government agencies. It's proportion is also less than one percent of India's GDP.

(iii) Loans from foreign private banks : This commercial loans should not be affected by the proposed sanctions, since foreign banks extend these loans on purely commercial considerations. It's proportion is slightly higher than one percent of India's GDP.

(iv) Another important component of foreign aids is the loans from the international multilateral financial agencies, such as , World Bank, IMF, Asian Development Bank, International Development Association (IDA), International Financial Corporation (IFC), etc. There should not be any obstruction to the flow of funds from these agencies as a result of the proposed sanctions. But the USA and their allies may use their weighted voting rights to stall a loan proposal for India. Voting right of a member of these organisations is, to a large extent, determined by the quantum of share capital (quota) contribution made by the member country to the total share-capital of the organisation. Higher the share-capital contribution higher will be the voting right. For example, the value of voting right of each member of the IMF is 250 plus one vote for each full 100,000 SDR of share contribution, or ten votes for each full one million SDR of share contribution. India with 3055 million SDR share, which is 2.05% of total share capital of the IMF, therefore, has a total voting right of  $(250 + 30550 =) 30800$  votes only ; while the USA, with 26318 million SDR share, which is 17.66% of total share capital of the IMF, has the voting right of  $(250 + 263180 =) 263430$  votes. The proportion of annual average flow of funds under this category is around 3 to 4% of India's GDP. The impacts of sanction on this part of the foreign aids largely depend on the diplomatic and persuasive capability of the Government of India and their permanent representatives at these organisations.

India's accumulated foreign aids of all types is about 92.88 billion dollars at the end of 1997-98 (which is 24% of GDP) the average annual incremental (receipt minus repayments) being 12 to 15 billion dollars, which is 3 to 4% of our GDP.

(b) Private Foreign Investments : Funds coming through this channel are of two types - direct business investment and portfolio or financial investment. India's foreign investment in 1997-98 is about



4.5 billion (which is about 1.2% of our GDP) of which nearly 3.2 billion dollar is direct and 1.3 billion dollar is portfolio investments.

Sanctions cannot affect the flow of foreign private investments to India, because the decisions of foreign investors to invest in a country (called host country) depend largely on the rates of return on such investments (profit and dividend in case of direct investments, and interest rates and capital gains in case of portfolio investments), to a certain extent on general socio-economic and political environment in the host country and on its exchange stability, degree of control and bureaucratic hassle, etc. If India can offer these opportunities to the foreign investors, sanction cannot deter the foreign investors from investing in India.

(c) International trade and commerce is another channel through which foreign funds can come. This area is again dominated by the private sector players who are, as stated above, least interested in sanctions. Their prime motive for staying in international business is profits. Government cannot ask the private sector producers and exporters/importers not to deal with a country having strained diplomatic relations. Even if a foreign government succeeds in doing so with India in a selected areas there would be no dearth of alternative sources for India. For example, licenses issued by foreign government to exporters of munition items and dual use technologies may be withdrawn after impositions of sanction on India. The local export-import banks of a sanction imposing country may be persuaded by the government not to issue any letter of guarantee to the the Indian exporters exporting goods to that country.

India's export value in 1997-98 is 30.59 billion dollar and her import value in the year is 36.98 billion dollar. Therefore sanctions on international trade and commerce would cost more to the foreign exporters than to our domestic exporters.

#### Damage Limitation Exercise :

If all these sanctions eventually come into operation, then less foreign funds would be available for development. So the country must find alternative sources of funding, so that development works donot suffer.

(a) Internal Exercise : Indian economy has the inherent strength to withstand the challenge. India has to mobilise its own resources by a variety of measures.



Government of India may float long-term bonds for important project works, which may be extended to NRI; Public-sector undertaking must be reformed so that they can contribute in a big way to the government exchequer; Fifteen million NRI spread globally in more than 50 countries should be given all help and assistance to invest in (and to remit foreign currencies to ) India; tax-net must be widened and extended to selected areas of agricultural sector; loopholes in the tax-laws must be plugged to stop evasion; India must develop sophisticated and critical technologies herself by developing our scientific laboratories, maturity-structure as well as total amount of commercial loans (both domestic and foreign) must be kept within manageable limits.

(b) External exercise : India's export must grow, so that the present trade deficit of 6.4 billion dollar disappear within 2 to 3 years. Due to South East Asia's currency crisis, devaluation of currencies by India's competitors and the slow down of world trade, India's annual rate of export growth fell to 2.6% in 1997-98 as against 4.5% in 1996-97.

India must encourage investors from other developed countries which are not contemplating sanctions on India, such as the UK, Russia, Taiwan, Singapore etc. Foreign investments in India should be made attractive to foreign investors, by offering hassle-free investment climate, tax-rebate, sovereign guarantee etc.

India must find out new foreign markets for her products in Latin American countries, Africa, Central Asia, East Europe, Russia and other CIS (Commonwealth Independent States).

India should initiate trade negotiations to buy required items from other developed countries.

All the sanction imposing countries are members of World Trade Organisation (WTO). As per WTO rules each member has to give most favoured nation (MFN) treatments to all other members. So stripping of MFN status unilaterally against India by a member nation through sanction, would tantamount to violation of WTO principles (except certain security exceptions contained in Article 21 of the GATT). If a member actually does so India can lodge complaint against it with the WTO.



(c) Diplomatic exercise : India can mitigate the impact of economic sanction through diplomatic exercises. India may vindicate its points of arguments at NAM, G-15 and other international bodies and try to convince the world of her compulsion for and objectives of the recent nuclear explosions.

#### Conclusion :

It is easy to declare economic sanction but very difficult to implement it. Economic sanction is a double-edged weapon. "In the long run those who impose sanctions also stand to lose business with the country against whom sanctions have been imposed". For this reason, sanctions never continue for a long. Fall-out, if any, on India's trade will slowly dissipate after some time.

Most of India's foreign aids / loans are tied. This means that these aids / loans are to be spent on buying goods & services from the aid / loans giving countries. If such aids / loans are suspended due to sanctions, exports from these countries to India would suffer.

India offers very big markets for several products from the U.S.A., Japan, Australia, etc. These countries cannot afford to lose these Indian markets for a long, nor they can ignore a large-emerging economy, consisting of 250 million strong middle class, the world's largest pool of scientific and technical manpower and a powerful leader of the Third World Countries. Moreover, all the MNCs from these countries operating in India would stand to lose.

So it would be very difficult for the Governments of these countries to dissuade their private sector manufactures, exporters, multinational firms from dealing with India.

Sanctions might affect us here and there for some time, but sanctions would die their natural death in no time. □

#### **Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed : India's Security Scenario and Post-Pokhran Implications**

Ever since "Budha smiled" for the second time in Pokhran desert on May 11 last, there has been a great deal of discussion to rationalize the explosion for both internal and external consumption. In the official version of the government of India presented by Brajesh Mishra, the



Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, it is stated : "We feel that the nuclear environment around India is very dangerous. With these tests the people of India have a credible nuclear deterrence. These tests prove reassurance to the people that their national security interests are paramount and will be promoted and protected". This statement is not specific about the strategic rationale behind the test, but Prime Minister's letter to President Bill Clinton removes some of the doubts. He wrote : "We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapon state. At the hands of this bitter neighbour we suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years". The statement of Defence Minister George Fernandes in Mumbai on May 19 pointed to the China factor as the most compelling one for the serial tests. These official justifications for the tests spell out the threat perception now obtaining in South Asia affecting our national security.

India's nuclear option was undoubtedly China oriented. The nuclear test conducted by China in October 1964 set the nuclear option debate to roll. After a meticulously prepared programme the Pokhran blast was conducted on May 18, 1974. This triggered off Pakistan's surreptitious nuclear programme called "Islamic Bomb" and in November 1989 Pakistan nuclear programme chief Abdul Qadeer Khan declared that they had acquired the capability. The threshold status is as good as actual status because there is hardly any difference between acquiring the capability and the testing of the bomb except the psychological satisfaction derived out of the successful test. Added to this threshold nature of proliferation, a few more new sovereign states emerged in the region with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This nuclear scenario has been there since 1992 and has been more or less stable even after the US massive military aid to Pakistan worth of \$368 million granted by the Clinton Administration, till of course Pakistan's test firing of the *Ghauri* missile.



The first pro-bomb emotion was steered by Defence Minister C. Subramaniam in October 1979 when he addressed the National Defence College in New Delhi and identified Pakistan's nuclear aspiration and efforts as the most fundamental provocation for India to go nuclear. Going on this logic, the test firing of the *Ghauri* missile (whose ingenuity, payload and accuracy are doubted very much) and the recent affirmative statements of Abdul Qadeer Khan on Pakistan's acquisition of the capability acted as the strongest provocation for the recent Pokhran nuclear tests. This has been acknowledged by Bill Richardson, the US Ambassador to the United Nations. Pakistan has been and shall be a grave security concern for India till something dramatic in the regional balance of power takes place. However, I personally do not find any China oriented threat perception warranting the serial nuclear tests. China, till the outbursts of George Fernandes, for more than a decade did not show any hostility against India. It has sidelined the contentious issues and upgraded the scope for better bilateral co-operation with India on economic and diplomatic fronts. China's defence co-operation with Pakistan which has been going on since 1966 cannot be construed as an act of hostility towards India as it did not alter the balance of power in the region. We are sufficiently equipped to deal with such situation coming from China's defence assistance to Pakistan. It will be pertinent to have a close look at the basic foreign policy and defence objectives of China. Its game plan is to become the next superpower and thus fill up the vacuum in international relations created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the pursuit of this objective China has been concentrating on military build-up to counter-balance the unipolar phenomenon dominated by the United States. One example in this regard can be cited. China is going to develop and deploy within a couple of years from now the ICBM of 13,000 miles range, which means the targetable country is no other than the United States and not India. In order to play the role of the next superpower it has the policy objectives to have very good relations with all its neighbours including India as testified to the visits of Li Peng in 1992 and the recent visit by the Chief of army staff General Fu Quanyou. Its immediate concern is to consolidate the gains of the merger of Hong Kong and see the smooth merger of Macao in 1999 and to promote the conditions for peaceful reunification of Taiwan, besides, of course,



its long term plans to ensure the continuance of the current industrial and economic growth rate. In such a scenario, the question of greasing their guns against India is not convincing. If there is any challenge from China, I believe, it is from its technological and economic front and the enormous market offered to the West for investments, more so in the wake of political fluidity in our country and our current *swadeshi* slogan. Obviously it is not from the military front. There has not been any material evidence to show China's hostility against India except its defence co-operation with Pakistan, which is manageable and low intensity in nature. As responsible citizens, we must go by facts and not by assumptions, and as I have stated in one my articles which appeared in *The Assam Tribune*, May 12, 1998, that we cannot unnecessarily afford to open two fronts of hostility of unmanageable proportion.

Except Sri Lanka not a single South Asian neighbour has hailed the Pokhran blasts for obvious reasons of mistrust. For all the years our South Asian neighbours have been complaining against India's 'big brother attitude'. The nuclear tests have now become a demonstration of such a posture and the first casualty of this exercise is the Gujral doctrine which enjoyed respect and confidence in the region. Can we really live peacefully surrounded by unhappy neighbours who may be weak and small? Even a very weak neighbour can from across the border fan internal sources of conflicts and even with our nuclear bomb we may stand helpless in such a situation. Pakistan's reaction is understandable. I do not like to elaborate on this matter. It will be a matter of time when Pakistan goes nuclear and that will lead to nuclear arms race in the sub-continent at the cost of economic development of both these two belligerent neighbours. Chinese response at the initial stage was cautious. But Prime Minister's letter to President Clinton provoked China to launch frontal attack on India. I personally believe that the contention of Mr. Vajpayee's letter was undiplomatic. It should have confined to pointing Pakistan's nuclear efforts and the missile programme as the fundamental strategic rationale behind the recent tests. For us, Pakistan is the most and the only formidable source of security irritation and we should have single minded devotion to tackle with that menace. To attempt to drag others into the security threat perception arena is to dilute the gravity of the



situation and to create more foes making the already complicated security scenario unmanageable. Although there has been recent tone-down in the language of President Bill Clinton on the matter of sanctions against India, but in the light of his visit to China and Pakistan in the near future, one cannot discount the possibility of the formation of a Washington-Islamabad-Beijing axis to deal with India. Whatever has happened on May 11 and 13 happened. Although these tests have been a matter of national pride and the nation pays tribute to our scientists and the engineers, yet we cannot take everything uncritically as Kanti Bajpai has written in his article "Truth Explodes" in *The Telegraph* May 16, 1998. The action has adversely affected the trust-worthy image of India as an international personality so assiduously and meticulously shaped since 1927. It has ruined the prospects of India's permanent seat in the UN Security Council. It has affected our global trade relations which have been established since 1992 in the changed atmosphere of a post-Cold War era. It will take long time to revert to the original position. It is very difficult to build up an internationally acceptable image, but it is very easy to destroy it, and it is more difficult to rebuild it once again. It is true that by becoming a member of the exclusive nuclear club India has reduced the security threat dimensions to an optimum level, but the Government has to convince the people, at least the conscious and critical citizens, that there were too strong security threats to our sovereignty to ignore and such strategic imperatives propelled us to go nuclear at the cost of many other matters of national interests. The nuclear weapon is after all an unusable weapon, as George F. Kennan wrote in 1950. It serves only a deterrent aspect of national security, and cannot be demonstrated as a symbol of arrogance of power. (We should learn from America's Vietnam and Soviet's Afghanistan syndrome). There is undoubtedly an adverse fall out of the Pokhran tests in regional and international contexts. It is difficult at this stage to tell what could be the magnitude of the adverse impact on India's foreign relations and how shall our foreign policy makers be able to succeed in the damage control and repair efforts. But the picture will be clear in a few months from now. The only ray of hope is the enormous market that India provides to the developed nations for investments. Even then, India is going to suffer from the sanctions even in a limited way. Will that lay negative impact on the economy is a million dollar question to answer at present. □



**Ruma Handique : The impact of nuclear explosions at Pokhran  
on the environment**

On May 11th 1998, India conducted three underground nuclear tests at Pokhran range of Rajasthan at 15.45 hrs. The tremors shook villages of about 10 km radius of Pokhran. The news of the blasts stunned the whole world and occupied headlines of all dailies, television and radio news broadcasts for few days. The announcement about the blasts was accompanied by the statement that no radioactivity was released to the atmosphere during the tests. Surprisingly there was hardly any report about the probable adverse effect of the explosions on the environment.

The nuclear tests were conducted at a depth of about 70 metres below the surface of the earth. Could there be no adverse impact of the tests on the environment? To analyse this one must examine the intrinsic properties of the environment. Environment is defined as the space surrounding an organism i. e. the atmosphere surrounding an organism. In fact a large number of different components combine to form the environment. There is constant interaction amongst all the components of the environment. Depending on these inputs, a series of response signals may be sent from the organisms and the signal may accordingly change the environment.

All the organisms of the earth are part of the environment which together with non-living components maintain equilibrium in different ecosystems. In an ecosystem populations of plants and animals survive and reproduce within certain environment limits, called its niche. Natural calamities like earthquakes or man made causes may lead to elimination of some species of plants and animals which could throw the ecosystem into jeopardy. Or the extinction of one species may lead to the movement of another species to the region and as a result energy and matter movement may change drastically. The earth's environment can broadly be divided into lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere. Most plants and animals spend greatest part of their life on the surface of the lithosphere which is known as the crust. The crust comprises about 0.4% of the surface of the earth. It weathers to form the soil which plants and animals use as their substratum to live. It provides a home and a source of obtaining nourishment.



The Pokhran range is some distance away from Jaiselmer district of Rajasthan. A sizeable portion of Rajasthan in fact falls under desert environment where annual rainfall is less than 25 cm and in some year there is no rain at all. The environment naturally is harsh in deserts. Therefore plants and animals adopting to that environment have special armours and mechanisms to protect themselves from heat, drought etc. Plants growing in such environment are 1) annuals which grow and reproduce only when moisture is adequate, 2) succulents like cacti which can hold water and 3) desert shrubs with thick leaves which are shed during dry periods. Mosses, algae and lichens are found in deserts and the blue-green algae is a nitrogen fixer. Seeds usually develop rapidly here and germination is ultra-rapid. Even if plants disappear due to drought seeds are extremely resistant, they may germinate with the next rains.

Desert animals likewise have special adaptations. The camel is the most common inhabitant of the desert which can withstand great fluctuations in temperature. Whenever the camel gets a chance it drinks enormous quantity of water. It has to depend on metabolic water for survival which the body produces by break down of fat stored in its hump. The day time temperature in deserts is extremely high which exceeds 50° c. When the temperature is very high normal activity is no longer possible and most animals take shelter in burrows deep inside the soil.

The desert though looks barren houses a wealth of wild life fauna. Some of the fauna are birds like partridges, the great Indian bustard, lizards like chamaleons, venomous snakes like cobras, various rodents like gerbils, rats and mice, mammals like the Indian gazelle, the black buck, the wild bear, the wild ass etc., insects like sand beetles, locusts and also animals like the very poisonous scorpions. Most of these animals can thrive without water and have adapted to nocturnal rhythm of life to avoid heat of the day. *The Telegraph* news paper of 21st May, 1998 says that the nuclear tests at Pokhran created huge craters at the blast site and trees and metal rods even were charred at the impact of the heat. It makes one wonder about the impact of the tremendous explosions on the desert inhabitants. The huge explosions might have caused instantaneous



destruction of the habitats of a large number of flora and fauna. The destruction of natural habitats compels the wild fauna to invade human territories. The result is the occurrence of dreaded diseases like plague and encephalitis in man which are diseases of wild rodent animals.

The nuclear holocaust in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Chernobyl disaster all are grim reminders of the terrible effects of radio active materials on human health and welfare. The underground tests might not have released any radioactive materials in the atmosphere but the fact remains that they may make their entry into the human body from the soil through plants and animals. Because it is not unknown to the food processing industry and the medical scientists that even tiny doses of radiation used for food preservation when consumed may be enough to cause termination of pregnancy, birth of deformed babies, increased incidence of leukaemia in children etc.

Wild life is an important natural resource and in spite of rapid industrial development it controls the economy of a country like India. Thus habitat destruction can have far reaching impacts. The camel to the desert is as important as the cow to us. It provides milk, meat, means of transport and over and above a part of the social systems of specially the nomadic tribes of the deserts all over the world. Snake catchers are small communities who earn their livelihood by displaying their skills of handling snakes. Many of them are helping the pharmaceutical companies by collecting venoms which are used in the manufacture of life-saving drugs. The consequences of underground nuclear tests at Pokhran range could in the long run prove to be disastrous. □

**Siddhartha Kumar Lahiri :** Threat perception of the Indian state vis-a-vis the nuclear tests

When the onslaught of finance capital is on its move to reduce the nation states into municipal bodies and after the collapse of soviets in the East European countries, political pundits were found increasingly interpreting the so called 'New world order' as the attainment of unipolarity which rang the bell of dooms day, the death of civilization to some corner, the recent nuclear tests conducted by the Indian state gives opportunity to some analysts to rediscover the



long forgotten bones of the "independent" state in the fragile cupboard of the so called political independence. Besides this, the latest shift of consensus politics in the parliamentary democracy from pinkish paranoia to saffron schizophrenia calls forth the need to investigate the threat perceptions of the Indian state, the factors and forces which are developing and those which are fast losing their relevance.

Before we enter into this discussion it would be better to put forward a clarification on two terms. First, the state and secondly what is meant by its Indianness. Like all other states so far witnessed in the history of human civilization, we will assume that this state of our present concern is no exception. It too is an organ of class rule. It came into being as a result of society splitting into antagonistic classes, as an organ for the oppression of one class by another. Its characteristic feature is the existence of a "public power" consisting of special bodies of armed men, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, a state bureaucracy.

To substantiate our contention, it will be useful to quote David Selbourne, (*An Eye to India*, p. 12)

The political economy of India since independence has been a battleground; not only a battleground between the classes, but between the shifting economic and political oppositions and compromises within the ruling classes. There has been an oscillation between paternalism, parliamentarism and savage reprisal against the people and their organizations, particularly at times of rebellion in the vortex of acute social, political and economic crisis. There has been alternation, in foreign and trading relations, between appeasement of India's paymasters and belligerent assertions of a largely illusory, political and economic independence of them.

Also the author in the same book says,

The history of post-independence India has not only been a stagnant and unstable one, but also a humiliating and bloody one, belying both its 'independence' and its supposed 'non violence', as well as its reiterated professions of 'non-alignment'. (p. 13)

He further adds about the ruling class and the state that,

It can not tolerate the claims of any form of revolutionary upsurge, whether from left or right. Moreover, the humiliations of external economic dependency, from which they nonetheless can not afford to alienate themselves, ... makes them maintaining a steady double standard — at one moment towards 'clipping the wings of foreign investors', and at the next towards giving them free access to their domestic market. And in the latter case, they are admitted to take full advantage of cheap labour and raw materials, at increasingly profitable rates of return.... (p. 13)



To further substantiate the basis of our assumption quantitatively, it will be useful to mention the present day international standing of the country in terms of global competitiveness after fifty years of balanced circumspection of the state in its auspicious journey towards 'socialism'. Out of 53 countries, India's rank on different criteria is as following :

Criteria	India's rank
Labour force	3
Management	25
Technology	41
Information Technology	43
Financial Markets	44
Infra structure	53

Source : *The Statesman*, 13 May , '98

Which clearly suggests that only in terms of its labour force is India competitive globally; on other criteria, it is at the bottom of the heap.

In spite of all rhetorics, myths of green revolution, white revolution etc. the character of the Indian society still remains semi feudal semi colonial.

The organ of class rule is expansionist, authoritarian, communal, bureaucratic and highly centralised agent state, the corrupt conglomerate which proclaims itself as the guardian of world's largest constitutional democracy and as Neville Maxwell remarks, 'beneath the forms, democracy in India has never been much more than government of the shallow political class for its own benefit and privilege, and for the maintenance of the social order upon which the parliamentary form have been an alien transplant'. (p. 14)

So far as the essential feature of Indianness is concerned, in a single sentence it has been summarised as 'Ahimsa paroma dharma' (Non violence the ultimate religion) practised by the inhabitants of its sovereign domain taught to them by Mahatma Gandhi.



His scheme of revolution was 'based on non-violence and the harmonious cooperation between capital and labour, the landlord and the tenant'. To enlighten others about his own views, 'I shall throw the whole weight of my influence' Mahatma Gandhi added, 'in preventing

a class war'. 'I shall be no party to dispossessing the propertied classes of their property without just cause'; 'Capitalists are fathers and workers are children'. (Mahatma Gandhi in 'Maratha' 12. 8. 34 quoted in *Explosion in a Sub-continent* R. Blackburn, ed. Penguin Books, 1975, p. 134-35)

And when David Selbourne says, 'The Indian state has been violent in its internal struggles with its own national minorities, such as the Nagas, the Mizos and others. It has been capable, above all - shattering widely held notions about its pacific state policies - of a barbarous cruelty, authoritatively as well as fully documented, in dealing with successive peasant uprisings and armed rebellions since independence, with oppositional party forces in India, and with the organized labour movement', (p. 14) we find a perfect harmony in the ultimate mission of non-violence.

Let us now have a brief comparative study of the time coinciding with the 'garibi hatao' style Pokhran blast and the recent 'Hindutva' one. Interestingly, both the blasts, conducted first in 1974 i. e. twenty four years back and in the 1998, the most recent one were on Buddha Purnima - yes, the message is, still to date the state conforms its holy stand of 'non-violence'.

1. By 31 March, 1974, there were 752 corporate bodies in India controlled by foreign enterprises, the value of their assets 30 percent of the entire private corporate sector in India. Thanks to open market policy and liberalization, right now, the number of foreign enterprises are free to come or go and it has become very difficult to keep proper track on their current status but a recent date shows India's current short term debt is 17.5 billion dollars which is half of annual export.



2. The annual growth pattern of factory sector since 1970 onwards shows certain interesting trend

Year	Annual growth (%)			
	Factories	Employment	Fixed capital	Gross output
1970-71	7.3	3.7	10.2	14.2
1980-81	1.4	2.4	11.4	16.9
1984-85	0.2	-0.2	12.8	12.9
1987-88	4.7	4.7	16.7	15.7
1989-90	3.7	5.1	20.0	24.8
1990-91	2.0	0.3	25.0	17.6
1991-92	1.9	0.5	13.7	10.6

Here the data covers factory units with 10<sup>+</sup> workers using power and 20<sup>+</sup> workers not using power

— Source. *The Statesman*, 13. 9. '96

This shows the actual growth rate of factories is coming down. Fall in employment rate but gross output and fixed capital is increasing quite steadily. That means, less number of workers are producing more. Yes, productivity is improving and at the same time the rate of exploitation is also increasing that means the growth rate of overall industrial sector is little better than total stagnancy. Unemployment is increasing. Fixed capital is also increasing steadily which explains modernisation i. e. increasing amount of investment is there that is import of modern means of production is going on which reduces the job opportunity if side by side rapid growth of industrialisation does not take place.

3. Another interesting data is there in the employment or unemployment scenerio whatever you call it, of the country

Year	Registration in '000s	Placements	Applicants on live register
1990	6,541	265	34,632
1991	6,236	253	36,300
1992	5,301	239	36,758
1993	5,532	231	36,276
1994 (Sept)	4,495	148	36,956

— Source : *Statistical Outline of India* 1995-96



This again shows stagnancy in the placements. Not only this, stagnancy in the number of applicants on live register shows stagnancy which reflects the frustration accumulating among the applicants. Increasing number of unemployed youths find it of little use to get themselves registered in the employment exchange because it hardly gives guarantee of placements.

4. By official reports in 1970, more than half the population was living below the poverty line, in 1977-78 it was 48.3% of the total population and in 1987-88 it was around 30%. Apparently, it seems that the drop in percentage is quite satisfactory. But the myth lies in defining the poverty line. First, besides considering the minimum calorific values needed for survival, nothing else is considered relevant enough to have some bearing with the minimum living standard of living of the average Indian citizens. Secondly, it is mostly compared with a price index which is ten to fifteen years old - because once the updating is done, there is every chance that the number game of the official statisticians will be shattered into pieces.

Many more concrete data can be cited specially in the field of black money circulation, sharp decline in the purchasing power of the average citizens, increasing gulf among the rich and the poor etc. If at the one end of the economic scenario there is little growth in the basic industrial front, yet money circulation is rapidly increasing in the market, there is definitely, speculation is on the rise in the stock exchange which can hardly be called a sign of prosperity or health in the national economy.

It is in this backdrop we have to judge the threat perception of the Indian state.

The Indian state basically guards faithfully the interest of four types of capitalists. Magnitude and importance wise their standing is as following :

- a. Foreign capital i. e. Finance capital  
(invested by different foreign corporate bodies, private houses etc.)
- b. Private indigenous Industrial capital  
(mainly belonging to the Indian big bourgeoisie who are basically comprador in nature but among the compradors they perhaps show highest skill of manoeuvring)



- c. Private non-industrial capital  
(mainly belonging to the feudal landlords who accumulate the capital through rents on lands, usury etc.)
- d. Bureaucratic capital  
(In the post-independence era, this capital has strengthened its might quite appreciably and was highly elevated by maintaining its so called stand of 'non-alignment' during the cold war and hence its bargaining capability)

Now these four types of capitals have different types of contradictions inside and among themselves. For generation of capital, surplus value has to be extracted from the millions of working hands, the toiling masses. So, the state has got dual task- first, it has to convince the investors that the return will be satisfactory and their investment will be secure under its supervision. On the other hand it has to convince the working class that it is seriously committed towards their well being and prosperous future. But the problem is with the unemployed reserve army of workers. For the growth of capital, their presence is a must. On the other hand the state does not provide them anything rather most often it even snatches basic democratic rights from them at slightest of provocation. Generally to keep them engaged the state makes use of the diversities existing in the demographic fabric and recruits many sub-agents to make theories in such a way that the diversities are looked upon by the masses as the real contradictions inhibiting the prospect of a better standard of living. So, to dilute the growth of class consciousness, all diversities starting from religion, language; nationality, ethnicity, caste, sex etc. are projected as the actual contradictions.

Nuclear tests are conducted either to scare somebody or to hide one's internal weakness i. e. when you are yourself scared of something which is your own creation, make a smoke screen and hide behind it. Contrary to propagandists' version, both the Pokhran blasts, one twenty four years back and the latest one were not due to the external threat mainly rather the threat comes principally and mostly from within.



1. It was needed for the Indian state to prove to its masters that they can still rely on this faithful old sentinel. It is strong enough to ensure the security of their interest. The butterfly syndrome of finance capital shown in the tiger asian countries must have influenced the political strategists.
2. Due to the liberation policy, even the Indian big bourgeoisie is facing difficulties to maintain its competitive edge, whatever little it has, with the finance capital of the imperialist forces. Besides this, those places of the Indian subcontinent where indigenous capital thrived to some extent, (mostly the local bureaucratic capital) as because the big capitalists are increasingly pressurised to cough up 'commissions' from them, to safeguard their interest it became necessary to prove the presence of a strong centre. Hence, the big bourgeoisie had strong backing behind conducting the blast.
3. Bureaucratic capitalists are divided into different lobbies. Due to uneven balance, policy decisions become very difficult to implement. The nuclear explosion has definitely strengthened the American lobby.
4. When in the eyes of the working masses the weakness of the state becomes quite obvious which happened due to increasing magnitude of military deployments to counter all types of civilian problems, the so called myth of omnipotence of the state breaks down and instead of depending on it, peoples start asserting themselves in greater magnitude everyday which is quite evident to any political observer. The nuclear blast and the myth of omnipotence associated with it was a desperate attempt of the Indian state to bolster its 'super cop' status before the Indian masses.
5. Against the policy of handing over the sector to the private sector over petty excuses, the organised labour forces were raising the banner of protest at different places which also induced a strong air of discontent among the oppressed and conscious masses. For diversion of attention of the public and affecting speedy handing over of the public sector to the private sector, the nuclear explosion was an useful distraction.



6. During the Pokhran blast of 1974, the state machinery could at least address the issues like 'Garibi Hatao' with much fanfare but currently, 'garibi' has reached such a pathetic stage that the state even does not dare to address such issues. The public is totally disillusioned over such rhetorics. As a result, religious fundamentalism has become indispensable in the part of the state. Hence, the 'Hindu bomb'! Even the government backed 'apolitical' saints and Sadhus, have declared their 'holy mission' to erect a 'Shaktipith, at Pokhran.

It is not needed anymore to establish the fact that the state propaganda about possibility of aggression from the countries like China-Pakistan is a cheap gimmick to hide the internal crisis of the state. The most important question is whether the struggling working class and the oppressed masses will allow the state conspiracy to have its last laugh or not ? ☐

**Girin Phukan :** Political compulsion of the BJP behind India's nuclear explosion and its consequences

Before addressing to the subject one should have a clear notion on the terms like 'national interest', 'national security', 'national consensus' and 'national integration' which are very often used by the political elite of our country. When the political powers talk of in terms of these vocabularies, inherently reference is made to the small articulate minority who is well fed, educated and capable of living a luxurious life. This minority group basically belongs to the bourgeois class. Because of hegemonic position of this class in the society, the interest of this section is projected and also virtually accepted as the interest of entire toiling masses of the country. This minority group conveniently forgets the toiling millions living in utter poverty in the villages and slums of India. These millions live without drinking water, often fall prey to every disease, are the targets of natural calamities, have no education, do not get food to fill their bellies and more importantly their children have no future. The ruling elite do not represent the interest of this class; but they want to identify their interest with the interest of the entire people. In this perspective, we have to understand the hidden interest of the Ruling party behind the nuclear test.



After the recent Pokhran Nuclear test made by the BJP led government, we have been told that this "tremendous achievement" will strengthen our 'national security'; and generate a sense of 'national pride and that now other countries will treat us with greater respect'. More importantly, the BJP government claims that the Chinese threat was a major reason behind the nuclear explosion and India's sudden desire to be recognised as a nuclear weapon state. But there was no fresh provocation either from China or Pakistan. Rather, from all indications Sino-Indian relation was improving. There was not a word of hostility from the Chinese to justify the fear psychosis set into motion by the BJP Government. In fact, the explosion was made without any real threat perception. In this context therefore, a question arises as to what are political compulsions of the ruling party behind India's nuclear explosion?

The real causes that impelled the BJP to make the nuclear test were domestic. It was directed not at an external threat so much as at Smti. Jayalalitha, the BJP's own ally. In fact, the main purpose of nuclear explosion is to develop a cult of heroism and receive political mileage for perpetuating power. By this action the BJP wants to project itself as a true nationalist, patriot and a saviour of the nation. Thus the BJP is trying to win cheap popularity by generating hate driven notions of nationalism - the nuclear counterpart of anti-Babri mindset. Nothing else can explain the timing of the test other than this. As a matter of fact, a tottering government with a vacillating prime-minister could not implement the Hindutva Agenda due to pressure from its allies and failed to adopt a viable "Swadeshi economic programme". Therefore, it has become important on the part of the ruling party to cover up the deplorable economic condition of the country and to divert the attention of the masses from their basic problems. In order to meet this situation the ruling party had to build bomb instead of building peace. Through this action the party in power has acquired the sanction based on the so called 'national consensus' to act for the nation. Indeed, this has been designed to arouse an unquestioning brand of nationalism that would consolidate the BJP and override all criticism against the party and its government. It is also aimed at appeasing the hardliners of the RSS and the BJP and arousing the



passion of 'nationalism' in the middle class and the nuclear elite. It has now the legitimacy to set into motion the agenda based on the RSS/BJP brand of nationalism. Dissent at this stage will not be tolerated not just by the hardliners but even by the middle class who possess an unquestioning attitude about the 'national interest'. Because, it is believed that nuclear option is in the national interest and any argument against it would arouse anger and condemnation.

It is clear that there was no national consensus behind the bomb. Even the opposition parties were not consulted about this major decision. More importantly, no steps were taken to make a 'strategic defence review' which was supposed to precede such step. The land of the Budha and Mahatma Gandhi defiled itself by conducting the nuclear explosion with the clear purpose of developing weapons of mass destruction. The tests push it further in the direction of possession of weapons with potentially disastrous consequences. Thus even at the cost of long cherished national values and ethos, the nuclear explosions were being used and politicised by the BJP to consolidate its constituencies, and expand its political base. Indeed, it is an attempt to make political capital out of it. But it may be reiterated that Indira Gandhi was unable to consolidate her constituency with the bomb in 1974. Within ten months after the first nuclear test she had to impose emergency. Further it should also be realised that the possession of a formidable nuclear striking force did not help erstwhile USSR to survive and retain its dominance over the Republics.

In any case, to-day India has gone against the emerging world consensus for disarmament and nuclear non-poliferation. Now India is seen by many small states with suspicion, which once regarded her as a leader and moral force, as a treacherous, hypocritical state with hegemonic ambition. Thus internationally, India has lost her friends both old and new. Being in the nuclear club will not earn her the trust and respect of all those countries who have taken a conscious decision to stay out of it. In fact, after the nuclear test India is going to be reduced to a very small player in the world arena as its claim to speak for the non-nuclear nations of the world has come to an end with the bomb. Once India had argued that possession of nuclear weapon would be declared as a "crime to against humanity". But surprisingly she herself has committed this crime. As such India has lost her stature globally.



Thus it appears that the BJP led government's decision to conduct the nuclear explosion is strategically irrational, politically outrageous and morally indefensible. The test makes no strategic sense because there was no perceptible adverse change in India's security environment in recent years. Sporadic Sino-Pakistani nuclear co-operation cannot be the reason for the tests. Rather several years' good works to improve relations with China has been undone by the BJP Government. With the nuclear test India has not only degraded her security but also antagonised her friends. India will be held responsible of sabotage of nuclear disarmament agenda.

A nuclear arms race will mean a retreat from developmental goals and minimum needs programme. Now India has to take risk of two nuclear arms race-primarily with China and secondarily with Pakistan. China is an advanced nuclear missile power and economically three times larger than India. This would be definitely ruinous for us. For India more damaging would be the impact of greater military expanding on account of nuclearisation. Nuclear weapons do no substitute for conventional armaments. Rather they are an additional burden. Even a minimal nuclear deterrent will raise our defence budget by 25 to 40 percent.

It would be pertinent to ask - how does the nuclear power status make India either safer or take it on the road of being ranked as a super power ? Indeed, it is unfortunate that India is making claims to be recognised as a super power and talking about mastering nuclear technology while more than half of the villages in India do not have safe drinking water ; every second Indian female is illiterate, and one out of every three adults is living below poverty line. All these clearly indicate that our performance in many pressing areas is not matter of 'national pride' but of 'national shame'. It is foolish to expect other countries to respect our achievement. After all, India still continues to be a semi-colonial and semi-feudal state. Financially, it has to heavily depend on the loan from the IMF and other funding agencies of the world. In reality, only way to earn respect is to build up a strong economy. Drinking water and food in every villages would really make India strong. But for this purpose our political leaders should have possessed the qualities like dedication and sacrifice which are however not known for.



In view of all these, India should understand that no self-crowned nuclear state receives international respect unless it builds up a strong economy. Now the sanctions which the affluent nations have imposed on India will affect its economic progress particularly in the infra-structure field for well being of the common people. Unfortunately, the BJP led coalition's horrible misadventure could mean serious damage for the economy and hardship for our people. After all, it is not the BJP and the nuclear elite but the toiling masses who will have to pay for bad political decision with their sweat. □

### **Archana Upadhyay : The Nuclear Debate**

States coexist in a condition of anarchy. Self-help is the principle of action in an anarchic order and the most important way in which states must help themselves is by providing for their own security. Therefore in weighing the chances for peace, the first questions to ask are questions about the ends for which states use force and about the strategies and weapons they employ. The chances of peace rise if states can achieve their most important ends without using force. War becomes less likely as the costs of war rise in relation to possible gains. How nuclear weapons affect the chances for peace is seen by examining the different implications of defence and deterrence.

A state can dissuade another state from attacking by one of the two ways. One way to counter an intended attack is to build fortifications and to muster forces that look forbiddingly strong. This is the defensive ideal. The other way to counter an intended attack is to build retaliatory forces able to threaten unacceptable punishment upon a would be aggressor. "To deter" literally means to stop people from doing something by frightening them. In contrast to dissuasion by defence, dissuasion by deterrence operates by frightening a state out of attacking, not because of the difficulty of launching an attack and carrying it home, but because the expected reaction of the opponent may result in one's own severe punishment. Deterrence is achieved not through the ability to defend but through the ability to punish. The message of the strategy is this : "Although we are defenceless, if you attack we may punish you to an extent that more than cancels



your gains". Purely defensive forces provide no deterrence. The message of the strategy is this : "Although we cannot strike back at you, you will find our defences so difficult to overcome that you will dash yourself to pieces against them".

Do nuclear weapons increase or decrease the chances of war ? The answer depends on whether nuclear weapons permit and encourage states to deploy forces in ways that make the active use of force more or less likely and in ways that promise to be more or less destructive. If nuclear weapons make the offence more effective and the blackmailers threat more compelling then nuclear weapons are bad for the world - the more so the more widely diffused nuclear weapons become. If defence and deterrence are made easier and more reliable by the spread of nuclear weapons, we may expect the opposite result. To maintain their security, states must rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves. It follows that the quality of international life varies with the ease or the difficulty states experience in making themselves secure.

If weapons are not well suited for conquest neighbours have more peace of mind. We should expect war to become less likely when weaponry is such as to make conquest more difficult, to discourage preemptive and preventive war, and to make coercive threats less credible. Do nuclear weapons have those effects ? Well, some answers can be found by considering how nuclear deterrence and nuclear defence improve the prospects for peace. *First*, war can be fought in the face of deterrent threats, but the higher the stakes and the closer a country moves toward winning them, the more surely that country invites retaliation and risks its own destruction. States are not likely to run major risks for minor gains. *Second*, states act with less care if the expected costs of war are low and with more care if they are high. Think of Kennedy and Khrushchev in the Cuban missile crisis, why fight if you cannot win and might lose everything. *Third*, the question demands an affirmative answer all the more insistently since the deterrent deployment of nuclear weapons contributes more to a country's security than does conquest of territory. A deterrent strategy makes it unnecessary for a country to fight for the sake of increasing its security, and this removes a major cause of war. *Fourth*, deterrent effect depends both on capabilities and on the will to use them. The will of the attacked striving to preserve its own territory, can be



presumed to be stronger than the will of the attacker, striving to annex someone else's territory. Certainty about the relative strength of adversaries also makes war less likely. Many wars might have been avoided had their outcomes been foreseen. Countries more readily run the risks of war when defeat if it comes is distant and is expected to bring only limited damage.

Contemplating the nuclear past gives ground for hoping that the world will survive if further nuclear powers join today's dozen. This hope is called into question by those who believe that the infirmities of some new nuclear states and the delicacy of their nuclear forces will work against the preservation of peace and for the fighting of nuclear wars. The likelihood of avoiding destruction as more states become members of the nuclear club is often coupled with the question of who those states will be. What are the likely differences in situation and behaviour of new as compared to old nuclear powers? It has been argued that some potential nuclear states are not politically strong and stable enough to ensure control of the weapons and control of the decision to use them. Fears are compounded by the danger of internal coups, in which the control of nuclear weapons may be the main object of struggle and the key to political power. Under these fearful circumstances to maintain governmental authority and civil order may be impossible. Again, new nuclear states may come in hostile pairs. Also it is feared that states that are radical at home will recklessly use their nuclear weapons in pursuit of revolutionary ends abroad. Again, some new nuclear states may have governments and societies that are not well rooted. The rulers of such societies having authoritarian and nomadic history may be freer from constraints as they have an altogether different set of values.

The fact remains that we do not face happy choices. We may prefer that countries have conventional weapons only, do not run arms races, and do not fight. Yet it has to be borne in mind that international politics is a self-help system, and in such systems the principal parties determine their own fate, the fate of other parties, and the fate of the system. This will continue to be so. America's policy of opposing the spread of nuclear weapons will not prevail. Any slight chance of



bringing the spread of nuclear weapons to a halt exists only if the United States tries to achieve that end. To do so carries costs measured in terms of other interests.

Second, given the massive number of American and Russian warheads, and given the impossibility of one side destroying enough of other side's missiles to make a retaliatory strike bearable, the balance of terror is indestructible. What can lesser states do to disrupt the nuclear equilibrium if even the mighty efforts of the United States and the Soviet Union did not shake it? Third, nuclear weaponry makes miscalculation difficult because it is hard not to be aware of how much damage a small number of warheads can do. However, it has to be kept in mind that nuclear weapons are controlled by professional military organizations and these organizations because of common biases, inflexible routines, and parochial interests may display organizational behaviours that are likely to lead to deterrence failures and deliberate or accidental war.

The recent tests conducted by India should be seen against this background. The Indian behaviour confirms that it is a reluctant nuclear state. It goes without saying that India, like most of the world, is a defensive victim rather than an aggressive agent in perpetuating the nuclear dispensation unleashed upon the world by the United States.





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