

*Marxist Leninist*

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*Theoretical Organ of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party*

# Only a Pawn in Their Game

Bob Dylan

*A bullet from the back of a bush  
Took Medgar Evers' blood  
A finger fired the trigger to his name  
A handle hid out in the dark  
A hand set the spark  
Two eyes took the aim  
Behind a man's brain  
But he can't be blamed  
He's only a pawn in their game  
A South politician preaches to the poor  
white man  
"You got more than the blacks, don't  
complain  
You're better than them, you been born  
with white skin, " they explain  
And the Negro's name  
Is used, it is plain  
For the politician's gain  
As he rises to fame  
And the poor white remains  
On the caboose of the train  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game  
The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the  
governors get paid  
And the marshals and cops get the  
same  
But the poor white man's used in the  
hands of them all like a tool  
He's taught in his school  
From the start by the rule*

*That the laws are with him  
To protect his white skin  
To keep up his hate  
So he never thinks straight  
'Bout the shape that he's in  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game  
From the poverty shacks, he looks  
from the cracks to the tracks  
And the hoofbeats pound in his brain  
And he's taught how to walk in a pack  
Shoot in the back  
With his fist in a clinch  
To hang and to lynch  
To hide 'neath the hood  
To kill with no pain  
Like a dog on a chain  
He ain't got no name  
But it ain't him to blame  
He's only a pawn in their game  
Today, Medgar Evers was buried from  
the bullet he caught  
They lowered him down as a king  
But when the shadowy sun sets on the  
one  
That fired the gun  
He'll see by his grave  
On the stone that remains  
Carved next to his name  
His epitaph plain  
Only a pawn in their game*

The country had yet to recover from the shock of Easter Sunday, when small groups of two religious communities clashed in Negombo on 5<sup>th</sup> May. The clashes were spontaneous and soon controlled. Worse followed on 12<sup>th</sup> May when violence spreading fast from Chilaw across the North Western Province and into the Gampaha District hit seven towns and some rural areas causing severe damage to mosques and property owned by Muslims. That was followed by harassment of Muslim traders. The spate of attacks on Muslims was well planned and waiting to happen. The response of the security forces was poor amid charges that the forces supported the attackers. This will not surprise people with memories of violent attacks on the minorities in the past five decades.

Weapons and explosives captured and the number trained to use them to launch suicide attacks are too vast to be the work solely of a few agents of the IS, which became a serious force only in 2012. Many Muslims have reported to the police about Wahhabi militancy years earlier. India claims to have been aware of the attack. The US, co-creator of Islamic terrorism and still a user of its services, could not have been ignorant of IS activity here. Was only the Sri Lankan state in the dark? The public suspects prior knowledge of political leaders and members of security forces about the Wahhabi group and its dubious activities including the bombings.

The IS, has lost in Syria and Iraq, and is making mischief in northern and western Africa. It is not established firmly. Its claiming credit for the local bombing is aimed at funds from sources, now unimpressed with its West Asian performance. Also, no wave of suicide attacks can install the IS or a proxy in power in Sri Lanka. The purpose, as the events that followed the bombing suggest, seems to be to create instability on several fronts.

Rival interests, local and foreign are at play seeking to capitalize on the crisis. The government is dodging responsibility for its failure to prevent the bombing and to be ready for the anti-Muslim backlash that was forthcoming from the Sinhala Buddhist fanatics.

*(Continued on inside back cover)*

# Muslims, Religious Fundamentalism and Terrorism

*(Fair translation of an analytical report on the bomb attacks of 21<sup>st</sup> April by the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party, distributed as a 16-page pamphlet in Tamil on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019)*

## **The Attack and Responses**

On 21<sup>st</sup> April more than 250 were killed and more than 500 were severely injured as a result of the bomb attack by suicide bombers in two Catholic churches, a Protestant church, three luxury hotels and a smaller hotel. It has come to light that three Catholic churches were among the intended targets and that the Protestant church was hit because the timing of one of the Catholic churches went amiss.

The day of the attack was Eater Sunday, a most sacred day for Catholics. It is a day on which Catholics go to church in large numbers to participate in prayer. Thus the aim of the attacks on churches was to damage them as well as kill a large number of Catholics. The basis on which the hotels, including one that was spared, were selected for attack remains unknown.

Politicians and community leaders say much about the attacks and the prevention of such attacks, while neglecting the important issues that the attacks raise. Some soberly urge the need to preserve unity among communities and eliminate discrimination. Many, shackled by their hardened attitudes offer explanations and solutions that suit their interests. The opportunism of the media follows its business trail.

This is not a problem that concerns Muslims alone. Nor is it about Muslim-Christian antagonism. It concerns the whole country. It is about

peace in the country and protection for the people. However, the basis of the problem is the transformation of the national question into hostile contradiction. Although racial hostility is not significant among ordinary people, there is a general tendency to view other communities with at least a shade of distrust.

Hence, we should look a little closely at the background to the rise of Muslim extremism, and take into account its national and international dimensions. We should also study the deterioration of the relationship between the Muslims and other communities and the social trends that contributed to it.

Let us first look at the social identity of the Muslims and their relationship with other communities.

### **The Social Identity of the Muslims**

Although the Muslims have not for long announced themselves as a nationality, they have asserted their distinctness for more than a century. Since the Muslims initially settled in the country as a trader community, the proportion of traders among them is higher than that among other communities. However, today the majority of Muslims are toilers. There was rivalry between Sinhalese and Muslim traders, as a result of which there was a Sinhala-Muslim conflict in 1915 across the island, but for the North and East. The Tamil leader, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan who sailed to London to plead on behalf of the Sinhala chauvinist leaders who were arrested for inciting violence, besides pleading for their release made negative statements about the Muslims. That led to bitterness among Muslims. It is besides notable that, earlier, Ramanathan had, based on Tamil being the predominant domestic language of Muslims, argued that they were Tamils and therefore did not qualify for separate representation.

Muslims live in high concentration in significantly large areas of the Eastern Province. There are regions in the north and along the western coast where they live in significantly large numbers. However, the vast

majority lives among the Sinhalese as a significant minority. Thus, despite their affection for Tamil being comparable with that of Tamils, their distinctness concerned religion and culture more than language.

Ramanathan rejected their distinctness. GG Ponnambalam who followed adopted an entirely Jaffna-centred Tamil nationalist political line. The Federal Party introduced the concept of “Tamil Speaking People” in order to bring the Tamils of the North and East, the Hill Country Tamils and the Muslims together into a common identity. Although that was agreeable to the Muslims of the North and East, the demands and campaigns by the Federal Party failed to address issues that were specific to the Muslims and to the Hill Country Tamils. The number of parliamentary seats won was important to the Federal Party. To Muslim personalities the priority was to strengthen their own positions. Thus an understanding built on electoral arithmetic did not last.

The demand for the separate of Tamil Eelam arose in a context where the oppressive attitude of the chauvinists and the narrow outlook of Tamil nationalists aggravated the national question. The demand, however, took scant account of the Tamil nationality that lived across the island and failed to give due thought to the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil communities. The Muslims, therefore, although supportive of the rights of the Tamil people, had reservations about secession.

### **Development of the Tamil–Muslim Rift**

A narrow nationalist domineering attitude prevailed even among the Tamil nationalist youth movements that came to the fore as the Tamil parliamentary leadership lost credibility. Most Tamil youth movements insisted that the Muslims should accept the demand for Tamil Eelam. Particularly during war, when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) became dominant, Muslims were frustrated by the attitude of the LTTE which expected the Muslims to obey them in the same way that the Tamils did. As a result, the East, especially the Districts of Batticaloa and Amparai, saw attacks on Muslims, counterattacks by Muslims and collaboration of some Muslims with the state, that harmed good relations

between Tamils and Muslims. This was further aggravated by the LTTE driving the Muslims out of the Northern Province in 1995, which drove a wedge between Tamil nationalists and Muslims.

Some Muslim politicians resorted to acts designed to alienate the Muslims from Tamils. Some Tamil nationalists took advantage of it to stir Tamil-Muslim animosity.

Now, a sizeable section of the Muslims who live in the South receive education in Sinhala as a result of governmental pressure, lack of resources and at times their own choice. Although Sinhala is not yet the domestic language of many, the situation has emerged where the identity of the Muslims will be more strongly based on religion and culture.

With Sinhala nationalism having transformed into Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, it is unlikely that the Muslims will be accepted as Sinhalese. Meanwhile, the rejection of the uniqueness of the Muslims by narrow Tamil nationalists who seek to place them under Tamil elitist dominance negates the prospect of Muslims accepting Tamil national identity.

### **The Muslims as a Nationality**

The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party (NDMLP), taking into account general as well as specific aspects of the national question, endorsed the uniqueness of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils and urged their recognition as individual nationalities well ahead of the leaders of the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils. On that basis, it expanded the scope of the principle of the right to self determination to resolve the national question based on autonomous structures for the four nationalities within a united Sri Lanka.

The proportional representation system in the Constitution of 1978 enabled a larger parliamentary representation for the Muslims than ever before. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress which thereby won a large number of seats, use its success to secure ministerial posts and other concessions rather than view the Muslim people as a nationality or a unique community and address the problems faced by them. Such

attitude rapidly undermined the social credibility of the Muslim parliamentary leadership.

### **Muslims as Targets of Chauvinism**

There was no Sinhala–Muslim conflict for long since 1915. However, old rivalries revived following the rise in affluence among Muslims involved in the gem trade and in business ventures that came about a result of the economic boom in the Middle East following the Oil Crisis of the 1970s. Yet little of significance was witnessed other than a few local clashes.

Sinhala chauvinism which targeted the Tamils since 1977 located its animosity towards Muslims on a low key. But bitterness towards Muslims was smouldering. Although the Muslim leaders were aware of it, they attended to protecting their parliamentary posts and positions and enriching themselves and their immediate narrow circles rather than enabling harmony between the Muslims and other communities.

Sinhala–Buddhist religious politics which started as Sinhala Urumaya late last century became a blatantly Sinhala–Buddhist chauvinist front at the start of this Century. Along with it emerged organizations emphasizing dislike towards Muslims. Most important of those was Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS). Sinhala Ravaya, Sinha Le and others followed. Meanwhile Priests like Soma Thero who whipped up towards Christians and Muslims had media backing. The death due to illness of Soma Thero during a visit to Russia in 2003 was interpreted as a conspiracy and churches were attacked during Christmas. The trend continues.

After the defeat of the LTTE, Sinhala–Buddhist militant outfits, besides undermining the resolution of the national question, specifically targeted Christians and Muslims. Muslim businesses were attacked. Muslim big businesses, however, sought to compromise even when legal action was possible. The Sinhala–Buddhist zealots spotted the weakness and took advantage of it.

During the ‘anti halal meat campaign’ of the Sinhala–Buddhist zealots, Muslim leaders who knew the issues on both sides, failed not only to



educate the Sinhalese about 'halal' but also avoided criticizing the religious organizations that made halal a money spinning venture. As a result, it was not possible to nip in the bud the hate campaign by the BBS that claimed that Muslims are imposing halal meat on the Sinhalese.

### **Growth of Religious Zeal among Muslims**

While the Muslims faced political isolation, the Saudi-funded Salafi-Wahhabi agents pressed on with moves that would further isolate them.

The trend of seeking employment in the Middle East grew since late 1970s. The UNP encouraged it. But now many speak of its negative social impact. Imposing Arab culture on the social life of Sri Lankan Muslims was an important aspect. Jobs in the Middle East made women money making machines, but the money earned by the women did not help their social emancipation.

The severe male chauvinist outlook of several Arab societies, especially the Gulf countries with the most reactionary regimes, spread into the Sri Lankan Muslim society through both men and women. Besides that, various Arab countries used means such as financial aid, relief activities and development schemes to buy influence among Muslims. Saudi influence penetrated the Muslim community in several ways including financial assistance and Salafi-Wahhabi propaganda. Fresh controls emerged within the Muslim community to restrictively define Islam and reject anything that fell outside as heresy. At a personal level it emerged as a prescriptive dress code for Muslim women. Men were required to sport a beard and wear a long shirt as worn in Saudi Arabia. In a context in which anti-Muslim violence and insults intensified, many took to the 'Islamic attire' as a statement of defiance. Not all who were attired in Islamic clothes were Salafi-Wahhabis. Nevertheless, amid strengthening religious sentiments in the country, it helped to isolate the Muslims from people of other faiths. At the same time, religious extremism divided the Muslim community. Moves were also afoot to denounce Muslims inclined towards secular thinking and indulging in practices not acceptable to Salafi-Wahhabis as "enemies of the faith".

Sufi mysticism had traditional following among Sri Lankan Muslims. Besides, the system of worshipping at tombs of Muslims of great devotion held in high esteem by the community exists in many parts of the country. This practice was also bitterly attacked. The wrecking of Sufi Mosques in Beruwela in the West and Kaaththaankudi in the East a decade ago was much spoken about. Divisive tendencies within the Muslim community were like deep wounds covered by scab.

At a time when the need was to support the majority of Muslims to overcome extremist tendencies that tended to isolate the Muslim population from the rest of society, anti-Muslim propaganda and violence only favoured extremism, fundamentalism and further isolation. Important among these were the position taken by the Tamil nationalists of the East regarding the Muslims, the anti-Muslim violence that followed the arrival of the Indian armed forces and, capping it all, the expulsion of the Muslims from the North.

### **Muslims and Muslim Leadership**

The United Front government carefully handled the few occasions of violence the mid-1970s and prevented the spread of violence. But it could not understand or eliminate the causes for the deep seated hostility.

In the 1970s some Muslim traders became very wealthy through the gem trade. The economies of the Middle East prospered following the rise in oil prices since 1974, leading to a rise in business and employment opportunities. While all communities of Sri Lanka benefitted from it, the Muslims used the opportunities better than the rest. Seeking work in the Middle East accelerated following the Open Economic Policy of 1978.

Also, the government paid special attention to the education of Muslims since 1956. Muslims advanced rapidly in higher education from 1970. Thus rivalry with Muslims in business extended to higher education. Besides, wealthy Muslims tended to show off their prosperity by building posh houses and massive mosques. These led to resentment, among the poorer sections of other communities in small towns, more

significantly in small towns than in the cities. Many noted that financial aid from the Middle East enriched the well to do sections of the Muslim community.

Although the opportunism of the Muslim political leadership enabled chauvinist political parties to form the government, there was bitterness about Muslim leaders bargaining for important posts and using them to enrich themselves and those close to them. Muslim leaders, rather than paying attention to such issues, acted to reinforce their Muslim vote bank.

The post-1978 electoral system based on district wise proportional representation enabled politicians to contest relying solely on Muslim votes. Thus the Muslim Congress established itself strongly initially in the East and later in the North. The Muslim parliamentary politicians who got elected to parliament other districts by joining hands with chauvinist political parties (and rarely in isolation) did neither appreciate that the Muslim community was a nationality nor care to know what its national aspirations were or what the social problems faced by the Muslims were. Even after the NDMLP recognized the Muslims as a nationality, Muslim politics stagnated in identity-based vote gathering rather than upholding the aspirations of Muslims as nationality.

From near the end of the last century and into the early years of this century, the concept of "Muslim Nation" generated some interest in the East. However, this concept which showed little consideration for the complexity of the population distribution of the Muslims was presented more as a rival proposal for the demand for 'Tamil Eelam' and with only the Muslims in areas where they lived in large concentration faded away fast.

No Muslim political leadership confined to electoral politics was willing to considered idea of the NDMLP that, in contrast, recognized the Muslims as a nationality in a way that no other political party had dared and called for the establishment of autonomies in regions where they live in large concentration and internal autonomous structures for them

where their concentration is thinner. Meanwhile, No Tamil nationalist party would dare to accept the Muslims as a nationality.

Thus Muslim politics, lacking in a clear social outlook and political principles, got confined to facing elections based on identity and to making noises when the Muslims are attacked or face specific issues. When the Muslims faced repeated land grab in the East, obstruction to resettlement in the North and chauvinist insult and violence throughout the South, the Muslim leadership seemed lacking in the broad political outlook and approach necessary to deal with the issues.

The reasons for the Muslim community to become isolated from other communities and face internal splits may be summed up as follows:

1. Deep economic penetration by Saudi Arabia
2. Islamic purists acting as agents of Saudi Arabia acting to Arabize the culture on the Muslim Community
3. Isolation of the Muslim community from the country's political mainstream
4. The surge of chauvinism in national politics and along with it the rise of Tamil narrow nationalism
5. Identity politics of the Muslims functioning with electoral objectives and failure to consider the problems of the Muslims with an all island perspective.
6. The ceasing of Muslim participation in the Left Movement. (The decline of the Left in the 1970s and the rise of chauvinism and Tamil nationalism contributed to this.)

The NDMLP, which insisted that the Muslims were a nationality, identified them on that basis and explained that it was only through struggling for the national rights of the Muslims as a nationality that it would be possible to avert the spread of Islamic fundamentalism among them. Here, the Tamil nationalists erred by ignoring the individuality of the Muslims, and the Muslim leadership by being opportunistic.

Muslim politicians who built their vote banks by isolating the Muslims from Tamils in regions where Muslims lived in large concentration paid no thought to the problems faced by Muslims in the South, whose linguistic, cultural and democratic rights were being denied. Muslim personalities in the South had little interest in anything besides figuring out the alliance which would yield parliamentary seats and ministerial posts. Thus Muslim politics was reduced to assertion of authority in certain regions and securing personal concessions rather than taking an interest in self determination and autonomy.

### **The Recent Anti-Muslim Wave**

Against the aforesaid background, the attack on Muslims in 2002 was followed in quick succession by hurtful events like attacks on Muslim businesses, campaign to boycott Muslim traders, making the campaign of sale of Halal meat into an anti-Muslim campaign, insulting Muslims and Islam in public places.

Especially, outfits such as the BBS, Sinhala Ravaya and Ravana Balaya that grew strong when the war was most intense under the Rajapaksa regime, spread anti-Muslim feelings among the youth. Hostility towards Muslims met its peak as anti-Muslim rage in Aluthgama in June 2014. Reluctance of the Rajapaksa regime to punish participants and instigators led to the fall of Rajapaksa in 2015.

Neither President Sirisena nor the UNP-SLFP government who came to power with the overwhelming support of the Muslims dared to punish the culprits. Besides, the dragging on of the murder case of ruggerite Thajudeen by the government, despite the UNP using it in the election campaign, contributed to displeasure among Muslims. Failure to punish anti-Muslim hate mongers emboldened Sinhala-Buddhist zealots. The failure of the government to bring promptly under control the anti-Muslim devastation triggered in Amparai in February 2018 through false propaganda and in the next month in Kandy and inaction in bringing the culprits to book further offended the Muslim community.

Amid this Muslim ministers and parliamentarians, as usual, clung on to their posts and were content to ritually issue critical statements.

### **The Appeal of the Islamic State**

Infuriation about the Aluthgama incidents among Muslim youth propelled a significant number towards extremism. It was also the time when the Islamic State (IS) that struck root in Syria with backing from the US and Saudi Arabia grew rapidly. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey among others, with encouragement by the US, but each for its purpose, were directly involved since 2011 in moves to overthrow the Syrian government. When fighters supported by them could not win, the IS that was created in 2013 started recruiting fighters for its Islamic army at international level. The US Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey supported IS.

The financial resources of IS had their origins in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf states, sending oil stolen from Syria to Turkey, and supporters of religious extremism among others. It is notable that IS did not strike root in every Muslim majority country. However, IS was able to mobilize individuals from many of the countries where Muslims lived. Muslims ranging from those who aced anti-Islamism in Europe to discontented communities in Asia had some attraction for Islamic fundamentalism. The number of such people who joined IS far exceeded those who joined movements like al Qaeda. The reason was the charm of the success of IS, which in a short time carved out a large territory and announced an Islamic caliphate. The glory faded as the territory shrank since 2017. Militants who joined it, when unable to return to their home countries, looked for room in extremist organizations of other countries. Many shunned politics. Some persisted in their religious activities.

It is useful to note that Islamic fundamentalism started in Sri Lanka in the final years of the last century, that its main support base was Saudi Arabia, and that IS came to Sri Lanka after 2013. The US and Saudi Arabia, besides IS, count among external factors that enabled the advent and growth of a terrorist group in Sri Lanka. Its base, however,

comprises local Muslims. Besides Wahhabi-Salafi groups that projected Islamic fundamentalism, those who were frustrated with the Muslim politicians, especially the youth, joined this violent tendency.

There was ample opportunity for religious extremist groups of Saudi Arabia to facilitate the IS to strike root in Sri Lanka. It is possible that the accumulation of a large stock of weapons and training in suicide attacks took place at the prompting or with support of IS. After the defeat met in the Middle East and the disaster faced by the IS, it is hard to say that the IS had a programme specifically for Sri Lanka.

Although the Aluthgama attacks were a strong inducement for Muslim counterattack, there was hope that the political change in 2015 would create a climate sympathetic to the Muslims. With that hope failing, the violence in Amparai and Kandy along with the apathy of the government and the deceit of the Muslim leadership pushed many youth towards extremism.

### **The Purpose of the Attack**

There are several questions relating to the attack need to be answered.

1. Why did the attacks target Roman Catholics?
2. Even if the planned attacks had achieved the desired success, was there prospect of sustaining such attacks?
3. How much did the Indian intelligence establishment know about the impending attacks?
4. Why did the Indian intelligence establishment communicate the information at a middle level?
5. Which officials at high level and state and political leaders knew of the information? And why did they not take appropriate action?

Even if there was prompt action on the information received, only the specific targets could have been saved; and the suicide bombers who operated as individuals or small groups could have carried out the attacks on other occasions such as May Day and Vesak when large

crowds gather. For, the purpose of the terrorists seems more extensive than killing a few Catholics and foreign tourists.

Besides its lack of prospect for prolonged struggle, what did a violent group which could at most launch suicide attacks on a limited number of targets achieve by killing a large number of people and inflicting significant material damage in a single day?

The immediate consequences include:

1. Deepening the sense of fear in the country to offer the government opportunity to emphasize security and enact oppressive legislation.
2. Wrecking harmony among communities and escalating mutual distrust. (Especially, strengthening the hands of those whipping up anti-Muslim sentiments)
3. Encouraging foreign hegemonic forces, mainly the US and then India, to use national security as pretext to strengthen defence ties through establishment of military bases or by other means.
4. Subjecting the social and economic existence of the Muslims to threat.
5. Worsening the economic crisis in the short- and medium-term.

Thus we should examine which forces benefit from the attacks. The matter cannot be explained away simply by saying that the IS was the only external force connected with the attacks. Besides determining whose instrument the IS is, we should not be dismissive of other international organizations that could have put to use National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) and the Jamathe Milathu Ibrahim (JMI) by declaring that they were guided by the IS. The very US that claims to combat terrorist movements is known to use the very same movements to undermine governments that refuse to obey its orders.

While charges are being traded about the Indian intelligence services who knew details of the impending attacks informing Sri Lankan intelligence and the information not being communicated to higher levels, the people have the right to know what the information was and



who communicated what to whom. Failure to provide the details thus far needs investigation.

### **The Aftereffects and the Future**

The persons arrested in the course of search operations, include those with connection to the events as well as many without any connection. Even those who possessed small weapons for self defence against anti-Muslim violence have been taken into custody. There is growing tendency to see every Muslim as a suspect and every mosque and Madarasa as a den of terrorism. Continuation of this trend is not good for the unity of the communities of the country. We should be alert to where dissatisfaction arising from growing discrimination against Muslims will take the country.

Already moves are expedited to pass repressive laws in the name of national security. People should be alert about attempts made in the name of eliminating terrorism and extremism to suppress the people by branding just struggles of the people as extremist and acts of self-defence by the people against state violence as terrorist.

Revolutionaries who accept armed struggle know the difference between revolutionary violence and counterrevolutionary violence. While they disallow their struggles causing pain to their people, they recognize people's right to bear arms against oppression by the ruling class and state terrorism as a fundamental right of the people. But they oppose individual acts of terror and rabid actions that willingly hurt people. Politics that replaces an anti-people regime with the rule of the people is not extremist politics.

What is important today is the unity of the nationalities— especially the toiling masses acting in unity, transcending racial differences. No narrow nationalist leadership or chauvinist political party is capable of achieving it. Those who stir racial sentiments and induce animosity speak superficially about unity. Beneath it will smoulder racial animosity. Although religious leaders get on public platforms to talk of religious

understanding, they are incapable of acting at grassroots level to bring about cordiality among communities. No religious leadership has acted against the interests of the elite with influence in the religious establishment. If clergy at lower levels participate in secular socio-political organizations they can do more than the said religious leaders. But one needs to be cautious about clergy who encourage superstition and cloistered thinking among the people.

From a historical perspective, the credit for rallying together all nationalities of the country goes to the Left Movement. From the time of commencement of electoral politics, the capitalist political parties have been functioning based on race. Electoral politics induced the parliamentary left to compromise with chauvinists. Although they have to differing degrees gone along with chauvinist oppression, very few resorted to blatantly racist politics. The JVP which started off with a leftist mask developed itself by emphasizing chauvinism. Its chauvinist approach dominated until the end of the war. Although now it plays down chauvinism as much cannot be achieved through chauvinist politics, its policies lack proper understanding about the right of nationalities to self determination.

The weakening of the Left was an important factor the contributed to many Muslims falling victim to Islamic fundamentalism and to the isolation of the Muslims from other communities. Tamil nationalism too now faces contradictions and splits caused by Hindu fanaticism.

After Indian religious politics took the form of Hindutva, the Sri Lanka Tamil society was penetrated by Hindutva since 1980 to whip up anti-Muslim and anti-Christian animosity. Hindutva which grew rapidly since the end of the war seeks to find accommodation with Buddhist zealots. It is our responsibility to alert people about acts of tit-for-tat irritation.

Religious politics has divided the people and strengthened the hands of capitalism and imperialism. To save the country from religious fanaticism, the state should be made secular. Despite shortcomings, the

new constitution of Nepal, has transformed the Hindu monarchy of Nepal into a secular state comprising regional autonomies, and its secular content and devolution of power will contribute to social unity. We should learn its lessons.

Since the militants who are now scattered do not seem to have a political programme, the chances are high that they would operate as disparate groups and join other religious organizations. Thus it is important to free them from religious extremism. The Muslim community as well as other communities have a responsibility in this matter.

Only socio-political forces that do not fall victim to electoral politics and openly reject emphasising of narrow ethnic identities can sow the way to the unity of nationalities and provide leadership.

All parliamentary political parties have lost credibility. But the narrow nationalist thought and religious extremism are alive. Defeating them is possible only through organizing mass movements outside the confines of parliamentary politics.

Now parliamentary political parties and their leaders have forgotten the sorrowful events of 21<sup>st</sup> April and are aiming to make political capital. Imperialism and regional hegemony are itching to take advantage of the desperate situation of the country and infiltrate. Capitalist and imperialist purposes in passing oppressive laws and reinforcing the state machinery are absolutely anti-people.

Hence, the task facing genuine leftists is momentous. It is only through peopling politics and building a revolutionary movement that they can overcome the anti-people government, its imperialist masters and all religious fanatics who indirectly facilitate them.

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# Some Observations on the Socio-economic Formation of India since the Colonial rule: Distortion, Disarticulation, Exclusion

*From “India’s Runaway Growth: Distortion, Disarticulation, and Exclusion”, Section III, “Colonial Rule: Setting the Pattern of Distortion, Disarticulation, Exclusion”, Aspects of India’s Economy’, issues 44-46, April 2008.*

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Research Unit of Political Economy, Ground floor, Sidhwa  
Estate, N.A. Sawant Marg, Colaba, Mumbai 400005.*

## **Source Editors’ Note:**

*What is the Indian society today? Semi-feudal? Capitalist? Imperialist?... The debate seems endless. The problem remains in the straitjacket application of Marxism which originated and developed through anti-feudal democratic revolutions in Europe in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> Century to interpret the socio-economic conditions of India which was, at the end of the Moghul period, potentially on the verge of a nascent democratic revolution forestalled by arrival of colonialism and immediately followed by de-industrialisation. The relevant problems are only recently being re-addressed by Marxist economic historians. In the following treatise the ‘Research Unit of Political Economy’ (RUPE) of Mumbai has dealt with the relevant issues in question succinctly and exceptionally. <sup>1</sup>*

India was no exception to the laws of historical development.

Before colonial rule, the feudal structure of Indian society was in the process of being undermined. Production for the market formed a large segment of the economy (since land revenue was collected in cash or sold

for cash); domestic and foreign trade grew, and merchant capital flourished, with some merchants acquiring fabulous wealth; a sophisticated financial system developed, geared to the needs of commerce; and the urban sector expanded, in which a high proportion of the population was employed in industrial/craft production. New elements began to appear – instances of private property in land (whereby land could be bought and sold like any commodity); the emergence of cultivation performed with hired labour; the setting up of some manufacture and mining enterprises worked with hired labour. Most importantly, in response to the increasing extraction of rent, there arose stirrings, revolts and movements of the peasantry and artisans of various regions, sometimes clothed as religious movements, sometimes led by local chieftains. These dealt blows to the Mughal Empire and accelerated its collapse.<sup>2</sup>

However, the new elements were still weak, scattered or sporadic; they were far from achieving the scale or cohesion to lead a social revolution. Whatever the reasons for the delay in the emergence of such a revolution (for which the tenacious caste system and the self-sufficiency of the village economy must have had some share of responsibility), it was forestalled by the arrival of colonial rule.

### **Transfer of Surplus from Agriculture to the Imperialist Metropolis**

The effect of colonial rule can be glimpsed in two figures. In 1700 India's share of world Gross Domestic Product was roughly the same as that of all of Europe – both were around 23%; by 1952 India's share was 4% and Europe's 30%. India's share of world manufacturing fell from almost one-fourth in 1750 to less than one-fiftieth in 1900.<sup>3</sup>

The new British rulers took the already excessive land revenue levels of their predecessors as a starting point, and increased them steeply by re-assessment and more efficient collection. Common to the two main systems of land revenue they introduced – *zamindari* and *ryotwari* – was

the drive to maximise revenue. Thus even in the latter – in which, theoretically, the cultivator directly confronted the State – parasitic classes developed rights over the surplus, since the cultivator was forced to borrow to make revenue payments. Since land could now be bought and sold, it became a commodity – but of a peculiar type, subject to a heavy rent/revenue. This huge drain from agriculture was also a drain from the country itself, because the land revenue formed the main component of British drain from India. Agriculture, thus drained of its surplus, retrogressed: while agricultural technique remained virtually frozen at the levels of Mughal rule, per capita foodgrain output declined considerably. Peasants had no surplus to invest in maintaining productivity, let alone improving it.

In one sense colonial rule superficially resembled classical capitalist development in that it forced an increase in the share of production for exchange; but this condition has aptly been termed a “deformed generalised commodity production”.<sup>4</sup> The peasant now had to pay the (hiked) revenue in cash and that too before the harvest, when he was short of cash; this rendered him dependent on merchants and moneylenders. The merchants and the moneylenders had a stake in encouraging tradable crops rather than subsistence farming, and brought about a shift in cropping patterns. The decline of subsistence crops and the expansion of cash crops served the process of transferring surplus from the colony to the imperialist metropolis: (i) these crops could be exported; and (ii) India was paid for these exports out of the taxes levied by the British rulers in India itself – in other words, India in effect received nothing in return. (Some writers talk of ‘export markets’ being opened up for India with British rule. This is similar to someone robbing one, and then paying for one’s goods with the money he has robbed.) Since the replacement of subsistence crops with cash crops depressed the consumption of the poor peasantry, it can be said that the ‘surpluses’ were transferred out of the very subsistence of the poor peasantry. The spread of cash crops went hand in hand with the spread of hunger. The

late 19<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a series of devastating famines and epidemics that wiped out millions; even after that malnutrition persisted.

Before British rule, a portion of the land revenues used to return to the region from which they arose, through the nobility's purchases of goods from artisans; now, with the ousting of the earlier nobility and their replacement by the British, this source of demand for artisans' goods vanished. The British imposed internal tariffs on Indian textiles and heavy tariffs or outright bans on their import into Britain, whereas British textiles were imported into India at low tariffs. India was converted from a leading manufacturer and exporter of textiles to a massive *importer* of them. This destroyed the section of the Indian textile industry producing fine fabrics for consumption by the earlier feudal elite. The industrial cities of the earlier period – Agra, Dacca, Surat, Patna, and others – declined in economic activity and population. Large-scale unemployment was thus a direct and enduring product of colonial rule. The share of *industry* in the workforce *fell*, as did its share in national income. The share of agriculture in workforce and national income grew, not thanks to any development in agriculture, but because of the shrinkage of industry.

### **Deindustrialisation, Pressure on the Land, Helplessness before Feudal Forces**

The artisans and workers once employed in the textile industry now had to fall back on agriculture. Under Mughal rule there was a great abundance of land, which allowed cultivators to cultivate only the more fertile land, and to cultivate only half their land in a given year, thus maintaining its fertility. However, as *deindustrialisation* took place under British rule, and ruined weavers fell back on the land as the only means of livelihood, land became scarce. W.W. Hunter wrote in 1893: "In Bengal there was in the last century more cultivated land than there were husbandmen to till it. The landlords at that time were competing for tenants.... A hundred years of British rule has reversed the ratio.... It is [now] the husbandmen who have to compete with each other for land."<sup>5</sup>

This destruction of indigenous industry, and the retrogression of agriculture combined with its commercialisation, led to a new kind of distorted feudalism, or 'semi-feudalism'. The peasants' *lack of any alternative* to cultivation rendered them helpless before the landlords, merchants and usurers, who found it easy to increase their extractions to the point where they took away not only the surplus, but even a part of what was needed for the peasant to subsist and to reproduce the conditions in which he/she could produce again. The lack of alternative employment also meant that many landless or very small peasants preferred to tie themselves in 'voluntary' bondage to a feudal lord with the guarantee of some sort of subsistence. Finally, it meant that, however poor the returns from cultivation, however marginal the plot of land, the peasant would cling onto it tenaciously as the only defence against complete destitution. At the same time, those trying to eke out a living in all sorts of petty trade proliferated, since there were no 'barriers to entry' in this field. Thus the share of the services sector in employment grew, even as the income of those so-called *self-employed* in such petty activities remained even lower than the income of those involved in production.

No doubt the peasant was now linked with national and international markets, but these did not operate to stimulate greater production. First, the large revenue demanded of the peasant left him little or no surplus to re-invest. Secondly, taking advantage of the peasant's need for cash before sowing, the moneylender-trader was able to tie the peasant in debt and force him to sell the crop to him at a depressed price. Thirdly, between these traders and the international market intervened large wholesale merchants, banks in India, and businesses and banks in the imperialist countries. Any rise in international prices could easily be retained by those links in the chain closer to the outlets in the imperialist countries; even if the peasant had information of improved prices, he lacked holding power to extract better terms in such a situation. (Thus any improvement in 'terms of trade' would not accrue largely to the peasant, but to these other links in the chain, including foreign ones.) On the other hand, any fall in international prices could be passed back down



the chain to the peasant, who, as we mentioned earlier, lacked alternative employment, and was trapped in debt to the moneylender-trader, and hence had no option but to continue to produce on worse terms.

### **The Usurping of the Forests**

Before British rule, the forests were to a large extent under the control of the tribals, for whom they were the source of their food, fuel, fodder, housing materials, raw materials for household needs, and medicines, and therefore an indispensable part of their social and religious life. Lacking ploughs and draught animals, the tribals practised 'shift and burn' cultivation on forest land. They also earned income from the sale of wood and forest products to other communities.

From around the 1860s, the British began to monopolise the forests – then two-fifths of the country's area – by a series of measures which classified most forests as 'reserved' or 'protected', set up a separate forest administration, placed restrictions on the tribals' use of the forests and banned shifting cultivation (the typical method of agriculture among tribals, who could not afford ploughs and cattle), and extracted large tax revenues. At the same time, the British plundered the forests for timber and fuel, setting in motion the process of deforestation which continues to date. Attempts by tribals to reassert their rights over the forest were sparking-points for numerous violent tribal revolts against the Raj.

The processes of imperialist penetration and trade in forest products brought to the forest areas non-tribal moneylenders and merchants, who soon alienated tribal lands on a large scale, and thus joined the government as a target of tribal revolt. The debt-ridden tribals were routinely forced to perform *veth*, or forced labour, on the fields of the usurers. Frequently the same usurer-landowners were also appointed forest contractors (given timber contracts) by the forest officials. In the later years of the Raj, the rich mineral resources of the tribal regions began to be developed, again by the displacement and exclusion of the tribals (even as a few would be hired as coolie labour). In the absence of any other source of livelihood, the tribals, now deemed encroachers in

their own land, nevertheless clung on to the forests and forest plots; as such they remained available for exploitation by sundry forest officials, merchants, and usurers.

There are a number of important common property resources (CPRs) apart from the forests: grazing lands, village commons, ponds, tanks, streams and rivers. Before British rule, a large part of the country's natural resources were under the control of local communities, and were freely available to the rural population. As the British rulers extended State control over these resources, community control and management declined, and a dwindling share of erstwhile common property resources and forests remained available to the villagers. As a result, today, in almost all parts of the country, villagers have a legal right of access only on some specific categories of land and water resources.

The process of extending State control over the common resources, which began with the declaration of 'reserved' and 'protected' forests in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, has essentially been that of exclusion of villagers' access to common resources by law. As a result, the systems of community management gradually disintegrated and are now virtually extinct. Today, in almost all parts of the country, the villagers have legal right of access only on some specific categories of land like 'pasture and grazing lands' and 'village forests', which are under the jurisdiction of the village or village panchayat. All other categories of land not under private ownership like barren and uncultivable land, culturable waste, land put to non-agricultural uses and forests belong to State Revenue department or Forest department. Nevertheless, the rural population, particularly the poor, depend greatly on the goods and services available from these categories of land. Besides, though only those resources are treated as CPRs on which no individual has exclusive property rights, there are systems of customary rights which support traditional practices, such as gleaning or grazing of cattle in the fields after harvest, which represent common rights on private property in certain situations.<sup>6</sup>

## **Introduction of Modern Industry: Displacement without Re-employment**

Machine industry was introduced into India in the 1850s (in cotton and jute textiles), and grew faster from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century onward. It came, that is to say, after the destruction of much of native industry, but, unlike in Europe, it did not grow *out* of native industry. Whether the firms were owned by British entrepreneurs or (as in western India) by Indian ones, the machinery for these firms was imported, largely from Britain. As modern industry proceeded, it kept displacing more workers from traditional industry, such as the surviving spinners and handloom weavers who produced cloth for the lower end of the market (the higher end of the market was catered to for a long time by imports). The modern sugar and iron industries similarly ousted traditional producers. In Europe too traditional industry in consumer goods had been ousted by machine industry, which developed through continuous increases in productivity; but in India, thanks to continuous imports of machinery, employment was not created within India itself in a machine-making industry and other heavy industries as could have made up for the loss of employment in consumer goods industries. Thus the net effect on employment was negative.

Given the nature of the transition to modern industry there was a large gap between the technology embodied in the imported machines and the know-how existing in India; indeed, even for running the machinery the mills imported technicians from Lancashire. Since the market was limited for many products, and the minimum size of the firms based on imported technology was large, Indian industry did not pass through a phase dominated by a large number of small firms competing for markets (with the winners growing into monopolies). Instead, a few firms between them could exercise monopoly control at the very outset, and did not face competitive pressure to reduce production costs and prices. As this practice proved profitable, technological dependence was continuously reproduced.

The typical Indian industrial house did not develop through an extended period of unfettered competition through which capital was centralised in the technological leader. Rather, it was born as a monopoly house, closely linked to government policy, contracts, and subsidies, and with ties to feudal sections, for example for the supply of raw materials. The background of the entrepreneurs was finance (including usury) and trade, and they excelled in financial, mercantile and speculative operations (often devoting to them as much attention as to their industrial operations). These firms, known as managing agencies, controlled a number of firms, often in disparate industries. A survey of Indian monopoly houses from the 1930s till the late 1970s remarked that “monopoly capital in India bears a closer family resemblance to pre-industrial monopolies than to contemporary monopoly capitalism in the west”.<sup>7</sup>

### **Railways & Irrigation:**

#### **Infrastructure for Imperialist Penetration, not Development**

In his 1853 article on “The Future Results of British Rule in India”, Marx anticipated that:

when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coals, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with the railways. The railway system will therefore become in India truly the forerunner of modern industry.... Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power.

Later, however, as he saw the actual process of colonial rule in Asia (in contrast to the history of colonial rule in North America), Marx revised

his views: in an 1881 letter he referred to the railways as “useless to the Hindus” (i.e., the Indians), and one of the means for the British to carry on “a bleeding process with a vengeance!”<sup>8</sup> And Lenin later remarked that imperialism had converted the building of railways, which “seems to be a simple, natural, democratic, cultural and civilizing enterprise”, into “an instrument for oppressing a *thousand million* people (in the colonies and semi-colonies), that is, more than half the population of the globe inhabiting the dependent countries”.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed only a minute portion of the railway equipment was manufactured in India, and so the entire ‘multiplier’ effect of investment in the railways did not take place in India. On the contrary, the dividends on (inflated) British private investment in the railways were one of the major elements of the *drain* from India.

Moreover, the route alignments and rate structures of the railways made it cheaper to transport goods from the ports to the interior and back rather than between points in the interior. Thus the railways “increased the relative distances between places in the hinterland, since very often the only connections they now had between themselves passed through the ports. The railway revolution thus turned the third world economies inside out and enormously increased the intensity of dominion of advanced capitalist countries over them.”<sup>10</sup> They helped convert India into a supplier of raw materials and food grain for Europe and its colonies, and open up the country’s market to imported goods. The actual effect of such growth of exchange, in a situation where productive forces and associated purchasing power stagnated, can be glimpsed in the export of, and increased domestic speculation in, foodgrain in the midst of famines:

As argued sarcastically by an administrator from a native state, “...In former famines only disjointed local areas were affected.... Now railways made it possible that we were starved to death as well as our neighbours.” Even an indigenous grain dealer of Calcutta was ready to concede that “...Prices rose throughout India during this famine largely

due to operation of railways. In the previous (1878) famine there was little movement of crops due to good harvests in some parts. In this famine bad harvest is also equally spread." Spread of telegraphs, according to the grain dealer, "...helped merchants in keeping up prices throughout India."<sup>11</sup>

When the new rulers finally made investments in irrigation, they did so only in select pockets, on strictly commercial considerations, and in a *distorting* fashion. Their purpose was to stimulate high-value, intensively cropped, commercial crops in order to increase government revenues. In the United Provinces (U.P.), with the introduction of canal irrigation under British rule, merchants – who, as we noted earlier, had an interest in promoting crops in which they could trade – extended cultivation loans on the condition that the peasants grow sugarcane. The costs of sugarcane cultivation were heavy, and the peasants remained trapped in debt thereafter, often losing their land in the process. Since sugarcane displaced the crops peasants grew for their own consumption, the peasants now had to buy their subsistence needs from the market, and at higher prices (since the crops were now scarcer). Moreover, the pattern of canal development caused environmental damage, rendering large lands infertile.<sup>12</sup> Thus the development of commercialised, 'high-value' agriculture did not result in accumulation within agriculture, but pauperised the poorer peasantry and drained surpluses into the hands of non-agricultural classes.

The process of spread of other cash crops, such as cotton or jute, was linked to a similar pattern of dependence on, and eventual near-bondage to, merchant-moneylenders. While physical coercion was used to impose certain crops such as indigo and poppy on the peasants, in most cases commercialisation was forced upon sections of peasants through the process described above, that is, through *seemingly free exchange*. At times the *forced* nature of this commercialisation showed up in the fact that, to the extent the peasant's position improved (say, when he actually got the benefit of better prices), he would *withdraw* from the market – i.e., reduce the share of output sold.<sup>13</sup>

## Stunted Industrialization

Because of the pauperisation of the peasantry and the small size of the working class and the middle class – largely as a consequence of British rule – the market for manufactured goods remained very restricted. Given the limited market and the absence of comprehensive *tariff protection* similar to that enjoyed by Britain before its Industrial Revolution (and for decades thereafter), investors did not find the Indian home market attractive enough to warrant large investments. Rather, speculation, hoarding, usury, and other such unproductive financial activities (for which the colonial economy provided much scope) proved more attractive.

Later, tariff protection was introduced selectively by the colonial rulers when Britain was in decline as an imperialist power, and it wanted to protect its market in India against encroachment from other imperialist powers. Thus the Indian sugar industry was protected in order to shut out sugar imports from the Dutch colony of Java; this led to sudden growth of the Indian sugar industry, which in turn led to a sharp rise in demand for sugar machinery from Britain. (The big bourgeoisie did not miss the significance of this experience of government support, and in post-1947 India the ability to manipulate governmental levers was critical to the fortunes of various business houses.) By the 1930s multinational corporations (a new phenomenon) were setting up plants in India to take advantage of tariff protection and penetrate the Indian market. These were harbingers of a new phase, in which India would shift from colonial rule by one imperialist country to multilateral dependence on several imperialist countries.

Industrial development was stunted, and yet the size of individual firms was relatively large in relation to the market (a scale dictated by the technology imported from advanced capitalist Britain). Industrialisation was thus, inevitably, lumpy and spread unevenly over the country. Till 1914, industry was concentrated in Bombay and Calcutta (apart from Tata Steel in Jamshedpur). While some industry did come up in Ahmedabad, Delhi, Kanpur and some other places in U.P., Coimbatore,

Madurai and Madras after World War I, growth remained regionally lopsided. "The situation was also markedly dichotomous – reflecting the disjunction between agriculture and industry. The port-enclave manufacturing centres, like Calcutta, were growing fast even as the hinterland agrarian and traditional industry was deteriorating. On the other hand, regions with relatively prosperous agricultural growth like Punjab had no major industrial centres.<sup>14</sup> As late as 1948, the three Presidency-states of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta accounted for 77% of the percentage of industrial workers, 77% of industrial production, 82% of engineering and electrical goods production, and 87% of chemical goods production in the country. The corresponding figures for the minerally rich states of Bihar, Orissa, and M.P. were only 10, 10, 10, and 5%, respectively, "showing how little the 'natural endowments' of the region mattered in this respect".<sup>15</sup>

### **Distorted and Arrested Social Development**

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century the minimum capital required to set up a competitive industrial enterprise was substantial, and was only available to sections endowed with considerable capital of their own and the confidence of the financial community. The big industrial entrepreneurs were almost *exclusively* drawn from a tiny handful of commercial castes/communities – the Gujarati *baniyas*, the Marwaris, the Parsis, the Khattris, the Aggarwals, and the Chettiars prominent among them. (Among the Muslims, too, business was dominated by certain trading castes, but they were weaker, and flourished only after the formation of Pakistan.) The big business communities had their roots, and continuing activities, in finance and trade rather than production, and they maintained this separation even after turning to industry. They refrained from carrying out any technological innovation; the more enterprising among them applied their minds to choosing which technology to import.

The education system the British set up in India cannot be criticised for not educating the masses, as it was not intended to do so; it was designed



to create a class of Indians who would mediate between the colonial rulers and the ruled, as well as facilitate and reduce the expenses of their rule in India. (Macaulay, then a member of the Governor-General's council, made this clear in the famous Minute he prepared for Bentinck in 1835: "I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.") No doubt, as a by-product of this education system, some independent-minded elements got access to European streams of scientific and analytic thought, but this was rare. The university system brought into being a class of professionals and upper white-collar staff which served the needs of colonial rule. Moreover, not only did the entire urban elite and a section of the middle classes learn English, but the Western education system, combined with the fact of British rule, established the intellectual and cultural domination of Europe over India. The urban elite and broader sections under their influence developed a mentality of subservience to all things European, an overpowering taste for European products, a sense of shame about their Indianness and a yearning for approval by the white man.

Secondary education too was shaped by the goal of entering tertiary education, reinforcing the status of English throughout of the educational system and consigning instruction in the native tongue to a second-class status. The real barrier to the fuller development of the numerous Indian languages was not any dominant Indian language, but the supremacy of English, just as the barrier to the development of the economic life of the various national regions was the imperialist-directed pattern of development.

All sorts of reactionary and obscurantist thought, rather than diminishing, spread under the British umbrella. After the revolt of 1857, it was a matter of conscious British policy to ensure communal division: in the words of the 1879 Army Commission, "Next to the grand

counterpoise of a sufficient European force comes the counterpoise of natives against natives.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike in the capitalist countries, the system of electoral politics was not introduced through a long process of democratic and working-class struggle; on the contrary it was introduced by the British rulers as part of their effort to associate elite sections with their rule, and to set competing communal elites on one another. However, the impact of these manoeuvres was not restricted to elite sections, but had terrible repercussions among the masses. It was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century that communal mobilisations and riots among Hindus and Muslims began making a regular appearance, finding their grim climax in the great massacres of Partition.

The caste system, that “decisive impediment to Indian progress and Indian power”, far from being dissolved by the railways and the appearance of modern industry under British rule, survived in a somewhat modified but hardly weakened form. British administration created certain limited opportunities for members of castes lower in the hierarchy, resulting in a scramble among the various castes for these favours. The earlier Brahmin dominance in government posts and social status was challenged to some extent by certain non-Brahmin communities with growing economic and social clout, and important non-Brahmin movements arose in the south. However, while there was a partial reordering of castes within the hierarchy, the institution of *hierarchy* itself was not threatened, and remained particularly oppressive to those at the bottom of the pile. The British resolutely abstained from interfering with the social prohibitions and economic exclusions suffered by the oppressed castes; indeed, as Ambedkar observed in an address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress, August 1930:

Before the British you were in the loathsome condition due to your untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove your untouchability? Before the British you could not draw water from the village. Has the British Government secured you the right to the well? Before the British you could not enter the temple.

Can you enter now? Before the British you were denied entry into the police force. Does the British Government admit you in the force? Before the British you were not allowed to serve in the military. Is that career now open to you? Gentlemen, to none of these questions you can give an affirmative answer. Those who have held so much power over the country for such a long time must have done some good. But there is certainly no fundamental improvement in your position. So far as you are concerned, the British Government has accepted the arrangements as it found them and has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all. Your wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted....<sup>17</sup>

The abundance of land before British rule allowed some caste mobility, yet even under those conditions certain castes were kept landless; with the destruction of native industry and the enormous pressure on the land under colonial rule, there was even less scope for escape from caste oppression. Only an agrarian revolution, with all its political and social implications, would have created scope for a profound churning of the caste order; and such a revolution would have upturned the native classes on whom British rule itself was based.

### **Distinct Class Structure**

Thus British rule created a class structure in India distinct from that of capitalist Britain. Parasitic classes – landlords, traders and usurers – maintained sway over the rural areas. There they found ample scope for fattening on parasitic extractions in landownership, usury and trading rather than on expanding productive forces. Their control over multiple markets – land, labour, credit, output – allowed them to increase extractions beyond the limits possible in any single market (for example, an indebted peasant would be compelled not only to pay interest but to sell his produce or his labour power cheaper to his creditor). The vast majority of producers fell in three groups: landless, very small, and

small, who were not in a position to take advantage of market stimuli to accumulate. Though the middle and rich peasants were able to respond to market stimuli, they were unable to concentrate land in their hands, as small producers clung to their holdings, however uneconomic, as their only defence against destitution in conditions where employment in industry was stagnant.<sup>18</sup>

The big bourgeoisie, composed of big industrial and trading concerns with close ties to foreign capital and feudal forces, prospered under British rule. By contrast, a section of small industrialists grew in numbers, generally restricted to businesses such as cotton gins and presses, rice and oil mills, traditional sugar manufacture, and small powerloom or handloom factories. Some enterprising elements of this class ventured into pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and small engineering workshops. Lacking access to finance, linked too to feudal sections, denied any support from the colonial government, too weak to compete with the monopoly power of the big bourgeoisie, and most importantly hobbled by the meagre markets of poverty-stricken India, they were unable to unleash the necessary ever-expanding circuit of accumulation in industry.

Colonial rule in India also led to the development of an industrial proletariat associated with modern industry, thus creating the basis, as in Europe, for political organisation with the ultimate aim of the abolition of private property. However, far from emerging as the great majority of society, the proletariat in India remained a small island in a sea of peasants and petty self-employed. Several obstacles stood in the way of its developing class consciousness. As industrial employment stagnated and capitalist concentration of landholding failed to materialise, the workers retained strong ties to their villages and to the land; these ties proved useful for the industrial employers, as they could escape paying the worker a level of wages that would provide for security after retirement, or for the upkeep of the worker's family (which would often remain in the village). This set-up allowed for the exploitation of women's labour in reproduction, even more than in capitalist

society.<sup>19</sup> Further, workers tended to retreat to their villages at the times of strikes and mill closures, thus weakening the fight. Finally, the worker's ties to the village imbued him with feudal consciousness, including subservience to social 'superiors' and fatalism.

The recruitment of workers, especially of the most unskilled manual labour, often took place in gangs and through contractors with feudal ties, which also helped keep them in line. (Large numbers of Indian workers were despatched as indentured labour to Assam, Ceylon, Fiji, South Africa, the West Indies, and Iraq, often in conditions of semi-slavery.) A major division emerged between the organised sector workers (which corresponded roughly to the unionised) and the unorganised sector; this division was greatly strengthened in the post-1947 period, and the second section was effectively kept beyond the pale of union organisation. In this environment, it is not surprising that reactionary influences, both caste and communal, retained their grip on workers to a large extent.

Even after the end of British rule, the Indian big bourgeoisie did not exercise exclusive hegemony over the Indian State. First, they served the interests of imperialism in the new configuration: that is, no longer the interests of a single colonial power but of the multilateral domination of the multinational corporations of all the imperialist countries. Secondly, the big bourgeoisie shared hegemony with a variety of feudal forces, who remained (and remain) prominent in the political life of the country, indeed dominating it at the state level. Formally, intermediaries in agriculture (such as the *zamindars*) were abolished, ceilings were placed on landholdings and tenants were protected from eviction, but in fact only trivial amounts of land were distributed, and landlords took evasive measures to perpetuate their hold. True, in the changed situation a greater share of the surplus could remain with the producers, and agriculture recovered to some extent from its long decline under British rule. However, as long as industrial employment grew at best slowly, the mass of the workforce remained trapped in agriculture, and thus subject to semi-feudal exploitation; agriculture remained trapped in the pattern

of surplus extraction and redeployment set by the class structure that emerged under colonialism. Important quantitative changes took place, such as those termed the Green Revolution, but they proved unable to break this mould.

Industry, on the other hand, has grown within the frame of (i) the restricted scale and skewed nature of domestic demand (concentrated at the top), (ii) domination by domestic monopoly business houses drawing on its control of State policy, and (iii) the worldwide domination of monopoly capital. These conditions have *ruled out* the possibility of the Indian bourgeoisie carrying out industrialisation of the type that would generate mass employment.

This sketch brings out the distinct historical process which has shaped the socio-economic formation of India today. The various sets of linkages described in the previous chapter, describing classical capitalism, are found here in a broken, distorted form. This helps us understand the *nature* of the growth taking place today, to which we now turn.

## Notes

- 1 As in the preceding chapter, the argument in this chapter is drawn from several well-known works. Among them (in chronological order) are R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, 1946, Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, 1957, A.K. Bagchi, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, 1972, and *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, 1982, and S.K. Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Its Genesis, Growth and Character*, 1985, though their perspectives that differ in many important respects.
- 2 Irfan Habib, "Potentialities of Capitalist Development in the Economy of Mughal India", *Enquiry*, Winter 1971.
- 3 Angus Maddison, *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run*, 1998, cited in Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, 2001, p. 293; and Mike Davis, *op cit.*, p. 294.
- 4 Krishna Bharadwaj, *op cit.*, p. 90.
- 5 Quoted in Utsa Patnaik, "Commercialization under Colonial Conditions", *The Long Transition: Essays on Political Economy*, 1999, p. 260.

- 6 National Sample Survey (NSS) Report no. 452, "Common Property Resources in India".
- 7 N.K. Chandra, "Monopoly Capital, Private Corporate Sector and the Indian Economy, 1931-76", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, August 1979.
- 8 See S.K. Ghosh, *op cit*, pp 91-113.
- 9 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Preface to the French and German editions (1921).
- 10 Bagchi, 1982, p. 34.
- 11 Sunanda Sen, *Colonies and the Empire, India 1890-1914*, 1992, p. 174.
- 12 Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India, Vol. I: The United Provinces under British Rule, 1860-1900*, 1971.
- 13 Krishna Bharadwaj, "A View on Commercialisation in Indian Agriculture" in *Accumulation, Exchange and Development: Essays on the Indian Economy*, 1994.
- 14 Krishna Bharadwaj, "Regional Differentiation in India: A Note", *EPW*, Annual Number, April 1982.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, p. 16.
- 17 Quoted in R.P. Dutt, *op cit*, pp. 243-244.
- 18 Bharadwaj, "A View on Commercialisation".
- 19 That is, the greater the labour of the wife of a male worker in household activities and child-rearing, the less the capitalist needs to pay the worker. Thus it is ultimately the capitalist who exploits the household labour of the woman. Where the family could be maintained not in an urban setting but in semi-feudal agriculture, the wages paid to the labourer could be even further depressed.

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# 17<sup>th</sup> Century Florence and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Calcutta:

*Anti-feudal bourgeoisie and semi-feudal bhadrалoks*

**Kumar Sarkar**

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A recent short visit to Rome, Florence, Pisa and Venice has been an inspiration to reopen the much-debated historical issues comparing 17<sup>th</sup> Century Italy with 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal.

Ever since historian Jadunath Sarkar (1928) identified the flurry of literary, artistic, social and religious activities in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal as the 'Renaissance' and Amit Sen (Sushovan Sarkar, 1946) provided introductory but comprehensive notes on the same topic, the issue has become widely controversial resulting in an ever-increasing volume of literature on the subject.

*What is presented below is an outline of a hypothesis that needs to be thoroughly researched.*

## **Introduction**

A new type of middle class, which has become known as the 'bhadrалoks' (gentlefolk), was born mostly of Hindu origins during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Bengal. Earlier, Bengal had been de-industrialised by the East India Company. The Permanent Settlement of 1793 created a new type of



Hindu landowning class, who gradually became mostly absentee landlords. As the accumulation of capital from agricultural land and from the remaining mercantile capitalism was becoming increasingly scarce and unavailable for investment in the manufacturing industry due to colonial restrictions, the new capital mostly went into urban and rural ground rent, giving birth to a rentier sub-class encompassing the bulk of the bhadraloks. A large section of the bhadraloks consisted of professional people.

Colonial rule allied itself with local feudalism to keep its hold. The bhadraloks became mostly subservient to the colonial rulers for survival. Thus, we can see that there was no scope for indigenous development of an anti-feudal independent industrial bourgeoisie, like that of Europe. The new middle class, the bhadraloks, were a diverse group of semi-feudal / semi-bourgeois elements.

The developments in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal were not comparable to the anti-feudal movements of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe.

## **Two Basic Issues**

Two issues have obscured a scientific characterization of the specific blend of movements of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal. These are:

(A) What is Renaissance?

(B) Who were the bhadraloks? What was their class-base? And what was their attitude towards imperialism?

(A)

## **Renaissance**

According to some historians, renaissance is purely a cultural concept of historiography, irrespective of any specific socio-economic significance, e.g. classical Graeco-Roman, 12<sup>th</sup> Century Carolingian and Byzantine Palaeologue renaissances.<sup>[1]</sup> Likewise, there was the Bengal renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This solely cultural definition cannot reveal the historic significance attached to the specific episodes of 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe known under the concept of Renaissance.

However, there are others who recognise the unique socio-economic significance of the Renaissance, but nevertheless maintain that the developments of nineteenth century Bengal were comparable to those of the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Century Renaissance of Italy and Europe.

## **Engels on the Renaissance**

The scientific evaluation of the Renaissance came from Engels. He defined it as follows:

“It was the greatest progressive revolution that mankind had so far experienced, a time which called for giants and produced giants – giants in power of thought, passion and character, in universality and learning. The men who founded the modern rule of the bourgeoisie had anything but bourgeois limitations. On the contrary, the adventurous character of the time inspired them to a greater or lesser degree. There was hardly any man of importance then living who had not travelled extensively, who did not speak four or five languages, who did not shine in a number of fields. Leonardo da Vinci was not only a great painter but also a great mathematician, mechanic, and engineer, to whom the most diverse branches of physics are indebted for important discoveries. Albrecht Durer was painter, engraver, sculptor, and architect, and in addition invented a system of fortification embodying many of the ideas that much later were again taken up by Montalembert and the modern German science of fortification. Machiavelli was statesman, historian, poet, and at the same time the first notable military author of modern times. Luther not only cleaned the Augean stable of the Church but also that of the German language; he created modern German prose and composed the text and melody of that triumphal hymn imbued with confidence in victory which became the Marseillaise of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.” (Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, Moscow, 1974, pp. 20–22.)

Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century also had ‘giants’ like Rammohan, Derozio, Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra and Vivekananda, to name only the principal leaders of that time. But they did not lead a ‘great progressive

revolution' i.e. a bourgeois-type revolution befitting their time, as it was in Europe.

(B)

Let us now move on to the second issue. Who were the bhadraloks?

*Identification of the bhadraloks and their objective role in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal is the cardinal issue for the evaluation of that period in history.*

- I. The bhadraloks were a unique product of early colonial Bengal of overwhelmingly Hindu origin, who had been favourably appointed as tax collectors by the Moghul rulers.
- II. From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards Bengal under the East India Company was witnessing continued worsening of indigenous industries. Colonial discrimination led to the demise of salt manufacturing and ship building together with downsizing of traditional cotton and silk textiles. Bengal was rapidly becoming de-industrialised from being the main part of the world's second leading producer, India, to the bottom rank, as the following table shows<sup>[2]</sup>:

**India's share of the world Manufacturing Output, 1750-1938**

<i>Year</i>	<i>1750</i>	<i>1800</i>	<i>1830</i>	<i>1880</i>	<i>1913</i>	<i>1938</i>
<i>Output (%)</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>19.7</i>	<i>17.6</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>2.4</i>

- III. This new class had no opportunity of investing capital in the manufacturing industry; instead they had to invest it in real estate. The new jute industry, engineering, tea plantation and coal mining, which were all growing spectacularly, were in the hands of British colonialists.<sup>[3]</sup>
- IV. Bhadrals were semi-feudal in their class outlook - more feudal than bourgeois. Their mode of existence was in appeasing the colonial masters for survival, sometimes struggling against them for concessions and better governance, reacting with the fear of revolutionary changes threatening their own existence.

V. In the prevailing conditions of the colonial grip in alliance with a parasitic feudalism served by the bhadraloks, the birth of an independent anti-feudal bourgeois class comparable to that of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe was inconceivable.

VI. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century movements did not affect the lower echelons of Bengali society, which consisted of lower caste Hindus as well as the vast majority of the Muslim population, who were peasants. The Muslims gradually became the dominant section of Bengal's population.

Census Year	Muslim Population	Hindu Population
1872 ( <i>first census</i> )	17,609,135	18,100,438
1901	21,947,980	20,150,541
1941	33,371,688	25,801,724

### **Bhadraloks and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe**

19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal was exposed to the Scottish Reformation and Calvinism, which was the background of William Carey (1761-1834) and Rev. Alexander Duff (1806 – 1878), who together with David Hare (1775–1842) founded the modern English-oriented education system in Bengal. Hare was an atheist. David Drummond (1785-1843), a product of the Scottish Reformation, was a rationalist.

It is necessary to quote Engels again:

“In Calvinism, the second great bourgeois upheaval found its doctrine ready cut and dried. This upheaval took place in England. The middle-class of the towns brought it on, and the yeomanry of the country districts fought it out. Curiously enough, in all the three great bourgeois risings, the peasantry furnishes the army that has to do the fighting; and the peasantry is just the class that, the victory once gained, is most surely ruined by the economic consequences of that victory. A hundred years after Cromwell, the yeomanry of England had almost disappeared. Anyhow, had it not been for that yeomanry and for the Plebian element in the towns, the bourgeoisie alone would

never have fought the matter out to the bitter end, and would never have brought Charles I to the scaffold. In order to secure even those conquests of the bourgeoisie that were ripe for gathering at the time, the revolution had to be carried considerably further - exactly as in 1793 in France and 1848 in Germany. This seems, in fact, to be one of the laws of evolution of bourgeois society." (Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific)

Let us have a brief look at the various leaders of the literary, scientific, social and religious movements of nineteenth century Bengal.

### **Rammohan (1772-1833)**

Rammohan Roy was born in a prosperous orthodox Brahmin landowning family. His father acquired rentier interests investing in landed estates following the Permanent Settlement in Bengal (1793). Rammohan bought six taluks (estates) between 1799 and 1810. As a senior official of the East India Company (EIC) he had the responsibility for land assessment for the Permanent Settlement. He later became a 'banyan' money-lender to the EIC.

Rammohan was a great scholar as well as an expert in public administration. He was well versed in several languages including English, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and Greek. He was a voracious reader of the Times, the Edinburgh Review, missionary journals and contemporary European literature.

Rammohan became a foremost reformist champion of women's education and freedom of the press. His successful opposition to the atrocious and inhuman system of immolation of 'Satis' (widows) and later founding of the Bramho Samaj put the Hindu orthodoxy in the dock for a considerable period of time.

However, Rammohan's social reforms did not go beyond the sphere of the upper caste. He considered peasants well protected by the Permanent Settlement and advocated its extension beyond Bengal.

Rammohan came in contact with William Carey in 1796. He was influenced by the French Revolution of 1789 and 1830 and organised a celebration dinner for the latter at the Calcutta Town Hall, which was attended by several hundred people. While in England in 1832, he visited France to have a first hand experience of the post-revolution situation there.

It was Rammohan who estimated that around one-half of all total revenue collected in India was being sent out to England, but he came to the contradictory conclusion that unrestricted settlement of Europeans in India governing under free trade would help ease the economic drain crisis. In 1828, he became Joint Treasurer of the Commercial and Patriotic Association organised by the British indigo planters.

The man who celebrated the victory of the French Revolution of 1830 did not consider his homeland India deserving even of self-government. Rammohan told French botanist Victor Jacquemont:

“India requires many more years of English domination so that she might not have many things to lose when she is reclaiming her political independence.” And, “I gave up my prejudices against them (British people) and became inclined to their favour, feeling persuaded that their rule, though a foreign yoke, would lead more speedily and surely to the amelioration of the native inhabitants.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Rammohan exemplified a typical early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengali elitist bhadralok whose subjective leanings towards bourgeois democracy, under the influence of Scottish Orientalism and the 1830 French revolution, could not grow roots as these were not conformable to the existing material base of the colonial environment, of which he was a part.

### **Derozio (1809-31)**

Henry Derozio was born in a well-to-do business family in Calcutta. His grandfather was a businessman of Portuguese descent and a Protestant. His father was the chief accountant at the well known Messrs James and Scott Company. Derozio's mother was of British parentage. Derozio

attended David Drummond's Dhurramtallah Academy from the age of eight to fourteen, when his father died. Derozio had to leave his studies and join the firm where his father worked in order to maintain the family. He did not like the job and after two years joined his uncle-in-law's firm in Bhagalpore. Later he returned to Calcutta for a better job. At the age of 17, he was appointed Assistant Headmaster in English literature and history at the Hindu College. He was an atheist and had renounced Christianity. He encouraged his students to develop independent rationalist thinking. He was expelled from the college by its Hindu orthodox management under the chairmanship of Radhakanta Deb, who belonged to the comprador Shovabazar Deb family.

Derozio led the radical Academic Association, which regularly met within and outside the Hindu College campus, attracting several hundred people. No doubt, he was highly influenced by his teacher David Drummond (1785-1843) of Scottish Reformation background.

Derozio was a great romantic and rationalist poet.

Derozio welcomed establishment of the Hindu College and wanted to see many of them. But he recognised:

“The most superficial observer must perceive that India is maintained in subjection only by Military Force. Withdraw it, and the boasted opinion of the natives, instead of supporting, would prove the cause of the utter subversion of the empire.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Derozio was a pioneer bourgeois democrat in his ideology with a mercantile background. However, his sphere of involvement was limited to the semi-feudal bhadrалoks. He only lived twenty-two years. His followers were all very well known firebrand intellectuals, ideologically democratic like Derozio, who later became known as the Young Bengals. Though a few of them sometimes expressed their concern for the peasantry, they did not have any contact with them. Some of them even became pro-colonial in their later life.

Derozio was the initiator of a nascent bourgeois democratic movement in Bengal that was nipped in the bud by his premature death.

## **Vidyasagar (1820-1891)**

Ishwar Chandra Bandyopadhyay, Vidyasagar's real name, was born in an orthodox Brahmin family but poverty stricken. At the age of nine, he went to live in Calcutta, where his destitute father had already been staying for some years to earn a living and finally gained the shelter of a well to do benefactor.

Ishwar Chandra proved to be a great scholar and academician. He was rewarded with a number of scholarships, but to support himself and his family he had to take a part-time teaching job. He studied at Calcutta's Sanskrit College for twelve years and qualified in Sanskrit grammar, literature, dialectics (Alankara Shastra), Vedanta, Smruti and astronomy. He received the title Vidyasagar for his academic performance at the Sanskrit College. In the year 1839, Vidyasagar passed his law examination. Two years later, at the age of twenty-one, he joined Fort William College as head of the Sanskrit department. After five years, in 1846, Vidyasagar left it and joined the Sanskrit College as 'Assistant Secretary'. Later he became Assistant Inspector of Schools.

Modern elegant Bengali prose literature is greatly indebted to Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar was an academic educator, writer, translator, publisher, philanthropist and social reformer. His greatest achievements were in the field of education for which he became a household name. He reconstructed the Bengali alphabet and simplified Bengali typography.

In Derozio's tradition, Vidyasagar was a rational secular thinker and was an atheist. He devoted his time in writing and contributing to many radical journals of his time. As a social reformer his main contributions were his tireless efforts towards uplifting the status of women in Bengal. He conducted a courageous and remarkable fight for widow remarriage, confronting the Hindu orthodoxy. Associated with this was also his opposition to the polygamy practised by the Kulin or the top-ranking Brahmins. However, widow remarriage and polygamy were predominantly upper caste issues. The struggle did not lead to other



reforms of women's oppression, though of course in the field of their education Vidyasagar's pioneering contributions were unparalleled.

Since he did not extend the fight against broader social issues, Vidyasagar did not achieve any far-reaching social progress. The Hindu reactionary forces, which were re-grouping themselves under his successors, i.e. Bankim Chandra and later Hindu revivalism as preached by Vivekananda, succeeded in isolating Vidyasagar. This probably accounts for his withdrawal from urban life during his last twenty years. Living afterwards with the indigenous people could have given Vidyasagar a rare opportunity of generating a meaningful social struggle, but presumably it was outside the class limits of the bhadraloks.

### **Bankim Chandra (1838-1894)**

Bankim Chandra Chattopaddhay was born in an orthodox Brahmin family. He was appointed as a deputy collector of revenue like his father. He served the British for almost thirty-two years and eventually became a deputy magistrate. He was awarded the Order of the Indian Empire in 1894.

Bankim Chandra was a writer and journalist. He modernized the prose form of Bengali literature. He is regarded as the father of the Bengali novel. He was the first writer to use the Western form of the novel successfully in an Indian language.

In the first part of his life he was influenced by the first and second French revolutions, contemporary democratic revolutions in Europe and the American civil war. The Pabna peasant uprising of 1873 and the famine in the same year provoked Bankim to come close to agrarian problems. He wrote a series of scathing essays under the title, 'Bengal's Peasantry' (1873), to highlight the misery of the peasants. He recognised that 'Just as surgery is used to remove gangrene, an operation was needed to eliminate a social evil and improve society.' But he did not go further than equality of rights. In his once famous article, Samya (Equality) (1879), he referred to the ideas of Rousseau, Voltaire, John

Stuart Mill, St Simon and Fourier. Referring to “land belongs to everyone” as a seed sown by Rousseau, he recognised “a gigantic tree” “to bear all kinds of new fruit” like socialists, communism and even the ‘International’, but never mentioned Marx by name! However, in the same breath, he opposed those who were against the zamindars, who, according to Bankim, had often performed good deeds.

Understandably, this flirtation with socialism was very short lived. Only a few years later, Bankim returned to his original class base and completely changed his hitherto liberal stance as he openly disclosed his fear of a revolutionary social change. Unashamedly, he advocated that the peasants were being well looked after by zamindars, that most zamindars were helping the peasants. The colonial rule was good for India and the Permanent Settlement was only a mistake! Bankim publicly withdrew his article ‘Samya’ in 1881.

Bankim soon appeared as an energetic reactionary ideologue against the then rising tide of anti-orthodoxy initiated by Derozio and later followed by Vidyasagar. He emerged as the inspirator of sectarian Hindu Nationalism directed against the Muslims. Of his thirteen novels, at least three were directed against the Muslims. He wrote in Bangadarsan (June 1880) opposing Vidyasagar’s campaign for widow remarriage on the pretext that they were becoming obsolete precisely because they were evil. An unashamed supporter of zamindars and apologist of colonialism, his Hindu nationalism has existed within India’s independence movement as a continued central or a parallel force, often in disguise of Indian nationalism. Bankim’s Hindu nationalism became Political Hinduism during the anti-partition movement in Bengal in 1905, which spread all over India like a prairie fire. His Hindu nationalism has continued with rejuvenated new life in the ideology of today’s Hindutva.

### **Vivekananda (1863-1902)**

Narendra Nath Dutta, Vivekananda’s pre-monastic name, was born in an aristocratic Hindu upper caste (Kayastha), but in an unorthodox family.

His grandfather was a Sanskrit and Persian scholar. His father was an attorney at the Calcutta High Court.

In his early youth Narendra joined a Freemasons Lodge and his early beliefs were shaped by Brahma Samaj concepts of formless God and deprecation of idolatry. Once, he even embraced atheism.

Narendra's introduction to Ramakrishna was in the General Assembly Institution, when Professor Hastie mentioned him as the person who experienced "trance" to exemplify the meaning of the word as used in one of Wordsworth's poems (Wikipedia). Narendra's association with Ramkrishna started in November 1881, when he was only 18. After his second day's experience, Narendra considered him as a "monomaniac" and a hypnotist. He could not accept worship of the goddess Kali as a follower of Brahma Samaj. It was Ramkrishna's state of 'Samadhi' that influenced young Narendra very much. There are medical scientists who consider that this so-called Samadhi could actually have been 'temporal lobe epilepsy'.

Following his father's sudden death in 1884, bearing the entire burden of the family, Narendra had to try very hard to find work and often distressfully questioned the existence of God. Eventually, he found great comfort in Ramakrishna, whose populist advocacy of all religious paths leading to the same destiny impressed young Narendra decisively. Narendra became Vivekananda and followed Ramakrishna till his death in 1886.

Vivekananda did not advance the legacy of Derozio and Vidyasagar or even Rammohan, but rather moved in the opposite direction. Travelling all over India for five years from 1888, when he was 25 years old, till 1893, as a Hindu wandering monk, brought him into direct contact with harsh social reality. He passionately reacted to the pathetic state of the lower echelons of Hindu society, but was torn between his rational 'bhadralok' youth base and Ramkrishna's divine theology.

At the age of 35, twenty-eight years after the legislation of the 'Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act' (1856) following Vidyasagar's social campaign

for the same, he was still only skirting the issue. While recognising justly that most of the social reforms being advocated during his time did not touch the “poor masses”, he however reached the opposite pole by virtually rejecting the basic rights of women and widow re-marriage and supporting the society’s “right to dictate whom you shall marry and whom you shall not” because “by the producing of children, you are contributing to, and are responsible for, the future good or evil of the society.” (Modern India<sup>[6]</sup>)

Being confronted with questions from the American audience on the status of women in India in 1900, he glorified Hindu womanhood, subordinating it to motherhood. He upheld the necessity of child marriage for the society (which he had opposed before) and caste divisions despite recognising:

“Then, again, there is caste. Each caste has become, as it were, a separate racial element. If a man lives long enough in India, he will be able to tell from the features what caste a man belongs to. Then, between castes, the manners and customs are different. And all these castes are exclusive; that is to say, they would meet socially, but they would not eat or drink together, nor intermarry. In those things they remain separate. They would meet and be friends to each other, but there it would end.” (1900)<sup>[7]</sup>

And all these issues were presented in the name of a ‘socialistic’ Indian Hindu society!

Three years before his death, in 1899, in his famous and most celebrated article, ‘Modern India’<sup>[6]</sup>, mentioned earlier, written in Bengali, he made it very clear that he was against the abolition of the ‘original caste system’, which he believed had rendered a great service to society! Despite witnessing himself the caste barbarity during his long India tour, he points out,

“From the time of Upanisads down to the present day, nearly all our great teachers have wanted to break through the barriers of caste, i.e. caste in its degenerated state, not the original system.”

Faced with another issue, amidst reformist movements during his time, of intermarriage between different nationalities, Vivekananda could support intra-caste marriage, between their subdivisions, but definitely not with 'alien' religions, presumably referring to Christianity and Islam.

Vivekananda failed the test of history to counter the issue of religious communalism that was so vital for the democratic development of India. In fact, he fostered it by a total negative presentation of the historical role of Islam. Vivekananda wrote:

“The Prophet Mohammed himself was dead against the priestly class in any shape and tried his best for the total destruction of this power by formulating rules and injunctions to that effect....To the Mussulman, the Jews or the Christians are not objects of extreme detestation; they are, at the worst, men of little faith. But not so the Hindu. According to him, the Hindu is idolatrous, the hateful Kafir; hence in this life he deserves to be butchered; and in the next, eternal hell is in store for him.” (Modern India<sup>[6]</sup>)

And, later, he could comfort himself saying:

“Again, it is an undoubted fact that if there had not been the advent of Kabir, Nanak, and Chaitanya in the Mohammedan period, and the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj in our own day, then, by this time, the Mohammedans and the Christians would have far outnumbered the Hindus of the present day in India.” (Modern India<sup>[6]</sup>)

It could not have been unknown to Vivekananda that it was the ideology of human brotherhood of those great personalities that kept the bitterly oppressed lower caste Hindu population at a 'safe distance' from the attractions of Islamic teachings of equality.

MN Roy in his famous article on Islam (1939) explained the specific attitude of the Hindus towards Islam very aptly:

“No civilized people in the world is so ignorant of Islamic history and contemptuous of the Mohammedan religion as the Hindus. Spiritual Imperialism is an outstanding feature of our nationalist ideology.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Vivekananda was the father of this Spiritual Imperialism, which he developed in the process of countering the influence of western democracy. It can be argued that the notion of 'Spiritual Imperialism,' originating from Vivekananda, together with Bankim before him, must bear some responsibility for the sectarian communal attitude of the "average educated Hindu" and its overriding formative role in 'Indian' nationalist ideology that Roy referred to.

Bankim's Political Hinduism received a spiritual boosting in Vivekananda's Hindu revivalism. The two trends together constituted the dominant socio-political ideology of the time, manifested in the first political explosion in the anti-partition movement of Bengal in 1905 - the democratic movement that rocked India but was soon to become, inevitably, a deformed phenomenon for the remainder of its life.

Like Bankim before him, Vivekananda was also influenced by contemporary democratic revolutions and working class struggles in Europe and even called himself a socialist. His stance on many burning issues of the time reflects the Narendra-Vivekananda dichotomy. His writing of 'Modern India' is a crystallisation of his philosophy, an amazing piece of self-contradictory assertions and analyses, often passionately exposing harsh historic reality, sometimes appearing so close to some basic tenets of historical materialism and making prophetic predictions, only to get buried soon after with unexpected end-products, rationalised at best and reactionary at worst. *'Modern India' requires a thorough critical study in the context of the present political situation in India.*

Continuing with his life-long dichotomy, Vivekananda tried his best to reconcile his own version of Sanatan Hinduism with the historical materialist view of human social development. All his energy was diverted to liberating Hinduism from its worst degeneration in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal via revivalism of traditional Hinduism, or rather his imagination of the latter - a glossy or apologetic version of a rotten system.

Vivekananda depicted Roman expansion and imperialism as the Kshatriya in action, the British mercantile aristocracy as a demonstration

of the ascendancy of the Vaisyas, and the American democracy representing the Sudrocracy of the future! In the same vein, he posed British imperialism in India:

“Conquering another country is very bad; foreign domination is also very bad; but sometimes good comes out of evil. British conquest of India is an amazingly novel occurrence. They were a new and strange power. Their flag was the chimney of a factory; their force consisted of commercial ships; their equipment of war was the world’s merchandise... Such a powerful and all-pervasive system of Government had never before taken over the administration in our country. Consequently peace, discipline and rule of law have been established.”<sup>[9]</sup>

So close to unravelling imperialism and so frustrating to obscure it at the end!

In ‘Modern India’ (1899)<sup>[6]</sup> Vivekananda describes the international background of his time (1863-1902):

“But from a careful study of the history of the world, it appears that in conformity to the law of nature the four castes, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra do, in every society, one after another in succession, govern the world.”....

“Again, at all yet, a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class, with their Shudrahood; that is to say, not like that as at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the Shudras of every country, with their inborn Shudra nature and habits — not becoming in essence Vaishya or Kshatriya, but remaining as Shudras — will gain absolute supremacy in every society. The first glow of the dawn of this new power has already begun to break slowly upon the Western world, and the thoughtful are at their wits’ end to reflect upon the final issue of this fresh phenomenon. Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism, and other like sects are the vanguard of the social revolution that is to follow.”

Narendra foresaw a Shudra revolution, but Vivekananda failed to welcome it. Instead, he was apparently concerned by the prospect of such a revolution “by their inborn Shudra nature and habits” — “the thoughtful are at their wits’ end to reflect upon the final issue of this fresh phenomenon”. He took refuge in a strange administrative solution to caste oppression, even describing its cruel hereditary bondage as conducive to social advancement:

“In modern India, no one born of Shudra parents, be he a millionaire or a great Pandit, has ever the right to leave his own society, with the result that the power of his wealth, intellect, or wisdom, remaining confined within his own caste limits, is being employed for the betterment of his own community. This hereditary caste system of India, being thus unable to overstep its own bounds, is slowly but surely conducting to the advancement of the people moving within the same circle. The improvement of the lower classes of India will go on, in this way, so long as India will be under a government dealing with its subjects irrespective of their caste and position”! (Modern India<sup>[6]</sup>)

Fifteen years after Vivekananda’s death, the October Revolution of 1917 shook the world.

We have seen that the episodes of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal are not comparable to those of anti-feudal 17<sup>th</sup> Century Renaissance. The roots of the former can be seen partly in the bourgeois democratic revolutions of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, whose democratic ethos could not generate a direct parallel in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal for reasons outlined above. The democratic bourgeois elements were ill developed, lacked a solid material base and thus were too weak to unite with the peasantry, which could have opposed feudalism and the caste system and challenged imperialism.

Such was Bengal’s (and India’s) bourgeois democratic revolution that never was.



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9. Quoted in ‘Rammohan Roy, Vivekananda and Tagore on British rule’, Romit Bagchi, Internet, 8 February, 2015.

# Women, Mobilize Against All Oppression

*[Statement issued by the Organization for Women's  
Liberation Thought on the occasion of the  
International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019]*

## **The International Women's Day**

March 8<sup>th</sup> is celebrated annually as International Women's Day. Although the UN declared the day as International Women's Day only in 1975, the first Women's Day celebrated in the US on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1909 was associated with the left movement, and has been marked regularly by socialist women since 1911 following the suggestion by the 1910 International Socialist Woman's Conference that a Women's Day be held annually. Thousands of Russian men died and disappeared in the course of WW2 and women who could not bear the loss of their men and the starvation of their children responded strongly. The a strike for "Bread and Peace" launched by 100,000 women textile workers on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1917 marked the beginning of the February Revolution of Russia against the oppressive rule of the Tsar. Following the event, March 8<sup>th</sup> was officially adapted as the International Women's Day, and since the 1917 October Revolution, it was declared the International Women's Day and celebrated in all socialist countries and by the communist movement worldwide.

Various rights that women enjoy today such as maternity leave and off-time for nursing mothers are rights that the Russian Socialist Revolution made possible for us. Yet, women in many countries across the world are still in struggle for a variety of rights.

## **Gender Oppression and Resistance**

In the Hill Country of Sri Lanka, plantation workers, predominantly women, have been campaigning for several months demanding their daily wage should be increased to 1000 rupees. Likewise women in the North and East are on a prolonged campaign for the return of their loved ones who were disappeared as a result of the war.

People of Kepapilavu and Silavaththurai persist in their struggle for the return of the lands that they have lived in for generations. In the District of Puttalam, the people are struggling against the dumping of solid waste from outside the region. In all such struggles, it is the women who have been the relentless fighters.

Even after the Supreme Court of India ruled that women between the ages of ten and fifty years should also be permitted to worship at the Ayyappan Temple in Kerala, reactionary male chauvinist religious fanatics have not only obstructed women who went to worship but also resorted to physical attack on them. Nearly five hundred thousand women of Kerala mobilized in a human chain for their right to worship and won the right. What does this experience demonstrate?

## **Attitude towards Gender Oppression**

Women have to fight to bring into practice even the rights that are lawfully their on paper. Various laws prohibiting violence against women exist only on paper. Several women including Eastern University academic Pothanayaki and nurse Shanthini of the GSM private hospital in Hatton have committed suicide as a result of violence and excesses experienced at home and in their workplaces. Acts of violence against women by family members are seldom recorded even as complaints.

Women are subjected to double burden through having to earn a wage and toil for the family. Capitalist laws take no notice of it. Since talking about it will be a threat to the survival of the capitalist economic system, only demands by the women elite are given prominence in the name of Women's Liberation, while ignoring the demands of toiling women.

In reality, the liberation of toiling women is linked to social liberation. There are no women that do not toil. Some receive a wage for their toil, and their toil has monetary value. Nobody takes notice of the life span and health wasting away in toiling for the family for which there is no monetary value.

In the 1990s the housewives of Venezuela went on strike based on the demand that their toil for the family should be treated as social labour and that they should be entitled to a pension and won.

There is no time limit such as an eight hour working day. Nobody is concerned about women working ceaselessly without protest from the time they wake up in the morning until they go to sleep.

In workplaces women are exploited by being denied a wage equal to those for men. They are also subjected to suffering in many ways including sexist insult and sexual excess. Those who voice protest against these are threatened through individual victimization. Consequently a lid is placed on various acts of violence so that they are not publicised.

The War in Sri Lanka has resulted in more than 80,000 families headed by women. Women who head these families undergo various forms of suffering owing to poverty and lack of permanent employment. This is taken advantage of by micro-loan organizations to further exploit women. Excesses of micro-loan organizations has pushed several women to commit suicide.

## **A Call to Working Women**

There are very few instances of legal redress violence against women. All the problems that have been resolved have been as a result of courageous and stubborn struggles by women.

The key to our liberation comprises women becoming an organization, and seeking to find solutions through sharing their experiences and sorrows within their organization. Rosa Luxemburg said: "Those who do not move do not notice their chains". It is only when our feet move

towards liberation that we will recognize the chains of captivity that bind us. When there is such recognition, it will become a basic necessity for us women to mobilize ourselves as an organization to direct us correctly. As long as women are kept apart as individual islands that subject them to oppression, liberation will only be a daydream.

Following marriage, many women suffer emotional stress for lack of female friends with whom they can share their feelings. It is painful to be unable to express one's feelings openly. Women should dare to overcome this situation. They should get organized to identify violence against them by the family, society and state, and mobilize to be rid of them through struggle.

The Organization for Women's Liberation Thought calls upon you to get organized and struggle against all forms of violence directed against women. The poet Bharathithaasan posed the question, "Hey parrot, is your freedom pepper or ginger to secure for free?" Thus we cannot receive our freedom for nothing. All rights that have been won thus far were won for us by some who dared to struggle. We should carry forward a liberation struggle for ourselves and the generation to follow.

**Let us carry forward organized struggles!**

**Let us open the gates for freedom!**

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Women's Organizations affiliated to the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party marked the International Women's Day with public meetings and special events. The Organization for Women's Liberation Thought and Karainagar Social Emancipation Society held their International Women's Day meeting in the premises of the Dhesiya Kalai Ilakkiyap Peravai.

The Organization for Women's Liberation Thought organized an International Women's Day meeting in Hatton.

# The Counter Terrorism Act Could Crush Organised Workers

*Text by Shiran Illanperuma  
for the Mass Movement for Social Justice*

The Counter Terrorism Bill presented to Parliament by Minister of Foreign Affairs Tilak Marapana on 9 October is being sold to the public as a lesser evil, but the Bill's implication for workers and trade unions is a severely under-discussed concern.

The Counter Terrorism Act (CTA) is meant to be a replacement of, and improvement on, the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which was enacted in 1978. The PTA has a gruesome history and has been widely criticized by the labour movement and the Tamil community, for the way in which it has facilitated abductions, detention without charge, torture, and racial profiling.

As a standalone piece of legislation, aspects of CTA are indeed better than its predecessor the PTA – especially the fact that confessions made to police under custody are no longer admissible in court. However, the tyranny of the CTA is best explained when examined not as a break from the PTA, but as a sequel to another piece of repressive legislation from the same era – the Essential Public Services Act of 1979.

## **Essential Public Services Act**

The Essential Public Services Act (EPS) gives the President the power to publish a gazette declaring virtually any service provided by public sector workers as “essential to the life of the community”.

Under the Act, workers associated with a declared 'essential service' who refuse to show up to work, refuse to perform at work, or refuse to perform their work within a 'reasonable time' can be imprisoned between 2-5 years, be stripped of their property, and have their names removed from any official registry applicable to their profession.

Formulated at a time of high inflation, rising prices of essential commodities, and a Government policy of privatizing state-owned assets, this Act was clearly intended to be used as a weapon to discipline organized workers. It was first and most famously deployed during the general strike of July 1980, after which over 40,000 workers lost their jobs.

More recently, the Act was deployed in July 2017 when fuel supply was declared an essential service, and the Army was sent in to undermine a strike by Ceylon Petroleum Corporation workers. Later, in December 2017, railways were declared an essential service in response to a strike by Railway Department workers.

### **Essential Services in the CTA**

Some experts have already pointed out that the 'acts' and 'intentions' used to define the offense of terrorism in the CTA Bill are overly broad and therefore liable to be abused by governments.

The clauses most noteworthy for workers and trade unions are the 'intentions' listed in sections 3(1) (b) and (c):

3(1)(b) wrongfully or unlawfully compelling the Government of Sri Lanka, or any other government, or an international organization, to do or to abstain from doing any act;

3(1) (c) preventing any such Government from functioning;

These are especially alarming when combined with the 'acts' listed in sections 3(2) (d) and (h):

3(2) (d) causing serious obstruction or damage to essential services or supplies;

3(2) (h) causing obstruction or damage to, or interference with any critical infrastructure or logistic facility associated with any essential service or supply;

An act which ‘obstructs’ essential services and their related ‘critical infrastructure’, carried out with the intention to ‘compel’ the Government ‘to do or abstain from doing any act’, can very easily be interpreted to include a range of popular democratic activity, ranging from workers’ strikes to peaceful protests.

For the first time in Sri Lanka, the above clauses also bring the language of ‘essential services’ into the legal scheme and discourse on terrorism. Such a move could categorize organized workers as ‘terrorists’.

### **Proscription Orders in the CTA**

The final nail in the coffin for organized workers is section 81(1) of the Bill, which is buried under the section titled Miscellaneous Orders:

81(1) Notwithstanding anything in any other written law where the Minister has reasonable grounds to believe that any organization is engaged in any act amounting to an offence under this Act, or is acting in a manner prejudicial to the national security of Sri Lanka or any other country, he may by order published in the Gazette, (hereinafter referred to as “Proscription Order”) proscribe such organization in terms of the provisions of this Act.

These ‘proscription orders’, when viewed in the context of the ambiguity of the definition of the offence of ‘terrorism’, could be used to proscribe and cripple the activity of trade unions and other workers’ organizations.

More worrying are latter clauses which specify that the Minister in charge can make proscription orders based on the recommendation of the Inspector General of Police or “a request made by the Government of any foreign country to the Government of Sri Lanka”, effectively undermining national sovereignty.



## **Repeal PTA! Withdraw CTA!**

It is easy to see how the CTA and EPS could be used in tandem to crush dissent. The State needs only to first use the EPS to declare an 'essential service', and second use the CTA to proscribe workers and unions for obstructing such services. The CTA is therefore 'EPS plus' from the point of view of workers and trade unions.

If the CTA is allowed to pass, public sector workers – who remain organized in key sectors of the economy such as railways, ports, healthcare and education – could be liable not just to the penalties outlined in the EPS but also those in the CTA. These penalties include fines of up to one million rupees and prison sentences ranging from 15-20 years to life depending on the severity of the offence.

From roughly 1971 to 2009, the Sri Lankan State was faced with existential threats in the forms of armed militants in both the north and south. While this does not justify the crimes committed in the name of national security, militant attacks on civilians provided the state with enough reasoning to pass and maintain anti-terror legislation.

In the post-war era, the state faces no such existential threat. Organized crime may exist but this can be adequately dealt with under the existing legal regime. In a context of increasing cost of living and attempts at privatizing or restructuring state-owned assets, it is reasonable to assume that the most likely source of instability anticipated by the state is from organized workers.

Sri Lankans should not be fooled by the stamp of approval given to the CTA by certain political parties, NGOs, and international actors who have colluded in its drafting. The CTA is not the closing of a chapter of state violence, but the opening of a new one.

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# **‘Reconciliation through Economic Development’: Budget 2019’s Hollow Prescription for North and East**

*Comment by the Mass Movement for Social Justice*

A significant focus of the 2019 Budget is ‘Reconciliation through Economic Development’. The section dedicated to it is rife with avenues of debt relief for communities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and simultaneously injects money into Government-run reconciliation initiatives. This article is an attempt to analyse these allocations, assessing their practical impact for populations most affected by the conflict, and how they factor into the Government’s long-standing promises for ‘reconciliation’.

As Sri Lanka closes in on 10 years since the end of the armed conflict, it is necessary to question why affected populations continue to struggle with neither sustainable economic support nor meaningful measures towards reconciliation from a Government that has repeatedly promised them both.

## **Micro Finance, Debt Cancellation and Tax Concessions**

The focal point of ‘Reconciliation through Economic Development’ in the Budget is the extension of Government-run micro financing to the north and east. This is done through the acceleration of the Enterprise Sri Lanka (ESL) scheme and with corresponding debt write-offs (which the Government began in 2018).

The criteria for these write-offs, however, are prohibitive and leave untouched those worst affected by micro-finance debt, especially single working mothers who are the heads of their households – the Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) for 2016 puts the number of women-headed households in the north and east collectively at nearly 180,000.

The Central Bank's minimum limit to qualify for a debt write-off is Rs. 100,000. A large number of indebted individuals, however, have taken out far smaller loans later to pay off their earlier, larger ones and thus would not be able to access this relief. Similarly, ESL bars those who have outstanding debts to other finance companies, meaning that individuals with loan amounts from non-Government entities that do not qualify for the initial write offs would be barred from seeking loans through this process as well.

As such, these measures leave those most reeling from the microfinance crisis, such as the single working mothers who are the heads of their households, and who are indebted multiple times over to predatory loan companies from taking out numerous smaller loans to pay off existing larger loans, locked in their predicament. The Budget instead most benefits middle to upper middle-class individuals who have a single line of credit (for larger scale entrepreneurial ventures) and are not indebted in multiple places.

On the extreme end of the Budget's benefits to the least vulnerable is the tax concession bestowed to investors of up to \$ 3 million in depreciable assets, which, at 200% for investments in the Northern Province, is double the 100% concession for the other Provinces. This is essentially a tax write-off with an equal amount as a bonus on top, clearly aimed at wealthy individuals and finance companies, not the ordinary citizens worst affected by the conflict. While this budget has been characterised as a budget of 'hand-outs', it can be seen more specifically as one of hand-outs for the least vulnerable.

The budget also begins a process of folding in the formal transitional justice mechanisms into the Government microfinance regime. It

commendably allows the Office of Missing Persons to provide families of missing persons with a monthly allowance until the Office for Reparations begins functioning. These families, however, are also to be given preferential access to the ESL scheme.

This signals that the Government's primary solution of 'economic empowerment' to those worst affected by the conflict is loan-powered entrepreneurial schemes. It also paints a picture of what a future reparations programme under this government would look like – the thrust of reparations is likely to resemble a doubling down on micro finance and debt concessions.

### **Job Creation**

Beyond half-baked financial schemes, the budget provides very little in the way of actual job creation, through for instance industrial or agricultural production investment in the north and east. There is a miniscule Rs. 200 million allocation to scale up toddy bottling and jaggery production through cooperatives. For comparison, more funds have been allocated to develop playgrounds and the National Art Gallery (Rs. 300 million each). Importantly, the budget also does not address the ban on toddy tapping on all trees except kithul that the Government itself imposed in 2018.

The only other job creation initiative in this part of the budget is a proposal to scale up producer cooperatives to "urgently create jobs" in the rural economy. Alarming, however, this budget item has no monetary allocation attached. The only actual monetary allocation for cooperative societies here pertains solely to debt relief.

### **The Palmyrah Fund and Peace Dreaming**

The Government lumps together some of the most pressing social needs in the north and east – such as psychosocial support and addiction counselling – into the 'Palmyrah Fund'. While it has a large Rs. 5 billion allocation over two years, there is scant detail on its entire framework. For instance, it is to be administered through the Treasury across

Government Agents in, ambiguously, 'war affected areas'; and there is no clarification on whether it will fund existing programmes or new ones; how the disbursements will be monitored; or how their impact will be analysed.

This is all the more concerning given that no national government policies exist on a number of the areas that fall within the fund. Further evidence of the magical thinking behind the Fund is the encouragement for 'well-wishers' and 'philanthropists' to sustain it as well as, ambitiously, 'the diaspora'.

Wishful thinking along these lines is repeated in the budget's allocations to the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) – for its schools and arts and culture programs – and to the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM) – for its communication and awareness programmes on reconciliation. While both ONUR and SCRM have been in operation for a number of years now, little assessment has been done on the impact of their work. ONUR's liberal peace building initiatives take a finger painting and smiles approach to ethnic division but do not undertake the vital structural reforms necessary to rebuke Sinhala ethno-nationalism and its proponents.

Similarly, SCRM has been virtually absent in print, televisual and online media on crucial and ongoing debates on transitional justice mechanisms and Sri Lanka's international commitments. Both institutions leave untouched actors who could be focal points for long term change, such as religious leaders, media networks and education policy makers. It is unclear then, what pouring more money into them could substantively achieve.

Coupled with the seeming lack of political will to meaningfully tackle the root issues of ethnic conflict, the allocation of large sums of state funds to essentially cosmetic acts of 'reconciliation' shows how far away the concept is from being realised meaningfully.

## Conclusion

Across all these areas, the Budget offers very little of substance or hope to the north and east's people. It offers micro financed entrepreneurialism as the solution to all the regions' economic troubles, and goes on to leave their most vulnerable citizens, brutalised by the war and now debt, out of even that. Correspondingly, it does little to create jobs and provide stable incomes. Finally, it band-aids the region's numerous social problems, and the country's own deep divisions, with poorly thought out or dismally functioning measures. 10 years on from the end of the war, the Government in sum offers little more than a disinterested shrug to the north and east's people who deserve so much more.

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**Section of the Participants, May Day 2019, Jaffna**

*Press Release*

*14<sup>th</sup> May 2019*

## **May Day Declaration of the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party**

### **Proposed May Day Slogans:**

**Denounce the cruel bombings!**

**Prohibit all religious fundamentalist initiatives!**

**People's problems face danger of obscuration!**

**The country faces ruin through ruling class rivalries!**

**We need alternative politics and mass struggle!**

The Party was in the middle of preparations for processions and rallies on May Day, the day of struggle of the international working class, based on the theme "Towards Working People's Power" in Putthur in Jaffna, Nuwara Eliya in the Hill Country and Vavuniya in the Vanni.

The Party had undertaken the task of explaining to the people on this May Day the causes of the economic crises that severely affect the people. The Party was also to give importance to explaining the bitter power struggle among the ruling elite forces and exposing the role of imperialist and regional hegemonic forces in that tussle. Besides, the Party was also to give primacy to urge the importance of an alternative political line for the people and the path of mass struggle to carry it forward.

Amid this, the country faced a great tragedy on 21.4.2018 when many ordinary people were killed and injured in suicide bomb attacks on Christian Churches in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa and in luxury hotels in Colombo. The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party while strongly denouncing these terrorist attacks on the public pays its heartfelt homage to the deceased and deep sympathy to the injured.

These cruel attacks has shocked and frightened the people of the country. The government, unable to use prior information provided by intelligence

sources to take the necessary security measures, as a result of political rivalry and indifferent attitude in matters concerning the people, has after endangering the safety of the people declared a State of Emergency and is conducting search operations.

This is not the first time that the country experienced bomb explosions and killing of people *en masse*. It is said that a Muslim religious fundamentalist group was responsible for the recent attacks. It is reported that its members joined and received training from the IS created in the Middle East under the guidance of the US, Saudi Arabia and other countries before returning to the country. Although they are Sri Lankan Muslims they do not represent the vast majority of the Muslim community.

We have come across religious fundamentalists and perpetrators of violence coming from among members of other faiths. Imperialists use them for their purposes.

During the past 40 years in which the country experienced globalization and neo-colonial economic initiatives, imperialism has from time to time induced acts of terrorism. It activated ethnic, linguistic and religious fundamentalism to deflect the attention of the people so that they do not pay attention to its pushing of liberalization and privatization under globalization. The cruel bomb attacks comprise the most recent manifestation of the pattern.

It is understood that information was communicated by Indian intelligence to Sri Lankan officials. The question arises in the minds of the people as to why was no appropriate action taken. Suspicion arises in the mind of the people whether the surplus of funds in the hands of the terrorists has bought over layers of power. Besides that, the focus of rival sections of the ruling class being on who is to come to power next rather than on the future of the country and its people has been a benefit for the forces of destruction.

President Sirisena, Prime Minister Wickremasinghe and Leader of the opposition Mahinda Rajapaksa are devoting their whole attention to the matter of who the next President would be and who will capture power next. They are nourishing Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism for that purpose. Their respective targets are their elitist upper class power to rule.



In this context of Sri Lanka, the terrorist bomb explosions have paved the way for US and European imperialists and Indian regional hegemonists to penetrate Sri Lanka.

This has enhanced opportunity for the exploitation of resources and political dominance by foreign forces. It also offers opportunity for the US to use Sri Lanka's location for its military interests and for India to deepen its footprint in the North-East of the country.

Besides, the bomb explosion will have a big impact on the country's economy. The already high volume of import will further increase. Meanwhile imports will decline and the tourism sector on which the government depends strongly is set to face a massive decline.

This climate will enable the government to dodge the handful of decisions announced in the budget that are favourable to the people. Wage increases may be refused for state and private sector employees. Taxes on essential goods could be raised thereby leading to increased prices.

At the same time, the introduction of the State of Emergency will lead to further denial of democracy and direct repression. The Counter Terrorism Act, which is opposed by all pro-people groups, will easily pass through Parliament. Thus prospects seem strong for the expansion of state terrorism

It is ten years since the end of the war, and the rulers who have thus far taken no constructive steps to resolve the national question should not use the occasion to sidestep the problems of the Muslim people, who comprise a minority nationality of the country. We should recognize that the impact of chauvinist anti-Muslim violence in the past has driven some of the extremists to the fringes of frustration.

Thus under the present neo-colonial, neoliberal framework more and more problems are bound to come up. Economic problems and the national question need to be found at least a minimum solution at appropriate level. The line of mass struggle should be carried forward for the purpose.

The rallying call of the Party on this May Day is that in the journey towards the power of the working people, **let the entire toiling masses**

**mobilize to establish true democracy and economic justice in the interest of the people.**

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

[Note: The Party held indoor meetings in Jaffna and in Vavuniya to mark May Day 2019. Owing to sorrowful circumstances in Nuwara Eliya, the meeting in Nuwara Eliya was cancelled and the local Party conducted a leafleting campaign stating the position of the Party.]

*Press Release*

*5<sup>th</sup> May 2019*

## **Denounce Arrest of Jaffna University Student Leaders**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP, issued the following statement on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019 on behalf of the Politburo regarding the arrest of student leaders of the University of Jaffna.

On Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May, the President and the Secretary of University of Jaffna Students Union were arrested by members of the Sri Lankan Army during a search operation in the University and they have been placed in remand custody by the Police under the PTA. The Party strongly condemns the arrest as well as the detention.

These acts, while taking revenge on the students for their activities in the past also have the intention of threatening them against future activities.

The action of the Army and the Police raises the question whether the oppressive measures against the Tamil youth and the Tamil people are being reactivated under the State of Emergency.

To arrest and detain anyone for the possession of the images of the leader of the LTTE and other members is a petty reason with revenge an intimidation as basic motives. The Party, while urging that all should denounce this action of the government's security forces, demands the earliest release of the students.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

*Press Release*

*23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019*

## **Oppose the Counter Terrorism Act**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the NDMLP, issued the following statement on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 on behalf of the Politburo.

All of us should jointly raise our voice against the Counter Terrorism Act (CTA) which is intended to be enacted against all sections of the people who speak up for their just rights and demands based on democratic principles and to intimidate those who cherish democracy. The government led by Ranil Wickremasinghe while declaring aloud that it is protecting democracy and rule of law is eager to pass in Parliament the CTA which is a brutally repressive law. The proposed law allows the police and the armed forces sufficient discretionary powers to interpret its clauses in broad terms as they will. It has provisions to punish any individual who takes to the street to put forward his just demands and demand justice with a prison sentence of up to twenty years. Hence the entire toiling masses and oppressed nationalities should unite in opposition to the Act and urge its withdrawal.

In 1979 the JR Jayewardene government introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act against the Tamil youth. During the past forty years the Tamil people who struggled for the rights denied to them were repressed under that Act. Even today more than a hundred political prisoners are in detention for many years using that Act. It is in this situation that the UNP government led by Ranil Wickremasinghe is intent on passing the CTA in Parliament.

What will the stand be of the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties that raise their hand in support of the government regarding this repressive legislation? Will the TNA support this barbaric legislation? Will the Muslim and Hill Country Tamil political parties turn their back on their people and betray them? Hence, it is important that the workers and other toiling masses, students and youth, and the Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people who struggle for their just rights should unite to demand that the CTA should not be presented in Parliament.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

*Press Release*

*14<sup>th</sup> January 2019*

## **The Plight of the Country and the Path for Salvation**

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party, in a statement issued on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019 on behalf of the Politburo of the Party on the position of the Party on the recent political trends noted that the political and economic conditions in the country are worsening as never before. The working population is saddled with exploitation of labour and the burdens of the economic crisis, while oppression is on the rise. The upper classes and their representatives who comprise the ruling groups gather wealth through high wages, brokerage, corruption and other improper means. With their help the resources of the country are given away to foreign and local companies.

The labour of the toiling masses is being cruelly exploited and wages to match labour is denied. A recent example is that a pittance of 20 rupee wage increase was granted to plantation workers who demanded a daily basic wage of Rs 1000. The Employers Federation and the government stood by each other and the treacherous trade unions signed in consent to the 20 rupee wage increase at the Temple trees in front of the Prime Minister. The whole country and the workers saw it. It exposed the depth of the class disparity and the degree of social inequality. It is an expression of the sharp contradiction between the toiling classes and the propertied classes of Sri Lanka.

This contradiction has enabled the burdening of the people with economic crises, tax burdens and foreign loans to the tune of 53 billion US Dollars. Increased taxes on all essential goods are the cause of their rise in prices. As a result, the cost of living rises as the standard of living falls. Poverty and the number living below the poverty line are rising. Unemployment is on the rise. Agriculture and small industry are failing.

It is four years since Ranil Wickremasinghe pointed to the service industry sector and claimed that Sri Lanka will be made a middle income country. He also boasted that there will be jobs for a million people. The very people who declared that they will get rid of corruption facilitated massive corruption.

Rather than punish the big fraudsters of the past, they protected them. We see that Sri Lanka is today a land of corruption.

The smuggling and consumption of narcotics is rising by the day. Media report that the consumption of narcotics has penetrated the Parliament and the Presidential Palace. Those in power and those in the opposition are totally indifferent.

In this situation the country is to face three important elections this year. In the politics of the South there is bitter rivalry among the three big-capitalist chauvinist parties led by the President, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about who will be the next to be in power. But none of them takes a stand supportive of the vast majority of the toiling masses in the context of the country's economic problem which is the basic problem of the country. Likewise, none of them is in favour of resolving the national question, the main problem facing the country, in a way that will provide justice for the oppressed nationalities. It should not be forgotten that all of them were party to the cruel 30-years long war.

It was also these power hungry groups that, during the past forty years, implemented without question the disastrous policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization followed by neoliberal economics, and supported and embraced imperialist and hegemonic forces. The chauvinist leaders who aggravated the national question to become a war also belong to this category. Whichever of them comes to power none of the problems referred to above will be resolved in ways that benefit the people.

Meanwhile there are intense moves by interest groups in the North-East and in the Hill Country to use narrow nationalism and ethno-religious identity to gather votes to retain their respective territories of political dominance.

The forces of political hegemony are particular that that the traditional upper caste, upper class elite leadership is secured. While they battle for primacy among themselves, there are cautious that representatives of toiling masses do not enter the scene. The deep desire of the Tamil narrow nationalist leadership is to sustain the politics of elitist hegemony through the caste-based social ideology.

In this context, the Party urges that the entire toiling masses should understand the correct and far-sighted political ideology through both

knowledge and practice and arrive at the decision that they shall determine their own political fate.

The government, while cheating the people who oppose the Prevention of Terrorism Act on its pledge to abandon it, is seeking to replace it with an even harsher Counter Terrorism Act. The Party very strongly denounces and opposes the CTA as it did the PTA from the very outset.

The Party has continued its support for the struggle of the people of Kepapilavu who for the past two years been struggling for the recovery of their traditional lands, homes and work places and the mass struggles demanding justice for those who have been disappeared. Likewise, The Party supports the people's struggle in Silavaththurai in Mannar for the recovery of their land from the armed forces.

The Party has supported and taken part in the mass struggle in Puttalam that has gone on for more than 100 days to defend the environment and oppose government plans to dump garbage on a massive scale in Aruvakkadu in Puttalam. It continues to stand by the people of Puttalam and their struggle.

There is need to develop a new policy and take it among the toiling masses. It is the need of the day to expose the reactionary nature of the traditional ruling elite and hegemonic political leadership and attempts to deceive the people based on their slavish faith in foreign forces. The people should be mobilized along the mass line in the political journey towards power for the toiling masses. Such mobilization led by a united collective leadership should carry forward mass struggles that will not sell out to any foreign force or narrow Tamil nationalist elite leadership in exile or NGOs.

A broad and firm united front should be built for the purpose. The electoral platform should only be a part of such mass struggle. Genuine forces for the toiling masses that do not have the opportunistic policy of misleading the people for sake of electoral success, should unite for the purpose of enabling the people to take an alternative political path. The Party is prepared to work with dedication for that purpose.

The Party, while it firmly undertakes its programmes, emphasizes advancing in unity with other left, democratic and progressive organizations.

SK Senthivel  
General Secretary, NDMLP

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President Trump lost no time to bypass the President and call the Prime Minister on 22<sup>nd</sup> April to offer support to fight terrorism. Notably, the US has been active since 2015 to ensure its military presence in Sri Lanka. In August 2019 the US offered a US\$39 million grant for maritime security as part of its Bay of Bengal initiative. China responded with financial aid to reinforce the defence sector and assistance with technological expertise and military hardware. European and sub-continental powers too seek to cash in on the looming crisis. None of these will help the Country.

Narrow nationalism has failed every nationality and the whole country. We should note that all anti-state upsurges of violence in the country since independence was due to loss of faith in the political leadership.

No parliamentary political party addresses people's grievances. Each looks for issues that would help gather votes at elections. Even there, the intention is to promote politics of hatred so as to remain politically afloat.

Anti-Muslim feelings were a part of Sinhala nationalism. Its growth into Sinhala Buddhism denies Muslims a place in society. Tamil nationalism, having failed to unite all Tamil-speaking nationalities under its umbrella is adopting an anti-Muslim line based on electoral arithmetic. Muslim political parties have hardly represented the interests of the Muslims as a nationality, and Muslims have paid a heavy price for the failure of the leadership to attend to the crisis brewing within community.

The Muslim community needs to recover from a setback, which is being exploited by all narrow nationalists including Muslim leaders, to isolate them further. It is wrong to expect better. It was the left, until opportunism weakened it to near extinction in electoral politics that united members of all nationalities to defend the rights of the people.

The genuine left supported by progressive and democratic forces should re-emerge to unite the people of all nationalities and other identities to mobilize them as a strong mass movement with to charter an alternative political path for liberation and social justice for the toiling masses and oppressed nationalities.

# The Dictators

Pablo Neruda

*An odor has remained among the sugarcane:  
a mixture of blood and body, a penetrating  
petal that brings nausea.*

*Between the coconut palms the graves are full  
of ruined bones, of speechless death-rattles.*

*The delicate dictator is talking  
with top hats, gold braid, and collars.*

*The tiny palace gleams like a watch  
and the rapid laughs with gloves on  
cross the corridors at times  
and join the dead voices*

*and the blue mouths freshly buried.*

*The weeping cannot be seen, like a plant  
whose seeds fall endlessly on the earth,  
whose large blind leaves grow even without light.*

*Hatred has grown scale on scale,  
blow on blow, in the ghastly water of the swamp,  
with a snout full of ooze and silence.*

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