

Disruptions in Economic and Social Polity

Disruptions in Economic and Social Polity:

What Is to Be Done?

By

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PREFACE

Against the backdrop of the concatenation of appearance of different worldwide phenomena in the neo-liberal phase of capitalism, it becomes imperative to analyse the essence of those phenomena. The appearance does not hide the essence. Do these phenomena reveal the deep crisis of capitalism as a system and as an ideology? These phenomena manifest themselves as disruptions in the established system. The rambunctious democracies which were installed as the post-world-war reconstruction of capitalism created a political and ideological vacuum. Questions were raised from the right, left and centre. This is symptomatic of a transitional phase. This transitional phase demands the construction of an alternative path for transcending the crisis and achieving the well-being of humankind. I started writing on primary aspects of those manifestations at different points in time. Some of those write-ups were published in various journals. But what is the connection between all those manifestations? This question cropped up in my mind at a later stage. What is the common thread that can bind all those manifestations? The connectedness of essence and existence needs to be explored for transcending this phase of deep crisis to build a new society. Without the realisation of this connectedness, the disruptions which reveal the failure of the system in diverse aspects of human life cannot automatically give rise to a concerted effort for the building of a new polity.

After that realisation, I decided to compile all these published write-ups within the current cover. But only the compilation of those published articles does not serve a purpose. The observer observes the phenomena from its position in space-time. As everything is soaked in ideology, the positioning of the observer is ideologically decided. Thus, the question of ideology has its paramount importance. So, I revised some of those published articles and wrote new chapters on the question of ideology to include these too in this book.

But everything mentioned above does not create any paradigmatic shift. These are all relooking, reconstructions and reassertions. This led me to write a long chapter on the connectedness of essence and the existence of diverse movements which the existing system fails to address in order to indicate a paradigm shift.

I hope the publication of *Disruptions in Economic and Social Polity: What is to be Done?* will revive interest to look at the here and the now holistically in order to join hands and build a society for a better future.

INTRODUCTION

The history of capitalism is intertwined with the history of crisis. Several theories of capitalism are built as theories of capitalist crisis. Wolfgang Streeck in the introduction of the book *How Will Capitalism End?* sequentially mentioned those prominent theories.¹ But capitalism has hitherto survived through its crises. According to one school of thought, the capitalist system is so dynamic and resilient that it can surpass even those systemic crises which appear to be insurmountable. Many others think that there is no proof that a systemic crisis will ever cause the demise of capitalism. In common sense parlance, capitalism is misconstrued as free market or laissez-faire economy. Capitalism is a relation of production which ensures profit and the accumulation of wealth. This relationship with production is backed by a network of institutions and state structure. The market and the state are the two sides of the capitalist system. But it's a dynamic system which changes its form to maintain historically determined societal balance. The crisis of capitalism also implies the disruption of societal balance. Disruptions occur in the institutions and structure of the system. The survival or collapse of the capitalist system is guaranteed only through the deep transformation of its economic and social institutions. The subjective socio-political assertions determine the nature of the transformation of the state and are characterised by its inclination to act in favour of capital or labour. The transformations which occurred during the period of the Great Depression and through the post-war reconstruction in the 1940s to ensure growth and development were marked by democracy, the Soviet project and the post-colonial nation-states. All human activities and their institutional manifestations are soaked in ideology. So, the characteristics and functioning of the state are all ideological constructs.

¹ *What kind of crisis was expected to finish capitalism off has differed with time and authors' theoretical predilections: structuralist theories of death by overproduction or underconsumption, or by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (Marx), coexisted with predictions of the saturation of needs and markets (Keynes), of rising resistance to further commodification of life and society (Polanyi), of exhaustion of new land and new labour available for colonization in a literal as well as figurative sense (Luxemburg), of technological stagnation (Kondratieff), or of the financial-political organization of monopolistic corporations suspending liberal markets (Hilferding), i.e. bureaucratic suppression of entrepreneurialism.*

Profit and accumulation are the driving forces of capitalism as a mode of production; it does not have any democratic or nationalist ambitions. But as a dynamic system, it makes a compromise with emerging reality to keep the countervailing forces within its overarching hegemonic control in order to ensure the sustenance of the capitalist system.

The present phase of the systemic crisis of the capitalist system began in the late 1960s or early 70s. The global inflation of the 1970s, the explosion of public debt in the 1980s, and rapidly rising private indebtedness in the subsequent decade resulted in the collapse of the financial market in 2008. The current phase of neo-liberal capitalism is marked by the dominance of financial capital over industrial capital, the meteoric rise of the financial market, the dismantling of organised labour through the restructuring of the production process and the overwhelming dominance of private capital over the state. All these factors combined created a polity favourable for the notion of neo-liberalism as an era “free from ideology”. This work redefined the concept of ideology to uphold the holistic idea of “everything is soaked in ideology” as a challenge to the distorted notion of everything being “free from ideology”. In this context, the ideological concepts of democracy, development, nationalism, pan-Islamism, Hindutva, fascism etc. are also revisited and redefined in due perspective. The ideology is embedded within the social system, the social division of labour and its inherent societal conflict. The ideological constructs change their connotations with the changing dynamics of the socio-economic system.

The present neo-liberal phase of capitalism a la mode is vulnerable to stagnation, debt, inequality and unemployment – not to mention recovery from long cycles of crisis since the late sixties or early seventies (or that the overall global short cycle recovery post the subprime crisis is not yet in sight). The transient recovery here and there is not sustainable. After dotcom and subprime, investors' confidence is too weak to give rise to another speculative bubble, set up to burst sometime in the future. Even if another bubble is created, rising unemployment will go on haunting the capitalist system. The global economy is caught between two stools: the capital surplus absorption problem due to the scarcity of profitable destinations for investment and the investment problem due to the scarcity of funds within highly indebted banks. Labour's earnings plummeted due to the widespread trend towards investment in asset values instead of production and manufacturing; asset value also took a downward slide. The gap between earnings and consumer spending is being tackled by the rise of the credit card industry and increasing indebtedness. Contemporary financialisation is merely the sign of a crisis of capitalism rather than its solution.

In the midst of a deep global economic crisis, India could not achieve the same level of export-led growth that China achieved at the initial phase of neoliberalism in the eighties. Indian exports to the US remained at the same level. The slowdown in demand has only aggravated the situation. The Indian economy is facing the cliff from where its downward march would continue. As the economy contracts, the news came of the massive growth in net worth of the top 100 growing by 26%. What we are witnessing is jobless economic growth with the tremendous growth of capitalists. Over the 1980-2015 period, the top 0.1% of earners captured a higher share of total growth than the bottom 50% (12% vs. 11%), while the top 1% received a higher share of overall growth than the middle 40% (29% vs. 23%).²

The global impact of the financialisation of capital, the subprime crisis of 2008, the development of new technology of cybernetics and the latest technological developments in robotics have contributed to the deepening of the capitalist crisis. The crisis of the present phase of neo-liberal capitalism has caused disruptions in the socio-political institutions that emerged during the post-war reconstruction and policy pursuance of Keynesian economics. The disruptions are becoming more and more menacingly palpable; the market mythologies are losing their power to mystify and deceive, and corruption has become all pervasive. The unbridled drive for cheap land, labour and money has disrupted the social balance. The global ecological degradation has a direct relationship with the accumulation of wealth, the unbridled drive of capitalists for profit maximisation and the competition of world powers for supremacy. This is because the nature of the carbon economy is such that wealth and power are primarily dependent on the consumption of fossil fuels. The increase in the consumption of fossil fuels in China and India has had its impact on the change in their international influence.

Capital in search of cheap labour ensures the participation of women in social labour and thus is transforming the nature of domestic labour and the institution of the family, especially in developing countries like India. In India, the presence of a vast reserve army of women's labour is pulling the wages down to a value below that of labour power in the sectors like health service, child rearing, NREGA, plantation etc. where women are primarily employed. The women are mainly engaged in informal sectors, and as such, they are also deprived of legal social and labour security. As per the NSSO

² Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty, *Indian income inequality, 1922-2015: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?* (<https://wid.world/document/chancepiketty2017widworld/>) Accessed August 2019.

survey report 2011-12, the average daily wages for female workers in organised and unorganised sectors are Rs.481.90/- and 120.30/- respectively and that of male workers are Rs.632.20/- and Rs.194.20/- respectively.

People need jobs for livelihood and leisure for creativity. But we are heading towards a society of extreme separation and polarisation of these two aspects: scarcity of employment for the majority who are struggling for survival; and shortage of leisure time for a minority competing for wealth.

The Indian economy is in tatters. Sops here and sops there are not going to help, the economy needs overhauling. The government considers job loss in public sectors as a good sign when they intend to attract private investors while following the neo-liberal path, because the larger the size of the reserve army of labour, the lower their wages become. But this attempt to motivate capitalists to invest is not going to be successful because of the demand crunch; specifically, that lowering wages will push demand down even further. Even investment for skilling India will be counter-productive in the absence of productive investment.

The rising cost of doing business combined with global disorder makes restoration of a stable capitalist world system impossible. For policymakers, GDP is the prophet as if the socio-economic scenario is coded only in this single dry number. But it's all about accounting; it's all about what is added and what is left out as income for GDP calculation. Cigarette companies earn income and pay taxes; the smokers spend money despite health hazards and thus contribute to the rise in GDP. The GDP reflects income from prostitution in the UK and the cocaine trade in Colombia. But anybody's service out of love, affection and community affinity generates no income but adds to the well-being of the people. So, GDP does not by itself reflect the welfare of citizens for which we must transcend capitalism and its methodology.

The crisis of capitalism and neoliberal restructuring has disrupted the democratic and welfare institutions of states. The phase of the post-war new deal for compromise between capital and labour is over. The dismantling of organised labour as a productive force, the extreme form of inequality, rising unemployment etc. are leading to a society in turmoil. The diverse people's movements and uprisings are transforming the economic crisis into a political crisis because production, distribution and consumption are not merely economic matters, they are also determined through processes related to power. As capitalism by its nature produces and reproduces uneven development and establishes its hegemony through differential

exploitation based on caste, community, ethnicity and gender, the people's movements also manifest themselves in diverse cultural orientations but within the common denomination of labour. The failure of the neo-liberal project to overcome the crisis of capitalism is compelling policymakers to resort to vain attempts to pursue protectionism and the ideology of the nation-state. Here in this book, the social ramifications of the systemic crisis, people's assertions, uprisings, and geo-political conflicts are analysed to visualise an alternative route of transformation beyond capitalism in order to overcome this transitory and uncertain period of crisis.

Frederick F. Clairmont in his book *The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism* quoted the World Bank for striking the right chord for once: "Economic growth has not solved the problem of world poverty, deprivation and unemployment. Indeed the numbers of the poor could rise still further as the world labour force grows from 2.4bn today to a projected 3.7bn in thirty years' time".³ To resolve the social menace and disorder, capitalism needs to be transcended, and an alternative route must be evolved from within the hitherto disconnected and disarrayed social and labour movements to go beyond capitalism. In the absence of such an alternative project, distressed people are vulnerable to becoming trapped in fascistic ideology.

Leaving the complexities and many other factors aside, the simple logic behind the rise of fascism is the systemic failure to contain the social and economic degradation of the toiling masses, because a democratic system cannot function under such circumstances. One of the structural reasons why fascism received widespread support in Germany and not in America is that the mental and manual labour forces were in close proximity in the social time-space continuum in America, whereas in Germany the two social formations were socio-economically a vast distance apart. When the mental labourers structurally maintain a vast psychological distance from the manual labourers due to the wide gap in social, economic and cultural values, the mental labourers become prone to be the repository of fascist values. Mental labourers don't find any urge to stand beside the manual labourers when their rights are curtailed and cannot take up the pedagogic task of instilling a sense of unity among the toiling masses to be conscious of the impending rise of fascism.

³ Frederic F. Clairmont: 1996: *The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism: The Other India Press, Third World Network: p 346*

Fascist ideology spreads its roots in the vast gap between mental and manual labour in the socio-economic status of Indian society. It's challenging, though not impossible, to achieve unity of labour by overcoming this structural barrier. In my assessment, this gap is more extensive than the one in German society in Hitler's time. The other structural barrier created by neo-liberal capital is the compartmentalisation of labour in many unorganised groups with conflicting interests in quotidian affairs. So, in the concluding chapter of this book, how to achieve unity of the masses overcoming these structural barriers with an alternative vision to the future has been delved into.

1. IN SEARCH OF A THEORY: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

David Pilling mentioned an interesting experiment in his book *The Growth Delusion*. In an experiment written up in a paper called ‘Monkeys Reject Unequal Pay’, two capuchin monkeys were initially perfectly content with a reward of cucumbers when they successfully performed a task. But when one monkey was subsequently given tastier grapes as a reward, the monkey receiving plain old cucumbers became enraged, angrily flinching the previously satisfactory salad vegetable at its handler. The monkey’s economy had grown since grapes are better than cucumbers. But the resulting inequality brought only discontent. Humans are the same. But this experiment can be done in another way to observe the behaviour from a different angle. If all the monkeys are given grapes instead of cucumbers for a certain period of time, and then grapes are withdrawn to revert to cucumbers, all the monkeys will be enraged. Furthermore, if the monkeys find that ‘grapes as their staple diet’ is an achievable option, their desire will be elevated. This is our everyday experience in human nature too.

This human nature is countered by the proposition that once a certain level of prosperity has been achieved, additional income furnishes no further joy. This diminishing rate of happiness may be applicable in a static society where no external stimulus to achieve anything exists. A clever advertising technique used by large corporations is to manipulate consumer behaviour so that they buy private goods and services they do not need or want i.e. the desire for new consumption is created through external stimulus. Mosen and Downs suggested a more fundamental factor at work – a desire on the part of consumers ‘for emulation and differentiation’ drives them to create visible distinctions between large groups and classes, and, within such groups, more subtle distinctions of individuality.⁴ But their notion of emulation and differentiation has two modes of provisions: one mode is public and collective, administered by state authorities; the other is private and individual, mediated by commercial markets. The distinction of groups and classes on the basis of two distinct modes is the reversal of the idea that the social relation of production or the relations between the classes

⁴ <https://newleftreview.org/issues/1176/articles/wolfgang-streeck-citizens-as-customers.pdf>

primarily determines the modes of provision. So the desire to emulate and differentiate may be fundamental for all societies, past and present, but it cannot be considered a law of human nature, because a society based on associated labour transcending capitalism will be the basis for shifting the competitive human desire for commodity consumption to a desire for collective aesthetic and creative purpose. Human psychological behaviour and human needs and desires are related primarily with the sociology and economy of the time. Wolfgang Streeck wrote in his book *How Will Capitalism End?* that “[m]any today feel that the current financial and fiscal crisis is not just an economic but fundamentally a social matter important enough to demand a revised interpretation of modern society – one that takes systematic notice of its being continuously revolutionized by expanding markets; of the fragility of social structure and political institutions that results from this; the growing uncertainty faced by governments and citizens as markets increasingly escape social control; the inherent limits of the market as site of social integration and a basis of social order, and the like. In principle, sociology with its history as a critical theory of modernity should be able to fill this need and offer to ‘the public’ insights that it could reject only at its peril. For this, however, sociology must restore the economy as the central subject of any theory of society worth its name – and not just as a neutral mechanism of wealth creation ruled by esoteric natural laws and governable by scientifically informed technicians. This will not be possible unless as a discipline we dispense with our interdisciplinary peace agreement with economics and rediscover the political economy which sociology was when it was young, which was later abandoned in order to specialise in ‘the society’.”⁵

In pre-capitalist society, politics and economy were intertwined in a common institutional mechanism and class rule, be it the domination of the feudal class or the monarchical kingdom. In a capitalist society, it is segregated, and with the maturation of the capitalist system, it tends to separate spatiotemporally towards the extreme. Rediscovering the political economy which sociology was when it was young is to visualise a system beyond capitalism – a radical break with the pre-capitalist social relation ushers in a modernity when human society gets enlightened enough to realise that humanity makes its own history. The concept of humanity creating its own history is embedded within the objectivity of capitalist relations where the dependence on supernatural force is replaced by the class power of capital and labour. The modernist project revolves around

⁵ Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (Juggernaut Books, 2017), pp. 242-43

the proposition that labour is not the victim of capital, but the agent of capital. The emancipation of the labourers (who was the proletariat during the phase of European industrialisation and subsequent British colonialism) was the guiding force in an attempt to drive the history of humanity in the direction of Soviet-styled state-socialism. This modernist project miserably failed along with Hitler's project of state building with a pre-modern pull. Samir Amin wrote, "The fundamental proposition of modernity means nothing more than that social action can give a meaning to history, and that it is desirable that it should do so."⁶ The modernist projects of history which are socialist or nationalist, have miserably failed. But in all these projects, the capitalist law of value, the social relations that ensure transformation of use value to exchange value were not challenged – political democracy was positioned against the capitalist tendency for the centralization of power, and as such the failure of these projects reflected the failure of many variants of capitalism itself, capitalism with or without capitalists. But these failures created societal disarray. The policy of dismantling the existence of the proletariat as industrial workers who were simultaneously the agent and the adversary of capital has cropped up from within the garb of the crisis of capitalism.

Industries have been restructured into assembly lines, and the production centres have shifted to locations of cheap labour. The marketing of goods has become more profitable than the production of it. For example, the Taiwanese company Foxconn manufactures the iPhone in south China, and Apple sells the product globally in its brand name. Foxconn makes 3% profit while Apple makes 27% profit. The control of Apple over the whole process of production and reproduction of the product is established by the monopoly of knowledge of the high-tech chip that is required for the manufacturing of the product. The service sectors and financial markets have thrived with the abandonment of the sites of industrially developed nations and the dismantling of organised labour with the implementation of hire and fire methods in the production sites of third world hinterlands. The large-scale restructuring and the global movement of capital have given impetus to the rule of capital killing space by time.

The deserted sites of erstwhile factory-production in Detroit, Pennsylvania and the rise of new sites of service and finance in New York etc. delineate the spatial-temporal changes in the US internally due to the restructuring of capital. The thriving service sector which has been accompanied by

⁶ Samir Amin, *Spectres of Capitalism: A Critique of Current Intellectual Fashions* (Monthly Review Press, 1998), p. 100

unabated urbanisation and suburbanisation has given birth to a new widely fragmented labour. This new working class is both horizontally and vertically fragmented. The myriad kinds of division of labour are spatiotemporally segregated. In the absence of a large amount of industrial labour in the sense of more or less homogeneous proletariat in a shared, gigantic workspace, the project of modernity of the human being to create its own history by going beyond capitalism appears to be utopian. The diversity of workspace which is formed due to restructuring and the variety of ethnicities which were retained from pre-capitalist social relationships influences the social thought of pluralism and of building the organisations of conviviality with a project to improve this or that aspect of social life. The modernist project of the human being to decide their own history by transcending capitalism is thus negated, and the end of history is pronounced by accepting the proposition of the permanent nature of capitalism. This is the material base on which post-modernist philosophical discourse is built. The discourse concerning the cultural dimension of social life revolves around nostalgia and gives rise to confusion and ambiguity.

“The repression of critical and radical currents of thought – or to be more exact the corralling of radicalism within the bounds of multiculturalism and cultural choice – creates a lamentable situation within the academy and beyond, no different in principle to having to ask the bankers who made the mess to clean it up with exactly the same tools as they used to get into it. Broad adhesion to postmodern and post-structuralist ideas which celebrate the particular at the expense of big-picture thinking does not help. To be sure, the local and the particular are vitally important and theories that cannot embrace, for example, the geographical differences are worse than useless (as I have earlier been at pains to emphasise). But when that fact is used to exclude anything larger than parish politics, then the betrayal of the intellectuals and abrogation of their traditional role become complete.”⁷

The deconstructionist viewpoints are useful in understanding the local and the particular. It may be the starting point to understand power; as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak said, “Foucault's analysis of power is not intended to tell us what power really is, but only where to look.”⁸ Samir Amin explained “In the long series of his major works, Michel Foucault is quite convincing in his view that language is, for power structure, a medium of domination

⁷ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 238

⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Routledge, 2009), p. 29

and of repression. In this sense, he has made a far from negligible contribution to a radical theory aiming towards human emancipation. But what I find regrettable is that he has held back from identifying the sources of and causes for the existence of these power structures.”⁹ Dwelling on Derrida, Spivak wrote, “A mother tongue is a language with a history – in that sense, it is “instituted” – before our birth and after our death, where patterns that can be filled with anyone’s “motivation” have laid themselves down. In this sense, it is ‘unmotivated’ but not capricious.”¹⁰

The local and the particular are important in understanding the power of capital. But the structure and function of capital and labour are the motivating agents for the continuation of the modernist project of determining the future.

In India the size of the labour force was 381.1 million in 1993-94, this increased by about 104 million (on an average of 6 million per annum) to reach 487.7 million in 2011-12. During the ten-year period ending in 2011-12, approximately 5 million workers left the agricultural sphere per annum. To be more precise, during the 2004-05 and 2009-10 period, 24 million workers left agriculture (4.8 million per annum). This happened for the first time in the history of the Indian economy which indicates a ‘structural change in employment’ during the high economic growth period. Moreover, the additional 13 million workers (6.5 million per annum) left agriculture during 2009-10 and 2011-12. The Economic Survey 2015-16 reports that net out-of-state flows of migrant labourers across India peaked at almost 9.4 million in 2013-14, before falling to 9.1 million in 2014-15 and just over 8.4 million in 2015-16. Much of this migration has entailed movement of labour from relatively poor states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Assam to more prosperous states like Maharashtra, Delhi-NCR, Gujrat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Therefore, each year approximately 80-90 lakh people from backward states migrate to other states searching for any job. Understandably, these huge amounts of internally migrated people manage to find work in the mainly ‘informal’ sectors (the majority in the construction sector) at abysmally low wages, with no job security and virtually no statutory benefits. The share of contract and casual workers in the public sector was barely 6.4% in 2001, 11.65% in 2009 and it was a whopping 43% in 2013. A report titled ‘Contract workers in India’s Organised Manufacturing Sector’, prepared by A.K. Panigrahi of the Central Statistics Office states

⁹ Amin, *Spectres*, p. 111

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

that during 2000-01, the ratio of direct workers to contract workers was 80:20, whereas in 2012-13 the ratio changed to 66:34.

The restructuring of labour in the neo-liberal phase has created a confusion in the modernist project of “men make their own history” because the proletariat is considered the driving force of going beyond capitalism, and the proletariat in the sense of large-scale industrial workers is no longer the most significant force to be able to lead history towards the future. The workers are fragmented in numerous groups both horizontally and vertically. The group affinity shows the signs of an ethnic and cultural construct. The cultural discourse addresses the partial and reformist agenda and conceptualises the permanence of capitalist laws of value. For servicing modern equipment, and daily life requirements, the new infrastructure is both physical and virtual – a whole lot of diverse skills are required. In the case of the service sector, this wide-ranging division of labour on the basis of diverse skill requirements does not manifest itself in the common workplace like a large industry on a daily basis. No hi-tech service can be provided to consumers without availing all variants of labour in a common time-space, even if this time-space is in flux and continuously changing its coordinates. The differential wage structure operates throughout the global capitalist system, and the differences of the wages follow the pattern of the divisions within nations, language, caste, ethnicity etc., and through the global supply chain, the labourers of the most backward regions of the global south are paid the least. According to the ILO database, Asia’s 900+ zones employed 53 million workers, 40 million of them in China and 3.25 million in Bangladesh.¹¹ The global labour force, between 1980 and 2007, grew 1.9 billion to 3.1 billion, a rise of 63% – with 73% of the labour force located in the developing world, and 40% in China and India alone. In 2010, 79% or 541 million of the world’s industrial workers lived in “less developed regions”, up from 34% in 1950 and 53% in 1980. Amongst industrial employment, the manufacturing sector contributes the maximum to employment – 83% of the world’s manufacturing workforce lives and works in the global south. However, in countries like India, a sizeable workforce is engaged in the service sector which is more than industrial activities. But the workers in both manufacturing and service are outsourced, casualised and compartmentalised. But the differences in wages and work status among a diverse section of this new working class are so marginal that the similarity in their sense of deprivation creates the psychological foundation of their unity. The dependence of one group with

¹¹ John Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and Capitalism’s Final Crisis* (NYU Press, 2016), p. 55

another to complete the production process of a commodity in manufacturing and service give them a sense of mutual inclusiveness, though they are segregated in small groups in assembly line manufacturing, and the services are spread across a huge range of activities. The ethno-cultural divisions are not the only dimension of this new working class restructured through the neo-liberal drive. E.P. Thompson said in *The Poverty of Theory* that “any theory of culture must include the concept of the dialectical interaction between culture and something that is not culture. We must suppose the raw material of life experience to be at one pole, articulate and inarticulate, formalised in institutions or dispersed in the least formal ways, which ‘handle’, transmit, or distort this raw material to be at the other. It is the active process – which is at the same time the process through which men make their own history.”¹²

How can we confront the dire state of social and natural relations which is fragmented in so many parts? The other side of this dire state is that all parts are engrossed with their own social desire. Those who are the direct victim of ecological disaster due to developmental activity based on the motive of compound growth are struggling for their existence. Those who are losing their rights due to accumulation through dispossession are struggling to retain their rights. Women’s movements, various identity movements, the movement for labour rights and human dignity etc. are visible across the third world landscape. But all these diverse social movements do not have the project to go beyond capitalism and have a nominalist approach. The unity of the fragmented working class in this neo-liberal phase of the economy can instil a worldview of “men make their own history”. The project of transforming society from this worldview must revolve around the question of power. Due to the neo-liberal onslaught and due to the growing reserve army of labour, the balance of force is in favour of the capitalist. But the unity of the fragmented working class and the broadest unity of worker-peasant and all the people who are spearheading the diverse social movement can make the paradigm shift in social relationships to push the capitalist out from power especially in third world countries like India to delink from global neo-liberal hegemony.

“To understand the political necessity of this requires first that the enigma of capital be unravelled. Once its mask is torn off, and its mysteries have been laid bare, it is easier to see what has to be done and why, and how to set about doing it. Capitalism will never fall on its own. It will have to be

¹² E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (Aakar Books, 2010), p. 289

pushed. The accumulation of capital will never cease. It will have to be stopped. The capitalist class will never willingly surrender its power. It will have to be dispossessed. To do what has to be done will take tenacity and determination, patience and cunning, along with fierce political commitments born out of moral outrage at what exploitative compound growth is doing to all facets of life, human and otherwise, on planet earth. Political mobilisations sufficient to such a task have occurred in the past. They can and will surely come again. We are, I think, past due.”¹³

Capital in this neo-liberal phase has replaced the organised proletariats of large industrial sectors with the vulnerable and fragmented working class. The financialisation and uncontrolled movement of capital across national boundaries have changed the dynamics of centre-periphery. The growing reserve army of labour in the third world also creates downward pressure on the wages of the advanced countries. The theoretical proposition of political mobilisation of workers in the post-war period needs to be reviewed in consonance with the structural and functional status of the working class in this neo-liberal phase to push the capitalist class out of power.

¹³ David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 260

2. MUSINGS IN IDEOLOGY

What is ideology?

The title of this chapter “Musings in ideology” has been borrowed from the book by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, the doyen and great thinker of modern Indian philosophy. In his book, he commented, “With the progress of science becoming ever more spectacular, the forces wanting to frustrate its basic aspiration – maiming it and mutilating it – are becoming all the more menacing. This tends to perplex the scientific community itself. Absorbed as the scientists are in their detailed research, they feel bewildered. Why for example should so much of scientific knowledge threaten the world with impending doom, with no more of any scope for science itself?”¹⁴ Here comes the question of ideology. Scientific knowledge bereft of a constructive ideological commitment may cause havoc. Everything that is solid melts into the air in the modern technological era, and in that case, the ideology that has no well-defined continuum is something airy and cannot be grasped and cherished by the people. If that is so, then human civilisation is destined to doom. But that is not the case. Humanity has always clasped ideologies. The plain truth is that everything is ‘soaked in ideology’ whether we realise it or not. Istvan Meszaros in his book *The Power of Ideology* pointed out, “to believe that one can get rid of ideology in our contemporary world – or indeed in the foreseeable future – is no more realistic than the idea of Marx’s ‘valiant fellow’ who thought that men were drowned in water because they were possessed with the idea of gravity.”¹⁵ He rightly opined that ideologies are epochally circumscribed in a twofold sense. First, is that the conflictual orientation of the various forms of practical social consciousness remain their prominent features for as long as societies are divided into classes. And second, is that the specific character of the fundamental social conflict which leaves an indelible mark on the contending ideologies in different historical periods arises from the epochally – not on a short-term basis – changing character of society’s productive and distributive practices and from the corresponding need to subject to radical questioning the continued imposition of the formerly viable mode of socioeconomic and cultural

¹⁴ Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Musings in Ideology* (Navakarnataka, 2001), p. 7

¹⁵ Istvan Meszaros, *The Power of Ideology* (NYU Press, 1990), p.10

intercourse as it becomes increasingly undermined in the course of historical development.¹⁶

The French and Russian revolutions had left an indelible mark on the contending ideologies of capitalism and socialism in the above epochal perspective. But in both cases, capitalism not only survived but also extended its material and ideological sphere of influence. So in the present context of the ideological substratum of chauvinism, obscurantism, parochialism, consumerism under global capitalist world order, the discourse of an alternative route to Marxism and negation of Marxism thereof have become fashionable in institutional academic circles. Can we Indians build up a substitute for Marxism from the materials of our own cultural heritage? Debiprasad has given a definite negative answer to this question. And he said “the reason for this is quite simple. The road along which Marx and Engels moved is not an accidental one. The heritage of classical German philosophy, British political economy and French socialism, which, through the great process of dialectical transformation, culminates in Marxism, is not a historical accident. Thus, for example, we have in traditional Indian philosophy potentials of the dialectical view, associated particularly with the early Buddhists. We have, moreover, among our ancient materialists called the *Lokayatas* or *Charvakasa* brilliant anticipation of the explanation of the origin of consciousness from matter. These are extremely precious elements in the Indian cultural heritage, and it will be a fatal mistake for us to remain indifferent to their real significance. Still, only the most extravagant imagination can lead us to expect the emergence of dialectical materialism or materialist dialectics on the basis of some synthesis of the two.”¹⁷ After the revolution in 1922, Lenin also warned that it would be the most significant and grievous mistake a Marxist could make to think that millions of people can extricate themselves from the darkness, ignorance and superstition only along the straight line of purely Marxist education.

But the moot question is, what was the ideological-organisational orientation which was one of the factors to cause the failure of the challenge posed at the international and national level to the prevalent and prominent hegemonic ideology of capitalism? This failure cast a shadow of a defeatist attitude in the minds of the many proponents of socialist ideology and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84

imbibed an impression that the dynamic system of capitalism despite its epochal structural crisis is here to stay forever and it is 'free of ideology'.

In this first part of my article, I would like to pose the above question which I intend to attempt to elaborately discuss later from the Indian perspective with reference to the international situation. This is important because chauvinism in the guise of 'chimerical nationalism' under the abstract universalism of hegemonic capitalism with structural differential exploitation cannot be challenged by evading an answer to this question and without remodelling the concept of ideology based on reality.

The reality unfolds layer after layer. But the release of energy during the unfolding of one layer affects other layers and conversely the disturbances in the lower layer affect the topmost layer also. As all the layers are intertwined, there cannot be any structural change without a change in its entirety. 'Soviet Russia' replaced 'Tsarist Russia' but reverted to the differentially exploitative capitalist fold without making any change to the structure of ideology. Infallibility of the cleverest central committee could not ensure a 'socialist mass consciousness' which might have been developed through the many mistakes of the masses in their socialist practice. The nationalist struggle in the inter-war and post-Second World War period was the history of the struggles of various social classes. But this also failed to generate a new ideological base. The Indian national struggle was also the struggles of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, the peasantry (peasant-proprietors, tenants and land labourers), urban and rural middle classes and ruined middle classes and handicraftsman, feudal princes, semi-feudal landlords and others as well as of the interaction of the Indian nation with the other nations of the world. The historical results of those struggles and interactions provided movement to Indian society at a given moment.¹⁸ The feudal and semi-feudal classes and the middle classes under the leadership of the bourgeoisie triumphed in contrast to the awakened lower layers of Indian society who were culturally backward, organizationally weaker and politically less conscious and thus a truncated nationalism with a fragmented differentially exploited social polity under the global capitalist order has remained in place. No decisive break from the past and no new ideology has been generated. The old hegemonic ideology with a new mask is set in motion.

The fragmented and hierarchical social polity under the differential exploitation of the global hegemonic capitalist order hinders the unity of the

¹⁸ A. R. Desai, *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (Popular Prakashan, 1960), p. 2

masses, and all the dominant ideologies rest on this premise. So, the ideology of genuine nationalism under real universalism against chauvinism in the guise of ‘chimerical nationalism’ under abstract universalism cannot emerge until this hierarchical social polity is adequately challenged from within. This is a question of activity of the masses from below to attempt to break many cleavages of the relationship with production, and that leads to an interaction of the ideology from within and relatively from without. The synthesis of the two produces new mass ideology and culture. The question is whether this ‘relatively from without ideology’ is actually from without? If not, what is it and how does it emerge?

During the epochal structural crisis of capitalism, the ideology of consumerism is concerned with the saleability of everything. ‘Even the holy spirit has its quotation on the stock exchange’ gets radically questioned from a socialist perspective built on the economic emancipation of the working class. This socialist ideology gets mediated through Gramsci’s organic intellectuals and interacts with the ideology of the masses from below.

But this does not guarantee the triumph of the new ideology and demise of the old. There are ample opportunities for the capitulation of the new to the prevailing dominant ideology. Rosa Luxemburg¹⁹ vividly described it in the passage that says “On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside the existing society. On the one hand, we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectical contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way. It follows that this movement can best advance by taking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform. That is why it is illusory, and contrary to historical experience, to hope to fix,

¹⁹ *In the book The Rosa Luxemburg Reader edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, the 10th chapter “Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy” reads: “... This will form in the day-to-day struggle with the existing order and therefore only within its framework. The identification of the great popular mass with a goal that transcends the whole existing order and the identification of the day-to-day struggle with revolutionary upheaval constitute the dialectical contradiction of the social democratic movement which must, in the whole course of its development, work a way forward logically between the two pitfalls, between losing its mass character and abandoning its goal, between relapsing into sects and declining into bourgeois reform movement.” (p. 263)*

once for always, the direction of the revolutionary socialist struggle with the aid of formal means, which are expected to secure the labour movement against possibilities of opportunist digression”.²⁰

How did the new ideology emerge in the backdrop of the structural crisis of capitalism in the past, how was this ideology mediated with the ideology of the masses and what was its organisational form? Has history taught any lesson which is being accommodated in present practices to avoid repetition of the same mistakes in the future? These are the questions which it can be attempted to answer only through the post-mortem of the past and the present in the Indian context concerning international practice.

Pan-Islamism

Many left-wing critics have underlined the mistakes of sections of the left in their understanding of political Islam both in India and abroad. These mistakes are considered as the legacy of Lenin’s idea of accommodating political Islam in the anti-imperialist programme in the early 1920s. While judging Lenin’s strategy, it seems that they have taken an ahistorical position, and viewed the role of the Islamic movement only from the ideological premise without considering the transformative character of any archaic ideology prevailing within the masses and being advocated by their proponents under circumstantial pressure built within diverse time-space continuums and under the pressure of the class-interest and aspiration of the people whom the movement intends to grasp. The ideology of political Islam is based on the assumption made implicitly or explicitly that Muslim societies form an extra-territorial and trans-historical unit which may be described by features transcending space, time and circumstances, features that are at once derived from, and foreclosed by, Muslim scriptures and the early historical experience of Muslims and the incapacity to think of political arrangement in terms of civic pluralism, and to rest forever content with an arrangement of public affairs ruled by a medieval legal system. This ideological thinking is befitting with the imperialist desire to use Islam for a world order that serves the interest of the imperialists. But there is no denying the fact that the Muslim community from national as well as global perspectives is an oppressed community under an imperialistic and hegemonic world order and as such the forces with the reactionary ideological moorings which are spearheading the resistance movement always have two polar opposite tendencies – one, to transform themselves to side with the progressive classes and other anti-imperialist forces, and

²⁰ *The Power of Ideology*, p. 314

two, to resolve the conflict of ideology and politics to take direct refuge in the imperialist camp. The policy framework of the left should consider these two opposing tendencies into cognisance.

The Indian perspective

Islamic universalism in India was a by-product of European imperialist policies and predated Jamaluddin al-Afghani's efforts to rally Muslims behind the Ottoman bid for the caliphate. Afghani's posthumous reputation as the intellectual progenitor of Islamic universalist politics in India was not unearned. He had preached Hindu-Muslim unity and waxed eloquent on the virtues of territorial nationalism. There were always historical links between the ideologues of radical Islam based on the interpretation of Jihad and anti-colonial nationalism in South Asia and the Middle East. While sharing distaste for Western imperialism, they avoid a rigid separation between the worldly and religious point of view. The Jihad as anti-colonial nationalism transforms itself into Jihad as terrorism in the face of the weakening of the people's resistance against the imperialist and national-hegemonic subversion. During the period of the rising tide of the mass-activity of anti-colonial nationalism, Jihadi Islam also engaged in a vibrant dialogue with Ijtihad (independent reasoning). That's why Iqbal applauded the Turks for vesting responsibility for collective Ijtihad in an elected assembly. The republican form of government was not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam but had also become a necessity in view of the new forces that were set free in the world of Islam. There is no denying that all variants of Jihadi Islam can be used by the state for its narrow interest and even one variant of Islam with a transcendental religious doctrine can be pitted against another as the military regime of General Ayub Khan (1958-68) tried to pit the Tablighi Jamaat against the Jamati-i-Islami in West Pakistan and used the Jamat-i-Islami in East Pakistan. In the anti-colonial struggle in India, the Khilafat movement along with Gandhi's Jana-Satyagraha had unleashed a large-scale militant peasant movement against the British colonialists, and this united Hindu-Muslim struggle might have led the movement to a different dimension of freedom struggle for united India, had Gandhi not terminated his programme of Satyagraha (mass civil disobedience) at a crucial juncture. Gandhi's desire to fuse his campaign for non-cooperation with the Khilafat Movement launched by Indian Muslims in 1919 to prevent the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and 'preserve intact the spiritual and temporal authority of the Ottoman Sultan as the 'Caliph of Islam' – was an organisational success in Gorakhpur. In the winter of 1921-22, the Khilafat and Congress Volunteer Organisations were

merged into a composite National Volunteer Corps. After the incident of Chauri Chaura and in the backdrop of rising peasant militancy emerged from Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi suspended the Satyagraha movement and thus paved the way for disunity and left the people branded with violence to endure all manner of sufferings for years to come.

Leninist formulation

That these regions became so vulnerable can be explained by the fact that the relationship between Crown Prince Amanullah of Afghanistan and Britain was not at all amicable, and Russia's Central Asian possessions had already become a bone of contention in Anglo-Russian relations in the pre-revolutionary period, notwithstanding the fact that Russia and Britain were allies in the war. Thus, immediately after the revolution Abdul Jabbar Khairy and Abdul Sattar Khaity, two Pan-Islamists, had travelled to Russia in November 1918, under the pseudonyms Professor Ahmed Harris and Professor Ahmed Hadi respectively. This was followed by the historic meeting between an Indian delegation comprising, among others, Raja Mahendra Pratap and Moulana Barakatullah, and Lenin on 7th March 1918.

Despite the pan-Islamic faith of Barakatullah, he was a nationalist, and Lenin himself attached great importance to a united nationalist front for the colonies. After the 'Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question' at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, Lenin's imperialism was adopted. Lenin's formulation that the Comintern was required to extend support to the nationalist movement in the colonial countries was rejected by M. N. Roy, a position very similar to the position of Trotsky who believed in the proletarian revolution in a colony like India. In consonance with this theoretical position, the IRA (Indian Revolutionary Association) was formed with Lenin's support and despite its strong inclination towards Pan-Islamism; Lenin had no difficulty in considering the IRA as a possible ally while formulating the strategy of an anti-imperialist struggle. The rest of the history of anti-colonialist struggle did not in any way underline Lenin's strategic mistake in formulating a broad anti-imperialist united front.

So to relate the failure of Lenin's strategy in one particular case with his stand on the Islamic movement and to advocate a uniform strategic line denouncing the movement of radical Islam instead of taking a stand through a concrete class-analysis of the concrete situation is guided by a deterministic approach.

Jihad against imperialism

A multi-layered concept like Jihad is best understood with reference to the historical evolution of the idea in response to the shifting requirements of the Muslim community. So, Jihad in the postcolonial era has been a more effective instrument of political opposition to the secular modernity promoted by Muslim nation-states than of resistance to Western domination. The present phase of capitalist neo-liberalism has further eroded the content of resistance of political Islam against the oppressor. Evidently, only the new socialist project can transcend the capitalist neo-liberalism which has the capacity to absorb not only all variants of Jihadi Pan-Islamist resistance against imperialist oppression but also certain kinds of modernist movements. But this does not mean that the left should not distinguish between the Pan-Islamist forces promoted and patronised by the imperialists and the Pan-Islamist mass resistance against the direct imperialist onslaught.

Statist outlook

Going a step further, these left-wing ideologues lament that the left has not strived much to impel the Indian state to take measures to stop the propagation of fascist ideology under the garb of religious freedom. They even envisage that the left should engage themselves in a pitched battle on the street with the Islamic forces to ensure the freedom of litterateurs like Taslima Nasrin and Salman Rushdie. This one-dimensional approach to define the democracy and the limits of tolerance in a democracy does not take two different but interdependent contradictions prevailing in the here and now into cognisance. The people cannot live without their past, but they always face a civilisational pull of progress not to live within it, and people identify themselves with the separate cause of the oppressor and the oppressed community in a developing country like India and also at the same time like to engage themselves in the on-going struggle for the eradication of this division of inequality for a common cause. While advocating the British cultural tendency to conceive of democracy instrumentally, one should remember that at one level, modern British history may be a history of progressive democratisation, but at another, it is also a history of expanding state authority and coercion. Instead of imposing a strict rule of behavioural democracy, we should rely more on the internal dynamics of contending opinions operating within the garb of community rights and freedom and make a space for the internal debates to flourish through democratic empowerment. If the left does not recognise these internal dynamics and imposes the behavioural norms decided by the left