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Rosa Luxemburg on the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Marxists' Assessment of the Destiny of October Revolution : Towards a Convergence ?

SOBHANLAL DATTA GUPTA

I

Reflecting on Rosa Luxemburg's *Zur russischen Revolution* after eighty years and at a time when the very relevance of the Revolution of 1917 is now under attack may appear to be quite a fascinating exercise, particularly for the reason that Rosa's text, generally considered as a critique of October, remained virtually ignored, if not suppressed, in the official marxist circles for decades. In the context of a search for renewal of marxism and reexamination of the legacy of the October Revolution, freed from the trappings of any dogmatic understanding, the reading of Rosa's text today opens up the possibility of addressing an old yet unsettled question afresh : what could have happened in history had Rosa's text been appreciated properly in the aftermath of 1917?

To understand the proper spirit of Rosa's manuscript it is vitally important to keep it in mind that the very news of the outbreak of the Russian Revolution charged her consciousness in a most radical fashion. She looked upon this event as "a world-historical phenomenon" (*eine weltgeschichtliche Tat*) containing immense historical possibilities and it is precisely for this reason that she became concerned when the emergent Bolshevik model of socialism appeared to be threatening the potentiality of the October Revolution. It is this future vision of socialism for which the Russian Revolution could have become a model that explains the necessary perspective of Rosa's text. This is most strikingly evident in her passionate response to the news of the Revolution as it reached her in her prison cell. Her letters to Luise Kautsky and Clara Zetkin, for example, bear testimony to it.¹ Very significant in this context is her letter to Marta Rosenbaum² dated 12 November 1917 where she quite clearly differentiates her revolutionary outlook from the reformist position of Karl Kautsky on the issue of the Russian Revolution. She

castigated the “Theoretician” Kautsky for arguing that the social conditions in Russia were not mature enough for proletarian dictatorship and said that he had forgotten that statistically in France in 1789 and even in 1793 conditions were less mature for the bourgeoisie’s coming to power and that, fortunately, history did not work according to Kautsky’s theory. Rosa’s manuscript, steeped in this spirit, had its focus on the contradiction between the possibility and the actuality of the Russian Revolution. It opened up, for Rosa, two possibilities, both related to the question of interrelation of democracy and socialism : a) the idea of all power to the Soviets and the peasant masses, releasing thereby the creative power and energy of the working people;³ b) the necessity and possibility of winning over the majority by ensuring active and conscious participation of the masses in the political life of post-October Russia. The Mensheviks lost their grip precisely on this score and for Rosa the outlook was “ Not through majority to revolutionary tactics but through revolutionary tactics to majority.”⁴ Rosa’s critical reflections on the Russian Revolution precisely touched upon those aspects of the actually emergent post-revolutionary order which threatened these possibilities, jeopardizing thereby the destiny of the Revolution. It is significant that a careful scrutiny of her arguments at once indicates how remarkably she had anticipated many of the criticisms of the course of the October Revolution as advanced later by such Russian Marxists as Trotsky, Bukharin and Ryzin in the 20s and 30s.

The significance of Rosa’s critical observations on the Russian Revolution may be judged with reference to the following aspects. One: she expressed concern at Trotsky’s attitude towards the mechanism of democratic institutions, as the latter described them as “ cumbersome” in the context of the argument that the Constituent Assembly dominated by the bourgeoisie had become irrelevant in post-October Russia, since the bigger the country and the more crude technical apparatus, the less is the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions able to keep pace with this development.⁵ Rosa’s criticism was simple yet full of deep insights. She had no liberal illusion about a Constituent Assembly which dominated by the bourgeoisie of the Kerensky era could serve any revolutionary purpose. Her criticism was directed against Trotsky’s negative attitude towards the very necessity of the institutions of representative democracy under socialism and in the following pages she highlighted precisely their importance by drawing instances from history and gave this warning, “...the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure, for it

saps the very living source from which alone can come the correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.”⁶

Two : she again criticized Trotsky’s rather oversimplified understanding of the complexities involved in the construction of a revolutionary order, since he believed that through open and direct struggle for governmental power the working masses accumulate in the shortest possible time considerable amount of political experience and quickly advance from one stage to another. Rosa argued that this was not only a complete misstatement of facts but also in contradiction with the outlook of Trotsky and his associates who were sceptical of representative institutions and did not hesitate to suppress public life.⁷ First, it was a misstatement, because while under capitalism the needs of bourgeois class rule require no political training and education, the construction of socialism envisages most intensive political training of the masses. Second, it was self-contradictory, because if the masses had grown mature enough to have already accumulated sufficient political experience, then how to reconcile it with the earlier proposition that the institutions of representative democracy were pronounced to have lost their relevance after the Revolution?

Three : Rosa quite categorically declared that socialism cannot be built by any ready-made formula, *ukaze* (proclamation) or decree and that while negatively breaking the resistance of the obstacles to the new order may have to be decreed, the positive construction of socialism cannot be effected along this path and it is precisely here, in this unknown, uncharted territory what is needed is plurality of views, free exchange of views, the freedom to think differently (*die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden*) rather than the freedom of the privileged few.⁸ What Rosa emphasized had nothing to do with any liberal notion of abstract, unrestrained freedom but a kind of “socialist pluralism”, to use Mikhail Gorbachov’s phrase in the early phase of *perestroika*. Yin Xuyi in his presentation at the Beijing Conference of The International Rosa Luxemburg Society in 1994 argued that although by projecting the idea of the freedom to think differently Rosa was perhaps emphasizing the importance of the voice of the minority her theoretical position remained ambiguous and inexact,⁹ a somewhat different position, however, was taken by Zhou Maoyong who considered this notion as the philosophical basis of the idea of tolerance under socialism. This expression of Rosa, he argues quite rightly, should be considered not on its face value, since otherwise it might be regarded as a defence of unrestrained freedom; rather it is a

philosophical thesis and what is to be appreciated is not the form of expression as such its but creative-critical spirit.

Four : She put forward the remarkable idea that socialism has to be built through replacement of egotism by social instincts and by using cultural and moral means;¹¹ basically this is a strategy which is very close to what Gramsci described as hegemony, as distinct from coercion. In other words, for Rosa the project of building socialism involved setting a new cultural and ethical standard for society by appealing to the masses on the level of consciousness.

Five : Closely related to this question was her perception that proletarian dictatorship being another name of socialist democracy the temporary necessity of taking extraordinary measures like revolutionary terror must not be made a permanent feature under socialism.¹² She did not question the temporary necessity of taking certain extreme and drastic measures against the enemies of Bolshevism ; what she, however, warned against was the idea of making it a permanent, an international model. In one of her recently published letters dates 30 September 1918 written from Breslau prison to Julian Marchlewski she reacted quite sarcastically to Karl Radek's article, "The Red Terror" published in *Izvestiya* (no. 192, 6 September 1918) where the idea of using violence and terror against the bourgeoisie, its agents, the conspirators was strongly justified. For Rosa these killings and threats could in no way stop the holes in economy and politics and was sheer idiocy, — "only a compromise with socialism and nothing more".¹³ Tibor Szabo in his excellent paper presented in 1994 has drawn very interesting parallels between Rosa's position and the strategies of Gramsci and Lukács with their accent on hegemony and not terror and correctly argues that the way Lukács came out in his Political Testament (written before his death) with sharp criticism of the fear of the masses and bureaucratization that characterized the countries of "real socialism" proved the correctness of Rosa's criticisms in her *Zur russischen Revolution*.¹⁴

Six : For Rosa the Bolshevik model of the post-revolutionary order was a product of extraordinary circumstances and was a consequence of the fact that the Bolsheviks were fighting all alone without international support and solidarity, especially from the German proletariat. This formulation has in recent years drawn increasing international attention¹⁵ and is of deep significance for at least two reasons. First, Rosa argued in one of her letters to Adolf Warski sometime at the end of 1918 that the red terror in Russia was in a sense an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat, because by taking advantage of the lack of international support the Russian

counterrevolutionaries gathered power and courage to indulge in their acts against the revolution and which in turn necessitated Bolshevik terror.¹⁶ The coming of the European revolution, therefore, was the clue to what might be characterized as setting the revolution on the correct path, free from the use of terror. In other words, the destiny of the October Revolution hinged on the destiny of the proletarian revolution in Europe and the Bolshevik Revolution, a product of extraordinary circumstances, could not be considered as a model for the proletariat. Second, it is an irony of history that in the Stalin era it is precisely the Bolshevik model that was accepted as the ideal with the Russification of Comintern and international communism. Besides, Rosa's name became virtually a taboo, as she was branded almost as a Menshevik and the menace of "Luxemburgism" was invented to point to the new threat to the communist parties which rallied around the Comintern. Erwin Levin in an informative article published in 1991 provides a very good historical and theoretical account of how this expression was coined with the direct encouragement of Stalin to justify the left extremist outlook of the CPSU and Comintern in the 30s in the context of the publication of his letter entitled "On Certain Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism" in June 1931 in which his principal criticisms were directed against the danger of the "Right", the reconciliators, the centrists.¹⁷ "Luxemburgism" came to be identified with the position represented by Rosa which all along condemned ultracentralism and the strategy of extreme leftism pursued by the Bolshevik Party (its accent on terror) after the Revolution and this came to be known as a kind of Menshevism. Understandably, this became an excellent argument to contain the "Right" danger in the CPSU represented by Bukharin, the challenge of the "Left Opposition" (Trotsky) which, too, questioned Stalinist centralism and justify Stalinism as a kind of universal model to be emulated by international communism.

II

Rosa's fear and concern regarding the destiny of the October Revolution were reflected in the writings of Lenin, in his growing apprehension that the cult of the Party and bureaucratism were fast replacing the ideas of Class and Masses,— a warning given by Rosa in her manuscript. Interestingly, *the finest Russian marxists in the post-October period echoed Rosa's ideas without any reference to her, when the occasion arose for them to reflect on the course of the Russian Revolution during the period of Stalinist consolidation after Lenin's death.* A careful analysis of the writings of Trotsky, Bukharin and Ryzin testifies to this remarkable

convergence between Rosa's vision and the viewpoint of these Russian marxists on a number of crucial issues.

Trotsky's critique : It is perhaps an irony of history that while in the early years of the Revolution Trotsky's scepticism of democratic institutions was criticized by Rosa and the former turned out to be a ruthless exponent of red terror and authoritarianism, his subsequent critique of Stalinism was strikingly similar to Rosa's position in many respects. This becomes evident from a careful scrutiny of Trotsky's writings touching upon a number of key issues centering around the destiny of the October Revolution : (a) Trotsky argued that Stalin's doctrine of 'socialism in one country' was used as a slogan to universalize and idealize the soviet model by glossing over its distortions and overestimating its achievements,¹⁸ — the danger against which Rosa had warned. This paved the way for Russification of international communism in the years that followed, as evident in the subsequent developments in the Comintern. (b) His critique of the Soviet Thermidor shared precisely the concern of Rosa when he argued that the party regime in the USSR strengthened the "class shrinkage of the proletariat".¹⁹ Trotsky, however, went one step further and apprehended that the growing distortion and bureaucratization of the Soviet state might generate an apparatus through which power might be shifted from the proletarian base and drawn to the bourgeoisie, paving the way for a Bonapartist rule.²⁰ Theoretically speaking, basically this was an issue concerning statism vs. anti-statism in the marxist tradition; Trotsky in this context highlighted the point that while Lenin's accent was on cutting down the elements of statism and energizing the role of the masses and the soviets in the post-revolutionary period, what was happening under Stalinism was just the opposite. In his defence of Lenin Trotsky was now virtually echoing Rosa's words when he expressed alarm to find that the mass soviets had entirely disappeared from the scene as a consequence of "policification" of the Soviet state.²¹ (c) Drawing clues from the history of the rise and fall of Jacobinism in France Trotsky drew parallel between the crushing of inner-party democracy in the CPSU under Stalinism and the regime of terror and purges that eventually destroyed Jacobinism's revolutionary potential.²² It is this stifling of the voice of the "other" against what Trotsky characterized as the Soviet Thermidor and it is precisely this issue which engaged the attention of Rosa in her defence of the "freedom to think differently". In this context he focussed on the qualitative degeneration of the Stalin era, as distinct from the Lenin period, when he pointed out in his *The Revolution Betrayed* published in 1937 that while during the worst

period of counterrevolutionary offensive in the aftermath of October from 1917 to 1921 it was “possible to dispute openly and fearlessly in the party about the most critical questions of policy”, “after the cessation of intervention, after the shattering of the exploiting classes, after the indubitable success of industrialization, after the collectivization of the overwhelming majority of the peasants,” it was now “impossible to permit the slightest word of criticism of the unremovable leaders”.²³

III

Bukharin's critique : Unlike Trotsky, Bukharin's critique of Stalinism was never directly political and open but always carefully guarded and formulated rather abstractly, since, like Lukács, he had to fight for political survival. The difference between Trotsky and Bukharin has to be considered, therefore, with reference to their respective locations vis a vis the Party; Trotsky's major criticisms emerged out of the period when he was expelled from the CPSU, while Bukharin's critiques grew out of his political presence inside the CPSU, notwithstanding the gradual erosion of his authority since the late 20s. Consequently, while Trotsky's critique centered around the party regime in the CPSU, Bukharin never openly criticized the Party. This difference becomes manifest in Bukharin's alternative vision of socialism which, significantly, is very close to Rosa's critique, as is evident from a careful reading of some of his texts.

Since the commencement of the NEP Bukharin systematically aimed at building up a democratic alternative to the traumatic experience of war communism and this was strongly expressed in his preference for moderation, plurality and gradualism. Thus, while highlighting the importance of proletarian dictatorship in the USSR very systematically and consciously he pleaded for persuasion and not coercion in the exercise of this dictatorship, emphasizing those forms of power which involved mass participation, i.e., “workers, organizations”, “all kinds of voluntary societies and associations”, “revolutionary legality” instead of “administrative arbitrariness,” since “the working class has no interest in becoming a new ‘tsar’; it has no interest at all in making the proletarian dictatorship eternal or in playing the part of a ruling class forever”.²⁴ In other words, this was a perspective which justified diversity and tolerance, that is, precisely those values which were so staunchly defended by Rosa and which Stalinism sought to nullify. These did neither square with the method of settling inner-party differences under Stalinism nor did they correspond to Stalin's emphasis on the generalization of the

Russian experience although Bukharin did never officially question Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country."

It is, in fact, this line of pluralism and diversity which Bukharin tried to incorporate in the Draft Programme prepared by him on the occasion of Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928 and which was rejected by Stalin through his personal intervention, as Firsov reveals in his meticulous study of this unpublished original Draft.²⁵ As we know it now for Comintern and international communism the consequences were disastrous. Already in 1927 Bukharin ventured to make the following observation which sounds so remarkably close to Rosa's perception of socialism in her manuscript of 1918. Bukharin said :

"But the point is that the movement toward socialism does not begin in a vacuum; it begins after the working class takes power into its own hands, along *with the inheritance bequeathed it by the capitalist order*. After what has been said, it will be perfectly clear that in different capitalist countries this inheritance will look *quite different*. And if capitalism had its peculiarities in the different countries, it is quite understandable that *Socialism, too, in the first stage of its development, before all the countries in the world merge into a single entity, will inevitably be differentiated in a similar fashion by its own peculiarities resulting from those of previous developmet.*"²⁶

The recent publication of Bukharin's unknown *Gefaengnisschriften*, written by him in prison in 1937 on the eve of his liquidation in 1938, further confirms on a rather sophisticated philosophical level the close affinity of views between Bukharin's project of building a humane, democratic model of socialism free from terror and violence and Rosa's vision with its accent on mass initiative, pluralism and freedom in the postrevolutionary order which she as well as Bukharin characterizes as the period of proletarian dictatorship. The following observations of Bukharin in this remarkable work testify to it. First, referring to the meaning of socialism he argues that by socialism Marx did not understand as something that is solidly absolute, some kind of "ideal society," a kind of end of history where there has been a break with motion, and which ushers in a static regime that is still like death. The greatness of socialism lies in historical "*self movement* and it is not a frozen, narrow *absolute ideal.*"²⁷ (Emphasis original). Second, reflecting on the fundamental difference between the meaning of freedom under capitalism and

communism, he points out that in capitalism in the name of diversity the individuals are *separated* and this is a regime where there is a chaos of tone, noise and screams, marked by an absence of harmony. Communism, on the contrary, develops maximum richness of life and creative functions, expands boundlessly the life world, makes possible the unending development of individual inclinations, capabilities and gifts. It is completely absurd to imagine the man of the future as one standing on one's legs like a calculating machine, bereft of passions. There will be *diverse* persons with diverse inclinations and energetic passions. The tragic components of life will not go out; but this will be an "optimistic tragedy."²⁸ (Emphasis original). Then, with reference to the concrete issue of freedom under Soviet socialism, he makes the following comment : "The masses in the USSR, for whom freedom here is the first question, are interested in *other* freedoms, which for them would have a total meaning, the *freedom of growth, material as well as intellectual, to its maximum height.*"²⁹ (Emphasis original). Third, we come across the observation of Bukharin which suggests that the necessity of terror is only conditional under socialism and it cannot be a permanent feature : the soviet power, the dictatorship of the proletariat as the political form of society need not be weakened so long as the threats from the enemy classes remain and continue to pose a danger to socialism and are not overcome. The strengthening and tightening of the Soviet state, therefore, constitute the *historical* conditions for its delayed dying out process. So it is necessary that when the *Sword* will no longer be necessary, the dying out process of state power will set in and (as Engels said) the "governance of persons" will be replaced by the "administration of things."³⁰ (Emphasis original).

IV

Riyutin's critique : Apart from the critiques of Trotsky and Bukharin, a very forceful criticism of Stalinism and the distortion of the spirit of the Russian Revolution in the Stalin era was provided by the programme of the Riyutin Platform which was drafted by Riyutin, Slepko, Kamenev, Zinoviev in 1932 (subsequently supplemented by many others) and clandestinely circulated inside the Bolshevik Party deserve mention for their close similarity with Rosa's critique. With the availability of the full text of this document which until very recently remained unknown, certain highly significant aspects of Stalinism come out in bold relief and it is not surprising that M.N. Riyutin was expelled from the Party in 1930, the allegation being that he was

propagating “rightwing and opportunist” views.

First, Riyutin criticized Stalinism for its intolerance of other’s views, resulting in the emergence of a system where only those persons were made party leaders who were narrow-minded, theoretically ignorant and unscrupulous, tame and submissive lackeys. At the same time persons with independent opinions were sacked from leading party posts, leading to a regime of terror and deception in the Party.³¹ Second, the Riyutin Platform made a distinction between leaders and dictators and declared that the proletarian revolution requires a good leader but dictators are not needed and the proletariat must fight against even the “best” kind of dictator.³² Third, in making the distinction between the leader and the dictator it was argued that the real leader is one who leads the movement of the masses and constantly moves around with them. He always goes at the helm and tells them the truth and never deceives them. Riyutin characterized Lenin as well as Robespierre as leaders belonging to this category. On the contrary, dictators aim at power or come to power through suppression of revolution or after the downfall of the revolutionary wave or through internal combination of ruling cliques or through palace revolution, relying on state or party apparatus, army and police. Thus a dictator generally does not rely on the masses, deceives them and tells them lies and depends upon his loyal clique.³³ The Riyutin Platform’s emphasis on the necessity of pluralism and democracy in the Communist Party, its plea for an enlightened political leadership which should be guided by the strategy of hegemony and not coercion in relation to the masses brings out very clearly the striking similarities between Rosa’s outlook and Riyutin’s critique.

Rosa’s manuscript on the Russian Revolution thus anticipated many of the criticisms made by the Russian marxists in the post-October period and at times one has the feeling that Rosa was as if giving warnings with remarkable foresight against what came to be known as Stalinism in future. Jan Dziejewski has correctly suggested that she applied her analysis to the construction of the macro model of a society which had its central focus on socialist democracy³⁴ and her warnings regarding the destiny of the Russian Revolution expressed the possibilities of serious deviations from this model. The criticisms made by the Russian marxists of the Stalinist deformations of the future course of the October Revolution shared exactly many of these concerns of Rosa Luxemburg.

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3. Rosa Luxemburg, "Zur russischen Revolution", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd 4 (Berlin, 1974), p.338. Henceforth ZRR.
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22. Leon Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification*, *op.cit.*, p.146.
23. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, *op.cit.*, p.108.

24. This alternative perspective of Bukharin on the question of political power under socialism dates back to 1925 when he tried to substantiate his position by referring to Lenin's writings in the last years of his life, namely, "Pages from a Diary" and "On Cooperation". See Nikolai Bukharin, "The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance" in Richard B. Day(ed.), *N.I. Bukharin. Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism* (Nottingham 1982).
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The Concept of Socialist Morality and Ernesto Che Guevara

BIKAS CHAKRABORTI

The concept of morality is integrally related with the history of social development. Man's moral senses are manifested through his ideas of good and evil, right and wrong or propriety and impropriety. Needless to say, the concept of morality is not an eternal concept but changes with the changes in time and space. The intention of the present paper is to analyse the idea of Marxian ethics and sense of values as advocated by Ernesto Che Guevara, one of the vanguards of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

Marx and Engels brought about a qualitative change in the field of ethics. Instead of simply interpreting the world with the help of philosophy they emphasized on changing it. In the Marxist philosophy a unity of approach was effected between ethics and philosophy of history through the concept of freedom which means a full and rational control over the nature, the society and the individual himself. With a view to removing the limitations upon freedom Marx, like Hegel, advocated for establishing a new social system. But like Hegel, he did not identify the source of limitations to any particular idea. Contrarily, he regarded the system of production in the society as the source of ideas, thoughts and consciousness. Marx did not accept the Hegelian concept of the manifestation of Absolute Idea but explained the process of social development in the light of the social and economic history of class.¹

Marxists say that ethics is essentially social because the notion of morality has developed on the basis of human behavioural patterns. Philosophers before Marx had been very much eloquent over the concept of 'eternal truth' but maintained silence on the question why certain actions would be treated as just or unjust. People had been compelled to accept those ideas which philosophers had placed before them in the garb of 'eternal ideas'. It may also be said in this connexion that the Marxist philosophy does not subscribe to the idea that end justifies means. Marxists are not in favour of any generalisation on the relationship between means and ends. In their opinion, if any principle appears to be congenial to the attainment of a better future, it may then be accepted as an end. Similarly the means which serves a social purpose may be accepted as good. The determination of the dialectical relationship between

means and ends help a man reach his true goal. Thus one is not opposed to the other but they are complementary. Marxists believe that in the long run a good or 'humanly worthy' means is very much necessary for attaining a good end.²

To the Marxists, ethics has no separate field of its own but, contrarily, embraces the whole span of human life and activity which include form the bare necessities of life like food-clothing-shelter to the finer instincts of love and romance, art and science and a host of other related things. Cultivation of the all-embracing moral principles is the prime necessity for the purpose of attaining a better and fuller life through collective effort. Man stands at the nucleus of Marxist ethics and the fundamental objective of the Marxist class analysis is to prescribe the ways and means for enabling man to lead a proper human life. To Marx, the greatest moral obligation of man is 'to make man a man'. It is true that man makes society but it is equally true that society also moulds a man. So Marxist ethics demands the destruction of a society which dehumanizes a man, and the establishment of an alternative one. This notion of morality enlightens the class consciousness of the proletariat, makes inevitable the expropriation of the expropriators and the setting up of a socialist society, and proclaims the firm determination for a transition to the communist society.³

To a Marxist revolutionary, the concept of morality has two aspects: firstly, he has to be conversant with the theoretical aspects of morality, and, secondly, to apply his theoretical knowledge to organizing the revolutionary activities. There is a process of continuity between these two aspects in the life of a revolutionary. The revolutionary life of Ernesto Che Guevara showed that from his childhood he was brought up in a familial environment which was opposed to the oligarchic-military complex in Argentina. At the age of fifteen he was convinced of the necessity of a concerted resistance against the oppressive rule and of developing a parallel organization, if necessary. In a conversation with his father he told, 'Papa, either you let me help you or I'll begin to act on my own. I'll join another fighting organization.'⁴ His family library contained books of Karl Marx, Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, Cervantes, Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Dostyevsky, Pablo Neruda, etc., and he was familiar with their writings since boyhood. Ernesto made a motorcycle tour with his friend, Alberto Granado, of over 3500 miles covering Argentina, Chile, Peru, Columbia and Venezuela. His book, *The Motorcycle Diaries : A Journey around South America*, (Verso : 1995) contains innumerable examples of his deep empathy for the poor, oppressed

and diseased peoples although there are no traces of direct political bias in his daily account. There is no doubt that a romantic attitude and some kind of adventurism prevailed in his Latin American tour but it helped him to a great extent come closer to man.

Guevara was not a member of any voluntary organization, nor was he associated with any reformist movement. He came to the conclusion from his knowledge of Marxism and his experiences from a host of incidents in Latin America that the United States imperialism was solely responsible for the political and economic ups and downs in Latin America. He was sure of the fact that this problem could not be solved until and unless the social set-up was pulled out root and branch. The failures of the bourgeois democratic revolutions in Bolivia, Guatemala and Mexico enriched his conviction. Guevara was present in Bolivia during its national revolution in 1952 and felt the pulse of the revolutionary process. He cautioned the leaders of the revolution out of his moral commitment to the people and the revolution, that the future of the Bolivian revolution would be uncertain if the vast majority of Indians were not emancipated from the spiritual isolation and, at the same time, not taken within the fold of the revolutionary process. Guevara was more encouraged with the Guatemalan revolution of 1954 because the popular support to the Arbenz government * was much stronger. When Castillo Armas** dislodged the Arbenz government under the sponsorship of the United States, Guevara, prompted by his moral obligation, took active part in the organization of the resistance movement. Incidents at Guatemala initiated a fundamental change in Guevara's life. In the words of Dolores Moyano Martin : 'The doctor died and the guerrilla leader was born in Guatemala City in June, 1954.'⁵

After the above incident Guevara was introduced to Fidel Castro and his associates, by Hilda Gadea at Mexico. A long discourse with Castro in one coldest night at Mexico, convinced Guevara of the victory of revolution in Cuba. Though he had a 'romantic adventurous sympathy' he was quite clear about the objective of his participation in the prospective Cuban Revolution : '... it would be worth dying on a foreign beach for such a pure ideal.'⁶ It is important to mention that during his stay at Mexico Guevara studied the Marxist philosophy with utmost emphasis and also taught its lessons to the members of Castro's 26 July

* Jacobo Arbenz became the President of Guatemala after the revolution in 1954.

** The CIA candidate who took over the presidency of Guatemala by a coup.

Movement.* His knowledge of Marxism, on the one hand, and his practical experiences, on the other—these two together confirmed his conviction about the qualitative change of society. So he could in no way shirk the moral responsibility of a revolutionary to make a revolution.

Guevara had confessed himself that at the initial stages of the revolutionary process in Cuba he very often used to suffer from a complex of being a foreigner. But preparations of the revolutionary process with its increasing momentum in the Sierra Maestra and the process of socialist reconstruction in post-revolutionary Cuba gradually changed his make-up. Initially he joined the 26 July Movement as a physician of the group and utilized all available resources for the treatment of the wounded. He built up a hospital in the Sierra Maestra within one year of activities there and also provided medical facilities to the people of adjacent villages. He was not contented with the role of a physician only. He was sure of the fact that problems arising out of poverty could not be alleviated without a social transformation. He gave vent to this realization in one of his speeches in later years :

I became aware, then, of a fundamental fact : To be a revolutionary at all, there must be a revolution. The isolated effort of one man, regardless of its purity of ideals, is worthless.⁷

Guevara used to consider revolution and any matter relating to it with a unity of approach and so also the role of a guerrilla fighter. But still the image of a guerrilla fighter with weapon in hand created a greater appeal to him. In his reminiscences he expressed his emotion of the day when he was given an automatic rifle and four guerrilla fighters under his command :

In this way, I made my debut as a fighting guerrilla, for until then I had been the troop's doctor. ... I shall always remember the moment I was given the automatic rifle. It was old and of poor quality, but to me it was an important acquisition.⁸

In this context, a few words about the preparatory phase of the Cuban Revolution appear imperative. In pre-revolutionary Cuba the administration of the state was run by the United States-sponsored oligarchy-military complex under the presidency of Fulgenico Batista. *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP) or the Cuban Communist Party as it was popularly called, enjoyed the backing of the erstwhile Soviet Union and held the reins of the left movement in Cuba but lacked the real

* For details, see below.

initiative for a revolutionary upsurge. Rather the government was based on a collaboration between Batista and the PSP. The first big jolt on this barren politics came when Fidel Castro and his associates launched an armed attack on the Moncada Fort on 26 July 1953. The plan proved abortive but bore an immense importance for the future in the sense that revolutionary activities in the Sierra Maestra might be said to be a continuation of the heroic Moncada assault. According to the analysis of Castro's 26 July Movement, as they were called, the objective factors of revolution were ripe in contemporary Cuba but what was lacking was the subjective factor. The PSP took a very passive role in organizing revolutionary activities on the pretext of the absence of subjective factors. What was more, the communists condemned the incident of Moncada attack scathingly. On the contrary, the 26 July Movement started its revolutionary activities with the sole object of promoting the subjective factors of revolution. The moral obligation of a revolutionary lies in his effort to conquer hurdles in the revolutionary process. Guevara offered a theoretical explanation of this revolutionary commitment :

Reality hits us : all the subjective conditions necessary for the materialisation of our plan did not exist. ... The people were conscious of the need for change but lacked the certainty of the possibility of change. To create the certainty of the possibility was our task and in the Sierra Maestra began the long process that served as catalyst to the movement in the island which provoked uninterrupted revolutionary outbursts in the entire territory.⁹

Guevara saw the manifestation of revolutionary morality in the character and activities of a guerrilla fighter. He described a guerrilla fighter as 'the fighting vanguard of the people.'¹⁰ Contact with the people for every moment helped him survive the hardship of the struggle. In the Latin American perspective he had to encounter a number of problems facing the peasants, such as, ownership of land, production and, above all, exploitation. A guerrilla fighter appeared to the people as the personification of revolutionary justice, the banner of which would be agrarian reforms. Guevara used different imageries to explain the role of a guerrilla fighter, such as 'a true priest of reform', 'an ascetic', 'a sort of guiding angel who has fallen into the lone' etc. A guerrilla's role did not exhaust only in offering benevolence to the people but had a revolutionary purpose of converting people into active comrades of the revolution by his ideological guidance.¹¹ It is important to bear in mind that the guerrilla fighter of a high moral standard was not a product of Guevara's idle imagination but was rooted in the socio-economic base of

Latin America. The *latifundio** system run on capitalistic lines, exploitation by indigenous and foreign capital, craving of the poor peasants for land and the consciousness for emancipation from the oppressive system— all had created the demand for social transformation, and the guerrilla force with its sense of commitment was born to shoulder the historical responsibility of fulfilling this demand.

Against this socio-economic and political background Guevara witnessed the possibility of the emergence of man of the future generation in the character and activities of the guerrilla fighters. He received the impetus for such a thought from the lives of the Cuban revolutionaries. He showed that the contemporary social urge in Cuba developed the extraordinary character of Camilo Cienfuegos.** With revolutionary warmth he mentioned the name of El Patojo,*** who had no military training, nor was he a participant in the Cuban revolution but came to serve the revolutionary government in Cuba out of his revolutionary zeal.

With a view to consolidating the gains of the revolution in Cuba a central economic planning was undertaken. What was needed for accomplishing this gigantic task was a huge number of party cadres. In his thinking the aspect of the ideological and moral standard of the cadres assumed greater importance than the issue of socialist reconstruction itself because cadres were the vanguard of the socialist society in Cuba. The rigorous self-control, strict discipline and a high moral character of the guerrilla fighters in the Sierra Maestra were placed as imitable examples to the party cadres for their ideological orientation. In Guevara's opinion, cadres were not simply agents of social transformation but would have to acquire human qualities. Their moral responsibility was to build up the image of the new man in the minds of the people. It was a characteristic feature of Guevara's thought that he used to enliven and enrich his theory by relating it to practice. For example, he presented Fidel Castro as the highest personification of contemporary revolutionary leadership on Cuba and also as an imitable example. Referring to the process of creating initiative and promoting creative faculties of the people in respect of the socialist reconstruction Guevara said unequivocally :

We do not want to create salaried workers docile to official thinking... Revolutionaries will come to sing the song of the

- * Large landed estate.
- ** One of the Cuban revolutionaries who died in a combat.
- *** A Gutemmlar, being inspired by the Cuban Revolution, came to Cuba. His ultimate objective was to organize revolutionary movements in Guatemala but he was killed by the army there at the initial stage of his efforts.

new man with authentic voice of the people.¹²

Not only that, Guevara added a new dimension to his concept of 'new man' :

The proletariat has no sex. It is all men and women taken together who, at all places of work in the nation, struggle consistently to reach a common goal.¹³

It is clear from Guevara's characterization of 'new man' that both the tasks of socialist economic planning and the making of man of the future society with socialist values were undertaken consciously and treated as complementary to each other. It was very difficult to decide which one of the two would be given more importance. Guevara's writings and speeches indicated that his preference for instilling new ideas and values into the public mind was very clear in his activities. In a workers' meeting on 15 August 1964 he claimed :

Today in our Cuba, every day work takes on new meaning. It is done with new happiness.¹⁴

It was his firm conviction that if the process of generating new ideas could be continued uninterruptedly, the emergence of the 'new man' would be expedited, a man who would regard himself as an integral part of the society.

Sincere love for man is the essence of humanism but the evaluation of humanism remains incomplete in the absence of a class analysis. The mental complex of private property associated with bourgeois humanism is a progressively disappearing concept in socialist humanism in which there is also a militant approach. Convinced as he was in the Marxist philosophy, Guevara said, on the one hand, that '...the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love,'¹⁵ and suggested a revolutionary, on the other hand, to be 'an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine.'¹⁶ These two statements may appear contradictory to a bourgeois humanist but they are, in fact, not different in respect of their spirit and are related to each other dialectically. As he tried his best to make a man enriched with human qualities, so also he gave a clarion call to destroy what dehumanized a man. In consonance with this approach Guevara said that 'a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy.'¹⁷ It should be noted that he was not in favour of creating an aimless terror by the random killing of enemy. Rather he used to judge each and every step of the revolutionary war on the basis of its merit. In his *Guerrilla Warfare* Guevara wrote that merciless punishment should be given to the enemy, if necessary, but he advised to treat 'defenceless prisoners' with kindness, pay homage to the dead and offer medical treatment to the wounded prisoners if their past activities did not justify capital punishment.¹⁸ His *Reminiscences of the Cuban*

Revolutionary War contained innumerable examples of kind treatment to the enemy while it was found that under similar circumstances guerrilla fighters were killed by Batista's soldiers. Guevara expected that all the qualities of fighting morale, discipline and revolutionary humanist values that the guerrilla fighters acquired in the process of hard struggle in the Sierra Maestra, would be blossomed in the character of his Twenty-first Century Man.

The issue of socialist reconstruction in Cuba appears relevant for discussion in the context of Guevara's approach to the concept of ethics. Charles Bettelheim, the French Marxist economist, and the then Moscowvite Cuban Communist held that greater stress should be laid on the productive forces and the material incentives so far as contemporary situation in Cuba was concerned. Guevara, as an opponent in the debate with Bettelheim, firmly established his point that the productive forces and production relations were not isolated phenomena but are dialectically related : 'two mechanisms that advance together, indivisibly, in all the intermediate process of society's development.'¹⁹ By a communist society he did not mean only material abundance as a consequence of the continuous development of productive forces. He stuck to the point out of his firm conviction in Marxism-Leninism that the stage of a communist society could not be reached with the help of the left-overs of the old society because this new society would be formed through a total transformation. Guevara's political and ideological stand may be stated in his own coinage : 'To build Communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.' Analysing the character of the complex process of making the new society and the new man Guevara was in favour of the adoption of a method which was 'fundamentally of a moral character, without forgetting the correct use of material incentives, especially those of a social nature.'²⁰

Guevara preferred moral incentives to material incentives in the field of production and its basic motive was to make the socialist system of production free from the influence of market economy and to develop communist values for creating the 'new man'. There was some sort of a combination between material and moral incentive in his thought-structure but he was in favour of gradually diminishing the necessity and importance of material incentives, matched correspondingly by the progressive importance of socialist values and moral incentives. He was an ardent supporter of voluntary labour as a necessary means for creating the 'new values' because he believed that voluntary labour would make a bridge between manual labour and intellectual labour. It was the considered opinion

of Guevara that the degree and kind of interpenetration between new forms of consciousness and values, and the system of socialist production aided by the advancement of technology would determine the pace of the process of progressive disalienation of man. This dialectical relationship would guide the process of evolving the 'Twenty-first Century Man'. As with other Marxist thinkers, Guevara's firm conviction was that the all-round qualities of the 'new man' would successfully enable the latter to transcend national frontier and consider the carrying out of the ideology of proletarian internationalism as his avowed obligation.

With regard to the moral obligation of a revolutionary in the international field Guevara held that the root of international consciousness lay in the national level. He described Jose Marti as the source of inspiration behind the Cuban Revolution but did not confine Marti into national limit : 'Jose Marti is more than simply Cuban, he is American; he belongs to the twenty nations of our continent....' To Guevara, the duty of a revolutionary was to put Marti's teaching into action : 'The best way of telling is by doing.'²¹ Guevara also remembered the glorious role of Simon Bolivar in fighting against the Spanish domination over Latin America in the 19th century. Taking the Latin American tradition into account Guevara thought in terms of elevating the national revolutionary efforts to the level of proletarian internationalism. He showed through his penetrating analysis of the character of imperialism that it was a global system and had to be fought on a global scale. The Cuban revolution was just a beginning of the greater struggle on a continental scale. He appealed to all revolutionaries to follow the valiant example of Vietnam. He suggested to open multiple war-fronts in the three continents in the model of Vietnam with a view to engaging and combating imperialism at a number of points. 'Create two, three or many Vietnams' was his clarion call in his *Message to the Tricontinental*.

In tune with his theory of continental revolution Guevara insisted on imposing certain obligations upon the socialist states in their relations with countries struggling for liberation. Firstly, he gave a call to all conscious people of the world to form a united front that would help the struggling nations from a political, economic and military point of view. Secondly, politics among the socialist states shall not be guided by foreign trade. He claimed that socialist states invested money in the developing countries and would get a definite portion of the produce for a definite period. Thirdly, the socialist states would help the developing countries in the technological field. Fourthly, arms would have to be supplied to the struggling

nations as per their requirements free of cost. Guevara was vehemently opposed to imposing upon the underdeveloped nations the burden of uneven trade relations between the former and the socialist states. He felt so deep a concern over the relationship of states of the anti-imperialist socialist bloc that he did not even hesitate to identify the socialist countries as 'accomplices to imperialist exploitation' if the fundamental norm of their relationship was violated. He thought that Cuba must not be the sole example of a country that received military aids from the USSR and the people's Republic of China during its days of revolutionary struggle, and urged upon the socialist states that all countries struggling for liberation 'must receive equal treatment.'²² Exposing very efficiently the trickery of the concept of peaceful co-existence which American imperialism had forced upon the developing countries as their unilateral responsibility, Guevara redefined the concept in a challenging manner :

As Marxists, we have maintained that peaceful co-existence between nations does not include co-existence between exploiters and exploited, between oppressors and oppressed.²³

It is not at all difficult to understand that Guevara hinted clearly at the *detente* between the United States and the former Soviet Union. In this connexion, it is necessary to bear in mind that his commitment to the cause of proletarian internationalism prompted him to tour different countries of Africa and, leaving behind all attractions of official status in Cuba, to go to Bolivia with the object of igniting the revolutionary spark there.

Thirty two years have passed since the death of Guevara. During these long years the world has witnessed a number of significant changes: the socialist camp is almost extinct today, the Soviet Union has disappeared from the world atlas, pieces of the 'Berlin Wall' have acquired an archaeological identity, the process of liberalization has forced the Chinese economy to recede from its goal of communism, and Cuba is now the lone partner of the socialist camp to kindle the dim light of hope for socialism. The existence of Cuba is at stake on account of the economic blockade by the United States and its associates, and the disappearance of the socialist camp. The urge for survival has prompted the Cuban authority to tighten the political grip of the Communist Party and, on the other hand, steps are being taken gradually for economic liberalization. The ban imposed so long on US dollars has been lifted. A host of trade agreements have been signed between Cuba and many non-socialist countries, and Cuba is getting flooded with tourists and touristic culture as a

direct consequence of the **policy** of promoting tourism, the aim of which is to earn dollars. That the situation is **turning** more and more critical is corroborated by documents.²⁴ It would be an aspect of serious research to inquire into, though not in the purview of the present paper, how Cuba has been trying to reconcile between political **centralization** and economic decentralization. It may be said that Cuba has not crumbled down in the face of both internal and external pressures. **Conscious** and concerted efforts are being made there with a view to **creating and maintaining** revolutionary values and ideological orientation. Guevara's image is still bright and imitable also to the youth. In this connexion, the comment of Alieda, Guevara's second daughter, on women's liberation deserves mention :

I am not a "feminista." Perhaps it is not a necessity at all in Cuba. I want the emancipation of all, irrespective of sexes.²⁵

Students start their daily routine in the schools after saluting the national flag even today and their oath reflect the essence of Cuba's social goal : 'Pioneers for Communism. We shall be like Che.' Guevara's ideas of moral incentives which were lost in the course of the 'Great Debate' during the sixties, are being revived as a moral booster for the people. That material incentives fail to develop socialist consciousness has been justified further by the disaster of applied socialism in Eastern Europe. The present Castroite leadership in Cuba has been pursuing Guevara's ideas of proletarian internationalism. Castro is very clear in this regard: 'When all that collapsed, the enormous responsibility we now carry fell on our shoulders.'²⁶

In conclusion, it may **stated** that the sense of morality and values, as cultivated by Guevara, was deeply anchored in the Cuban tradition. It is also significant that Guevara identified Marti as the 'Apostle of Cuban Independence' but did not stop within the confines of Martian ideas only. Contrarily, Guevara's thoughts had a transition to the Marxist philosophy and this qualitative transformation took place on the basis of the concretization of Marxism in the historical and socio-economic context of contemporary Cuba. There are both a continuity and a break in Guevara's transition from **Martian** to the Marxist philosophy. Fidel Castro said in his usual lucid manner how Guevara internalized the Martian tradition in the context of the Cuban historical development :

As (José) Marti said, whereas there are people without dignity, there are people who carry inside them the dignity of many people. We might add there are people who carry inside them the dignity of the world, and one of those is

Che!²⁷

It is true that the present world has drifted a long distance from the waves of the revolutionary movements of the sixties and Cuba has not been able to reach the coveted goal for which Guevara fought. It is also equally true that in the face of a host of socio-economic and political problems, and, as a consequence, the increasing individualist tendencies, Cuba has been trying hard to hold high the banner of socialist morality in order to tide over the present crisis. Under the present circumstances Guevara is still more relevant. He is not dead even after thirty two years of his mortal death. The emotion of the Cubans at the reception ceremony where Fidel Castro received Guevara's remains flown from Bolivia, shows that Guevara is not lost in the world of oblivion. There has been a resurrection of Guevara in Cuba through the reminiscences of the past, the obligations of the present and the commitments for the future. On the eve of the twenty-first century Cuba pays tribute to the valiant life and imitable example of Guevara who became an icon for a generation of revolutionaries around the world. As Michael Lowy observes in one of his recent articles :

But for those who reject the pseudo-Hegelian notion of the "end of history" with its primal belief in the eternal nature of capitalist exploitation, as for those who condemn the heinous crimes generated by this system and the imperialist New World Order's exclusion of the peoples of southern nations from the global polity, Che's humanist revolutionary outlook remains a window opened to a future of a different sort.²⁸

Notes and Referances

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 22. Guevara, 'Revolution and Underdevelopment,' *ibid.*, pp.351-9.
 23. Guevara, 'Colonialism is Doomed,' *ibid.*, p.336.
 24. For details see Bikas Chakraborti, 'Cuba : Samajtantrer Pathe Nihsanga Pathik' (in Bengali), *Kranti Samkalan* : 4, pp.18-41.
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Economic Reforms : Drawing New Political Battlelines ?

APURBA KUMAR MUKHOPADHYAY

The term 'economic reforms' is a misnomer, particularly when it is used as a synonym (or euphemism?) for liberalization. Since the days of the utopian socialists, predating Marx, economic reforms implied a process of chastening the harshness of capitalism through administering doses of socio-economic welfare for its hapless victims. This was also in keeping with the spirit of liberal democracy that sought to legitimize capitalism through the invocation of the majoritarian principle. The culture of equality, though not the economics, was to be projected by political regimes which would tinker with the capitalist economy every now and then to make the latter appear reformed or redressed in the light of aspirations of the majority. Tocqueville, anticipating John Stuart Mill, wrote about the ideological requirements of the nascent bourgeois societies during the 1840s and conferred a specific meaning on 'economic reforms'.

Under the changed scenario marked by the collapse of socialism, the uninhibited play of the market forces in an atmosphere of crude inequality and vulgar homogenization cutting across national frontiers, 'economic reforms' now stands on its head, meaning the exact opposite of what Tocqueville, Marx, Mill or the utopian socialists would have imputed to it. * Given their historical liability, social scientists cannot but trace the historical continuity in its thematics. The conceptual baggage built up around the recent clamour for economic reforms also addresses itself towards explaining the logic and machinations of capitalism as a global system. The point of difference lies precisely in the fact that under the new dispensation, such concepts are singed with unpretentious and unapologetic connotations; unpretentious because of the objectivity with which these depict the socio-economic realities emerging on the horizon; unapologetic because these are not burdened with any legitimizing concern, particularly for those whose survival is being threatened by the post-reform society.

* Anthony Giddens, an eminent sociologist has referred to this displacement of meanings of a concept in a changing ideological milieu. He points out that today it is the Right that talks about reforms and change of the economic order while the Left radicals are opposing reforms in favour of whatever remnants of welfarism may be conserved in the capitalist economy. – A. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right : The Future of Radical Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1994.

In other words, the discussion centering around economic reforms in the sense of liberalization has tended over the years to follow a crude positivistic framework of analysis, unmindful of the problematic nature of the concepts being used not only by economists but also by statesmen, policy makers and the literati in general, known more for their sophistry and less for common sense.¹

Privileging the economically privileged group's perception of it, economic reforms would imply 'policies for macro-economic stabilization as well as structural adjustment.' Spelt out further, stabilization policy would aim to 'reduce macro-economic imbalances, e.g., budgetary deficit, balance of payments deficit and inflationary gap,' whereas structural adjustment policies are 'designed to achieve the longer-term objective of making an economy more efficient and competitive by replacing the inward-looking growth strategy with an outward-looking one and by reducing the role of the state in the economy.'²

As a technocratic response to the maladies of an economy marked by stunted growth, the agenda of reforms sounds innocuous. If by administering the policy, an economy breaks through the shackles of stagflation, cuts down its fiscal deficits and public borrowings and reduces its balance of payments gap, its planners may boastfully claim to have achieved a measure of success, if not a miracle. But social analysis of economic ills has an incurable habit of questioning ahistorical, technocratic premises as 'simplistic beliefs' which are 'at best, historical ignorance and, at worst, intellectual dishonesty or a refusal to face facts.'³ This becomes clearly evident when one links up the economic consequences of 'reforms' with the social costs entailed by the same. A general tendency towards worsening poverty situation, decline in employment and surge in underemployment promoting social 'ill fare' have been the social outcome as a number of ILO-sponsored case studies reveal in unambiguous terms.⁴ That the burden of reforms is skewed heavily towards the poor is undeniable. Reduction in government expenditure in a number of Asian countries as part of their 'stabilization' programmes has adversely affected public health, basic education and poverty alleviation schemes, causing further downslides in the living conditions of the poor therein. In India, expenditure on poverty alleviation programmes went downright from 1991-92. The number of families assisted under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) declined steadily from 3.4 million in 1989-90 to 2 million in 1992-93. Employment generated under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) in the

rural sector also declined from 864 million mandays in 1989-90 to 778 million mandays in 1992-93.⁵ In Philippines, the adoption of stabilization measures brought about sharp increase in underemployment during 1980-85, decline in real wages and proliferation of subcontracting or casualization of workers, in the absence of any upward swing in the demand for labour.⁶ In Pakistan, a study of some manufacturing firm shows that 7,495 of their 17,335 workers were to be eased out of employment. Such trimming down of employment is an inevitable fall out of the privatization drive.⁷

Advertising the success of the so-called 'tigers' (no more perhaps ?) of Asia is against an ahistorical and therefore a fallacious exercise. The 'miracle' they achieved in the yester years was made possible not because of 'less' but 'more' government in certain crucial economic sectors.⁸ They relied heavily on the state for implementation of land reforms and public health measures in addition to boosting up literacy rates in order to secure a robust workforce. In the field of training for development of a skilled labour force, market failure and the need for government participation have been quite obvious, if the North Korean experiences are any guide.⁹ The strategy of rolling back the state is, therefore, not a transhistorical palliative for all times and climes, notwithstanding the neo-liberal euphoria in this respect.

Coming on to the Indian scene, one is convinced that contrary to impressions given by its planning process over the last five decades that its avowed goal is to take care of grinding poverty, growing unemployment and chronic malnutrition affecting the lives of millions, politico-economic realities point unmistakably to blatant neglect and carelessness about the same, as no amount of statistical jugglery would manage to hide. With the self-congratulating Indian state, supervised by the successive political regimes, one more corrupt and fragile than the other at the helm of political affairs of the country, the plight of the poor is anybody's guess. While serious-minded economists rack their brains over the choice of development strategies suited to the country's requirements and warn against possible misuse of precious resources, managers of the state, politicians and bureaucrats alike, fritter away tax payers' money at will.¹⁰

Needless to say, management of the economy through planning exercises undertaken by such regimes has failed to deliver the goods. The failure has been mansided, 'whether in the matter of redistribution of land, public ownership and management of industries, the functioning of cooperatives, participatory democracy from the village upwards,

workers' participation in industry and so on and on. Growth has been poor, inequalities have widened not narrowed, unemployment is massive, and nearly half the population continues to subsist below any reasonable national minimum. The failure, by all accounts, is fundamentally a political one.¹¹ Votaries of 'open society', given their antipathy to planning process of any sort which they look (down) upon as proto-socialist, take the cue from the record of such failures and recommend the policy of throwing the baby with bathwater. Since 1991, they have found the global intellectual ambience favourable to their calmour for deregulation, privatization and free market operations, well in accord with the spirit of the Friedmans' *Free to Choose* and the prognosis of the World Bank and the IMF.

It will be naive to assume this change of heart on the part of India's policy makers to be a sudden *volte face*, a turn about from the contemporary history of India's political economy. Going by the assumptions and objectives of the First Plan-document prepared by the National Planning Committee of the Indian National Congress way back in 1938 under the Chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru, one is convinced about the scope of private economic enterprises anticipated by the rulers of future India.¹² This was also found to be remarkably similar in tenor and spirit to the document prepared by India's leading industrialists in what is known as the Bombay Plan of 1944. Both the documents favoured limited intervention of the state in the economy. Industrialists and businessmen welcomed patronage by the state in building up the industrial infrastructure through large scale public investment, ensuring free flow of credit through public financial institutions for the consumption of private entrepreneurs and last but not least, for disciplining the industrial labour force through suitable legislative enactments and administrative intervention as and when called for.

Industrial and economic policies of the power that be in post-independence India were to safeguard and promote the interest of capital. State regulation and the presence of a flabby public sector gave the Indian economy the appearance of a mixed venture with built-in checks against, but also protective shades for, capitalist expansion. It is interesting to note in this connection that while mixed economy was exhibited before world public as a move away from unfettered capitalism, there was no promise in it for a radical restructuring of agrarian relations or for universalization of primary education and health care for the country's poor. The fury of such an overbearing state, emptied of any radical content, enjoyed the confidence of the Indian capitalist class, itself wary

of opening up before the competitive world market in a jiffy. A marriage of convenience between the state and the capitalist class in India shaped the trajectories of India's economic development of 'ill fare' during the post-independence period. Occasional bouts of deregulation and liberalization were no more uncommon than outbursts of populist gimmicks in such dispensation. The sudden uncorking of a series of reforms with a gusto in 1991 is, therefore, to be placed in this overall historical context to be appreciated objectively. It came about at a historical juncture marked by total lack of confidence of the citizens in the state within the domestic sphere and a neo-imperialist bonhomie in the global sphere with the caving in of the socialist regime in erstwhile Soviet Union. Raw economic arguments offered by the then Government of India in support of the reform measures hardly sounded convincing against this politico-economic backdrop at home and abroad.

Critics may argue, for instance, that it was a minor crisis in the economy, 'no more than a ripple in the history of independent India,' that 'led to dramatic changes in economic policies which have placed economic liberalization at the centre-stage.'¹³ The fiscal crisis, no doubt, created an apprehension that 'dramatic action' was called for. But 'such action need not have been the liberalization package opted for. To quit what degree the will to embark upon radical liberalization existed, independently of conditionality, is not clear.'¹⁴ Even Bhagwati and Srinivasan, two of the programme's most sophisticated and uncompromising defenders, had to concede :

The fact that the reforms were part of the conditionality that came with multilateral assistance has... created the impression that they are the result of foreign pressure. In turn, there is the notion that the ideas and policies being imposed on us are foreign and also that they are ill-designed, in consequence, for us.¹⁵

Last but not least, the representatives of leading indigenous industrial houses were caught on the wrong foot by the seriousness and sweep of the reforms as against the earlier 'reforms by stealth'. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry has preferred liberalization in phases as they are afraid of being 'killed by imports' after more than 'three decades of highly protective industrialization.'¹⁶ Considering such counterpoints in the prevailing mode of economic thinking and policy debates, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that :

there can be little doubt that it was a combination of the reality in the national context and the conjuncture in the international context which provided the impetus for sudden change. Despite later pretensions to the contrary, the change

was neither planned nor debated. Instead, the government was driven by the immediate compulsions of an impending sense of crisis in the economy. The response was driven, even dictated, by the crisis. It was not planned.¹⁷

It was prompted by the realization that the state had been completely delegitimized and faced with a situation where even the people of India may not be willing to lend to their government to bail it out from a crisis. The rest was the free play of the economic fundamentalism of the IMF and the World Bank.

Economic policies have an innate tendency to open up fields for political contestation, notwithstanding the apolitical or amoral projections of those by professional economists basking in the glory of scientism. The policy of economic reforms thriving on the assumption of infallibility of the market signified a moment of defeat for India's national economy, contrary to the optimistic pronouncements of a section of the nation's elites. Far from deregulation weakening the hold of the state on civil society, the former has become more illiberal and authoritarian in the process of administering liberalization. This is nowhere more manifest than in the response of the state *vis a vis* labour. Disciplining the working class with vengeance and with an employer-friendly high-handedness has been the new role assigned to most of the liberal states by the zealots of the neoliberal faith all over the world, India being no exception. What the late Professor Sukhamoy Chakraborti used to characterize as 'the theology of the market place' is found to be happily correlating with symptoms of a theocratic state. With battleline between capital and labour more sharply drawn in recent years, the state is bound to give up all pretensions of a soft mediator and opt for the strategy of aggression minus rhetorics. Viewing the global situation one can't but agree with Victor Wallis that in the last two decades, capital, 'scorning accommodation, has unabashedly reasserted its polarizing tendencies,' resulting in 'resurgence of poverty and hardship on an unprecedented scale, extending even to countries that had served as models of mass prosperity.'¹⁸ According to another account, in the 1990s most Latin American and African economies continue to be extremely depressed. Stagnant growth and wage depression encompass all the advanced countries including Northern Europe and Japan. Yet even more resources are being redeployed to the external sector at the same time as 'austerity policies dominate corporate wage-setting and government economic strategies.'¹⁹ According to figures available, people without work number 17 million in the European Union, 35 million in the OECD nations and 700 million the world over.²⁰ Not to speak of the Afro-Asian countries alone,

even industrially advanced countries now witness a 'rising natural rate of unemployment' without any sign of redemption in near or distant future. As the historian Hobsbawm has noted, those going out of jobs due to structural adjustment are not likely to find reemployment in future.²¹

World economy is thus blatantly discriminatory *vis-a-vis* its workers and the potential job-seekers. Defenders of this new economy try to explain away such discriminatory behaviour by contemplating a bifurcation between a monetary society and a labour society, giving the former the appearance of reality and wishing the latter out of existence.²² Neo-liberal orthodoxy justifies itself through the invocation of an ideology that is 'beyond Left and Right— a formidable stick to beat Marxism with.'²³ Professor Amartya Sen, a staunch votary of public action for effecting human development observed in a centennial obituary note on Marx that 'there is much new life in Marx, a hundred years after his death.'²⁴ The observation is confirmed further by the state of economic affairs across the world a hundred and fifty years after the publication of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 'Economic reforms', originating as a crisis management strategy, has elevated itself to an ideology of economic fundamentalism of the Right, far outpacing the fundamentalist assumptions of Marxism. Worse still is the fact that it has encouraged the spread of an 'I-me-myself' mindset plaguing the cultural systems of diverse civilizations — from the modern and the waiting to be modern to even those refusing to be modern so long. The cultural homogenization attempted by the neo-liberal economic philosophy through skillful manipulation of the media now engulfs the vast terrain from 'Siberia to California', outwitting the *Manifesto*.²⁵ The working class, the poor and the marginal have nothing to hope from this new policy. They have also no reason to be ashamed of the labour power they possess because the state declares such power redundant, under the dictates of the global operators of usurious and speculative capitalism. The battle lines have to be redrawn to ensure more fruitful and productive use of labour, keeping alive the spirit of liberal heterodoxy as against the illiberal orthodoxy of liberalization masquerading as 'economic reforms'.

Notes and References

1. The need for comprehending liberalization from a common sense point of view, liberating the concept from unnecessary obfuscation has been underlined, in an apparently lighter vein, by Amit Bhaduri and Deepak Nayyar in *The Intelligent Person's Guide To Liberalization*, Penguin Books, New Delhi 1996. The authors write in the preface, 'We are convinced that economics is, and should be, comprehensive to the intelligent person at least in so far as it affects his or her everyday life. For economics may be difficult, but it is not occult... matters are made worse by the jargon of economists which mystifies the ordinary person. But it is possible to explain complex things in a simple manner. It

is perhaps even more important to avoid setting out simple things in a complex manner?' (p.xi).

2. Rizwanul Islam (ed.), *Social Dimensions of Economic Reforms in Asia*. ILO, SAAT, New Delhi 1994, p.1.
3. Bhaduri and Nayyar, op.cit., p.14.
4. Rizwanul Islam (ed.), op.cit., p.3; see also the articles by Azizur Rahman Khan, Ashoka Chandra, Masihur Rahman, Sudipto Mundle, Rohini Nayyar, Naqvi and Kemal, among others in the volume.
- 5,6,&7. Rizwanul Islam (ed.), op.cit., p.5.
8. J. Dreze and Amartya Sen (eds.), *Indian Development : Selected Regional Perspectives*, OUP, New Delhi 1996; see the introduction by Amartya Sen, in particular.
9. Rizwanul Islam (ed.), op.cit., p.7, and the article by Moo Ki Bai and Woo Hyun Cho in the same volume.
10. Apurba K. Mukhopadhyay, 'Economic Policies for Elite Citizens, *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 15 January 1994 (Literary Supplement).
11. B. Harris-White and S. Subramanian (eds.), *Illfare in India : Essays on India's Social Sector in Honour of S. Guhan*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1999. See the 'Introduction', p.41 and also Dreze and Sen, 'Public Action and Social Inequality', in the same volume, pp.374-401.
12. Partha Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State' in Terence J. Byres, (ed.), *The State, Development Planning and Liberalisation in India*, OUP, New Delhi 1997, pp.82-103.
13. Bhaduri and Nayyar, op.cit., p.21.
14. J. Terence Byres, (ed.), op. cit., 'Introduction' by Byres, pp.7-8.
15. Bhagwati and Srinivason, quoted in Byres, ibid., p.7.
16. Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991.
17. Bhaduri and Nayyar, op.cit., p.49.
18. Victor Wallis, 'Socialism under Siege,' *Monthly Review*, January 1996, and Apurba Mukhopadhyay, 'In Defense of Marxist Orthodoxy,' *Samaj-Tattva*, Vol.2, No. I, June 1996; Apurba Mukhopadhyay, 'The Third World in International Politics' in R.R. Chakraborti and G.K.Basu, (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, Sterling, New Delhi 1993.
19. Gregory Albo, 'A World Market of Opportunities? Capitalist Obstacles and Left Economic Policy,' *Socialist Register 1997*, p.11.
20. Elmar Altvater, 'Financial Crisis on the Threshold of the 21st Century,' in ibid., p.50. See also C. Leys and L. Pantich, 'The Political Legacy of the Manifestos,' *Socialist Register 1998*, pp.18-48.
21. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, Viking, Indian Edition, 1995, p.413.
22. Altvater in *Socialist Register 1997*, op.cit., p. 50. The author notes ruefully, '....money. in the historical conditions of the late 20th century, emancipates itself from the substance which gives it a material and local character. Money emancipates itself from

work; the monetary and the real economy part company. Money becomes the referent of real relations, which however, functions like a draconian tablet of laws; money requires social actors to observe the rules. It transforms society into a money society, into a divided society, as owners of monetary assets draw income from their monetary assets and debtors must bear the costs of their debt service through real production. Money and work thus become opposites.'

23. Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, op. cit. This is a convenient label for the neoliberals to hide their real ideological project.
 24. Amartya Sen, 'Marx since His Death,' *The Statesman*. Calcutta, 14 March 1983.
 25. O. Body-Barrett and T. Rantanen (eds.), *The Globalization of News*, Sage Publications, London 1998. In their introductory note, the authors regard the development of the concept of 'news' as 'a process that lies at the heart of modern capitalism and which also illuminates processes of globalization which modern capitalism has helped to generate. 'News' represented the reformulation of 'information' as a commodity gathered and distributed for the three purposes of political communication, trade and pleasure ... the collection and dissemination of this commodity was organized and rationalized on behalf of media and non-media clients by a small group of powerful agencies, acting globally and as a cartel. Hence the links between modernity, capitalism, news, news agencies and globalization are an outstanding but neglected feature of the past 150 years.' pp. 1-2. See also, Chris Paterson, 'Global Battlefields' and C. Giffard, 'Alternative News Agencies,' in the same volume.
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Development at the Grassroots : the Policy Syndrome

ANIL KUMAR JANA

The Indian state is the central actor in the process of planning and development though its role in the whole area is no less problematical. It is widely acknowledged in the circle of political philosophers and economic thinkers that the role of the state is predominant in bringing the ideals of political and economic democracy together.¹ The objective of this essay is not to trace the interplay of economics and politics in the formulation and implementation of policies for economic development in independent India. There is a good number of rich contributions to the domain of political economy highlighting the role of the Indian state in development and planning. The main search of this essay is confined to the changes in policy approach leading to the introduction of grassroots planning and development.

I

The Indian state like its counterparts in other parts of the world represent a set of institutions and personnel exercising complete constitutional authority over a vast territorially distinct area and these institutions and apparatus include the whole machinery of planning and development. These institutions and apparatus also include the Government, the bureaucracy, the financial institutions, the law courts and the judiciary having profound implications for the operation of planning and for the possibilities of capitalist transformation. This, however, does not mean that the state in India act 'at the behest' of the dominant class.² The notion of 'a self-determining state'³ devoid of classes and class conflict does not fit in the Indian context. The situation in India is too complex to allow the formulation of such a simplistic view.

Formulation of policies for development and planning involves conflicts at different levels and stages among the different actors participating in the process. The centre, being in a hegemonic position in India, seeks to 'impose' planning from above, while the states have been clamouring for more resources and need-based planning, keeping in view their own order of regional priorities. Hence development policies in India have always been a conflict-prone platform where the two levels

have often collided only to be resolved through some patchwork at the National Development Council level. Within the states, the politics of planning and development has been manifested in resource-competition among the different regions within the state. Also, at the sub-state level local institutions compete for power and resources to bend 'development policies' to the fulfilment of local needs. Again, there is an important area of passive politics where the state's departments silently but decisively strive for resources with people's representative institutions. With the passage of Constitutional Amendments (1992), grassroots planning under the aegis of local self-governing bodies is now being legitimized. The new voices being raised by the people at the micro level are going to be, many a time, discordant and cacophonous. It will need a valiant and tactful effort to orchestrate all these forces, factors and actors.

The other dimension of implementation of planning and development policies is subsumed in the structuring of people's participation, so often advocated as a precondition and an objective of development. The contemporary approach to development lays emphasis on the people as the critical centre in the total process of development. In this sense, people's participation is not to be viewed as an instrument of administrative efficiency but as a preferred political objective for the development of the democratic system. People's participation is a political issue and aims at reducing power differences and ensuring power equalisation. Hence an attempt to achieve a meaningful level of participation may be problematic since the exercise may become the focus of power struggle.⁴ Planning is a tool of development, which can be used by both individuals and groups as well as by the state. Hence it is essentially value-laden when it is put in actual operation. It is guided by political considerations, apart from obvious economic and management considerations.

II

The first two decades of India's planning and development are better considered as the periods of 'revolution from the top'. When the planning was introduced the country's development prospects were rated high. It had a very stable government with a strong commitment to planned development based on Nehru's vision of a mixed economy moving towards a socialistic pattern of society. Political parties, their leaders and the bureaucracy— all were pushed in the background as long as Nehru was at the helm of affairs. There was almost a national consensus

on socio-economic objectives of the country and the approach to national development was determined in the context of a mixed economy.⁵ The Central Government developed its own methodology and infrastructure for formulation of plans and development schemes and the states were required to follow and execute the central programmes. They had no independent authority to decide their objectives and draw their schemes according to their needs and priorities. Their main purpose was to secure the largest amount of grants and they became gradually more dependent on central assistance and less interested in the mobilisation of their own resources and revenues.⁶

In a federal set-up like ours it is expected that both the Union and the states should have equal rights and responsibilities in the spheres of planning, but the situation was quite different and the states were given little role in regulating the development policies of the country. Again since the late seventies and early eighties the role of the states in deciding policies for development gradually eroded through the introduction of a good number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). Further, below the state level no serious attempt was made to decentralise decision-making in the spheres of planning and development through creation of appropriate apparatus. The planning boards created in different states were not serious about grassroots planning. With a view to reducing poverty in rural India and introducing people's participation in the developmental programmes, Community Development Programmes (CDP) were launched in 1952 through the creation of development blocks throughout the country.⁷ The CDP was a method of rural development which sought to initiate the process of democratic decentralization for the transformation of the social and economic life of the villages in a coordinated and planned manner.⁸ Right from the beginning of the programme, participation of the people, both in formulation and implementation of development schemes, were stressed through the creation of a Project Advisory Committee comprising non-official elements within the project areas. But people's participation in the programme was negligible and was bypassed through a government agent engaged in rural works, customarily described as the Village Level Worker (VLW).⁹

The First Five-Year Plan itself accepted the principle of democratic planning in which the people's cooperation was solicited in the implementation of development programmes. The plan document emphasized not only the vital role of the State governments, but also of the Local Self-Governing Bodies in the field of development. Different

local, regional and functional bodies were required to be involved actively in the preparation of plans and the role of the central planning authority was visualized to be the preparation of a general framework of the Plan. Thus the concept of decentralized planning and development became an important aspect of the successive five-year plans. The preparation of the First Five-Year Plan in the States was mainly done at the States' headquarters. Subsequently attempts were made to divide State plans into district plans. The need for execution of local developmental works in cooperation with the people compelled the bureaucracy to realize the urgency to introduce a scheme for development through a process of comprehensive village planning taking into account the needs and priorities of the community. It was also realized that without a representative agency of the people in the villages all the people could not be brought together under the umbrella of rural development. The review of progress followed during the CDP era opened the eyes of the planners and politicians who understood the need for creating an active organization at the village level that could involve all the people into the common programmes.

These considerations were taken into account in the formulation of the Second Five-Year Plan. Early in 1954, that State governments were advised to ensure local initiatives in formulating plans and development schemes so as to attain a close relation between the local needs and priorities based on public participation and voluntary efforts. Thus the methods adopted provided valuable linkages between the village people and rural officials.

In spite of contradictions in the ideology of the Second Plan,¹⁰ it emphasized the need for inclusion of local varieties into national and state plans. It stressed the urgency in creating effective administrative and developmental institutions at the grassroots level for planning and development :

Unless there is a comprehensive village planning... weaker sections... may not benefit sufficiently from assistance provided by the government. Secondly, rural progress depends entirely upon the existence of an active organization in the villages which can approach each family and bring all the people... into productions and other programmes to be carried out with the help of administration.¹¹

But no concrete progress in this direction could be traced during the Second Plan period. The practice followed hitherto in planning and development remained almost the same although the Second Plan

discussed the concept and the scope of decentralized horizontal plans in great details.

III

During the initial period of the Second Plan an important event took place having far-reaching implications in the field of decentralization in development policies. In this period, the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team was appointed to evaluate plan projects under the CDP. The recommendations of this Committee led to the genesis of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Committee stressed the need for placing rural development administration fairly at the hands of local representatives to ensure popular participation in development programmes at the local levels. It recommended the creation of democratic institutions in the rural areas to take charge of all development activities. It was suggested that the body would be statutory, elected and comprehensive in its duties and functions, equipped with the necessary executive machinery with adequate resource in its possession. In the final analysis, the body was visualized to be an instrument of expression of the local people's will with regard to local development.

The introduction of the Panchayati Raj system by the end of the Second Plan added a new dimension to the concept of development. It created an agency at the grassroots which could easily be utilized for strengthening the process of decentralization in development below the state. Though limited in functioning, the creation of PRIs was no doubt a bold experiment in the sphere of democratic decentralization. It became a representative body at the local level which could very well play an important role in rural development. The Second Five-Year Plan put much emphasis on district development administration especially on the models on which District Development Councils were proposed to be built up in future. Thus the district development administration was considered as 'an agency of change towards a new social order... to respond to the needs and aspirations of the people.'¹² In the context of this new addition to the field of rural administrative machinery the Third Plan was launched, which paid considerable importance to decentralized planning and identified district level development programmes similar to the lines contained in the Second Plan. The success of the ambitious Second Plan already created a sense of confidence in the planners and they could now draw up the village production plan. During the Third Plan, attempts were made to formulate state plans taking the district plans into account. Though the plan expounded a methodology for

decentralized development planning no tangible result could be achieved.¹³

IV

During the sixties, the economic atmosphere changed drastically. The successive droughts caused by hostile monsoon, the declaration of 'plan holidays' and large scale import of food grains aggravated the crisis and uncertainty. There was also a speedy change in the political scenario after the Fourth General Elections (1967). This changed political situation coupled with economic uncertainty necessitated rethinking and reorientations of the development policies. Certain progressive measures like the abolition of privy purses and the nationalisation of commercial banks were undertaken by the government. Pursuant to this attitude of the government at the Centre, the Fourth Five-Year Plan laid more emphasis on social justice and equity as well as on the solutions of the problems of the weaker sections of the society. It was realized that planning was not something that came from without or from the above but what each state, district or even cluster of villages would develop according to its own resources and potentialities. Realization had its genesis in the failure of the Third Plan and brought home the point that the state plans to be successful must be based on district plan.

The real breakthrough in the sphere of developmental process was made during the Fourth Plan period when some concrete steps were taken by the Planning Commission to decentralize the planning system. Credit for this shift in outlook goes mainly to D.R. Gadgil, the then Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission, who popularized the concept of district planning. Prior to the introduction of Fourth Plan, India's Planning was highly centralized in both concept and content. Planning Commission, being primarily concerned with planning techniques, was the sole authority in the formulation of an integrated plan for development. The five-year plans were the products of different recommendations arrived at by various working groups, task forces and committees concerned with some specific subjects and departments. "They were all mechanically combined to form the plan and when, as a result of decisions regarding allocations, adjustments have to be made upwards and downwards they are made independently for each separate set of programmes."¹⁴ The situation at the lower levels was more deplorable. Preparation of plans at the state level was used to be done by the secretaries. There was no scope for public discussions or consultations of general or specific nature except for the debates in the legislatures

and no information was available outside in these regards. The schemes and proposals for development were prepared in such a manner as to attract the Planning Commission with a view to inducing it to release handsome assistance from the central pool.¹⁵ In spite of the prevalent practice, there was little difference among the politicians and planners on the desirability and need for changing the existing system of centralized and sectoral planning and development.

V

In 1969, the Planning Commission finally decided to settle down at the district level and recommended district as the unit of both plan formulation and execution and issued 'Guidelines for the Formulation of District Plans.' The Commission advised the states to adopt district as the unit of planning below the state level and to put emphasis on 'the integration of plans of local self-government bodies, Panchayati Raj Institutions, co-operative organizations and government departments.'¹⁵ The Guidelines also recommended continuous consultations not only after the preparation of plans but also before and during the formulation of plans. It is needless to point out that such a change emerged in the minds of planners from the utter disillusionment with the results of the highly centralized planning and development process followed in the fifties and sixties. At this stage one interesting point deserves special mention. During all these years both the planners and politicians had reduced the size of the unit planning—from the national and state levels to the district and block levels, but the real question remained unsettled. In all these plans, 'people' were missing. The planners were perhaps confused. They could not settle the vital question : planning for whom? The whole concept of decentralized development planning appeared to be confused in a perception of getting the plans formulated 'for the people' instead of planning 'by the people'.

The failure of the Indian planning to attain self-sustained economic growth based on an equitable distribution of income and improved standard of living is mostly attributed to its heavy reliance on bureaucracy. Indian planners believed that with the help of state bureaucracy they would be able to achieve the targets. But the state apparatus modelled on the heritage and tradition inherited from the British was not well suited for the task of rural reconstruction and development in a country so vast and heterogeneous like ours. Indian bureaucracy developed and nourished under the steel-frame of the British administration was turned into a distinct class which preferred to live in a narrow, circumscribed

world of its own. The bureaucracy with its narrow horizon and exclusiveness fails to reach the masses, not to talk of influencing the way of the people. Moreover, it lacks the social attitude necessary to perform the huge task of nation building. Virtually a different kind of development machinery was required which could be entrusted with the responsibilities of development. A close review of the operation of the five-year plans and different development policies in India amply substantiates the hypothesis that there was a lack of eagerness in implementing the process of decentralization in planning and development. The elite associated with the formulation and implementation of development policies believed that increase in productivity, capital formation, appropriation and utilization of national resources, regulation of trade and commerce, management of financial resources and control over price mechanism required the intervention by central authority as well as planning at the top.

Thus it is clear that during the first decade of India's planning there was no specific programme, but only statements and declarations regarding regional planning and grassroots development. From the Fourth Plan onwards necessary steps were proposed to actualise decentralized planning and development.¹⁷ Later on, the Central government initiated a scheme for financial supports to the states for meeting additional expenditure for strengthening and organizing the State Planning machinery, and the States taking cue from it, strengthened their state-level organizations, and some states even set up planning organization below the state-level. Though both the Fourth and Fifth Plans were directed towards decentralization taking the district and the block as the micro-units of planning to speed up the work of planned rural development, no adequate concrete steps were taken to materialise the idea. An attempt was made for the first time to treat the village as the lowest unit of decentralized planning and development by adopting the scheme of *Antyodaya*. (whole village development programme) in 1977 in order to bring about the integrated development of the village as a whole. Real thrust on decentralized development and planning was given in the late seventies when the surplus production in wheat induced the Central government to undertake new programmes like 'Food for Work' to combat rural poverty. It is interesting to note that the 32nd National Sample Survey showed that in 1977-78, the proportion of the population in rural areas living below the poverty line was 51.2%.¹⁸ Thus the renewed urge for concrete steps emerged from the utter disillusionment with the result of India's planning practices followed for almost three decades.

VI

The establishment of Janata Government at the Centre (1977) paved the way for real experiments in decentralization in the spheres of both administration and planning. Special mention may be made about the constitution of two important committees, viz., the *Working Group on Block Level Planning* headed by M.L. Dantwala and the *Committee on Panchayati Raj*, popularly known as the Asoka Mehta Committees in 1977. In view of infrastructural difficulties at the block level, the committees assigned the responsibilities of block planning to the district level organization though recommended 'the case for selecting a small area for planning'¹⁹ and proposed the integration of block plans with the district plan. The Asoka Mehta report opened a new era in the field of local government and decentralized development in India. Besides identifying the district as the first point of decentralization below the state level under popular supervision, it recommended the formulation of development plans at the district level on the lines suggested by the Dantwala Committee. It also stressed the need for accommodating the views articulated about the Mandal Panchayats and the question of rural-urban continuum from time to time.

The national debate on decentralization and development was thus revived in the late seventies and early eighties. A few State governments took these reports seriously and started experiments in decentralization and development in their own ways, though there were certain inadequacies and even confusions in those recommendations. Subsequently the Sixth Five-year Plan sought to accommodate the recommendations of these committees and adopted the strategy 'to strengthen the process of democratic decentralisation.'²⁰ But there was no perceptible change in the process of development planning and the bureaucracy at the district level controlled the whole process of development under a more or less concentrated arrangement. Different poverty alleviation programmes were introduced in the Central budget and a beginning in effective decentralization was made. With the launching of large-scale multisectoral, countrywide programmes of rural development the need for developing an appropriate infrastructural machinery to ensure their planning and implementation in an effective and integrated manner was felt. The Planning Commission appointed a *Working Group on District Planning* in 1982 under the Chairmanship of C.H. Hanumantha Rao and the recommendation of this group formed the basis for evolving the district planning and the approach was outlined in the recommendations of the Working Group and stated to pursue 'the

decentralization of the planning process' for development. It was also realized that developmental activities at the district level would vest in a single body which would determine the strategies and priorities and allocate funds for various departments taking into account the planning and other capabilities available at the grassroots. Thus the important point of convergence is that both the expert groups assigned the basic functions of development to the district level.²¹

The idea of decentralization in development got a further fillip in the recommendations of the *Commission on Centre-State Relations*, popularly known as the Sarkaria Commission and the *Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes* (CAARD), headed by G.K.V.Rao. The Sarkaria Commission appointed mainly to examine and review the arrangements between the Centre and the States, provided a scope for strengthening the idea of regional development planning in its recommendations on issues like greater role for the State Planning Boards and the reorganization of the National Development Council.²² The G.K.V. Rao Committee while dealing with the issue of decentralized development, endorsed the major recommendations of the Working Group on DP in respect of creation of district planning committees and the decentralization and devolution of greater administrative and financial powers.²³ But the findings of the CAARD were somewhat different from those of the Working Group Report on district planning in that the CAARD emphasized the representative leadership of the Panchayati Raj Institutions at different levels. Highlighting the planning operation as a single holistic one, the Committee, in broad agreement with the approach to decentralization indicated by the Working Group, suggested the total accommodation of local needs and aspirations in the development plan of the district. The Committee stressed the need for creation of a sound planning and implementing organization, for effective integration and coordination of all rural development activities under the umbrella of the district planning. It also recommended the rationalization in the activities of different organizations at the district level under the effective leadership of democratic bodies of local governance.²⁴ These recommendations together with those of the two Working Groups constitute the ideological and operational foundations of decentralized planning and development in India.

In the ultimate analysis, the way in which planning has been executed has left the people as mere spectators than active participants in the entire process. Hence the need for institutionalization of the process of

decentralization to check that of alienation of the people, was felt. Accordingly, the Eighth Five-year Plan laid down the emphasis on institution building to make the people's initiative and participation as the key elements in the process of development. In this sense, the Eighth Plan may be considered as 'more a manager's plan than an abstract economist's plan of cliches and pious wishes.'²⁵ The Eighth Plan stressed the role of the government to facilitate the process of people's participation through the creation of necessary institutional infrastructure particularly in the rural areas. But the progress was slow due to the fact that the other tiers of the government were not fully integrated into the development strategy.

VII

Besides this neglected state of affairs in the process of grassroots planning and development, the over-all progress in effective decentralization through Panchayati Raj was not at all satisfactory excepting in a few states. Rather the signs of instability and concentration of power became more visible in the process. There was a growing realization that the ineffectiveness and non-functioning of rural local self-governing bodies were the result of the absence of constitutional sanctions for these institutions. The idea of inserting a constitutional provision according recognition to these grassroots-level organizations was first articulated in Asoka Mehta Committee report and found support in the report of the Thungon Committee which recommended constitutional status for these bodies.

The 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts (1992) are considered as milestones in the field of decentralization in administration and development. These amendments seek to initiate a genuine process of decentralized planning and development with the total involvement of grassroots-level institutions together with the District Planning and Metropolitan Planning Committees. Now it has become mandatory on the part of the States to constitute 'District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole.'²⁶ The twin amendments contain larger implications for planning and development since they seek to elevate the status of the panchayats and the municipalities as effective institutions of self-governance by making the *Panchayati Raj*, *District Planning Committee* and the *Metropolitan Planning Committee* as necessary parts of the basic structure of the Constitution itself. The amendments also seek to ensure

periodical elections and assign active and enhanced roles to them in the process of planning and development. Thus the amendments may be considered as the culmination of the long debate that was revived in the aftermath of the Asoka Mehta Committee and Working Group reports. These are again viewed by some scholars rightly as attempts towards real decentralization in an evolving 'federal nation' based on participatory democracy and popular base.²⁷

The amendments have paved the way for multi-level planning and development in India. The constitutional provisions for establishment of *District Planning Committee* at the district level, *Gram Sabha* at the village level and *Ward Committees* within the municipalities as the structural means for devolution of decision making powers from the Centre to the grassroots-level together with other constitutional provisions give new meaning and content to multi-level decision-making process in which Panchayats, Municipalities and District Planning Committees become institutions of self-governance and agencies of development throughout the country. In fact, one more tier has been added to the existing two-level planning system by these amendments. These amendments, viewed critically, not only constitutionalise three strata in planning and development — national, state, and district, but also contain the seeds of creating a five-storied pyramid of planning and development starting from the village Panchayats and Ward Committees at the grassroots.

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The Congress and the Politics of Agrarian Reforms in India : A Case Study of West Bengal

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The programme of agrarian reforms introduced since the planning exercise was started as a tool for rapid economic development. Hardly the reforms policy of the Congress government had paved the way for reduction in disparity in the ownership of land, and the implementation of tenancy reforms and land ceiling laws that had been enacted was not quite satisfactory and encouraging. In a strategic posture the ceiling redistributive reforms were essentially motivated to eradicate feudal tendencies in land relations, rehabilitate landless masses up to the point of a standard mark and add a pro-capitalist dynamism. In the rural class structure landowners remain at the top and landless labourers at the bottom within the framework of patron-client relationship.

In the First Five Year Plan land reforms were placed with paramount importance, but there remained a low degree of consensus on the land reforms issue. Differences were prevalent among the central and state leadership on the imposition of ceilings and land holdings. Resolutions were passed by the central leadership to make the state leaders regulate rents, provide greater security of tenure to the tenants. In the Second Five Year Plan ownership and peasant proprietorship were emphasized to make a fresh look into. The Plan also emphasized the individual or co-operative farming and declared that in the system of Co-operative Village Management, the principal mode of agricultural operation would be the co-operative farming based on individual peasant ownership of land. The ceiling laws though implemented, were based on certain preconditions like conditions of regions, types of social and irrigational facilities. The objectives of increasing the agricultural production, revamping rural economy with wider and more egalitarian distribution of land, and achieving democratic socialism through ceiling fixation, co-operative farming and increase in agricultural production were deadlocked and therefore were not achieved as desired. The State legislatures made laws and took measures to legislate against any discrimination and for every contingent disorder to satisfy popular demands and put the growing unrest in a deep freeze. Mrs Gandhi with a bleeding heart for the poverty-stricken, extended pressures on the state leadership to take measures on land reforms, but bureaucratic lethargy brought about unhappy results. It was a half-

hearted attempt on the part of the Congress leaders. In essence, although in principle Congress(I) politicians favour land reform, in fact they are often landlords, related to landlords, or members of the same caste or social groups as the landed. As a result, means of evasion are written into the tenure of laws.¹

There also remained a wider gap between the land actually declared surplus and land allotted to landless persons. Mohan Lall Shrimal and V.R.Krishna Iyer have therefore suggested measures to detect the cases of evasion thus :

To detect the cases of evasion of ceiling law, the government needs the assistance of beneficiaries of surplus land. If associations of small and marginal farmers, landless labourers and village artisans are formed, these can very easily identify the case of evasion or *benami* transactions and the surplus land can expeditiously be taken possession of. Organized effort could also be made by such associations by pulling their resources for development and cultivation of the land and marketing the produce. Such voluntary associations have proved useful in various developed countries.²

So, they emphasized that bureaucratic malpractices and loopholes were responsible for evasion of ceiling and other land reform measures. Theoretically, this had been supported by Rajiv Gandhi in his speech at Kashipur, Nainital on 8 October 1988 that responsibility would be delegated to the lower level and one could not remove all these malpractices if the base was not strengthened.³ Characteristically, there were little differences between the Congress party and other rightists. Both were in favour of the capitalist framework of the system—in its style of living, functioning and ruling, and in maintaining the same ‘atmosphere of sycophancy and back-biting’.⁴

Before independence, there were differences among the Congress leaders on land reforms, and the framers of the Constitution pursued the policy of reform by means of law and administration. The Constituent Assembly was faced up with the difficulty of striking a balance between the right to property and the interference of the state in the sphere of this right with a view to maintaining a semblance of social relations. The Constituent Assembly ultimately favoured and supported the restrictions on right to property and land reform measures respectively. Differences now continued over the question of compensation between Nehru, V. Patel and G.B.Pant, Nehru

being in favour of acquisition of property without compensation. The Congress leaders at the central level, therefore, were in disagreement over the question of land acquisition and the legitimacy of compensation. Instead, the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee recommended that opportunities should be provided to the farmers for their all round development, and the diversion of lands should lawfully be prohibited; the state should guarantee permanent, inheritable and transferable land rights to the cultivators in a non-exploitative agrarian structure; the state should determine the limits of ceiling based on individual holdings and profess maximum production with maximum efficiency; the state should encourage joint and co-operative farming in consonance with the practical requirements. Recognizing the implications of the recommendations, the central Congress leaders opted for phased and evolutionary land reforms. The West Bengal Congress leaders though accepted land reforms through legislation certain difficulties arose in the way of its implementation, namely, the difficulty of judicial litigation and unnecessary delay in land reforms, the difficulty of paying fair and adequate compensation and the difficulty of disagreement among the wider sections of the population affected by the land reform measures. Therefore, the leaders tried to pacify the transitional support bases of the middle class rural influentials, instead of taking further radical and evolutionary measures alienating the past supporters and gaining the new ones, the intermediaries, share-croppers and labourers:

Those who were the intermediaries would obviously suffer directly by the loss of their rights, although the amount of the loss would vary with the importance of these rights. Those who had rented land to tenants were not in favor of reducing rent; those who hired farm labor were not in favor of directly raising the wages of their laborers.⁵

The Central government tried to influence the West Bengal leadership of the Congress to implement the land reform laws and the party's programme of land reforms. Many important sections of the party did not accept the land acquisition without compensation. Many party members were totally against the land reforms and argued in favour of the eradication of poverty and distribution of social justice by and through increased agricultural productivity, improvement of the technical skills and proliferation of scientific education among the farmers. The West Bengal Congress was broadly divided into two important segments over the issue of land reforms: supporters of limited land reform and those who were against land reform. However, the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953 was passed, which empowered the State to acquire lands of the intermediaries between the

States and the tenants except those 20-25 acres of land which were under individual cultivation, the *barga* lands in excess of 33 acres, mills, factories, gardens, ponds, tea gradens etc. While acquiring land, the State government at the same time paid compension. (Table no. 1).

Table 1: Net Income and the Amount of Compensation

Net Income	Amount of Compensation Payable
For the first Rs. 500 or less of net income	Twenty times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 500 or less of net income	Eighteen times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 1,000 or less of net income	Seventeen times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 2,000 or less of net income	Twenty times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 10,000 or less of net income	Ten times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 15,000 or less of net income	Six times of such net income.
For the next Rs. 80,000 or less of net income	Three times of such net income.
For the balance of net income	Twice such balance of net income.

Source : S. K. Bose and S. K. Bhattacharya, *Land Reform in West Bengal: A Study on Implementation* (New Delhi : Oxford Book Co., 1983), p. 103.

By enacting the Land Acquisition Act 1955, the State government of West Bengal 'reinforced the legal rights of the landlords and working peasants already existing, and consciously preserved the system of crop-sharing and wage labor.'⁶ The government under the Congress rule were reluctant to enact radical land reforms and was not even persuaded by the Central leadership to do so. Therefore, Franda argues that the Central government and the Congress party leaders were unable to persuade its state counterparts to take significant steps with regard to land reform measures. The State government devised, independent of Central influence, their own brand of legislation to pacify the rural influentials.⁷ Though the West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act 1970 was radical enough to promote such social ends as equality, justice and fairplay, it was a half-hearted measure and

short-sighted posture, detriment to the interests of the peasants, and did not end the patrimonial relationships between the landlords and *bargadars*, thereby creating inequality of income and wealth. The *bargadars* heavily relied on the big farmers and landlords for investment and consumption credit. They were not given land security and liable to eviction and subject to legal insecurity to satisfy the needs of status insecurity of the landlords and big farmers. The rural social structure and consequent patron-client relationship remained unchanged. Lack of political will and bureaucratic intricacy, gathering of information and processing of records on the one hand, and disunity among the workers and peasants on the other, were responsible for half-hearted land reforms. The long debate among the radicals and moderates over the issue of composition and size of the family, when the radicals did not allow the minor children to own his or her property, and the moderates opted for otherwise and argued the exemption of privately irrigated lands from the ceiling laws, was somehow resolved in the hands of the Congress High Command in favour of the moderates. It laid down that a family should consist of its head and wife, and their three minor children; the ceiling for privately cultivated land should be 25 per cent higher than that for the government-cultivated land. Mrs Gandhi herself admitted that radical programmes were not applicable in our present organizational structure and administrative set up.⁸ Therefore, not only lack of political will, but organizational loopholes and administrative inefficiency too were responsible for ineffective land reforms: "Between 1961 and 1971, the number of landless labourers in the country went up by 81 per cent, from 17.3 million to 31.3 million. The 'green revolution' further widened the gap between the rural rich and poor."⁹ Vested interests remained intact; economic and social power of the landholders and moneylenders were least affected. Thus,

It is this power that pervades rural social relations, defines and translates the constructions of the realms of civil law and state politics into acceptable molds for the hamlet. One thus finds a legal reality and a hamlet reality, the latter more precisely defined by the local equation of power. This explains why during the current cadastral survey *bargadar* with twenty years of tenancy glumly refuse to so identify themselves to the survey officials and claim instead to be *munish* or wage labourers; or why a landlord can, without fear, transfer the title of his excess land to the name of a *bargadar*, for he knows that the *bargadar* understands; or finally, why all legal reforms can be reduced to a fantastic mockery at the hamlet.¹⁰

Therefore, the Congress and the government run by it, initiated the measures which took care to protect the 'local equation of power' and the rural 'hamlet'. The Congress agrarian reform programmes thus had benefitted certain sections of the rich peasants and to some extent 'gained under the rule of the new post-independence regime.'¹¹ Therefore, due to local power equation land reform legislations took different shapes, twists and turns in different states. The loopholes in recitals and expectations provided ample opportunities to the landholders to rule over the poor peasants and the working class. Basically, as a middle class organization the Congress tried 'to keep the balance between the demands of the vested interests and the poverty struck masses,'¹² and pacify the disorganized masses ever since independence. The CPI(M)'s Political -Organizational Report (1989) records that the governmental offensive and the programme of war against poverty fell behind with the improvement of the peasantry and agricultural workers in the rural areas living below the poverty line. The minimum wage legislation had not yet been implemented. The agricultural workers were now totally left defenceless against inflation, price rise, and rise in electricity rates, when the land reforms were only the attempts of the bourgeoisie for the expansion of their market and meeting the foodgrains requirements of the urban areas, the maintenance of feudal and semi-feudal relations, the use of agricultural products and productivity for their own cause. The reform measures, further, were nothing, but attempts to create a new type of landlord, which produced surplus foodgrains by employing hired labours and inducing new technical skills, so that these might not transform agriculture into a modern capitalist enterprise. Those were intended only to modify and reform the earlier forms of crude feudal exploitation, and thus to superimpose on it capitalist forms and relations.¹³ The bureaucrats spread their wings a bit to render helping hands to the property holders and agricultural capitalists, and to open up 'pre-independence attitudes of alienation and estrangement.'¹⁴ While facing the unprofessional and unprincipled political interferences, the bureaucrats took recourse to a steel-frame administration, ranks and files machinery, politics of red-tapism motivated by personal considerations and dispensed with personal favours. Therefore, reform laws had come to halt or at least to a stationary level and were unable to make a change or to take an unpleasant stance to make a good taste with an unsavoury mixture of cold pasta and curry. "It, more often than not, allows itself to remain morbidly, seized with peripheral matters like individual appointments, postings, transfers, promotions and the like."¹⁵ Therefore, the Congress and its State government in West Bengal had been helpless and unable to take actions in implementing the laws. The Central leadership, on the other hand, had not been able to

rise above the ‘individuality and independent sources of power’¹⁶ of the State leaders, their own independent efforts, economic and social prestige and status, which swayed away the ideological considerations and policy options of the Central government. In fact, the State Congress leaders were in no position to substantially alter the internal power equation, when in 1971 “only 9.5 per cent of the total arable land was actually vested with the government under the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act (1953) against the ideal target of 37.3 per cent ... guided by the philosophy of growth before redistribution.”¹⁷

Instead of implementing the land reform laws effectively, the State Congress leaders of West Bengal were pursuing the policy of growth before redistribution *vis-a-vis* distribution before growth. The leaders relied more on ‘law-court-police nexus’ than ‘panchayat system and peasant movement,’¹⁸ which made them more bureaucratic and distrustful to the people’s cause, more close to the application of capital-intensive technology both in agriculture and industry than labour-intensive one. In their strategic questions, the leaders calculating the costs and benefits for gratifying their interests in politics, made it clear that politically as capitalism was dependent on the landlord class or rich peasants, who were all-in-all in their hamlets to catch votes of the larger sections of the rural electorate, most united in the faces of external threats, so attacks on their class forces and interests would be a self-suicidal policy for the Party. Besides, little progress had been made with regard to land reforms as is evident in the figures shown below :¹⁹

Surplus land (declared)	—	7362	thousand	acres
Acquired	—	6056	”	”
Distributed	—	4513	”	”
Not distributed	—	2849	”	”
Declared, but not distributed :				
Under Judicial Review	—	1403	thousand	acres
For social needs	—	310	”	”
Non-cultivable land	—	444	”	”
Other causes	—	380	”	”
Now can distributed	—	311	”	”
Total	—	2848	”	”

In fact, that the reforms were not the popular demands of the masses, but the brainchild of Congress intellectuals was evident from the fact that the landless peasants and farm labourers had been turned into mere onlookers instead of being the real participants of reform movement. In fine, the Indian situation represented itself thus : there were many people in the agricultural sector, who depended on lands for their living needs and reality, but lands

were scarce and concentrated in few hands; negligible capitals were invested in the lands due to poor economic conditions of the farmers; and, the existence of certain contradictory bottlenecks : poor farmers and expensive farms, inadequate irrigation facilities and dependence on the nature, fragmentation of land and rising population with no occupation. It lacked significant economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector (Table Nos. 2, 3, 4). In this situation land reforms were difficult to attain. The government had failed to redistribute lands among the landless, to give weightage to the legitimation of peasants' rights, to remove the abuses of bureaucratic lethargy, and to minimize the contradictions and instabilities of the Indian setting such as scarce resources, and more competitors, growing poverty and livelihood below the subsistence level, which had to go a long road ahead to reach the goal of loosening the soil and removing the weeds. Therefore, the Congress in West Bengal had been reduced to an amalgam of conflicting interests and policies without any genuine policy options and fundamental consensus, and a clear-cut ideology. In this connection Nemi Sharan Mital finds the cause and prescribes a probable solution. According to him, as in Indian society non-recognition of class interests had led to the frustration among many and the rise of few propertied class, so, there arose the need for 'a shake-up, a clean-up and a radical change in the methodology of political parties from 'demonstrational' to 'articulational', and in their stage of action from streets to fields and farms, factories and slums.'²⁰

As the 'green revolution' technology had seriously affected the balanced regional development as well as the subsistence level of living and 'self-reliant' economic growth,²¹ it is imperative to make land reforms and agrarian transformation more radical free from rich-poor rural tensions, to implement need-based wages to the agricultural labourers, to provide remunerative prices, agricultural credit and other facilities to the farmers and the lower echelons in the hierarchy by and through the politics of movement-agitation instead of that of mere pressure-persuasion. Gunnar Myrdal had aptly opined that one could not be reformed without a movement from below as the higher-ups would not voluntarily give up their privileges and powers to the lower orders of the social hierarchy 'to come equal with lower classes. 'When power has been assembled by those who have grievances, then is the time when ideals and social conscience can become effective.'²² The Planning Commission's approach is that 'certain degree'²³ of politicization of the rural poor peasantry along militant lines is necessary for the successful implementation of land reform laws. Otherwise, we would consume illusions, succumb to the pressures of the landowners, and sacrifice the rights and privileges of the poor peasants through open and naked coercion.

Table 2 : India : Distribution of Labour Force

Percentage of Population of Working Age (15-46 Yrs)		Percentage of Labour Force in					
1965	1985	Agriculture / Industry Services					
		1965		1980		1965	
54	56	73	70	12	13	15	17

Source : Primary : *World Development Report, 1987* (World Bank : OUP, 1987) and Secondary : Francine R Frankel and M S A Rao, (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India : Decline of a Social Order*, Vol. II (New Delhi : OUP, 1990), p. 534.

Table 3 : India : Basic Economic Indicators

GNP Per Capita	1965-85	1965-80	1980-85
Average annual growth rate (per cent)	1.7		
Average annual growth rate (per cent)			
GDP		3.8	5.2
Agriculture		2.8	2.7
Industry		4.1	5.4
Manufacturing		4.4	5.6
Services		4.8	7.5

Source : *ibid.*, p. 534.

Table 4 : India : Structure of Production

GDP		Distribution of Gross Domestic Product (per cent)							
(millions of dollars)		Agriculture		Industry		Manufacturing		Services	
1965	1985	1965	1985	1965	1985	1965	1985	1965	1985
46,260	175,710	47	31	22	27	15	17	31	41

Source : *ibid.*, p. 534.

In the opinion of the present author until and unless the peasantry are given the desired rights and privileges or they acquire these through the articulation and mobilization of their class interests and the joint struggle of the workers and peasants. The author prefers the leftists' multi-class strategies and workers-peasants alliance to pursue class politics in contrast to the centrist politics of sectoral mobilization (industrial; agricultural; manufacturing and service sectors) of the new agrarian classes, who have argued for growth before distribution and ignored the differences between bullock capitalists, self-employed peasant cultivators, small farmers and agricultural labourers. The movement strategies are badly needed because the property owners would never voluntarily surrender their own rights. Consequently poverty and widespread discrepancy between the poor and the rich prevail even after independence. To substantiate our contention, at least two evidences can be cited :

First, as Ahluwalia showed , there was no statistically "significant evidence for asserting a trend increase or decrease in rural poverty over the period [1956-57 to 1973-74] as a whole". Within that period, he found a decline in the incidence of rural poverty up to the early 1960s, then there was an increase that peaked in 1967-68, and again a decline thereafter. When the series began in 1956-57, the proportion below the poverty line was 54.1 per cent and, at its end it was 46.1 per cent, with a low in 1960-61 of 38.9 per cent and a high in 1966-67 of 56.6 per cent. Only two states (Assam and West Bengal) showed a significant trend increase in poverty and only two (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) a trend decline.²⁴

Secondly, the proportion of short-term loans (crop loans and production inputs) channelled to small-holders (2.5 acres and below) in 1979-80 was 34 per cent, a proportion equivalent to their share (33 per cent) of agricultural-sector households. On the other hand, small holders' share of long-term loans was only 12 per cent, about a third of their proportion of households. Co-operatives, more subject to the influence of local elites than commercial banks staffed by career professionals, did less well in reaching out to small and marginal cultivators : although 49 per cent of all households, those 5 acres or under, obtained only 34 per cent of co-operative bank loans, households above 5 acres (only 32 per cent of households) received 62 per cent of loans. Larger holders also did better than medium-sized holders in obtaining commercial bank credit. While those in the 2.5+ -5 and the 5+ -10 acre categories received credit in rough proportion to their shares of agricultural households, those with more than 10 acres received short- and long-term loans at proportions twice and five times their proportion of households, respectively. These findings suggest parallel between small and

marginal cultivators' access to credit and to new technology and improved inputs : they are disadvantaged in relation to more prosperous farmers, but they are still significant beneficiaries of both the new technology and the credit required to use it.²⁵

Therefore, the rural Indian had in this period come under the influence of landed commercial forces promoted by governmental elites and credit societies through their accommodative politics. Mrs Gandhi's call for 'war on poverty' thus ended in jeopardy as the beneficiary-oriented programmes and employment-oriented schemes had shown their poor performances in solving the problem of rural poverty by providing income-generating assets to the rural poor and subsistence income without making any solution to the grinding problems of corrupt practices of rural oligarchy, bureaucratic nepotism, diversion of productive assets to the rural few and flight of resources from productive capital investments, and growing rural unemployment. The price, procurement and distribution policies of the government were intended to divert the resources to different plan areas for removing regional disparities, industrial development in the countryside and reducing urban-rural conflict to a minimum, to the interests of the landed aristocracy. For example, the government abolished the tax-farming system, but did not adopt effective land ceiling laws, provide opportunities to the persons from dominant peasant castes to control 'price support, easy credit, and subsidized inputs of all sorts, which favoured the peasantry',²⁶ and was thus able to increase 'the profitability of their farm operations'²⁷ through land reforms, various governmental policies and the Green Revolution. Furthermore, the government had reduced the possibility of rebellion or revolution by granting and providing concessions to the poor peasants and landless labourers to overshadow their real problems and actual situation as 'substantially less desirable than the situation that they perceive ought to be theirs.'²⁸ In the days of Nehru politics had been that of his class, the bourgeoisie, when the peasantry were a blind, poverty-stricken suffering mass, resigned to their miserable fate and sat upon and exploited by all, who came in contact with them—the government, landlords, moneylenders, petty officials, police, lawyers, and priests.²⁹ When the sharecroppers were not entitled with tenant status, the landlords resorted to sharecropping, which had made the land reforms policy well-nigh impossible. All the measures were affected seriously to a large extent by the social and political conflicting attitudes and pressures from various influential corners, thereby producing serious gaps and loopholes in the total land reform administration : 'lack of proper administrative agency, and in some cases, a certain degree of pro-landlord bias in the agency where it exists.'³⁰ Ceiling was fixed exceedingly high. Landlords were given free

scope to transfer their lands in *benami* considerations. The Congress leaders were not prepared to disrupt the sensitive nerve centres of private property. At the same time they responded to the rising demands of the lower and downtrodden classes only for the purpose of vote-catching and for manipulating the majority section to run effectively the minority domination by following a middle path between the two extremes of social change : capitalism and socialism. Their concern with the poor and the objectives of alleviation of rural poverty were only 'to face their electorates to seek their mandate to rule' and under 'sociopolitical compulsion.'³¹ Arguably, "The basic path of development on capitalist lines in compromise with semi-feudal elements, which has been the general direction of the economic policies followed by the ruling circles of the Indian National Congress during the last two decades, has had its inevitable impact on the agrarian structure of the country."³²

The Green Revolution increased inequality and contingent social problem in rural areas and was unable to provide well-being of the poor. The growth in agriculture had been at the expense of the poorer section of the society. The rich farmers produced for market and profit, transformed the tenants into agricultural labourers, adopted capital-intensive technology, pushed back the small and poor farmers into the background as they could not afford the costly inputs of modern technology. Without radically changing the agrarian structure through radical land reforms agricultural growth had led to the increased land concentration in few hands. It was estimated that forty five per cent of India's rural population was either landless or had less than one acre. Those who owned some land increased from 14.2 per cent to 19.2 per cent, while those who remained completely landless declined from 30.8 per cent to 25.6 per cent. Holdings of less than one hectare constituted 5.4 per cent in 1953, 6.9 per cent in 1961 and 9.2 per cent in 1971. Seventy-eight per cent of all rural households owned either no land or less than five acres in 1971-72 and those accounted for 25 per cent of the total area owned. Three per cent of all rural households owned more than 20 acres, which accounted for 30 per cent of the total area owned. Ten per cent of the households owned more than 10 acres, which accounted for 54 per cent of the total area owned.³³ Thus the conditions of the agricultural labourers in India and their landholding operations during 1951-71 were not quite satisfactory.^{33a}

Again, according to the Agricultural Census Report, 1970-71,

...small farmers, as a class, command more productive assets and inputs per unit of land than large farmers. But, of course, since they constitute 70 per cent of agricultural

households, assets and inputs availability per household is less in the small farm sector than in the large farm sector. As a result, income per household, and even more, income per capita, is less in the small farm sector. ... Poverty persists in the small farms because they support a much larger population per unit of land.³⁴

Therefore, there was substantial concentration of land in few hands and poverty in larger proportion. Improvement in production and growth in agriculture would help raising income, but the growth process had generated negative impacts for the poor, 'particularly in an institutional setting of highly unequal distribution of assets and access to resources.'³⁵ In fact, the rich peasants had become economically strong. The application of new technology had contributed to the rural proletarianization. Henceforth, there was mechanism and commercialization of agriculture, development of production of agriculture at round 3 per cent per annum. Besides, the greatest beneficiaries were the rich peasants who became the dominant class and independent proprietors in the agrarian structure. With their increasingly effective class-for-itself role, rich peasants became increasingly the masters in the countryside. Landless labourers, poor peasants, artisans and craftsmen were the victims of land reforms and applications of new technology.³⁶

In the rural areas egalitarian distribution of land was accompanied by inegalitarian income distribution and increased exploitation, when the "contradiction between the rich and the poor will not be solved so long as capitalism exists."³⁷ The power of the village oligarchies had remained intact and government as the manipulating instrument of the few in rejuvenating and consolidating the situational co-existence : "(1) landowners are primarily supervisors, doing no actual work in the fields, and (2) continuing inequality in the size of landholdings"³⁸ had become strong enough. The Congress leaders in the name of rural development and community development had created tensions between the rich and the poor, and were also exploiting those tensions for their own class interests, widening the gap between the ideals and realities and spreading it into inegalitarian distribution and governmental policy failures. Actually, to Namboodiripad, "land reforms have been supported by ruling groups in India because they are necessary for the destruction of feudal production relations, but cannot be carried 'too far' because of the urban and rural bourgeoisie is exploiting the peasantry through ground rent and their positions as sellers, buyers, and users in rural areas."³⁹ Hence the need to attack rural power structure and property relations.

Given the role of the Congress and its governments, both at the central

and in West Bengal, in the politics of land reforms, let us now look at how much the Left Front government in West Bengal headed by the CPI(M), that came to power in 1977, has been able to implement land reforms measures.

The Left Front government was also not able to remove totally the shackles of feudalism as its leadership in West Bengal came from the middle class intellectuals. So there was 'an air of unrealism in most of its slogans and policies.' "The only thing that was real about it was the quest for power—power which despite the revolutionary protestations of the party—was sought to be derived from the ballot box."⁴⁰ In essence, the success of such government would lie in the efforts to organize the agricultural labourers, poor peasants and share-croppers and to develop their class consciousness, initiative and courage. But while pursuing revolutionary aims within the parliamentary framework, the left parties of the Front only implemented the laws enacted by the Congress government and supplemented parliamentary actions with non-parliamentary or extra-parliamentary ones, if necessary. Land reforms within the framework of legality and distribution of surplus lands were merely the tactics, but not strategies with long-term goals of socialist transformation. Lands above ceiling were distributed among the landless and the poor, hence the *bargadars* who traditionally cultivated, lost the tenancy rights. Swasti Mitter points out,

...there was not enough land to distribute... It was hoped that temporary whetting of their appetite for land would bring the landless labourers to the side of the party. The CPI(M) Kisan Sabha took the charge of distributing land on the ground that the party was the vanguard of the proletariat. Also, in order to maximize the number of party supporters, the workers tried to distribute land to as many peasants as possible.⁴¹

The rural power structure based on concentration of land was then giving rise to a broad-based middle peasantry. Small and middle peasant proprietorship was not ruling the rural economy after the introduction of commercialism in agriculture and disaggregation of semi-feudalism, that is, paying back the loans for consumption in grain from the legally stipulated shares, harvest-to-harvest survival through loans and hopeless grip of perpetual indebtedness. The CPI(M)-led Front had incorporated the small and middle peasants into its organization than the lower ones, provided security of tenure to the sharecroppers and sought to identify areas with concentration of sharecroppers; to politicize them through panchayats outmanoeuvring bureaucrats; and to register them illegally 'aiming at the limited goal of

recording the tenancy right of the bargadars.⁴² The Left Front in West Bengal was not able to cross the constitutional-political limitations of tenancy reforms as was done by the Kerala government through the Agrarian Relations Bill 1959. The government of West Bengal abandoned the programme of arousing the group-action programme as the harbinger of fundamental changes in the faces of adverse High Court ruling, which was shown as otherwise in Kerala. It did not mobilize the masses for inclusion of certain provisions of the Land Reforms Act in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution. "The very fact that the Left Front did not try to cross the limit on the extent of tenancy reforms that was suggested by the Land Revenue Commission of British Bengal in 1940 and enacted by the Congress government in 1955, reveals that, unlike the first Communist government of Kerala, it had hardly any political will to go beyond what has somehow been accepted, at least in principle, by the existing political order."⁴³

Due to organizational failures and uneven development, the 'Operation *Barga*' programme and registration drives achieved limited success. While it was more successful in Burdwan and 24 Parganas, than in Murshidabad, its proportions to the total population were 0.133, 0.115 and 0.084 respectively. Secondly, sharecropping and *barga* operation had reduced the agricultural production. In mono-crop areas, the size of the holdings and the number of persons involved had accelerated the fragmentation of lands and led to the deteriorating conditions of the poor peasants. A small holding with unfavourable climate and low level of irrigation facilities was not in tune with viable economic conditions. On the average, five to six members of a family had to struggle hard against poverty and starvation over only 1.0-1.5 acres of land in mono-crop areas. Sharecropping holdings had been reduced from 0.75 to 0.50 acre. Sharecropping rights would pass to the heirs of the present sharecroppers and divide the holdings into further fragments after the death of the present sharecroppers.⁴⁴ Thirdly, a small plot of land was offered to save the vast area of land. The *bargadars* also had to depend on *jotedars* or big farmers economically. Only 59,948 sharecroppers were provided with loans. 90% of the *bargadars* did not repay their loans in time. Institutional credits were least provided to the sharecroppers due to bureaucrat-*jotedar* nexus. The controversy over the validity of certificates issued to the *bargadars* in the case of *Biswanath Ghosh vs. The State of West Bengal and others*, seriously jeopardised the availability of bank loans to them. Once more, the Left Front government failed to satisfy a large number of sharecroppers and *bargadars* and rescue them from their economic dependency on the *jotedars* and big farmers through institutional credit. The Land Reforms Commissioner and the West Bengal Government's

Settlement *Karmachari Samiti* also criticized the West Bengal government's 'Operation Barga' Programme⁴⁵ :

Even after all this some vital problems remain : since barga recording depends much on the oral evidence of the bargadars concerned instead of a broad-based programme for identification of the real bargadars and the land cultivated, partisan outlook and malpractice may easily creep in... beggars and farm hands have been provoked by some people to record their names.⁴⁶

However, compared with the past performance of the Congress, the Left Front made a spectacular success with regard to the recording of the sharecroppers. But in 1982, their number was recorded as 1,198,000 which reached 1,329,087 by September 1985. The record showed that the programme had virtually come to a halt, experiencing 'an average landholding of 0.97 acres with a total state-wide area of 2.5 million acres under barga cultivation.'⁴⁷ Besides, the *bargadars* evicted from the possession of their lands for maintaining order and safeguarding the existing property relations. In this respect Ross Mallick has observed :

11.25 per cent of the recorded bargadars have thrown out of possession by one way or the other. When converted into district figure the number of such unfortunate bargadars comes to 12,000...⁴⁹

Therefore, 'Operation Barga' Programme was not able to bring away the sharecroppers from the "grip in which the rich farmers hold the village community"⁴⁹ and the 'authority of the big landowners.'⁵⁰ Those who had to own < 5 acres of land were placed in a position to control the rural economy; and lease transactions were made mostly among small and medium sized holders rather than > 10 acres *jotedars* who accounted for 25 per cent of the area leased out.⁵¹ Therefore, as Ajit Kumar Ghosh pointed out :

...about 36 per cent of the share-cropper households, each owning between 1.0 and 5.0 acres of land, account for about 58 per cent total sharecropped area... Operation Barga thus serves to strengthen the economic position of the group of households operating between 2.5 and 7.5 acres.⁵²

Big farmers and landholders still continued to provide credit and input facilities to *bargadars*. Most of the institutional credits were pocketed by the rich farmers, when non-institutional credits were offered to poorer sections of the society. Pradip Kumar Bose has shown that rural indebtedness of the poor peasants and labourers and middle peasants to the private moneylenders was mostly for consumption and ceremonies rather than for production and

cultivation, which would divert their production initiatives and incentives into consumptive thirst and convert their income into the repayment of cumulative indebtedness.⁵³

Therefore rural power structure ultimately remained intact. In case of percentage distribution of households (10 >) leasing out the co-efficient of variation in percentage term was 10.17 per cent *vis-a-vis* 1.56 per cent for the area leased out. In case of 5-10 acres, the co-efficient of variation for the households leasing out and the area leased out were 46.45 per cent and 32.47 per cent. Changes occurred between 1-2.5 acres and 2.5-5 acres. In case of households leasing out, there was an inverse relationship ($r = -0.03$) between 1971-72 and 1981-82. And no significant changes occurred in the case of the area leased out, when r was only 0.55 (Table No.5). Small and big farmers ruled the scene. In the case of tenancy area operated the co-efficient of variation between 1951 and 1981 was only 26.82 per cent, and the co-efficient of co-relation remained at 0.75. Widespread disparity between districts in the sphere of tenancy operation rounded up with disparity of the existence of agricultural labourers between 1951 and 1981, culminated in 34.95 per cent variation for the latter, inspite of positive co-relation ($r=0.98$).^{53a} Districtwise variation and disparity clearly pointed at left parties' organizational variation, somewhere and somewhat low, high or medium. In rural West Bengal, marginal and small farmers had to use 53.8 per cent of industrial consumption goods with their 58.3 per cent income from property ownership out of 83.7 per cent of their total income *vis-a-vis* 23.1 per cent use against the total income of 25.6 per cent for the agricultural labourers, from labour only. Landless sharecroppers earned only 2.1 per cent from property and 4.2 per cent from labour. Though the co-efficient of variation in the use of industrial consumption goods was only 8.60 per cent, the widespread variations in labour and property-ownership remained at high, disparity continued with greater extent than the improvement of the conditions of landless poor and agricultural labourers. This does not mean that the estimated incomes from labour or property ownership or total income are positively co-related. In fact, they are in inverse relationships ($r = -0.99$, $r = -0.03$ and $r = -0.51$).^{53b}

In the sphere of land reforms, small and marginal farmers had increased from 48 per cent in 1970-71 to 63 per cent in 1985-86. The government during the two years of its rule could not distribute 3,45,338 acres of surplus land. Estate Acquisition Act was more active than the Land Reforms Act, as there were few farmers with large acres of land above the ceiling and too many ways and opportunities of overcoming or avoiding the laws of ceiling. Only 76.46 per cent of land under Estate Acquisition Act and 23.54

Table 5 : Percentage Distribution of Households Leasing out and Leased out Area by Size-class of Ownership Holdings, their Co-efficient of Variations and Co-efficient of Co-relation : Rural West Bengal, 1971-72 and 1981-82.

Size of holdings (acres)	Households (%) leasing out		Co-efficient of Variation between the years (%)	Co-efficient of co-relation between the districts	Area (%) leased out		Co-efficient of variation between the years (%)	Co-efficient of co-relation between the districts
	1971-72	1981-82			1971-72	1981-82		
0-1	27.75	19.87	16.64	r = - 0.03	4.88	4.23	7.03	
1-2.5	30.45	19.84	21.08		19.19	10.36	29.85	
2.5-5.0	21.19	18.50	6.75		27.50	14.30	31.57	r = 0.55
5.0-10	10.99	29.99	46.45		24.35	47.77	32.47	
10>	9.62	11.80	10.17		24.08	23.34	1.56	

Source : Compiled and calculated from data used in Nripen Bandyopadhyay and Associates, *Evaluation of Land Reform Measures in West Bengal : A Report*, 1983, p.31.

per cent under Land Reforms Act were available for distribution, when each beneficiary received only 0.57 acres of land under the former and only 0.35 acres under the latter. In total it was only 0.54.^{53c} The land reforms implementation programme was minimum, which was more attuned to a policy of redistributive reform, in spite of the Front government and their partners' adhered aim of building a socialist society and the immediate objective of establishing a people's democracy. Ratan Khasnabis opined that the Left Front government under the leadership of the CPI(M) had to compromise with class divided and conflict-ridden state structure, and sacrificed revolutionary steps to reformist ones.⁵⁴ Similarly, Ashoke Rudra has pointed out that while making an alliance with the big and marginal farmers the left parties sacrificed the interests of the landless sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and landless poor, mostly SCs and STs, i.e., the most exploited and most oppressed sections of the rural masses.⁵⁵ Nripen Bandopadhyaya and his associates had studied intensively 14 villages and evaluated land reform measures in terms of sharecropping pattern (recorded and unrecorded), sharecropping ratio, vested land assignees and co-operative societies, and showed widespread disparity throughout different villages concerned in different districts. The co-efficient of variation (V) was low (31.49%) in case of 50 : 50 sharecropping ratio and highest (311.53%) in case of 67 : 33.^{55a} This once again proved organizational dislocations and low level impact of land reform measures throughout different districts and different villages in West Bengal. The scene has most precisely depicted by Ashim Mukhopadhyaya thus :

1. A number of jotedars, mainly from Burdwan, still hold important positions in the party hierarchy.
2. Dozens of leaders including MLAs own lands well above the ceiling. For instance, an MLA in Murshidabad owns hundreds of acres in Nabagram, Lalgola and Bhagobangola. In Bankura three MLAs have excess land.
3. Sharecroppers of a Minister in Bankura were all edgely evicted shortly before the commencement of the operation.
4. The *Pradhans* of the Panchayats have introduced a parallel administration in the rural areas. Some of them have allegedly misappropriated public funds and not yet submitted accounts, ... Even the Panchayat Minister himself has expressed deep concern over the role of the *Pradhans* and warned that [if] these elements are not restrained, the entire panchayat will go to its grave.⁵⁶

The Left Front government, it must be noted, took energetic actions to

obtain surplus land and distribute them among the landless through its less dramatic and more institutionalized redistribution programme, as is evident from the official land- redistribution statistics.

	Up to 1977	Between 1977 and 1983	Between 1983 and 1991	Up to 1991
No. of beneficiaries (households)	984,032	472,443	537,141	1,993,616
Cropped area redistributed (acres)	626,284	140,417	146,688	913,389
Land distributed per beneficiary (acres)	0.64	0.30	0.27	0.46

Source : Government of West Bengal, *Economic Review, 1977-78*, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, *Annual Report 1991-92*.

In fact, the average area of land distributed per beneficiary was very small. And most of the beneficiaries were from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Harris thus notes :

Land reforms ... in West Bengal, has not brought about any radical change at all in the structure of land ownership. But it has made some contribution to the livelihoods of the poor, scheduled caste households who have been the beneficiaries.⁵⁷

The Left Front government has however achieved a success in the matter of providing homestead land to the landless cultivators, village artisans and fishermen. Out of 2.41 lakh beneficiaries of homestead lands, 1.48 lakhs belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Up to 31 March 1997 the progress of land reforms in West Bengal was under :

Cultivable surplus land above the ceiling	13,02,000 acres
Cultivable surplus land distributed	10,13,000 acres
Beneficiaries of leasehold of land (households)	23,86,000
Land distributed per beneficiary (acres)	0.42
No. of recorded <i>bargadars</i>	14,76,000
Beneficiaries of land for construction of houses (households)	2,77,000

Source : Calculated and compiled from the data used in *Ganashakti* (in Bengali), (Special No., 20 June 1997) p.43.

Further, 'Operation *Barga*' reached its genith during 1978-80 period and by the end of 31 March 1997 it reached 1,476,000, as has been shown in the following figures.

Up to 31.1.79	5,72,694
Up to 31.12.81	11,25,826
Up to 31.12.86	13,61,680
Up to 31.12.90	14,50,000
Up to 31.3.97	14,76,000

By the end of 1991 West Bengal's share of the total cropped area in India was only around 3 %, which accounted for nearly fifth of all cultivable land redistributed in India.

The small-holders and landless beneficiaries formed the support basis of Left Front in West Bengal. The reforms ameliorated the conditions of the landless labourers, but did not alter the class relations between the rich and the poor as very small area (0.42 acres) of land was distributed among the landless agricultural labourers whose main source of earnings remained with wage labour. According to the *World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) Village Surveys 1987-89*, income from land for the landless beneficiaries accounted for only 28% of the total income and it varied greatly between villages. With regard to the 'Operation *Barga*' Programme, diverse crop-sharing between villages and lawful fixing of shares without improving proper institutional credit facilities to the *bargadars* might produce landowner-*bargadars* relation contradictory and economic conditions of the *bargadar* poorer.⁵⁸ For that unrecorded *bargadars* wished to maintain better relations with the landowners for credit facilities.⁵⁹ Further, for caste background (the general caste) other than the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe background of the registered tenants the unrecorded leasees had to maintain better social relations with the landowners from the general caste without reckoning the class pattern, but with mutual kinship and social ties.⁶⁰ There was clear preponderance of marginal and small farmers,⁶¹ who were susceptible to radicalization. But the Left Front's policy of class collaboration has become noteworthy in this respect. Thus the CPI(M) :

by default has given priority to middle-class control, by attempting to control lower-class aspirations within demands acceptable to the middle landed classes in the middle-lower class alliance.... The lower class can best be described as giving critical support to the Front, ..., but providing little in terms of real life improvement.⁶²

The *jotedars* and rich peasants realized that the overt method of domination they were used to apply, had to be changed and a new strategy had to be adopted. So, they entered into the local-level leadership of different Left parties, especially the CPI(M).⁶³ The 'politics of middleness',⁶⁴ did not alter the rural power structure of inequalities, indeed!

Despite improvements in agriculture and opportunities for the tenants to invest more in agriculture, the consumption capacity of the tenant-poor has risen proportionately more than that of the non-poor, without altering the alliance between the middle peasants and the landless and small-holder poor as a successful challenge to the dominance of the landlords, which formed the political power base of the Left Front at the local levels. The redistribution programme and tenancy legislation were nothing but the marginal redistribution of private property rights in land. Though for the entire period from 1978 to 1991, West Bengal's growth trend in foodgrains output was 4.6% compared to the all-India's 2.8%,⁶⁵ it was the availability of modern technology, introduction of the so-called Green Revolution, which unlocked agricultural development more than the institutional changes brought about by agrarian reforms.⁶⁶ As institutional changes have not been brought about fairly and the semi-feudal semi-capitalist relations remain, so the application of borrowed technology and induced knowledge as properties of Green Revolution cannot be fruitful. Modern technology is in general labour saving and capital intensive.⁶⁷ So, the existence of agricultural labourers is not minimum in West Bengal, but has fallen from its maximum concentration. However, the application of modern technology has created the puzzle between modernization and unemployment, to be solved through (1) minimum support price for labour and (2) infrastructural developments rather than 'operation cultivation'.⁶⁸ Agrarian production between the mid-70s and the early 90s has virtually doubled. The population below poverty line has shrunk to 27.7% in 1991.⁶⁹ In India the proportion and number of the poor showed steady decline from 56.4% in 1973-74 to 53.1% in 1977-78 to 45.6% in 1983 and further from 38.3% in 1986-87 to 34.4% in 1989-90. However, in 1990-91 it increased up to 35% and sharply to 44% in 1992, even though it declined again to 37.5% in 1993-94.⁷⁰ The proportions of large operational holdings and the area operated by them declined significantly in all states during the period between 1970-71 and 1990-91 and marginal holdings increased except the state of Punjab during the same period. Therefore, the processes of marginalization of holdings, proletarianization of the peasantry and inequality in land distribution have become the distinctive feature of rural poverty. West Bengal is not an exception to this. "The higher the concentration of land and the proportions of agricultural labourers and marginal and small

farmers, the higher would be the incidence of rural poverty.”⁷¹ The Gini-coefficient of the distribution of the operated area during 1970-71 was 0.619 declined a little to 0.578 in 1990-91. The direct distribution effect on rural poverty during the period between 1972-73 and 1990-91 was less than the agricultural development effect. In the former the measures were : Gini-coefficient of the distribution of operated area = -52,251, proportion of marginal and small operational holdings to total holdings = 0.061, and proportion of agricultural labourers to total workers = 0.095. In the latter the measures were 60.542, 0.236 and 0.298 totalling the effects into 8.291, 0.297 and 0.393. Therefore, the land reforms measures failed to transform the rural inequalities. The fact was that the Left Front government used to play with the politics of agrarian reforms as a legitimacy building exercise as its component parts; especially the CPI(M) used to maintain the existing balance of forces (middle-lower class alliance) to retain power at the local level.

Therefore, in India and also in West Bengal, the agrarian economy operates within a framework defined by semi-feudal and semi-capitalist relations. The primary form of surplus is ground rent rather than profit. The value of labour is determined by subsistence rather than the forces of demand and supply, economic relations by personal contacts rather than the market relations. Both the Congress and the Left were not able to transform the rural economy through agrarian reforms. Both the Congress and Front governments’ “focus on reforms in the structure of land ownership and in tenurial relations represented a concentration on structures of production to the exclusion of property relations in exchange and circulation. In the meanwhile a compromising accommodation had been developed between a powerful commercial elite and the state.”⁷² Agriculture has become subservient to industry. Mere reforms on the structure of land ownership can never transform agriculture characterized by semi-feudal and semi-capitalist relations. The need of the hour is radical agrarian reforms and a social security circle around it, and all round developments in health and education.

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Conflict-resolution, Non-violence and Political Organization : Gandhi and the Indian National Congress

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Conflict-situation in any society may assume different forms according to the nature of the unit of action pitted on each side. Thus conflicts are classified as follows : (a) an individual versus another individual, or an individual pitted against a group; (b) a group pitted against another group; or, (c) a community versus the state.¹ As there are different types of conflicts, so there are various techniques or methods for resolution of conflicts. Satyagraha, 'the supreme invention, discovery or creation'² of Gandhi, is one such technique for conflict-resolution, which is, so to say, 'a synonym for non-violent direct action.'³

In the case of a conflict between a community versus the state run by an imperialist regime, however, when the former employs satyagraha for resolving the conflict, it has to work out it *on a mass scale*.⁴ It is fairly well known how the Indian people resorted, on different occasions in the Gandhian era, to satyagraha under the aegis of the Indian National Congress (INC) which was deemed by Gandhi to be 'the only purely non-violent political organization of importance' throughout the world.⁵

The present paper seeks to analyse with special reference to some crucial turns of events in the national movement, the interaction between Gandhi and the INC over the issue of 'scrupulous and conscientious' observance of the principle of non-violence in resolving the conflict between an alien rule and a subject people.

I

Non-violence had always been the guiding principle of the INC ever since Gandhi joined and led it, whether directly or indirectly. True to the India's peace-loving tradition Gandhi introduced the idea of non-violence in the realm of Indian politics. But what is non-violence? Is it purely and simply an abjuration of violence or shunning of force intended to inflict injury upon the opponent? Non-violence, when used in connexion with satyagraha, means both, plus 'the exercise of power of influence to effect change without injury to the opponent.'⁶ Given the meaning of non-violence, thus succinctly expressed, another question follows : why had Gandhi relied so much on non-violence particularly in the face of violent, at times cruel and fatal,

onslaught of a powerful opponent, namely, the British government? The ideational basis of Gandhi's reaction to organized state violence of the imperialist rule can be found in his own words :

In the past, non-co-operation has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil-doer. I am endeavouring to show to my countrymen that violent non-co-operation only multiplies evil and that as evil can only be sustained by violence withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence. Non-violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-co-operation with evil.⁷

Gandhi, as we know, opted for the INC as the organizational vehicle for implementing the principle of non-violence in Indian politics. For, he believed that the INC was based on non-violence, 'pure and undefiled,' and that its authority was derived from that of non-violent attitude.⁸ Historically speaking, Gandhi's first experience with the INC was at the Congress session of Calcutta in December 1901 when he moved a resolution on South Africa⁹ where he launched a movement for the first time on non-violent principles in order to fight the organized discrimination of the South African whites against the Indians who had settled there. The splendid victory with which Gandhi was crowned in South Africa had emboldened him to pursue again the non-violent principles in the freedom struggle of India after his return to the country. And, unhesitatingly he thought of the INC, notwithstanding its certain limitations, to be one of the principal organizations through which he might be able to execute his own plan of work. It was, to Gandhi, more a national organization providing a platform for all parties to appeal to the nation in moulding its policy than a party organization.¹⁰

II

At the outset Gandhi had, however, reservation to engage in the INC to initiate any agitation against the British government though he had unsparingly praised the organization's non-violent character. Thus when Gandhi resolved to launch civil disobedience against the Rowlatt Act of 1919, a *Satyagraha Sabha* was established at his instance to direct the movement since 'all hope of any of the existing institutions adopting a novel weapon like satyagraha' seemed to him to be 'in vain'.¹¹ However, at the same time he was not oblivious of the dislikings of some of the *Sabha* members about his emphasis on truth and non-violence.¹² Ultimately, the violent outburst in several parts of the country including Punjab and Gujarat incapacitated the *Sabha* from acting upon its pledge to 'faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property.'¹³ Gandhi's expectation was thus

belied. He now came to realize that it was an 'error' on his part to call on the people to launch upon civil disobedience before they had qualified themselves for it. The mistake seemed to him to be of 'Himalayan magnitude.' Hence it was a 'Himalayan miscalculation.'¹⁴

Though the INC was not responsible for the so-called 'miscalculation', Gandhi wanted to use its platform to censure the violent attitude of the masses, by attending the Amritsar Congress in December 1919, which he regarded as his 'real entrance into the Congress politics.'¹⁵ In the Congress, Gandhi intended to move a resolution to the effect that the mob violence in Punjab and Gujarat be condemned. To his disappointment, the resolution was thrown out by the Subjects Committee. Reacting, Gandhi 'firmly, but politely and respectfully, expressed his inability to be in the Congress if the Congress could not see its way to accepting his viewpoint.' In the end, however, he won. For, 'while fully recognizing the grave provocation that led to a sudden outburst of mob frenzy,' the Congress resolved to express its 'deep regret' at, and 'condemnation' of, the excesses committed in certain parts of the Punjab and Gujarat resulting in the loss of lives and injury to person and property. Gandhi hailed the resolution with the advice to the Congress : '... do not return madness with madness, but return madness with sanity and the whole situation will be yours.'¹⁶

III

The Ahmedabad Congress resolution, as has been observed by the official historian of the party, 'set the tone for Congress.'¹⁷ But hardly two years had elapsed, application of non-violent principles in the action-process of INC was seriously faltered. And this time the occasion was the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921 when the Non-Co-operation movement was just gaining momentum. The INC regarded the visit as a 'political move' which was 'calculated to give strength and support to a system of Government' designed to keep India away as long as possible from her 'birth right of Swaraj.' Accordingly, it resolved to boycott all celebrations connected with the Prince's visit. At the same time the Party made it clear that India bore 'no sort of ill-feeling against the person of the Royal Highness.'¹⁸

The idea that the boycott programme meant 'no insult to the Prince' was elaborated by Gandhi himself in his article, "Honour the Prince", in *Young India*, dated 27 October 1921.¹⁹ In the same vein he insisted that non-violence was the creed of the Indians 'who had to keep to that principle whatever it might cost them', and who were duty bound to do their work in a non-violent manner so long as they believed in non-violence,

swadeshi and Hindu-Muslim unity.²⁰

But Gandhi's advice was practically unheeded by those who demonstrated in different places of the country against the Prince's visit along with bonfires of foreign clothes. In fact, in Bombay, when the Prince arrived on 17 November 1921, the demonstration resulted in riots on a large scale. Ironically, earlier on that day Gandhi, in a public meeting, congratulated the people of Bombay on their non-violent stance. On hearing the news of the riots his natural and obvious reaction was : "We have had a foretaste of Swaraj. I have been put to shame."²¹

Having eyewitnessed the mob violence Gandhi opined that the hope of reviving mass civil disobedience had once more been 'dashed to pieces' as the atmosphere for it was absent. Therefore, he urged the Congress Working Committee (CWC) to consider whether mass civil disobedience could at all be encouraged until complete control over the masses had been obtained. However, he personally considered that the movement should not be started 'for the present.' In a similar case of mob frenzy broken out on 13 January 1922 during the Prince's visit to Madras, Gandhi was so annoyed that he castigated it as 'hooliganism.' Mortified at the events of Bombay, and then at Madras, he observed :

Either we believe in a successful peaceful resolution or we believe that non-violence is merely a preparation for violence. If the latter represents the true state of things, we must revise our creed.²² Thus, to him, the requisite non-violent atmosphere would only be reached 'when we have eradicated violence from our thought.'²³

IV

The 'gruesome' Chauri Chaura incident of 1922,^{23a} was another occasion when Gandhi became 'violently agitated' for the breach of the principle of non-violence. On the eve of embarking upon mass civil disobedience, an infuriated mob set fire on 5 February to a police station at Chauri Chaura in the district of Gorakhpur of UP, killing thereby a score of policemen lodged in the house. Having inspected the violent spot, the eighteen-year old son of Gandhi reported to him that 'after Chauri Chaura father should forget the Punjab wrongs.'²⁴ Rudely shocked and horrified at the event, Gandhi issued a private communication on 8 February to the members of the CWC, in which he made it clear that the civil disobedience could make no impression upon the country when 'disobedience of a criminal character' went on in its other parts, 'both for the same end.' For, the whole conception of civil disobedience was based upon the assumption that it would work 'in and

through its completely non-violent character.' Gandhi now firmly declined to be a party to 'a movement half violent and half non-violent even though it may result in the attainment of so-called Swaraj,' as he thought that it was not to be 'real Swaraj as he had conceived it.' In view of this, Gandhi then summoned a meeting of the CWC on 11 February 1922 at Bardoli to consider, among others, the question whether mass civil disobedience should not be 'suspended for the time being.'²⁵ The CWC, as was expected, by paying regard to Gandhi's sentiment, asked the Congressmen 'to stop all activities designed to court arrest and imprisonment, all volunteer processions and public meetings merely for the purpose of defiance of notifications.'²⁶ The Bardoli resolution which considered the Chauri Chaura event as the desecrating upsurges in the sacred non-violent affray, virtually put a brake on the non-co-operation movement.²⁷

Suspension of mass civil disobedience movement on the ground of the outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura led to 'the amazement and consternation' of many Congressmen and leaders who were at that time in jail. Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, Lajpat Rai and others thus 'took Gandhi to task for punishing the whole country for the sins of a place.' They were even ready to isolate Chauri Chaura, 'and if need be, Gorakhpur,' while insisting to go on with civil disobedience, individual and mass. Sitaramayya records : "That was the burden of the complaints of Panditji as well as Lalaji and two other young friends who too made no secret of their displeasure and disappointment and disgust at the sudden termination of the movement."²⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru recollected how his father was upset in jail to hear the news of suspension, and reminisced how they themselves were 'angry' with the news of withholding struggle at a time 'when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts.'²⁹ Later Subhas Chandra Bose commented : 'To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reacting the boiling point was nothing short of national calamity.'³⁰

Amidst such wide indignation by the Congress leaders Gandhi however stood firm in his conviction. He was resolute in his belief that India 'gained by the stopping,' and stood 'for truth and non-violence by the suspension.' Succinct was his logic : 'We dare not enter the kingdom of liberty with mere lip homage to Truth and Non-violence.'³¹ In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru he defended his stand thus :

I assure you that if the thing had not been suspended we would have been leading not a non-violent struggle but essentially a violent struggle. The movement had unconsciously drifted from the right path.³²

Therefore, Gandhi held, non-violent attainment of self-government would presuppose a non-violent control over the violent elements in the country.³³

Though Gandhi jeered at the Congress leaders in jail who criticized the decision of suspending non-co-operation movement as 'civilly dead,' and therefore 'could not claim or be expected to advise those outside,'³⁴ he at the same time appreciated the role of the members of CWC :

But never has a man been blessed, perhaps, with colleagues and associates so considerate and forgiving as I have. They understood my difficulty and patiently followed my argument. The result is before the public in the shape of the resolutions of the Working Committee.³⁵

Incidentally, it may be mentioned, the AICC in its Lucknow session held on 7-9 June 1922 'reiterated its faith in the principles of non-violent non-co-operation' after having placed on record 'Gandhi's services to the cause of humanity by his message of peace and truth.'³⁶

V

It is well known that as a votary of non-violence, Gandhi, from the beginning of his political career, was opposed to any kind of revolutionary action based on violence. So intense was his abhorrence for violence that he never heartily approved of the activities of national revolutionaries who dared to think of liberating an unarmed nation by arms and sacrificed their lives for effecting the purpose.³⁷ There were elements within the Congress, who had profound sympathy and respect for those revolutionaries. Having acted through the Swarajya Party founded by Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru in 1923, those revolutionaries became a formidable force within the Congress. The issue of Congress attitude towards those revolutionaries however soured the relationship between Gandhi and the Swarajists in 1924, and once again the principle of non-violence became a bone of contention.

The climactic moment of the acrimony came when on 2 June 1924 the Bengal Provincial Conference at Serajganj passed a resolution on the death-sentence of Gopinath Saha. Saha who was a member of *Yugantar* party, shot by mistake one Mr Ernest Day, an employee of a mercantile firm of Calcutta, to death instead of Mr Tegart, the Commissioner of Police.³⁸ The resolution while 'denouncing (or dissociating itself from) violence and adhering to the principle of non-violence,' appreciated Gopinath Saha's 'ideal of self-sacrifice, misguided though that is in respect of the country's best interest,' and expressed 'its respect for his great self-sacrifice.'³⁹

The spirit of the resolution irked Gandhi; he not only described the resolution as 'unfortunate' and 'inconsistent' with the Congress creed, but also regarded

it as 'a travesty of non-violence.' He was ready to call the revolutionaries like Gopinath Saha as patriots because of their 'selflessness, defiance of death and love of the country,' but he insisted, he would do so with the use of an adjective, 'misleading.' Gandhi would condemn their actions 'in the severest terms possible,' and as such he was reluctant to be party to the resolutions praising their motives: 'We can only judge people's actions, and if they are bad and harmful in society we cannot afford to pay them homage for their motives.' Referring to the words, 'while adhering to the policy of non-violence' in the Serajganj resolution Gandhi commented that it would have been 'less undignified if non-violence had not been dragged in at all.' To him, patriotism of Gopinath Saha, 'if any,' consisted in the 'act of murder,' and murder was certainly inconsistent with non-violence 'even when regarded purely as a policy.' Therefore, so long as the Congress creed 'stands as it is, every Congressman to be true to his creed is pledged to oppose and condemn in thought, word and deed every act of political violence.'⁴⁰

In addition to his personal observations on the Serajganj resolution, Gandhi also wished the Congress to censure the action of Gopinath Saha. To that end, he moved, among others, a resolution at the party's Ahmedabad session held on 27-29 June 1924. The resolution condemned the murder of Mr Day by Saha as well as 'all such political murders' as those actions were 'inconsistent with the Congress creed and its resolution of non-violent non-co-operation.'⁴¹ It was passed by a bare majority; out of 148 members 78 voted for Gandhi's resolution. Disgruntled Gandhi reacted that a clear minority would have been pleased him more than a narrow majority.⁴² The sharp reaction was an obvious reflection of how Gandhi was pained at the Congress's as well as his own failure to instil the ideal of non-violence in the minds of the broad majority of the Congressmen.

VI

Attitude of some Congress leaders towards the violent activities of the North Indian revolutionaries (NIRs) came once again between Gandhi and the INC. Most of the NIRs, like Chandrasekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Jatin Das, Jogesh Chatterjee, organized under the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA),⁴³ it is to be noted, began their political career by joining the non-co-operation movement in 1921. But after the Chauri Chaura episode of 1922 they became 'disillusioned' with the Gandhian ideology and his method of action in achieving country's freedom. Those NRIs were sceptical about the Gandhian principle of non-violence which, in their eyes, was 'a philosophy arising out of despair.' To them, the principle of non-violence was 'an imperfect physical mixture of Tolstoyism and Buddhism and not a

chemical mixture of East and West.' And, the non-violent non-co-operation movement could not, in their views, succeed not as a result of 'sporadic outbursts of suppressed feelings here and there' but because it lacked in a 'worthy ideal'. According to the HRA activists, that 'worthy ideal' was to be 'to establish a Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organized and armed revolution.'⁴⁴

That the 'ideal,' however 'worthy' it might be to the NIRs, could never be accepted by Gandhi, was obvious. He accused the latter of 'retarding India's progress.' At Belgaum Congress (1924) he denounced the NIRs thus :

If you have any pity or friendly feeling for the starving millions, know that your violence will do them no service.... Whatever may be true of other countries, there is no chance of the cult of violence flourishing in this country. India is admittedly the best repository and exponent of non-violence. Will you not better devote your lives, if you sacrifice them in the cause of non-violence?⁴⁵

Interestingly, other INC leaders, even some of Gandhi's close followers, ignored this damning indictment of the violent programme of the NIRs. That was evident in the sympathetic attitude shown by those Congressmen towards the NIRs. Thus Motilal Nehru, the leader of the Swarajya Party and a staunch Gandhian, formed a Defence Committee led by Govinda Ballabh Pant, another loyal Gandhite, for the prisoners who were arrested in connexion with a train robbery on 9 August 1925 by ten HRA activists at Kakori, an obscure village near Lucknow. Later the activists were tried in what was known as the Kakori Conspiracy case.⁴⁶ Similarly in Bengal, on the other hand, another Gandhian leader, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta moved on 18 December 1925 an adjournment motion in Bengal Legislative Council as a mark of protest against the brutal treatment of the government in transferring Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee, a member of the HRA from Berhampore to Hazaribagh jail on 22 November. The motion was passed by a majority of eight votes in the Council.⁴⁷

Apart from this disregard of the individual Congressmen for Gandhi's stance on non-violence, organizationally the INC too cared little for their supreme leader's disapproval of the activities of NIRs. For example, notwithstanding Gandhi's presence in the open session of Madras Congress in 1927, a resolution was passed to record the party's 'sense of deep pain at the callous attitude of the Government in not commuting the brutal sentences passed in the Kakori case... inspite of the powerful public indignation aroused by the vindictive sentences.' The Congress also resolved to offer 'its heartfelt

sympathy to the families of the victims.⁴⁸ Surprisingly, when the same Kakori prisoners were released from jail in September 1937, the Congress leaders now changed their position diametrically, 'Alarmed' by the historic ovation given to those prisoners by the citizens of Kanpur 'with open arms,' Jawaharlal Nehru and Govinda Ballav Pant were reported to have become scared as they apprehended that if too much importance was given to the revolutionaries, 'the absolute leadership' of the Congress 'might be in jeopardy in the long run.'⁴⁹ Hence Gandhi's principle of non-violence was invoked and his interference was sought. Accordingly, in an article in *Harijan* dated 4 September 1937, Gandhi censured the public demonstration to felicitate the released Kakori prisoners as 'a political mistake.'

Did the thousands of demonstrators approve of the acts said to have been committed by these prisoners, let me hope, in mistaken zeal? If they did, they have evidently not understood the Congress method;...⁵⁰

As if Gandhi's admonition of the demonstrators was not enough, the Congress High Command in the party's Subjects Committee meeting now officially condemned the demonstration as an act of 'indiscipline':

The Congress has given during the past few months ample evidence of its desire to take severe notice of indiscipline and breach of the code of non-violence that the Congress has laid down for itself. Nevertheless the Congress invites the attention of Congressmen to the fact that indiscipline in speech and action, calculated to promote or breed violence, retards the progress of the country towards its cherished goal.⁵¹

One member of the Subjects Committee, Vishnu Saran Dubhlesh who was an ex-Kakori prisoner, had however protested in the meeting that the released prisoners were in no way responsible for the disturbance of peace as an outcome of the demonstration. Nay, he held that those prisoners had come to the conclusion 'that terrorism could no longer serve any purpose and that the fight for India's freedom should be carried on under the banner of the Congress by non-violent methods.'⁵²

VII

In late 20s a few activities of the NIRs aroused once again a lot of controversy in the INC over the issue of non-violence. In the first place, when at the time of a demonstration against the Simon Commission at Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai was severely wounded in a brutal lathi charge by the police, and consequently died on 17 November 1928, the members of the Hindustan

Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), the rechristened form of HRA, resolved to take retaliatory measures. Soon action followed : Bhagat Singh and others assassinated Mr Saunders, the police officer responsible for Lajpat Rai's death. Gandhi reacted sharply; he denounced the assassination as 'a dastardly act apart from whether it had a political motive behind it or not.' He argued that what the concerned police officer did, 'was done in obedience to instructions.' Therefore in his opinion, none could be held wholly responsible for the assault on Lajpat Rai and its aftermath. Gandhi held :

The fault is that of the system of Government. What requires mending is not men but the system. And when the youth of the country have the real determination they will find that it is in their power as it is in nobody's else's to kill the system.⁵³

The attempt to blow up a train by the HSRA activists in December 1929 was the second occasion when Gandhi and the NIRs came into confrontation over the method to be resorted against the British imperialists. On 13 December 1929 Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy, was travelling in a train on his return trip from Southern India to Delhi to meet Gandhi. The HSRA activists made an effort to destroy the train. The Viceroy, Lady Irwin and their party escaped narrowly though the train was damaged badly.

The action was defended by the HSRA activists arguing that it was only to register their 'opposition to the Congress policy of appeasement and conciliation.' They accused Gandhi of 'bending on his knees' to meet the Viceroy when the imperialist government inflicted 'unbearable humiliation' on the INC and the nation. So, the revolutionaries deemed it to be their sacred duty 'to create a situation in which the people and the Congress would not avoid the conflict and would have to join the war.'⁵⁴

Gandhi expectedly disapproved the HSRA action. The resolution he moved on this incident in the meeting of Subjects Committee of the INC, at its Lahore Congress on 26 December 1929, was pungent enough:

This Congress deplores the bomb outrages perpetrated on the Viceroy's train and reiterates its conviction that such action is not only contrary to the creed of the Congress but results in harm being done to the national cause. It congratulates the Viceroy and Lady Irwin on their fortunate and narrow escape.⁵⁵

But Gandhi's resolution was faced with a strong opposition of a few other members of the Subjects Committee. Those who opposed his resolution argued (i) that the Congress were concerned with neither revolutionary activities nor with any crime committed anywhere; (ii) that the sympathy with the Viceroy and his family members were unwarranted since

the country had got nothing from him; (iii) that despite its adherence to Gandhi's creed of non-violence, the Congress should not condemn the activities of revolutionaries; (iv) that religious and moral teachings which were the main concerns of the mosques and temples, should be kept apart from 'a stern matter of fact of politics'; and (v) that the second part of the resolution should therefore be deleted.⁵⁶

Gandhi took strong exception to the opposition arguments. To his mind, it appeared that the opposition did not believe in peaceful means. If that was so, he suggested, the opposition should try and change the Congress creed. If the creed was changed from non-violence to violence it would not pain him. But, he insisted: 'If we adopt non-violence as our creed we would act up to it fully and see that it is acted up to by the nation.'⁵⁷ Gandhi also averred that his resolution was political instead of religious: 'If it had been religious, I must be a fool.'⁵⁸ He then reminded the members who demanded the dropping of the second part of his resolution, that since the beginning of non-violent action in 1921, the INC considered it to be the duty of every Congressman 'to look to the safety of every Englishman, English woman and child.'⁵⁹

Ultimately, however, Gandhi was able to pass his resolution in the Subjects Committee even in the face of opposition from a section of its members.

VIII

Gandhi was loath to compromise with his principle of non-violence even on the question of martyrdom. True, he was pained at the martyrs' death, yet he did not dither about censuring their method of violent action. His attitude in this matter was clearly manifested at least on two occasions when he again confronted with his colleagues in the INC: (i) self-immolation of Jatin Das, and (ii) the hanging of Bhagat Singh and his compatriots, both of whom had no regard for the 'non-revolutionary and compromising leadership of Gandhi.'

It is well known to the students of the history of freedom struggle in India that during the Lahore Conspiracy Case (which started on 10 July 1929) the accused undertrial prisoners went on hunger strike to redress certain grievances relating to the conditions in jail where they were interned. As was natural, the imperialist government did not give a fig for those demands; instead it tried to feed the prisoners forcibly. The government indifference to the prisoners' conditions created commotion among the public who in their turn organized demonstrations in different parts of the country. Because of the intensity of public feelings the government ultimately relented and

prescribed a few concessions for the prisoners. As a result, Bhagat Singh and other prisoners excepting Jatin Das, withdrew their agitation. Das fought to the last for the redressal of all grievances. Ultimately he died on 13 September 1929 after his 64 days' fast.⁶⁰

The martyrdom of Jatin Das created a sensation all over the country. His funeral procession led by Subhas Chandra Bose and Jatindra Mohan Sengupta was reported to have been attended by six lakhs of people. The Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru and Madan Mohan Malaviya condemned the role of the government for the death of Jatin Das and paid tribute to him.⁶¹ Only exception however was Gandhi; he kept mum over the issue. Earlier he did not even approve of the fast underwent by Bhagat Singh and others.⁶² Now, on his silence over the death of Jatin Das, he defended himself thus : "I have preferred to observe silence over the self-immolation of Jatindra Nath Das because I feel that by writing on it I would have done more harm to the country's cause than good."⁶³

That the INC, on the contrary, did not follow Gandhi was evident from the resolutions it passed during the period. Thus at the AICC meeting held on 28 September 1929 at Lucknow, Motilal Nehru moved a resolution admiring Jatin Das and others for their 'great courage and steadfastness' underlying their sacrifices, and also for having given up their lives for 'ideals dearly cherished by them.' Both in the Subjects Committee meeting and in the open session of the Lahore Congress (December 1929) the AICC resolved to express its appreciation for the 'supreme self-sacrifice' of Jatin Das, and also to hold the foreign government responsible for his self-immolation.⁶⁴

Thus the stand that INC took in contradistinction to the sentiment of Gandhi revealed the fact that perhaps it could not ignore the tremendous popularity of Jatin Das after his self-immolation.

Again, while Gandhi was reluctant to approve Jatin Das's action, his attitude towards the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Raj Guru on 23 March 1931, was surprisingly otherwise. Now instead of maintaining silence he actively drafted a resolution on the eve of Karachi Congress, praising those patriots who were awarded death sentences in the Lahore Conspiracy Case on 7 October 1930.⁶⁵ However the draft of the resolution was worded cautiously. The resolution which was moved by Vallabhbhai Patel, the President of the Subjects Committee meeting at the Karachi Congress dated 27 March 1931, reads, among others :

This Congress, while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form, places on record its admiration of the bravery and sacrifice of the late Sardar

Bhagat Singh and his comrades Syts. Sukhdev and Rajguru and mourns with the bereaved families the loss of these lives.⁶⁶

The wording of the resolution came, however, in for criticism by the other members of the Subjects Committee. Two amendments to the resolution were tabled by V.L. Sastri and P.S. Sastri. The main burden from the arguments of those two Subjects Committee members was to delete these words from the resolution : '*...while dissociating itself from and disapproving of political violence in any shape or form...*'. However Vallabhbai Patel supported Gandhi's original resolution. Ultimately the amendments, when put to vote, were defeated, and the original resolution was passed. The open session also endorsed it by an overwhelming majority.⁶⁷

Thus, as R. C. Majumdar observes, 'even with the face-saving preamble,' the resolution on the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh and others must have been 'a bitter pill for Gandhi to swallow.'⁶⁸ For, earlier Gandhi had strongly opposed a similar resolution passed in the Bengal Provincial Congress in connexion with the death sentence of Gopinath Saha.⁶⁹

In fine, Gandhi's reaction to the self-immolation of Jatin Das and hanging of Bhagat Singh and others amply betrayed his disinclination towards the violent activities of those revolutionaries. In fact, he was, and had been, not ready to accept anything that would mar his plan for direct action by non-violent methods. He apprehended, it seems, that any eulogy of the martyrs who adopted violent course of action, would justify their method. That was why he was silent on the death of Jatin Das. And that was also why even when he moved a resolution appreciating the deeds of Bhagat Singh and others, at Karachi Congress, he was careful to ensure that the INC should dissociate from, and disapprove of 'political violence in any shape or form.' When the 'terrorist' deeds were in full swing by the end of July 1931 Gandhi even went to the extent of saying : 'Bhagat Singh' worship has done and is doing incalculable harm to the country.'⁷⁰ A month later, toeing the line of Gandhi the AICC which met on 6 August 1931 at Bombay, resolved unanimously for the first time to condemn political murders :

The A.I.C.C. warns those who secretly or openly approve of or encourage such murders that they retard the progress of the country. The A.-I.C.C. calls upon the Congress organizations to carry on special propaganda against all acts of public violence, even where provocation is given for such deeds.⁷¹

Like NIRs, the nationalist revolutionaries of Bengal also did not adhere to the principle of non-violence in their fight against the alien rule. Even

during the Civil Disobedience movement they did not shun their violent course of action.⁷² Thus on 8 April 1930, a month after the famous 'Dandi March' of Gandhi, the Chittagong Armoury Raid which was 'perhaps the most daring of the revolutionary enterprises in India'⁷³ occurred. In fact, historically speaking, during 1930-34, despite the failure of two national revolutionary organizations— Anushilan Samity and Yugantar Party — to implement their programme of armed uprisings and armed actions, the Bengal Volunteer group led by Hem Chandra Ghosh stuck to its programme of assassinating the high British Officials.⁷⁴

Gandhi, needless to say, was very much perturbed by all those violent activities. He requested the revolutionaries 'not to disturb the free flow of non-violent demonstration.'⁷⁵ He tried at the same time to impress upon the civil resisters to 'fight an unequal struggle—the violence of the Government and the violence of those among us who have no faith in non-violence.'⁷⁶ Gandhi insisted that whatever might be true of other countries, political murder at least in India would be harmful to her.⁷⁷ The belief of the revolutionaries that an occasional murder of an official would help the cause of country's freedom, was, according to Gandhi, 'wholly unfounded'; rather he thought that every murder had 'hampered' him in his pursuit. Therefore, he appealed to the revolutionaries for listening to his 'advice and request' and for suspending all their activities while the nation was giving a trial to his experimnt.⁷⁸

As if all those requests were not enough, Gandhi dwelt on at length the issue of non-violence vis-avis the violent activities of the national revolutionaries in the AICC session at Bombay on 6 August 1931. By drafting as well as moving a resolution in the session he countenanced the principle of non-violence to counter certain prevailing views questioning his and Congress' non-violent method of action.

First was the criticism that the Congress had nothing to do with the 'violent acts of the non-Congressmen,' and that while sticking to its creed, it should leave alone those who did not believe in non-violence. To this, Gandhi responded thus :

I have been pointing out all through, that inasmuch as the Congress has claimed to speak for the whole of India, Parsis, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and inasmuch as we want to win swaraj not only for the Congressmen but for the whole country, we must accept responsibility for the deeds of every Indian. It is not Congressmen alone that carried on the movement last year [i.e., the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930.— TKB]. The whole

country fought side by side with the Congressmen, and we gratefully accepted and joined by their help. We must influence the political assassin. And this we can only do if we regard him as our brother and be responsible for his acts.⁷⁹

In defence of his argument, Gandhi referred to the issue of suspension of Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919 and that of mass civil disobedience movement in 1922. While the former was suspended, according to him, 'because of outbreak of violence among those who were strangers to the Congress, the 'much criticized Bardoli resolution was taken because we could not disown responsibility for Chauri Chaura.' Now Gandhi lamented that the resolution adopted on the hanging of Bhagat Singh at the Karachi Congress^{79a} was a 'mistake.' For,

Those who knew Bhagat Singh, had told me a good deal about his fine character, his rare courage and sacrifice, and so I drafted the resolution. But I find that the qualifications of the resolution have been forgotten, and the praises have been exploited. I am deeply pained.⁸⁰

In the second place, as to the allegation why the Congress did not condemn the violence of British government while at the same time denouncing the deeds of the young revolutionaries, Gandhi forcefully asserted that those who argued like that failed to know the Congress. He unequivocally declared that the Congress was 'pledged to end' the system of British government, and was sure that no condemnation of it would help to 'mend' it. For, the existence of Congress was a 'standing condemnation of the system.' Therefore, Gandhi thought that while condemning political murders recounting the government wrongs would be 'to confuse' the issue and would as well mislead the 'hot-blooded youth.' Hence they must be told 'in clearest possible language' that 'they must cease to murder, no matter how great may be the provocation.'⁸¹

Finally, and most importantly, Gandhi dispelled the doubt of those who were not sure whether the British rule could be ended 'by the way of non-violence.' He pointed out that the progress made by country in this respect was 'sufficiently tangible proof of the success.' Success or otherwise was however not the question to him. What he emphasized was :

There is the Congress creed, and we have to work it out faithfully. Hence we must not in any shape or form identify ourselves with murderous activities that we witness about us. It would be perfectly legitimate for those who do not believe in the Congress creed to agitate for its removal, and

there will be no need for such a resolution as the one before you. We must not deceive ourselves or the world.⁸²

In view of all these arguments, in the AICC session at Bombay (6 August 1931), Gandhi at the outset requested the Congressmen to accept the resolution 'wholeheartedly and with all its implications' if it appealed to them. And if it was otherwise, then he advised them to reject it. But at the same time he insisted,

... if you pass it, let it go forth as a declaration that we want to fool neither the Englishmen nor the world, but that so long as the Congress has truth and non-violence as its creed, it is our bounden duty to be truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed, and to endeavour to plead with and wean those who are not with us from the path of violence.⁸³

This forceful advocacy of non-violence by Gandhi, needless to say, did not go unheeded. Ultimately his resolution was passed by the Congressmen. Even Sardar Kishen Singh, the father of Bhagat Singh who was brought to the session, supported the Congress leaders.⁸⁴

IX

The Gandhi-INC co-ordination over the issue of non-violence was once again evident in the immediate post-Gandhi-Irwin Pact developments. To recapitulate, after his return from England where he went to attend the Round Table Conference on 28 December 1931, Gandhi saw his motherland being subjected to some draconian ordinances promulgated under the regime of Lord Willingdon, the new Viceroy. To him and the Congress leaders, such promulgation amounted to the breach of the Pact made by him with the government. The rupture thus had a disappointing effect leaving both Gandhi and the INC with no other alternative than to resume civil disobedience movement. While announcing their intention to launch civil disobedience movement Gandhi, in his letter to the Viceroy, made it clear :

Non-violence is my absolute creed. I believe that civil disobedience is not only the natural right of a people, especially when they have no effective voice in their own Government, but that it is also a substitute for violence or armed rebellion. I can never, therefore, deny my creed.⁸⁵

In conformity with Gandhi's views, the CWC passed a resolution with a plan for civil disobedience, and with an appeal to the 'free people of the world' to watch Indian struggle "in the belief that the non-violent method adopted by the Congress gives it a world-wide importance, and if the method becomes demonstrably successful, it is likely to furnish an effective moral

equivalent to war.”⁸⁶

As against the non-violent method adopted by Gandhi and the Congress in the civil disobedience movement, the alien ruler resorted to the severest type of suppression and oppression : Gandhi was arrested on 4 January 1932; all Congress organizations were banned, and civil liberties were stifled. Bereft of leaders and organization notwithstanding, the people defied government’s reign of terror in a non-violent manner. The failure of the people to withstand government repression, and of the leaders, ‘to build up the tempo of the movement’ ultimately led to its withdrawal on 7 April 1934.⁸⁷

X

The unanimity between Gandhi and INC over the use of non-violent method in the civil disobedience movement during 1932-34, was short-lived. Historically speaking, after his release from jail on 23 August 1933 Gandhi devoted all his energies to work for the Harijans and for constructive programme. In addition, in view of the loss of tempo and vigour in the mass civil disobedience movement Gandhi replaced it with individual civil disobedience. Finally he suspended mass civil disobedience movement, as we have seen, on 7 April 1934. Gandhi’s decision to withdraw the movement in favour of such activities as removal of untouchability and constructive programme, incurred the displeasure of a few leading Congressmen of the time. Those leaders also wanted a change of leadership in the organization. Coincidentally Gandhi too was contemplating his retirement from Congress as he was worried for the prevailing ‘corruption’ in the party and the insincerity and lack of steadfastness among the Congressmen to scrupulously adhere to the principle of non-violence as a ‘creed.’ In a statement from Wardha dated 17 September 1934 Gandhi lamented :

After fourteen years of trial, it still remains a policy with the majority of the Congressmen, whereas it is a fundamental creed with me. That the Congressmen do not still regard non-violence as a creed is no fault of theirs. It is undoubtedly my own faulty presentation and still more the faulty execution that are responsible for this failure. I have no consciousness of any faulty presentation or execution, but it is the only possible inference from the fact that it has not yet become an integral part of the lives of Congressmen.⁸⁸

A month later, in October 1934, at Bombay Congress he made an effort to amend the creed of Congress in replacing the words, ‘peaceful and legitimate’ by ‘truthful and non-violent.’ He argued that if the Congressmen really believed in the necessity of truthfulness and non-violence ‘for the

attainment of our goal, 'they should have no hesitation about accepting the unequivocal adjectives.'⁸⁹

The Congress response to Gandhi's amendment was somewhat equivocal as was clear from the presidential speech of Dr Rajendra Prasad at the Bombay session of Congress held on 26-28 October 1934 :

About the amendment in the creed, I would ask you only one question. Have we really understood by "peaceful and legitimate" anything but "truthful and non-violent" all these years? Has the world outside understood our creed differently? All the credit that we can take today and all the discredit that critics and our self-introspecting hearts pour upon us spring from the fact that we have kept that lofty creed as our ideal. The world should cease to watch our fight with interest if our creed meant anything less than it has meant all these years. Whatever the failure of our civil resistance to civilise our rulers, there is no gain-saying the fact that there should have been much more unashamed brutality than we have been the victims of, if there had not been this great creed proclaimed by us.⁹⁰

However, Dr Prasad at the same time lost no opportunity to remind his 'socialist friends' that there was no greater ideology than was expressed by 'the creed of truth and non-violence.'⁹¹ Regarding the method to be followed in the struggle against the British rule, he made it clear :

It is active dynamic non-violent mass action. We may fail once; we may fail twice; but we are bound to succeed some day.... Our weapons are unique and the world is watching the progress of great experiment with interest and high expectation. Let us be true to our creed and firm in our determination. Satyagraha in its active application may meet with temporary set-backs but it knows no defeat.⁹²

But all those lofty pronouncements cut no ice with Gandhi. He made his last effort to revise the Congress creed at its session at Bombay on 26-28 October 1934. As the CWC refused to concede his amendment, Gandhi resigned from the INC on 29 October 1934. Earlier the Lahore session of the Congress in December 1929, it may be mentioned, foiled a similar move by Gandhi.^{92a}

XI

Gandhi's resignation did not, however, lead to any illfeeling on his part toward the INC which still remained in his estimation 'the most powerful

and the most representative organization in the country' having a history of 'unprecedented noble service and self-sacrifice.'⁹³ The Congress also did not fail to look up to Gandhi as its source of moral inspiration. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his presidential speech at Lucknow Congress in April 1936, summed up the Congress attitude to Gandhi thus :

We have differed from him in the past and we shall differ from him in the future about many things, and it is right that each one of us should act up to his convictions. But the bonds that hold us together are stronger and more vital than our differences, and the pledges we took together still ring in our ears. How many of us have that passionate desire for Indian independence and the raising of our poverty-stricken masses which consumes him? ... The pledge of independence that we took together still remains to be redeemed, and we await again to guide us with his wise counsel.⁹⁴

Thus even after his severance of official connexion with the INC Gandhi had the opportunity to attend the CWC meetings only when his presence was required by the members for consultation in matters involving the application of non-violence or affecting communal unity.

XII

Once again Gandhi's services were badly needed by the Congress and the country during the 'Quit India' movement in 1942.⁹⁵ In retrospect, it may be mentioned that the failure of the Cripps Mission⁹⁶ dealt a severe blow to the nation's aspiration for freedom. With the refusal of Sir Stafford Cripps to concede the Congress demand for the formation of a wartime 'Responsible National Government,' the negotiation between him and the Congress leaders failed. Those leaders now realized that the British Government were not ready to meet even their minimum demands. Incensed by the imperialist intention, Gandhi, on the other hand, appeared once again at the helm of affairs of the Congress organization. While other Congress leaders were dilly-dallying with their idea of supporting war efforts of the imperialist rule in India, against the Axis powers, Gandhi became 'impatient' to launch his last struggle against the British government. Ultimately, the Congress had to fall in line with his stance. Thus in its historic session held in the first week of August 1942 at Bombay the AICC resolved to start a non-violent mass struggle led by Gandhi to end the British rule in India. The famous 'Quit India' resolution which was adopted on 8 August at the session, urged that the 'immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity,

both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations.’ “The ending of British rule in this country is thus a vital and immediate issue on which depend the future of the war and the success of freedom and democracy.”⁹⁷ Therefore the Congress resolved ‘to sanction, for the vindication of India’s inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale, so that the country might utilize all non-violent strength it has gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle.’ Gandhi was then requested ‘to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.’ The people of India were also appealed ‘to face dangers and hardships that will fall to their lot with courage and endurance, to hold together under the leadership of Gandhiji, and carry out his instructions as the disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom,’ and to remember that ‘*non-violence is the basis of this movement.*’⁹⁸

Emphasizing the non-violent character of the impending struggle Gandhi on his part made it very clear :

Ours is not a drive for power, but purely a non-violent fight for India’s independence. In a violent struggle, a successful general has been often known to effect a military coup and set up a dictatorship. But under the Congress scheme of things, essentially non-violent as it is, there can be no room for dictatorship. A non-violent soldier of freedom will covet nothing for himself, he fights only for the freedom for his country.⁹⁹

So,

Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is : ‘Do or Die.’ We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery. Let that be your pledge.¹⁰⁰

But both Gandhi and the INC leaders had hardly any opportunity to lead the struggle, as from the early dawn of 9 August 1942 onwards the British government clapped the Congressmen, including Gandhi, all over India into gaol. As a sequel to the arrests of Congress leaders violent outbursts broke out in some parts of the country. The Government also reacted violently : brutal repression was let loose, which was later described by Gandhi as ‘leonine violence.’ When the British administration later alleged in a ‘White

Paper'¹⁰¹ released in February 1943 that 'the Indian masses were incapable of non-violence,'¹⁰² Gandhi now languishing at the Aga Khan Palace in Poona retorted :

... human nature has nowhere risen to the full height which full non-violence demands. The disturbances that took place after the 8th August were not due to any action on the part of the Congress. They were due entirely to the inflammatory action of the Government in arresting Congress leaders throughout India and that at a time which was psychologically wholly wrong. The utmost that can be said is that Congressmen or others had not risen high enough in Non-violence to be proof against all provocations.¹⁰³

Therefore he refrained himself from apportioning the blame for violence on the Congressmen or the masses, nor did he himself take its responsibility. On the contrary his gun was directed at the British government. If the government were, Gandhi accused, bent on goading people to violence, they could succeed in their design. The masses were not 'angels' and were likely to be misled in the absence of leaders capable of advising them to adhere to non-violence.¹⁰⁴ Hence he came to the conclusion :

If the Government goes mad with anger and perpetrates unheard of atrocities on unarmed men and women, and as a result thereof the people go mad with despair and disappointment and retaliate without thinking their violence will be considered as non-violence as compared with the violence used by the Government.¹⁰⁵

While all those were said, Gandhi at the same time disapproved the violent activities of the countrymen.¹⁰⁶ He warned that India would never succeed in attaining her freedom through violence.

If a vast country like ours, with a population of four hundred millions, takes to the path of violence, the world cannot escape destruction. If, on the contrary, we keep on the straight path, we may be able to show the same to the war-weary world.¹⁰⁷

That Gandhi's warning failed to exert any impact on the people, and that, therefore, he did not wholeheartedly approve of the mass action in the 'Quit India' movement, was evident from some of his pronouncements after his release from jail. An example may be cited here. When in December 1945 Gandhi visited Mahishadal of Midnapore district in Bengal—a place which played a historic role in the August movement—the local Congressmen reported to him on how they acted in the upheaval, and claimed that they

had scrupulously avoided taking of life and had thus acted non-violently. While Gandhi expressed his satisfaction with the people for shedding their inertia, he at the same time lamented for their failure to understand the significance and meaning of non-violence. He told the Congressmen :

You have graphically put in your reports how you blew up a railway track, put a road out of use, burnt a court, seized a *thana* set up a parallel government and so on. *This is not the technique of non-violent action.* The people committed the mistake of thinking that all that did not involve killing was non-violence. Sometimes killing is the cleanest part of violence.¹⁰⁸

He then explained to those Congressmen that non-violent rebellion was not a programme of 'seizure of power,' but one of 'transformation of relationships, ending in a peaceful transfer of power.' If the people had fully carried out his advice as enunciated in his speech of 8 August 1942 at the Bombay AICC session, and had there been 'a perfect atmosphere of non-violence,' Gandhi thought that the government's power of repression would have been sterilized and they would have been compelled to yield to the national demand.¹⁰⁹

In the final analysis, in the 'Quit India' movement of 1942 'the revolutionary spirit raised its head and the cult of non-violence was submerged under that of violence.' Therefore, the short-lived upheaval of 1942 was 'the product of an admixture of the revolutionary violence and a spirit of non-violent resistance inculcated by Gandhi.'¹¹⁰

XIII

During the period from the end of the Second World War to the dawn of her independence India experienced a series of tumultuous upsurges the methods of which earned disapproval, and were even condemned, by Gandhi and the INC, as violence was alleged to have reigned supreme in those events. Major three such popular explosions were : (i) in Calcutta on 21-23 November 1945, and (ii) again, there on 11-13 February 1946, and (iii) in Bombay on 18-23 February 1946 in connexion with the RIN mutiny.¹¹¹

On the first occasion, the students of Calcutta gave a strike call throughout Bengal on 21 November demanding the release of INA prisoners.¹¹² Having assembled at a huge rally on that day, they marched in a procession towards Dalhousie Square (now Binay-Badal-Dinesh Bag) via Dharmatala Street (now Lenin Sarani) of Calcutta. The armed police prevented the procession from entering the Dalhousie Square at the crossing of Madan Street and Dharmatala Street. Obstructed thus, the students sat down then

and there. On their refusal to disperse till 6 p.m. in the evening, the police resorted to lathicharge the demonstrators who in their turn hurled stones and brickbats on the former. Then police firing ensued. Two students were killed while many of them were injured.¹¹³ As a result of this, the whole Calcutta got embroiled in a series of disturbances on the next two days, such as 'strike by Sikh taxi drivers and Communist-led tramway men as well as in many factories (Calcutta Corporation employees were already out on economic demands), burning of cars and lorries, crowds blocking trains, and barricades on streets.'¹¹⁴

That the Congress leaders vehemently apposed the activities of the students in late November 1945 was clear from the attitude of their President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who characterized the 'barricade fighters' as "irresponsible rioters." For, the 'present policy of the Congress is to maintain peaceful undisturbed conditions in the country and to fight the elections.'¹¹⁵ Vallabhbhai Patel, on the other hand, virtually dismissed the event as the 'frittering away' of energies in 'trifling quarrels' with the police.¹¹⁶ The Bengal Congress leaders were also in no mood to take up the cudgels for the student-demonstrators, nay, they advised them to keep away from the communists. As Gautam Chattopadhyay, an eminent communist historian who himself was a demonstrator, reminisced :

Students expected that some top Congress leaders would surely come and take up the leadership of the demonstration. They expected, at least, Sarat Bose to come. But none came—neither Sarat Bose nor Kiran Sankar Roy. They both sent letters through couriers, calling on the students to 'disperse' and not to be 'misled into adventurist actions, instigated by the Communists.'¹¹⁷

Though the individual views of Gandhi on the event, are yet to be available, the CWC at its Calcutta session of 7-11 December 1945, which was attended by Gandhi himself, passed a vote of oblique censure on the demonstration by insisting 'to affirm for the guidance of all concerned that the policy of non-violence adopted in 1920 by the Congress continues unabated and that such non-violence does not include burning of public property, cutting of telegraph wires, derailing trams and intimidation.'^{117a}

The second event was related to another disturbance occurred in Calcutta on 11 February 1946 as a sequel to the students' protest against the conviction of Abdul Rashid, a prisoner of INA, who was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment. The student wing of the Muslim League called a strike on that day, which was joined by its counterpart of CPI. The nationalist students' bodies were too, more or less, reported to have supported the

strike. The strike was total and a big procession marched towards Dalhousie Square on the day of strike. When the processionists were returning the police blocked their way on Clive Street. The former then and there began squatting. Later the police lathicharged the squatters and arrested a dozen of them. The police action led to indignant protest demonstrations by the public. Thereafter 'Calcutta was thrown into turmoil with burning lorries, firings, dislocation of vehicular traffic.' Next day, the CPI called a general strike which paralysed the industrial Calcutta. A huge rally was also organized on that day attended, among others, by Suhrawardy, the Muslim League leader, Satish Chandra Das Gupta, the Gandhian Congressman, and Somnath Lahiri, the communist leader. After 84 persons were killed and 300 injured by the police-military actions, order was ultimately restored on 15 February 1946.¹¹⁸

Of all the three episodes the one which evoked most resentment among the INC leaders and Gandhi was the RIN mutiny that took place from 18 February 1946.¹¹⁹ About 1100 naval ratings of *HMS Talwar* went on strike at Bombay to protest against the ill-treatment meted out to them, like 'flagrant racial discrimination, unpalatable food and abuses to boot,' by the representatives of the British rulers in the upper deck. The next day the revolt was extended over 22 ships and coastal naval bases. Incited by a false rumour of shooting on the *Talwar* ratings, their counterparts on the *Castle* and the *Fort Barracks* joined the strike. The ratings left their posts and 'went around Bombay in lorries, holding aloft Congress flags, threatening Europeans and policemen and occasionally breaking a shop window or two.' On 19 February the strikers in the Bombay Harbour 'demonstrated widely and sometimes violently for two hours... causing utter confusion and complete hold-up of traffic.'¹²⁰ The citizens of Calcutta and Bombay and later other cities sympathised with the causes of the ratings. Violent activities ensued : attacks on the Europeans, burning of police stations, post offices, tram depots, food godowns, were resorted to by the people. Even the YMCA centre was not spared. At Bombay a general strike was called on 22 February, in which about three lakhs of workers participated. At other places the people showed their empathy toward the ratings by organizing *hartals* and processions. The mutiny was reported to have been participated by 78 ships, 20 shore establishments and 20,000 ratings. In addition, the Indian soldiers of the Royal Indian Air Force went on sympathetic strikes in Bombay, Madras, Poona, Calcutta, Jessore (now in Bangladesh) and Ambala (in Punjab). However, finally, at the request of Vallabhbhai Patel and Jinnah, the ratings surrendered on 23 February 1946.¹²¹

Interestingly, the issues of violence and non-violence figured prominently

in the mutiny. Thus, as Das has shown, almost all the *Talwar* leaders 'vacillated between violence and non-violence,' and at times they 'tried hard to restrain the ratings of other units and drum into their ears the *mantra* of non-violence.' A few other educated rating leaders 'tried to peg down the strike to a non-violent form in their units.'¹²²

Outside the battlefield of mutiny, the Congress leaders who were now very busy with the transfer of power from foreign to Indian hands and also with the impending elections, were vehemently opposed to the activities of the ratings. Earlier their public stance was that of 'non-intervening.' Later when the situation appeared to them as 'alarming' Vallabhbhai Patel 'intervened to induce the ratings to surrender unconditionally, and thereby to take the wind out of the protesting people's sails.' On behalf of the Congress, he assured the strikers that none of them would be victimized and that their grievances would be redressed.¹²³ Patel also urged the need of enforcement of discipline in the army.¹²⁴

Nehru, on the other hand, though hailed the RIN mutiny for opening 'an altogether new chapter in the history of the armed forces in India,' emphasized the necessity for maintaining 'discipline' in the army: "We all want discipline in the army, for any army without discipline is no army."¹²⁵ On the question of violence, he opined that if one thought in terms of violence, he should think 'in terms of superior violence.' Therefore, to him, it was 'folly to put up inferior violence to oppose superior violence.' Thus one 'could not match a pair of nail scissors with a gun and a gun with a machine gun.' So, violence, according to Nehru, if there was to be any, 'should be on the biggest scale possible,' and 'small-scale violence comes in the way, not only of non-violence, but big-scale violence.' Despite all his argumentation as to the efficacy of the use of violence, ultimately Nehru had no 'shadow of doubt' that the right policy to follow was the non-violent policy.¹²⁶

Compared with other Congress leaders, Gandhi's views on the mutiny were very candid indeed. It seems that he could have anticipated the ensuing atmosphere of violence. Thus on 15 February he wrote :

Hatred is in the air and impatient lovers of the country will gladly take advantage of it, if they can, through violence, to further the cause of independence. I suggest that it is wrong at any time and everywhere. But it is more wrong and unbecoming in a country where fighters for freedom have declared to the world that their policy is truth and non-violence.¹²⁷

The remarks seemed to be 'prophetic' so far as the RIN mutiny was concerned. Therefore, it was natural for Gandhi to condemn the activities of

the ratings as those were not 'non-violent' in character. Destruction of churches and the like, burning of tram cars and other property, insulting and injuring Europeans— all were censured by Gandhi as the 'thoughtless orgy of violence.' Elaborating his arguments he said :

I have deliberately used the adjective "thoughtless." For there is such a thing as thoughtful violent action. What I see happening now is not thoughtful. If the Indian members of the Navy know and appreciate, the way of non-violent resistance can be dignified, manly and wholly effective, if it is corporate. For the individual it always is. Why should they continue to serve, if service is humiliating for them or India? Action like this I have called non-violent non-cooperation. As it is they are setting a bad and unbecoming example for India. ¹²⁸

To Gandhi, moreover, the combination between Hindus and Muslims and others in the mutiny, was 'unholy,' and it would, he apprehended, lead to and 'probably is a preparation for mutual violence— bad for India and the world.' He finally wondered whether Bombay where the mutiny happened, would prove 'the burial ground of ahimsa.' ¹²⁹

When Aruna Asaf Ali, the firebrand Congress Socialist leader who took up the cudgels for the ratings, reacted sharply to Gandhi's remarks about the mutiny. She held, among others, that the people were not 'interested in the *ethics* of violence or non-violence.' Gandhi retorted :

... but the people *are* very much interested in knowing *the way* which will bring freedom to the masses — violence or non-violence. The people have, however imperfectly, hitherto gone the way of non-violence. Aruna and her comrades have to ask themselves every time whether the non-violent way has, or has not, raised India from her slumber of ages and created in them a yearning, very vague perhaps, for swaraj. ¹³⁰

Thus both Gandhi and the Congress leader were opposed to the RIN mutiny though for different purposes : while the former was anxious to maintain the sanctity of non-violence *per se*, the Congress leaders were apprehensive of the ratings' activities that might spoil the peaceful transfer of power and mar the progress of the ensuing elections. ¹³¹

XIV

The recounting of political events in the pre-independence India in relation to Gandhi - INC interaction, thus undertaken, is likely to convey an impression that the INC and Gandhi had taken on many an occasion two different lines of action to find a way out of difficulties in respect of 'scrupulous and conscientious' adherence to the principle of non-violence. But to do justice to both, it must be remembered that in the event of an immediate political issue, they also sank their differences facilitating ultimately a co-ordination of their activities as well as formulation of future course of action. And to a large extent Gandhi's deep sense of political realism accounted for this. Although he believed in the superiority of non-violence to violence, yet he realized that if he had to start his public work with those who accepted non-violence as a creed, he would have to end with himself. Hence he presented non-violence before the Congress 'as an *expedient*.' He confessed: 'I could not have done otherwise, if I was to introduce it into politics.'¹³² He also admitted that the non-violence he had preached from Congress platform, was not a 'final form of non-violence' but was a *policy* and that Congress had indeed succeeded in executing such a policy: 'For better or for worse the Congress has adopted it, and ... has consistently and to the best of its ability tried to act up to it.'¹³³ In the ultimate analysis, Gandhi, as a 'practical idealist', intended to inculcate the principle of non-violence among the Congressmen only to be followed as a political method for the solution of political questions.

As a political method, it (non-violence - TKB) can always be changed, modified, altered, even given up in preference to another. If, therefore, I say to you that our policy should not be given up today, I am talking political wisdom. It is political insight. It has served in the past, it has enabled us to cover many stages towards Independence, and it is as a politician that I suggest to you that it is a grave mistake to contemplate its abandonment. If I have carried the Congress with me all these years, it is in my capacity as a politician. It is hardly fair to describe my method as religious because it is new¹³⁴.

The INC, as is well known, had accepted the method of non-violence 'because of a belief in its effectiveness'. As Nehru in his presidential address to the Lahore session of Congress in 1929 observed that the majority of the Congressmen judged non-violence 'not on moral but on practical grounds', that is, that violence promised no 'substantial results', as it too often 'brings reaction and demoralization in its train,' and in our country especially it

may lead to disruption. 'Any great movement for liberation must necessarily be a mass movement, and a mass movement must essentially be peaceful, except in times of organized revolt.'¹³⁵ Nothing could become more a lucid exposition of non-violence by 'policy' as opposed to 'creed' or 'faith' and also of the nature of Congress' interaction with Gandhi in following his principle of non-violence, than this one.

Notes and References

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20. *ibid.*, p. 460.
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- 22-23. *ibid.*, vol. XXII, *op. cit.*, 1966, pp. 223-4.
- 23a. For details, see R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp.149-53.
24. Cited in Nimai Pramanik, *Gandhi and the Indian National Revolutionaries*, Sribhumi Publishing Company, Calcutta 1984, p. 45.
25. Krishnadas, *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi* (abridged and ed. Richard B. Gregg), Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1951, pp. 223-4.
26. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *op. cit.*, p.236.
27. In this connexion Tarapada Lahiri, himself a national revolutionary, observed, "There is a general belief in the country that by the Bardoli decision the non-co-operation movement was called off. Even historians of high repute have endorsed the mistaken view. The N.C.O. movement was not called off either by Gandhi or by the A.I.C.C. at that time. The Bardoli resolution suspended the starting of the projected mass civil disobedience. The programme of five fold boycott was kept intact. The non-co-operation movement was called off at the Belgaum session of the Congress in December 1924, presided over by Gandhi himself."— 'The Eventful Decade : 1920-1929,' in Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya (ed.) *Freedom Struggle and Anushilan Samiti*, Volume One, Anushilan Samiti, Calcutta 1979, p. 174.
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32. *ibid.*, p. 436.
33. *ibid.*, p. 418.
34. See note no. 28.
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37. For a comprehensive account of the disagreement between Gandhi and the national revolutionaries on various issues, see Nimai Pramanik, *op.cit.* I wish to take this

opportunity to acknowledge that the Sections V, VI and VII are largely based on the facts stated in the book.

See also Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal Politics 1921-41 : Gandhian Leadership*, Sarat Book House, Calcutta 1984, pp. 110-58.

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42. *ibid.*, pp. 334 and 342.
43. It was later rechristened as the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).
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50. *CWMG*, Vol. XVI, p. 102.
51. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, op. cit., vol. II, p. 84.
52. Cited in Nimai Pramanik, op. cit., p.220.
53. *CWMG*, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 274.
54. Cited in Nimai Pramanik, op. cit., p. 145.
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56. Summed up from Nimai Pramanik, op. cit., pp.145-6.
- 57-59. See note no. 55.
60. For details, see R. C. Majumdar, op. cit., pp.428-30.
61. Nimai Pramanik, op. cit., p. 158.
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64. *IQR*, 1929, Vol. II, p. 297.
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66. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, vol. II, pp. 456-7.
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99. *ibid.*, p.152.
100. *ibid.*, p. 161. Anthony J. Parel observes, "Ironically, the inspiration for the new mantra ['Do or Die'—TKB] came from a stanza in Lord Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' written to commemorate the fate of the British soldiers who perished in the Crimean War :
- 'Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do or die.'
- These lines had a life-long fascination for Gandhi."— See his edited book, *M. K. Gandhi : Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 181.
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107. Quoted in Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, *Evolution of Political Philosophy of Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, p.314.
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111. For details, see Sucheta Mahajan, 'Post-War National Upsurge'. in Bipan Chanda, *et al*,

- ch. 36; Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Post-War Upsurge in India (1945-46)*, Independence Golden Jubilee Series 4, Communist Party Publications, New Delhi 1997. [The pamphlet was previously incorporated in Jagannath Sarkar *et al* (eds.), *India's Freedom Struggle Several Streams*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi 1986, pp. 215-35.]; and Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India : 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi 1983, pp. 421-5; see also his *A Critique of Colonial India*, Papyrus, Calcutta 1985, pp. 125-30. Facts about the up surges have been summed up from these sources.
112. This refers to those personnel of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's INA, who were captured by the British in the eastern theatre of War. For details of the release of those prisoners, see Sucheta Mahajan, *op.cit.*, pp. 475-9.
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118. For details, see Gautam Chattopadhyay, *Post-War Upsurges in India*, *op. cit.*, pp.15-19.
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122. Dipak Kumar Das, *op.cit.*, p. 243.
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124. For details of Patel's views, see Dipak Kumar Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 252-58.
125. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works*, (ed. S. Gopal), Orient Longmans, New Delhi 1982, p.17.
126. *ibid.*, pp.10-2; see also Dipak Kumar Das, *op.cit.*, pp.258-61.
127. *CWVG*, vol. LXXXIII, P. 133.
128. *ibid.*, p.171.
129. *ibid.*, p.175.

130. *ibid.*, p.184. On other points of the debate between Aruna Asaf Ali and Gandhi over the RIN mutiny, see *CWMG*, vol. LXXXIII, pp.182-84 and 205-07.
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Note

Ethnicity : the Scenario of Bhutan

PRITHWIRAJ RAY

One may not agree with the view that ethnicity is a dangerous or reactionary phenomenon. Whatever it may be, ethnicity is a ubiquitous phenomenon both in the developing and developed countries. Because of its ubiquity, variety of forms, scope, regularity and intensity, and of its involvement in psychic, social and historical variables, ethnicity has been defined in myriad ways, depending on the discipline, field of experience, and interests of the researcher. Following Cohen, an ethnic group can be operationally defined as a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behaviour, and (b) form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system. The term, ethnicity, refers to the degree of conformity by members of the collectivity to these shared norms in the course of social interaction.¹

By patterns of normative behaviour, as referred to by Cohen, are meant the symbolic formations and activities found in such contexts as kinship, marriage, friendship, ritual and other types of ceremonials, which, in sum, an anthropologist would like to label as custom or oversimplistically as culture. These are not idiosyncratic habits, hallucinations, or illusions of isolated individuals but are of largely collective representations, even though they manifest themselves in individual behaviour. They are involved in psychic processes and thus can be subjectively experienced by the actors. They are nevertheless objective in the sense that the symbolic functions representing them are socially created and are internalized through continuous socialization. Often, it is the objective symbolic forms that generate the subjective experience of ethnicity and not the other way round.²

Symbols are thus essentially objective, not subjective forms. They may be originally the spontaneous creation of specific individuals going through specific subjective experiences, but they attain an objective existence when they are accepted by others in the course of social interaction within a collectivity. What was originally subjective becomes objective and collective, developing a reality of its own. The symbols thus become obligatory and exercise constraints on the individual.³

Unlike signs, symbols are not purely cognitive constructs, but are

always emotive. In the context of Bhutan, where ethnicity is undoubtedly a relevant issue, labels like 'Bhutia', 'Nepali', and the like, are not simply natural intellectual concepts but symbols that agitate strong feelings and emotions.

While ethnicity to Cohen is the objective manifestation of subjective symbols, to Paul Brass, it involves objectively distinct ethnic groups who become transformed into subjectively conscious and politically oriented communities, when the members of the group develop an awareness of a common identity and attempt to define the boundaries of the groups.⁴

The difference between these two scholars' viewpoints is overtly semantic in nature. While anthropologist Cohen focussed on ethnicity as the process of transforming the subjective symbols into objective instruments to attain certain group goals, political scientist Brass, on the other hand, is in favour of labelling ethnicity as an attempt in which the objectively distinct ethnic groups become subjectively conscious and politically oriented communities when its members develop an awareness of their community membership. The definition of community in Anthropology / Sociology connotes in itself a strong sense of 'we feeling' as its basic constituent feature. Perhaps, this led Cohen in not detailing, what Brass did, the formation of common identity consciousness. Cohen thus prefers to concentrate on the process of transformation of subjective symbols into objective ones. For Brass, symbols are not so much important, inasmuch as they stand for objectively distinct ethnic groups. What is more important is that the ethnic groups here are subjectively conscious political communities. Brass's focus is on to elaborate how on the basis of the specific symbols the ethnic groups change their character vis-a-vis maintenance of group solidarity in the changing dimension.

The view of Brass is noteworthy. *In his view, ethnicity is socially constructed, and conflict that appears to be ethnic in nature is actually the result of manipulation of symbols by the elite for their own benefit.* To him, while it is true that people have emotional attachments of language, religion, culture and kinship, a sense of identity based on attachment to one's region or homeland does not become a politically significant matter for those who remain there unless there is some perceived discrimination against the region and its people in the larger society. 'The facts of birth' are either inherently of no political significance or are subject to variation.⁵

The fear of *elitist manipulation* as expressed by Brass appears to be motivated. If the view is internalized by the common folk of a particular

ethnic group it would be under perennial suppression and deprivation. *Brass is speaking the language of a ruling political party endeavouring to suppress an ethnic group which is trying to break the chain of oppression. For, a ruling party, whatever its ideology is — communism or any other else— always prone to violating human rights whatsoever. The party always swears to look after the interests of the common folk, and curses the elite or privileged section of the ethnic groups accusing them of exploiting the miseries of the common folk to subserve their vested interests. Clearly Brass thus provides a food for thought and action to strategise against the deprived ethnic groups.*

Bhutan like its counterparts elsewhere, is a country having the problem of ethnicity. The geophysical feature as well as the socio-political twists and turns in Bhutan's neighbourhood have been two major factors in the evolution and growth of its multiethnic structure. The central Bhutan comprises a number of groups of Tibetan (Bhutia) origin. Most of them migrated to Bhutan as early as the 19th century and some as late as 1959-60, consequent to the political upheaval in Tibet. The Bhutanese, mainly of Indo-Mongolid origin, who live mostly in the area east of the black mountains are believed to be the earliest major inhabitants of the present-day Bhutan. Then there are the Nepalis, who were brought in the early 20th century to work in the foothills of southern Bhutan. They are given Bhutanese citizenship in 1958.⁶ Unlike the people of eastern and western Bhutan, the Nepali migrants believe in Hinduism, follow the Hindu caste system, speak Nepali, and have familial connections as well as extended associations in Nepal and in Indian areas approximating Bhutan.⁷

Bhutan thus is not an ethnically homogenous country. Broadly speaking, one can identify three major ethnic groups in Bhutan, viz., a) the Ngalopos of western Bhutan (Tibetan origin); b) Sharchops of north-eastern Bhutan (Indo-Mongolid origin), and c) Lhotshams of southern Bhutan (Nepalese origin).⁸

Apart from that, the country also includes a large number of ethnic communities who have their distinct identities and life-style. These are : Mangdipas, Bumthangpas, Kurtoepas and Khenpas.⁹ Although inter-ethnic rivalries are somewhat uncommon, though not rare phenomena in Bhutan, the Royal Government of Bhutan appears to be highly concerned about emergence of ethnic issues involving Nepali settlers in southern Bhutan, especially since August-September 1990.¹⁰

The huge influx of ethnic Nepalese, seemingly in possession of a more developed culture, put the ethnic Bhutias on the defensive. It made the

latter conscious of their cultural nuances so that the Bhutias could exhibit a distinct identity from others.¹¹ In 1988, for the first time, Bhutan launched a comprehensive census programme, adopted a firm policy on immigration, and took a survey of land records. Apparently, all these were aimed at effectively curbing the influx of illegal immigrants. But, in reality, those policies were to harass the ethnic Nepalese.

Cultural policies and changes in citizenship laws were perceived by the ethnic Nepalese as violations of human rights and deliberate attempts to destroy Nepali language and culture. Such perceptions engaged the Nepalese settlers, and fomented serious discontent. They organized protests and demonstrations. Initially the Nepali militants were organized into two groups : People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) and United Liberation People's Front (ULPF). In June 1990 the UPLF was renamed as the Bhutan People's Party (BPP). However, the BPP, the PFHR and the Students' Union of Bhutan, another militant Nepali organization, are all activated by the same membership.¹²

The BPP undertook two-pronged strategy : politically mobilizing the ethnic Nepalese in southern Bhutan to struggle for their cause; and promoting international awareness about alleged human rights violations by the Bhutanese authorities.

In 1992 ethnic Nepali militants underwent a change in their organizational structures to renew their appeal among their supporters. A new party, the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) was launched consisting of former members of the BPP and southern Bhutanese officials who absconded to Nepal. The PFHR has been renamed the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB). The role of the BNDP and the HUROB is to conduct this disinformation campaign against the Bhutanese Government in order to mobilize international sympathy and support under the banner of democracy and human rights.¹³

Thus, it is clear from the above description that ethnic conflicts are being created by the Nepali ethnic groups by mobilizing the Nepali masses in southern Bhutan. They are forced to create ethnic conflicts due to the oppressive policies of the Royal Government of Bhutan. It is notable that there is a rapid shift in the banners of political parties. It shows how symbols are being used for political gains. The Nepali ethnic identity has several political manifestations, and under every banner they, however, have played two major roles, viz., a) mobilization of the people to have recognition within the state, and b) an attempt to draw international attention to the cause of ethnic groups in the name of human rights by using such names as PFHR.

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Book Review

Towards Good Governance, Special Number of The Indian Journal of Public Administration, IIPA, July-September 1998, New Delhi.

The volume under review is devoted to explore the different dimensions in the process of discovering what is to be a good administration for the ruled. A government is a looking-glass through which one can observe the natural faces of the state in modern times. It reflects the currents and cross-currents in the society. A government is usually judged as desirable or not, and /or good and bad on the basis of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Thus the 'goodness' or 'badness' of the government is to be evaluated in the changing context of the particular historical setting. Yet a normative category of good governance always looms large in the minds of the discerning citizens. The editor of the present volume in his introduction quotes Alexander Pope providing the touchstone to judge goodness in governance –“for forms of government let fools contest; whatever is best administered is best.” The problem of good governance has been a perennial question in political philosophy and the ongoing search in applied Political Science since the days of the great Greek masters. The editor rightly comments that “it has been an eternal challenge to rulers since the very dawn of 'State' irrespective of its nature, structure and form.”

The Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) has been regularly publishing volumes on related themes to provide necessary inputs to the policy-makers, legislators, administrators, scholars and opinion-makers. The predominant objective has been to help Indian Administration to achieve the goal of good governance. During the last few years the Institute has brought out a number of volumes on the emerging problems of society, state, government, administration and other related themes that directly concern the citizens in their search for a good life through a democratically elected representative government. The volume under review has conceptualised and thoughtfully built up to this end in view.

The present volume consists of three parts. The substantive part deals with thirty seven articles. The articles are well argued and indicate the depth and span of the subject matters, and the scholarship, perspective and varied interests of the authors. Some citations would make the point clear. L.N. Misra and others pick up the Kautilyan indicators in their search for good governance, while O. P. Minocha looks upon the problem from a 'New Management Perspective.' Asok Mukhopadhyay emphasizes the need to establish and strengthen rule of law and wants to reinvent the action of

administration in the emerging context. Mohit Bhattacharya's concern is to conceptualise good governance in the framework of Comparative Public Administration. G. Haragopal dwells on the human rights perspective while S. R. Maheswari thinks that political reform is a prime necessity. D.P. Sharma deals with the key models of administration and control. R. B. Jain wants to enhance the accountability of the government in the context of the present political scenario in India. To M. K. Gaur, political stability is one of the main components of good governance, U.C. Agarwal focusses on the importance of the Panchayati Raj system in the process. Taking the cue from the concern of newly vitalised Panchayat system in India, S. N. Misra and others have given attention to different aspects of the system to revitalise the grassroot level of administration. However, people's participation, particularly participation by women in the process of development, deserve more attention.

Ved Marwah and O.P. Tandon are concerned with maintaining proper law and order and to put a stop to the brutality of the law-maintaining authority in general and the police force in particular, Shri Tandon opines that in a democratic polity "people want an effective police, but not a brutal police." B. S. Bhargava and Avinash Samal argue for protective discrimination for the SC/STs as adopted in our Constitution as a means for achieving the preliminaries of good governance. But K. S. Narayan promptly points out the limitations and defects of the system of providing more opportunities to uplift the target groups.

The empirical aspects of the process of good governance, particularly in the Indian federal panorama have also been dealt with in depth with reference to the states of Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. These are important additions to the ongoing debates on the subject. In the same vein, R.S. Kumar and Yatis Misra deal with the recruitment policies for manning the administrative structure in the desert areas of Rajasthan and the backward areas of Gaya district in Bihar respectively. As a comparative perspective, the valuable contribution of Norman Douglas Lewis, based on his UK experience, has further added to the conceptual richness and varied experimentations in the field.

Good governance is not an ideal concept to be kept in the realm of imagination and illusion; it is not even a mindset for a few thinkers; it is a guide to action; it brings up the civil society at par with the men entrusted by the society to the ruler. It reduces the imagined hiatus between the government and the civil society. It is to be kept in mind that the developing countries like India and many others in Asia, Africa and Latin America have their own peculiar problems. In the age of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation,

the industrialised developed countries of the West in their bid to level out, will do a great injustice to the needs of these countries in ignoring the stages of their economic development. Good governance is not only the concern of a particular country in the era of 'global village'; the agencies and organs of the United Nations cannot be oblivious of the needs of the disadvantaged.

The second part of the volume under review contains nine valuable documents. These original documents deal with a number of aspects such as Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Administrative Reorganization in India, New Public Management, Public Bureaucracies in Developing Countries and Civil Service Reforms in India and the Commonwealth. These documents will serve the purposes of the policy-framers, scholars, teachers and students of government and administration. Ordinary citizens and informed journalists may also find these documents to be of significant help.

The concluding part of the volume contains a select bibliography. It is an important adjunct to the volume. Sumita Gulati and Hukam C. Jadav have taken enormous pain to compile this bibliography. It will no doubt serve the purposes of the scholars and researchers on the subject. The volume has been brought out with meticulous care and commendable editorial excellence. This moderately large but handy volume is a collector's pride and a 'would-be important addition' to any library of repute.

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