

De-Brahmanise our cultures to dig the grave of Brahmanist Hindu Fascism!

April 2021

Comrades,

Lal Salams to the great martyrs of Indian and world revolutions!! Lal Salams to all of you!!

Virasam is unique among cultural organisations in India with its unbroken record of upholding the banners of revolutionary culture. It did this, and continues to do it, in the face of extreme suppression. Over the past 51 years of its existence it has been banned, its leaders have been imprisoned, its publications have been prohibited and some of its leaders and activists have even been murdered by the reactionary state. Yet, it persists in boldly serving the cause of the people, unhesitating in declaring its adherence to proletarian ideology, i.e. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM) and the inspiration it has taken from the Naxalbari armed agrarian rebellion that laid the foundations of the Maoist movement in India.

To be invited to address a meet of an organisation with such illustrious revolutionary credentials is indeed a great honour. I thank the leadership of Virasam for having given me this opportunity. I also thank them for the initiative taken to translate and publish my collection of essays, 'Critiquing Brahmanism', in Telugu.

The organisers have requested me to speak about Brahmanic Hindu fascism. Rather than delivering a theoretical critique, I am supposed to focus on the practical tasks that need to be shouldered in the fight against it. Given the dangerous times we are passing through, when every day is witness to one or the other inhuman crime or suppression of democratic rights by the fascist hordes of the Sangh Parivar, this focus is quite appropriate. Yet, I still must take some time for a little bit of theory. That is needed to ground the practical tasks in their proper setting, to give them context.

In his address delivered last year, comrade Pani made the following observation:

"Criticising blind belief and scolding the RSS for its gimmicks and tactics to attract the masses is not sufficient. A traditional notion underpinning a rigid concept of life dominates in society. Sangh Parivar upholds this very notion in order to protect the advantages of the bourgeoisie section."

This grasps the crux of the matter. It exposes the game plan of the RSS, while simultaneously indicating the complexity of the tasks we face in confronting it.

Generally speaking, the traditional notion mentioned here is nothing other than the so-called 'common sense' view of life and society critiqued by Gramsci. Gramsci pointed out how this notion is actually an internalisation of ruling class hegemony. He explained the role it plays in generating and sustaining the hegemonic consensus moulded by the ruling class. It is employed to ensure the docility of the masses as 'law abiding citizens'. This hegemonic consensus is an ideological, political, socio-cultural, psychological construct. These are its principal modes of expression. Yet, its boundaries are always determined and enforced by the brute force of the state. In the normal func-

tioning of bourgeois democracy this violence is veiled. It is presented as an exceptional step enforced by exceptional conditions; by a situation where the so-called 'rule of law' is upset. This is the norm of bourgeois democracy. Fascism subverts this notion. The exceptional is now made out as the common place. Employing all means of propaganda, fascism projects a society threatened by the 'others', internal and external enemies. This threat is even actualised through manufactured events, including staged acts of terror. These then become the justification for continuous, open, state violence and the suppression of democratic rights. Not just state violence, the violence of fascist mobs against the 'others' too is legitimised as the new normal of social existence. The 'rigid concept of life' is made explicit as unbending norms of social behaviour and political life. All diversities get branded as defilement of an assumed 'national ideal'. All dissent is stamped as treachery.

As a form of bourgeois rule, the modern ruling classes of the oppressed countries quite often internalise elements of the fascist ideology. It is blended with the autocratic, 'rule by edict' system of rule, commonly seen in the past under feudal regimes all over the world. Imperialist countries too witnessed aspects of 'rule by edict' system of feudal polity under fascist regimes like those of Hitler and Mussolini. 'Rule by edict' replaced bourgeois democracy's 'rule of law' and 'formal equality'. But there is a qualitative difference between the two. This stems from persisting semi-feudal socio-economic and cultural relations seen in the Third world. As a result, even when forms of bourgeois rule like the parliamentary system exist, they are inherently flawed. The seamless makeover from modern forms of bourgeoisie governance to feudal autocratic ones is a permanent feature in these type of countries. However, it manifests differently. In the urban centres, and particularly for the middle classes and upper classes, 'the rule of law' is the norm, mostly. But in the rural areas, and especially for those at the bottommost levels of society, law is given by the local oppressors. They are ably assisted by modern instruments of 'lawful government', like the police and local bodies like the panchayats. More often than not, their raw violence with all of its reactionary inhumaneness, is a permanent presence. It usually becomes the determining factor.

Even then, the switch over from a formal parliamentary system with constitutionally assured rights to the blatant suppression of democratic rights stands out as a distinct event. Nowadays, it inevitably summons up broad mass resistance. This is a reflection of the growth of democratic awareness among the masses. It is an outcome of their own struggles as well as the awareness they have gained through the wider global flow of information. The ruling classes are well aware of this. Therefore they consciously prepare the political, cultural grounds for the formal realisation of their planned fascist takeover. By formal realisation I mean the adoption of fascist rule as a legitimate, constitutionally sanctioned, form of governance. This inevitably includes the formal suspension of all democratic rights, rights of the workers and even those of the ruling class political opposition. That is where the country is being pushed to by the RSS through the Modi regime. But it is yet to come. Therefore, we must necessarily distinguish between the trend and the moment. Strong elements of fascist rule are increasingly present. But the situation is still not like what it was under the Emergency of 1975-'77 period.

In the case of our country, there is another particularity. This relates to the fact that the present move to fascism is closely bound up with an exercise to restructure the hegemonic consensus of the Indian ruling classes as a whole. It represents a further step in the ruling classes' project to tackle and overcome the long-standing legitimacy crisis they have been facing for decades. Under the Sangh Parivar dispensation it has acquired a distinct hue and doubly venomous content. This makes

it appropriate to name it Brahmanist Hindu fascism. But Brahmanism is by no means restricted to the Sangh Parivar. To make an accurate analysis of this fascism, it must be done in a broader context.

The aggressive Brahmanist stance advocated by the RSS and other Hinduvadi forces had existed parallel to the Gandhi-Nehru ideological theme from the beginning itself. It never gained traction among the ruling classes. Yet it was never completely excluded. This aggressive Brahmanist stance has moved out from the margins. It now enjoys the dominant position in the hegemonic consensus of the ruling classes. This movement has been the most significant development in the Indian polity during the past few decades. It can be properly understood only if it's viewed in the light of the legitimacy crisis of the Indian state. It must be situated within the direction taken by the recasting of the ruling classes' hegemonic consensus. Otherwise one will remain trapped in the superficiality of parliamentary politics.

Brahmanism has always been at the core of the Indian ruling classes' ideological make up, that is of both the feudal class and the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie. It was a key ingredient during the emergence, coalescence and alliance forging of these classes during the British period, as ruling classes in the making/waiting. Yet this was not the Brahmanism of the Middle Ages, of classical caste-feudalism. Complying with the pressures and influences of colonial modernity, it was recast, remoulded. Moreover, throughout this period, in keeping with the changing demands to be addressed and pressures from below, its articulation and stance have been modified. With the arrival of M. K. Gandhi, the stress was on Brahmanism's capacity to retain and extend its domination through accommodating and assimilating the 'other'. The Brahmanism favoured by them during this period was implicit. It was one of moderation, infused with prominent aspects of modernity's political symbols.

This hegemonic consensus started to come under severe stress from the 1960s onwards. The reality of imperialist dependence and the hollowness of the 'socialist, secular, democratic' claims of the rulers, became more and more exposed. Their state's legitimacy was increasingly being challenged by various sections of the struggling masses and by national movements. The Naxalbari armed peasant rebellion shook up the whole country. Under the Indira Gandhi regime, a mix of populism coupled with fascist rule was tried out to regain ground and restore the hegemonic consensus. When that failed, an ideological remoulding raising the need to revise hitherto sanctioned views on caste-based reservation, secularism and other elements of the old consensus was promoted. The state-controlled, public sector-led, economic model began to be dismantled. The semblance of self-reliance made way for deeper penetration of TNCs. All of this would take a leap with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the wholesale promotion of the globalisation agenda in the 1990s.

The recasting of the hegemonic consensus was accompanied by a conscious attempt to bind the Savarna Hindu castes into an all-India compact as a core social base of the state. Over the years, the undertones of the new hegemonic consensus being shaped up became more and more apparent as an explicit Brahmanism, packaged as resurgent Hinduism. All sections of the ruling classes, their political representatives across the whole spectrum from right to left, have endorsed and promoted it. They differed among themselves (and still do) on the limits of its aggressiveness and the modes of its articulation.

The Sangh Parivar stands at an extreme in the explicit Brahmanism commonly endorsed by the ruling classes. However, it would be wrong to identify this as an 'exclusionist' position as opposed to some 'inclusiveness' favoured by others like the Congress. Brahmanism thrives on the graded assimilation of the 'other'. It excludes the 'other' from an equal status precisely by allowing such graded space to it. It privileges itself by what may be termed as an 'exclusionist inclusion'. There is therefore nothing new or unusual in the sermons of RSS leaders on being inclusive, even while their fascist minions go around lynching Muslims and Dalits.

The RSS is trying its best to draw the Dalit, intermediary castes and Adivasis into its folds. An elite has emerged within the oppressed castes. They are getting Brahmanised in direct proportion to the growth of their exploitative interests. On their own, they have been 'sanitising' their struggling pasts and leaders to suit them to their current interests and supposedly improved social status. Hence, there is much that is complementary between the dynamics governing these elites and the RSS' appropriation strategy. Any attempt to counter the RSS' tactics with exclusively caste-based alliances thus inevitably runs into an inherent obstacle.

The task is to confront and undermine the ruling classes hegemonic consensus being forged with explicit, aggressive, Brahmanism at its core. That cannot be fulfilled by seeking refuge in the benign Brahmanism of the Gandhi-Nehru type. The liberalism it displayed, the democracy it professed, was superficial. It avoided the basic issues of democratisation in our context, even those of a bourgeois nature. The people's stream, with its roots going all the way back to the anti-Brahmanist Bhakti movements, must be made the basis for any meaningful struggle against the Brahmanist fascist agenda of the RSS and its cohorts. However, a mere recall of those values and teachings will not suffice.

All of those movements had emerged from, and responded to, then existing conditions. They cannot be simply stretched out to suit our times. The material conditions that have given rise to Brahmanist Hindu fascism within the recasting of the ruling classes' hegemonic consensus are a complex ensemble. Not just the interests of the ruling classes, those of contemporary imperialism too are enmeshed in it. Moreover, class division is very much present and growing among the Savarnas too. The concerns of all oppressed sections, including those from the Savarnas, should be addressed, while drawing on the people's traditions of anti-Brahmanist struggles. This cannot be done through caste, religious community alliances, no matter how representative they are. It cannot be done through the parliamentary system. What is needed are grass roots movements. Movements that address class, caste, gender, ethnic, religious minority, nationality, regional and environmental issues need to be promoted. A broad, radical democratic platform and a counter-consensus must be given shape to through these movements. This is what is needed to build a powerful, consistent struggle against the RSS and the fascist cohorts within the broader, radical, perspective of confronting the ruling classes.

Such is the broad framework, context. The tasks in the cultural front have to be situated within this. This poses two tasks. They are interconnected yet distinct. One of them calls for challenging and exposing the hegemonic consensus of the ruling classes, as comprehensively as possible. The other demands the articulation and propagation of a counter-hegemonic consensus, firmly rooted in the democratic traditions of our people. Evidently, among the two, the latter is decisive. An effective challenge to the hegemonic consensus of the ruling classes must necessarily

be informed by it. But then, what exactly is meant by 'democratic traditions'? Which traditions, whose traditions, are we speaking about?

Democracy, in the modern sense, came to our land through colonial modernity. As such, it was never free from this pedigree. We must therefore take a critical look at this modernity. It was not identical to the one that emerged in Western European countries through their transition to capitalism. This much is usually admitted. Some have now started terming it as 'Indian modernity'. They desperately hope that the qualifier 'Indian' would let them get away from having to account for the obnoxious persistence of caste-feudal values and relations. But that really doesn't solve anything. By their argument, 'Indian' must stand in as an omnibus term for all the pre-modern features seen in their 'modernity'. We might then very well say that this modernity is one where the modern cohabits at ease with the pre-modern. But that was the crux of the formulation 'colonial modernity'. Re-dubbing it as 'Indian' only serves to confuse the issue and takes a step back. What is needed is a deeper probing of colonial modernity. Is this merely a matter of a modernity that is incomplete? A modernisation process that couldn't be taken to its capitalist conclusion, because it took place under colonial conditions? No, this is not a matter of being incomplete. Rather, incompleteness is inherent to it. It is an inseparable aspect of this modernity. This is rooted in the specific characteristics of bureaucrat capitalism, the distinct type of capitalism engendered and nurtured by imperialism in the oppressed nations.

Imperialism did indeed transform caste-feudalism. But it was not interested in destroying it. It engendered bureaucrat capitalism, a specific type of capitalism. It was indissolubly linked to caste-feudalism. Intertwining with imperialism and feudalism, bureaucrat capitalism serves both of them as well as the traditional type of rich peasants. In other words colonial modernisation had a dual, contradictory role. Bureaucrat capitalism continuously transformed various features of caste-feudalism and ushered in the new. Yet, simultaneously, it regenerated, resurrected, significant aspects of that old. Transformation through bureaucrat capitalism will never be complete. Bureaucratic capital indulges in transformation as well as consolidation/stabilisation only to suit its comprador interests. Hence both the processes will contain distorted features. This is the essential characteristic of colonial modernity. So long as the country continues to be under imperialist oppression, so long as bureaucrat capitalism remains operative, this dialectic of transformation/resurrection will persist. Hence we see it under neocolonialism also.

All the old social movements which emerged under colonial modernity were afflicted by this duality. They tried to seize the opportunities provided by colonial modernisation. But they also internalised the limits imposed by that very social process. Within this we must distinguish between two broad streams, which may be broadly termed as the Savarna and Avarna streams. The former includes all those considered to be within the varna frame, from Brahmin to Shudra castes like the Nair, Reddy, Patel, Maratha and so on. The latter encompasses all those outside it. Presently that would mean the OBC and Dalit castes. Let me clarify that the terms used to indicate these streams, Savarna and Avarna, are related to their content, not the birth origins of the protagonists.

The Savarna stream also contributed to democratisation. But the oppressor status of the Savarnas did not demand anything more than a reform of rituals, relations and institutions, including family, that hampered the traditional rich and emerging middle class from availing of the new opportunities offered by colonial transformation. Beyond that, caste was not a burden but a

useful social relation for their advance. On the contrary, the Avarna stream could not but challenge the caste order itself. Any gain in class status would become of social value only through this. I have often tried to demonstrate this distinction through an example from Keralam's past. Alummoottil Channaar, coming from an Avarna caste, was the highest tax payer in the native kingdom of Thiruvithamkoor. He was able to buy a car and employ a Nair (Savarna) as his driver. Yet, when passing a temple he was forced to get down and take a walking detour, to avoid causing pollution. Meanwhile, his Savarna driver, un-polluting, could drive right across and wait for his employer.

The Savarna stream's restricted vision of democratisation may be illustrated through the following example from Malayalam literature. O. Chandu Menon's famous novel *Indulekha* is considered a classic and even as one of the initiators of Malayalaee Renaissance. The plot revolves around the love of a couple of Nair youngsters and the attempt made by a Namboodiri (Brahmin) to assert his caste privileges in order to make the girl his concubine. Ultimately love wins. That plot certainly was a challenge to the existing caste order and its social norms. The individual and her/his right to choose a partner stand opposed to caste privilege. Yet, this democratic posture still stood well within then existing caste norms, within Brahmanist norms. The protagonists of the novel also happened to be betrothed by relation according to Nair customs. In other words, we have both the breaking and reassertion of casteist norms. The difference is that the assertion comes from the Nair's side, traditionally a Shudra caste. It thus reflects the upward movement of this caste, initiated in pre-colonial times and further advanced under colonial conditions.

Let us note the implications of the differentiated access and response we saw in these instances. The Savarna stream of democratisation could present its reforms as a matter of individual and class demands against caste. But the Avarna stream could not but raise caste demands to satisfy similar needs. It had to first settle the matter of its caste exclusion. Equality of opportunity meant something different in this case. It had to be gained and legitimised as a caste. Thus, the Avarna stream was forced to articulate its demands through the historically outmoded category of caste. It seemed to be stuck in the old rut. But, in fact, in our context, it was really addressing a task of genuine democratisation. Unlike this, the Savarna stream remained limited to reforms within the traditional caste order. The democratisation it strove for was superficial. Yet it could articulate its needs through the language of modernity. Apart from removing the obstacles of orthodoxy it had no quarrel with caste or Brahmanic rituals. Once that was done, the casteist values and practices that persisted in the Savarnas' social and private lives, could be 'disappeared'. They could enjoy the privileges of being Savarna, while presenting themselves as individuals, standing above or beyond caste. Thus the Savarna stream could appear as the standard bearer of modernity even while it continued to nurture a reformed Brahmanism.

I have given examples from Keralam. But I am sure you will find similar instances in all the nationalities and cultural regions of India where caste-feudalism existed. There is the striking case of the ending of Sati being trumpeted as a momentous episode in 'Indian Renaissance'. How could something involving only a tiny section of so-called upper caste women, that too from only a part of the Northern region, be considered as representative of that whole sex in the sub-continent? Moreover, the ending of Sati was accompanied with a making of the 'modern' Savarna women with new notions of propriety. This was then generalised as the model for 'Indian' women. In the

process, the relatively liberal moral spaces enjoyed by Avarna, and even Shudra, women were eroded. So how exactly does this qualify as Renaissance?

What we see here is an inversion. It was generated by the interaction of the modern, brought by colonialism, with existent social relations. Through this inversion, the sustenance of the traditional through its reform appeared as modern. Meanwhile, in the case of Avarna articulation, necessarily done in caste terms, the progressive appeared as outmoded. It concealed the real nature of social relations shaped up under colonialism. This false consciousness had tremendous influence in all aspects of society, particularly in the ideological realm. This remains true even today.

To be truly radical in our critique we must challenge and upset it. In this regard, the distinction made here between the Avarna and Savarna streams of democratisation is of extreme importance. Whether it be sociological studies or cultural critiques, we must make it an essential part of our analysis. One of the major errors committed by the revisionist theoreticians of the united CPI and CPM/CPI was their failure to grasp this vital division. In Keralam, this was seen in EMS' extolling of Vallathol (Savarna Nair) as a 'national' poet because he supported the anti-British struggle and also wrote about workers and the ending of untouchability. Vallathol was actually writing of untouchability in a society where Avarna stalwarts like Narayana Guru, Ayyankali and Poykayil Yohannan had already made the annihilation of caste a practical task. Sahodaran Ayyappan had already written poems lauding the October revolution. Yet for EMS the Savarna conception of the 'national', which claimed to stand above caste and class was more determining. The anti-Brahmanic democratisation manifested in the Avarna stream, essential for any genuine national movement in our context, was secondary in his view.

This is not to deny the role of the Savarna stream in our democratisation process. It too has contributed to this process at the level of theory, social reform, political mobilisation and organisation. This has to be admitted. After all, upholding individual love or opposing child marriages does indeed contain the element of modernity. What has to be challenged is its claim to be the standard of modernity. What has to be exposed is its pretence of being above caste. What has to be intensely and incessantly critiqued is the refurbished Brahmanism it promotes as 'national'.

Let me now go back to that quote given in the beginning: "A traditional notion underpinning a rigid concept of life dominates in society. Sangh Parivar upholds this very notion..." Earlier, I spoke about how this is the 'common sense' view prevailing in society. To be more specific, in our context, this is contemporary Brahmanism. This permeates all realms and aspects of social and private life. We must have absolute clarity on this. Brahmanism is not something existing outside us, an external entity. It is very much part of our lives, our upbringing, our social habits, language. Brahmanism gains and exercises domination by assimilating the 'others'. It assimilates by placing them at some lower rung of its graded universe. It is therefore able to anchor itself within the 'others', to be the hegemon, even while concealing its presence in the 'others'. What does this mean for culture?

We surely recognise the relation of revolutionary culture to the progressive cultural streams of earlier periods. But can we mark our continuity and rupture from them, can we concretise this relation, without critically examining how progressive they really were? Did they break with Brahmanism? And how much? Were they part of the Savarna or Avarna streams? How did they relate to the anti-Brahmanic traditions of the past? Our national cultures as we know them today, the

Malayalee, Telugu, Bengali and other cultures, are closely bound up with colonial modernity and the Brahmanism refurbished under colonial conditions. But how exactly was this manifested? How was it worked out, for instance, through modern modes like formal education and the print media? For example, how and why did the seemingly progressive and scientific approach of formalising the grammar of our languages end up with heavy doses of Sanskritisation? These endeavours literally expelled the truly national vocabulary of these languages and alienated them from the masses.

Earlier there was the language of the elite, Sanskrit or Persian, and then that of the various peoples. Even before the advent of colonialism, a Savarna standardisation of the national languages had been going on. And that inevitably meant greater doses of Sanskrit. Under colonial modernity this took a big leap. Through the so-called Renaissances, the languages of the people have themselves been appropriated and divided against themselves. So now we have two Malayalams. One of the people, quite pithy and grounded. The other of the new elite, supposedly civilised and thoroughly Savarna, with Sanskrit as the appointed source and arbiter. Thus, in coining new words while translating, the average Malayalee intellectual turns to Sanskrit rather than Tamil, which is actually closer to it. The usual result is a word unintelligible to the great majority of readers. Something that can only be deciphered with the help of a dictionary. I have no idea about the vicissitudes Telugu had to suffer. But in the case of Marathi, the little that I read quite clearly revealed how that language was Sanskritised. It has gone to such an extent that quite a large number of words with Prakrit roots, even those used by a *littérateur* as modern as Pu La Deshpande, have no place in a so-called standard Marathi dictionary! Interestingly, I was rescued from this predicament by my prison barrack neighbour, a Dalit poor peasant. For him those words were commonplace, very much part of his village milieu. The language still lives. And revolutionary culture faces the task of grounding itself in it. We must de-Sanskritise our languages. This is also a process of de-Brahmanising our cultures.

From the little that I know, the founder leaders of Virasam and successive generations of its activists have broken the moulds of mainstream culture and vigorously promoted that of the people. Quite probably, what I just spoke about, giving the specific example of language, may well be a rehashing of things already spoken of among yourselves. Yet, I would still request you to revise everything in the light of the challenges we face today. There is first of all the task of undertaking a critical review, keeping in mind the particularities of colonial modernity and the two streams of democratisation that came up. This would necessitate a re-examination of what has passed for long as the Renaissance periods of the nationalities and of the country as a whole. This should necessarily proceed by viewing the matter in its multiple dimensions of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and so on.

In this respect, I believe that the most fruitful method to follow is that of approaching this through specific, concrete, instances of national cultures (or proto-national ones). The problem with analysing or critiquing this in terms of an 'Indian' culture or society is that it becomes very abstract. At times it could even be misleading. For instance, the lovers seen in Chandu Menon's novel are related. The heroine is the niece of the hero's father. In the Nair's matrilineal kinship, this was perfectly acceptable. But many non-Malayalee communities would surely see it as incestuous, perhaps as immoral as the Namboodiri's quest to make her his concubine. The caste order was quite region specific, more or less according to nationalities. Culture too had this imprint. And it still has it. The broad sub-continental or country-level context has certainly informed and influenced these

cultures. It continues to do so and in greater degree. This must surely be factored in. But not as THE overarching, 'Margi' culture. This Brahmanic notion considers all national, regional cultures as 'Desi'. In its view they are deviations, derivations, even distortions of the grand Brahmanical narrative given by the Margi. Yet, the roots of these cultures, the specific contours seen in them, their distinct motion and issues thrown up are national, not Indian or sub-continental. Democratisation has to be carried out primarily at this level. Brahmanism can best be tackled with counter-values in this domain. The new democratic culture can be readily and directly communicated through this medium.

It is all the more important to lay stress on this today. The Sangh Parivar has been consistently promoting a distinct brand of North Indian Vaishnavite rituals and beliefs in its effort to enforce a standardised Indian identity bound up with its Hinduvad. This is very much part of its Brahmanic Hindu fascist package. It aims at depreciating and even eliminating the national, democratic cultural values and identities of the people. It thus seeks to disarm them in the face of the fascist onslaught. We must not forget that the Bhakti movements, the momentous cultural awakening that swept across the sub-continent, challenging Brahmanism and promoting counter-cultures, were invariably expressed in the peoples' tongues and in their idioms.

In recent years quite a few critical studies on the so-called Renaissance and colonial modernity have appeared. They have succeeded in bringing out many unknown or unseen facets. But the synthesis is missing. Let me explain what I mean by synthesis. The acts of submersing those facets was simultaneously the engendering of a generalised, standardised patriarchal Savarna image. That was deemed to be THE 'national' culture. Quite often, it is precisely this engendering that is missed in these critical studies. The trees are brought out quite vividly. And one can understand the woods being faded out in order to realise this. But it's another matter when they are simply removed and the individual trees are all that remain. The totality is missed. Most crucially, the interests served by the main-streaming which submerged all these distinct identities is left unsaid. I believe this happens because these critical studies mostly take their methodological inspiration from various trends of postist thinking that deny totality. There is also the matter that the great majority of intellectuals simply fail to acknowledge our continuing semi-colonial, semi-feudal situation. Some may grudgingly accept some presence of feudalism. Those who recognise our neo-colonial status are indeed rare. The intellectuals, academicians, thus lose the framework which would serve to assemble the disparate elements into a coherent whole. However, that should not lead us to dismiss them summarily. If anything, the wealth of details they have dug out is in itself a valuable addition to the people's knowledge. Besides that, the methodologies they adopt offer new insights and hence that too demands critical engagement.

The matter of synthesis immediately brings up the question of the approach we must adopt in this task. Mao had correctly pointed it out by calling on us to "make the foreign serve national needs, make the old serve the new.' In the context of the topic under discussion, what is involved in making the old serve the new? I will remind you of something said earlier. While the Avarna stream addressed the basic issues involved in democratisation in our context, it too had internalised the limits imposed by colonial modernisation. Most notably it failed to place the tasks like caste annihilation it had taken up, within the context of imperialist oppression, its nexus with caste-feudalism and the emergence of bureaucrat capitalism. Evidently, we cannot simply pick up and continue from where they left off. Critical analysis and ingestion of the positive is called for here.

Won't this also apply to the traditional art forms, the songs and other artistic creations of the oppressed? They were expressions of their suffering, of their hatred towards the oppressors and visions of a just life. As such they remain popular among the masses and continue to inspire. But a question remains. Can revolutionary culture be satisfied with updating them with new content? Didn't the historical limitations of the past weigh in on those forms that had been created then, just as much as it was reflected in their content? Doesn't the new democratic content, distinguished by the leading role of the proletariat, demand new forms? Don't the new times demand new beats? Mao's wise words give us guidance in addressing these tasks. The people need the new. Their new. And it will be theirs only when it is brought forth in organic relation to their past, the old.

As noted earlier, Brahmanism's unique method of establishing its domination is that of assimilation. We must grasp this properly. It has major implications. Monotheistic religions like the Semitic ones or Buddhism, can't leave space for the 'other' within their theologies. Their claim to represent godly truth is anchored in their belief to be the sole truth. Contrary to this Brahmanism seemingly acknowledges the 'many truths'. A little digging will show that it too ultimately claims to be the sole truth. But, even then, the formal acceptance of 'many truths' gave it a lot of flexibility. It was able to assimilate the belief systems, rituals and deities of tribal communities through this. Thus we see numerous tribal deities, customs and rituals made part of the Brahmanic belief systems in subordinate positions. This makes its ideological binding stronger.

However, there is also another side to this. The 'exclusion by inclusion' practised by Brahmanism forces it to accede some space to non-Brahmanic customs and values. They thus continue to have a living presence among various sections of the people. What does this mean? Living, organic, elements or strands of counter-culture, counter-values, with long standing, deep, roots are already present among the people. They certainly vary. Some are quite democratic, pro-women and progressive. Some are less so or mixed up. But on the whole they form a valuable, favourable, source for the generation, propagation and sustenance of counter-hegemony. Whether it be egalitarian community building, gender equality or environmental awareness, they provide ingredients which can be woven into powerful anti-Brahmanic cultural assaults. We must consciously and consistently tap it.

The democratic urge, the quest for just values and social norms, is there in every pore of our society. Today it is even more powerful than the past, precisely because of the heightened awareness of the people. Unleashing it in all possible manners, in each and every aspect of social, cultural life is the most effective way to build the counter-hegemony against Brahmanic Hindu fascism and imperialism. The shouldering of this task calls for bringing out the multifaceted potential of revolutionary culture in all of its vibrant hues. We must keep in mind that we will be mainly addressing a wholly new generation. Confounding all dreary complaints about the a-political character of the youth, they have been there, they are there, out on the streets, all over the country. We saw that during the anti-CAA struggle. We see it now in the farmer's agitation. What is most significant is the outburst of creativity. Their interventions are vibrant. They are bold. They are uncompromising in their opposition to the powers that be. New technology, media, the internet, everything is put to use. The foreign and national, the old and the new, are drawn upon to effortlessly express their thoughts and feelings with a high degree of artistic quality. The future prospects of successful cultural resistance and push back of Brahmanic Hindu fascism surely

depends quite crucially on the success of the organised forces of revolutionary culture linking up with the protest culture of the youth.

In this task of linking up, revolutionary culture needs to come up with its creative best. It must draw on its proletarian quality of 'uniting the many, to defeat the few'. The more we sharpen our weapons of criticism, mercilessly attacking all the oppressive casteist and patriarchal constructs embedded in all aspects of society, the better will be the prospects of doing this. This is the age of smartphones and the net, of the social media and mimes, of short films and podcasts. No doubt, they are already being used in greater or lesser degree. But it seems that this still depends on individual initiatives and is often amateurish. We need to be not only 'Red'. We must be 'Expert' also. Keeping politics in command, technology can surely be mastered. I have heard that the comrades of CNM build temporary sound-proof recording studios deep in the jungles using leaves and straw. The quality this assures is readily seen in the high degree of professionalism of their output. If they can do that, all the while facing up to repeated enemy attacks, we can certainly do much more, better and wider. The reach of artistic creations, of the visual and spoken art, is now the whole world. If we consciously bring it to the notice of even a hundred, it will often be picked up and shared in the thousands. Obviously, that 'picking up' will depend very much on their critical content and artistic form in tune with contemporary sensibilities and tastes of the youth's protest culture.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to an inherent characteristic of Brahmanism. It is extremely divisive. This is not just about what it does in society as a whole. It is about the divisions it always carries along with it internally, its intrinsic sectarian nature. There never was a Brahmin caste. Nor is there such a thing now. As for the Savarnas, that is a very broad category made up of hundreds of distinct castes. All of them have their own identities. Their comprador elites have all along contested with each other to gain prominence, at the country level and particularly within the nationalities where they are mostly located socially, culturally and economically. All of this increases, the more aggressive Brahmanism becomes. Declarations of caste supremacy that were earlier frowned upon are now made openly. Contestations for supremacy get stepped up. In short, the Brahmanist version of fascism cannot but be intrinsically divided against itself. Of course, I'm not suggesting that it is a push over. That it doesn't have real teeth. No. What I want to highlight here is the inherent weakness of this anti-people, anti-national force. It can be confronted and defeated. Its very logic, dynamic, can be turned against itself. Challenging the unitary identity it insists on with the actually existing manifold identities, undermining its singular narrative by bringing out and embellishing the democratic content of the many narrations of beliefs and mythologies thriving among the people, demolishing its pretensions of patriotism with the truth of its sell-out of the country, above all, presenting and promoting the vision of a society where liberty, democracy and equality can truly flourish and create the grounds for future leaps – such are the tasks before revolutionary cultural activists.

Once again I thank the leadership of Virasam for having given me this opportunity. Looking forward to your critical comments, let me take leave.

LAL SALAM.

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