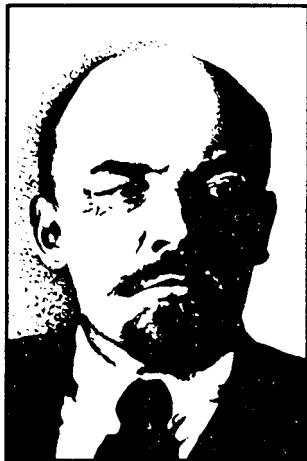




Born : May 5, 1818



Born: April 22, 1870

# Marxism - Leninism

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## Our Current Problems

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A.B.BARDHAN

Communist Party of India Publication

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# PREFACE

This booklet is an attempt at restating some of our fundamental ideological positions as a communist party.

The Trissur Conference of the Party, and its last National Council meeting have called for an ideological campaign in memory of the birthdays of Marx and Lenin.

But of course, this is not a task for just a fortnight, from April 22 to May 5. It is a sustained and continuous task for the party.

Unfortunately there has been neglect. Moreover, recent events have given a series of severe jolts, leaving many ideologically confused and disoriented.

There is no claim to originality in what is written here. It is a restatement of what is known, but has to be restated under present circumstances, for the benefit of cadres, party ranks, and also sections of people who believe in socialism as our future. Enough damage has been done by the bourgeois media to the cause. There has to be a fight back.

There are a few matters however, such as the effect of the STR on the class struggle, the effect of the new policies of government, the new manifestations of imperialist offensive, the role of class and caste differentiation in our society, their impact on each other, the combination of the class struggle with the struggle of the oppressed castes etc., which have been discussed here, hopefully from a Marxist point of view.

If this booklet is of any use in the discussion, its purpose would be served. I look forward to criticisms—no matter how sharp, and also to suggestions.

Delhi, April 17, 1994

A.B.Bardhan

# I

## **Marxism-Leninism : Only Scientific theory of Social Transformation**

**Karl Marx** was born on 5 May, 1818. Along with his life-long friend and collaborator, **Frederich Engels** (1820-1895), he evolved a new revolutionary scientific theory which armed the working class and other sections of the toiling and oppressed people for working out their emancipation, and for revolutionary transformation of the world they live in.

Their great cause was further continued by **V.L.Lenin** born on April 22, 1870, who developed Marx's theory during the phase of imperialism, and by his practical revolutionary activities led the **October Revolution** (November 7, 1917) in Russia to victory. He illumined the path of national liberation for the oppressed colonial people, and forged the bond of solidarity between the struggle of the working people for socialism and the struggles of the enslaved peoples for their liberation.

The revolutionary scientific theory which has come to be associated with their names is what we call **Marxism-Leninism**.

It is this ideology which gripped the minds of millions in all countries during the course of a century, and roused hope and faith in the socialist and communist future of mankind.

There is no denying that this hope and faith suffered a severe jolt with the collapse of socialism the Soviet Union and the former East European countries. Imperialists and bourgeois propagandists everywhere crowed that 'Marxism is dead', that 'Socialism has no future' that 'Capitalism has triumphed' and the free market holds the future in its hands. A few even talked of the 'end of ideology' and the 'end of history'. There were some who lost heart, and whose faith in the victory of their cause was rudely shaken.

Disoriented by the errors and distortions that were committed in the building of socialism in the former Soviet Union and some other socialist countries, they started talking of 'deideologisation', of liberating first one sphere, then another from the 'grip of ideology', till finally, the party and the working masses were disarmed, and thrown in disarray.

As we approach April 22 and May 5 this year,— a fortnight of ideological revival and renewal in the spirit of the teachings of the great founders whose birthdays we celebrate, we ask ourselves the question: Is there any other scientific theory, any ideology that can take the place of Marxism-Leninism for guiding our activities, if we wish to end the present order characterised by economic exploitation, political subjugation and social oppression? Is there any other consistent theory which tells the oppressed the way to end the evils of poverty and disease, illiteracy and ignorance, corruption and unemployment, and bring in its place a socialist order which is more just and humane?

## II

### **Need of Ideology : Unity of Theory and Practice**

For the toiling masses, and for a party which claims to work for their emancipation, absence of ideology or an ideological vacuum can only mean total surrender to and enslavement by the ideology of the ruling class, which the mass media of today working under the control of the imperialist and the local bourgeoisie has made all-powerful and all-pervading. There can be no real and practical victory without an ideological victory.

“Without revolutionary theory there will be no revolutionary practice”, Marx had said. And this is as true today, as it was then.

‘Theoryless practicalism’, while all the time mouthing demagogic and high-sounding phrases about the welfare of the lower and weaker sections and about social justice, may dazzle people’s minds for sometime, and even yield momentary results. But it cannot usher in a new social order, for neither the goal is clear, nor the path leading to that goal and the revolutionary forces which will work for it. It is like ‘floating with the current’ not knowing where it will carry us.

In life, an individual or a party must be both realistic and practical, with both feet firmly planted on the ground. But that is not the same thing as raising ‘practicalism’ itself to a theory, and glorifying it. Practice and theory have to go together, else practice would be rudderless and directionless. Conversely, theory has to derive from practice, be proved in practice, and generalised and enriched from practice. Else it would be lifeless. Integration of

theory and practice is a basic principle of Marxism.

Practice is the test of theory, and experience is often the best teacher. It has been well said by **Sant Tukaram** :

“No virgin knows what it is

To deliver a child :

There's no alternative to experience”.

### III

#### **CPI's Commitment and Goal**

The CPI in its latest Programmatic Document has therefore reiterated that:

“It considers the science of Marxism-Leninism as indispensable for charting its path to consistent democracy and socialism. It strives to use the Marxist methodology as a tool of understanding and changing Indian society. Repudiating dogmatic and fossilised thinking, it is guided by this science and India's revolutionary heritage to chart out its path which will be determined by the particular characteristics and features of our country, its history, traditions, culture, social composition and level of development”

The CPI has emphatically put “socialism as the goal of India's future development”. In the latest edition of its Constitution,—the basic document of Party organisation, it has declared unequivocally that:

“The CPI is the political party of the Indian working class. It is a voluntary organisation of workers, peasants, toiling people in general, intelligentsia and others devoted to the cause of socialism and communism.

“The CPI remains firmly wedded to the goal of a just socialist society in which equal opportunities for all and the guarantees of democratic rights will clear the way for ending all forms of exploitation, including caste, class and gender exploitation, exploitation of man by man, a society in which the wealth produced by the toiling millions will not be appropriated by a few. The science of Marxism-Leninism is indispensable for charting the path to such a new socialist system...

“For building of socialism, the achievement of power by the

working people, based on socialist democracy, is essential. With unflinching loyalty to the working people and their historic mission the CPI will work for the realisation of this mission and go forward to its ultimate goal of establishing a Communist society in India".

## IV

### Renewal of Marxism-Leninism

At all times, even as far back as hoary antiquity, man has dreamt of a better world. Great men and thinkers, visionaries, social reformers and revolutionaries in our land as in others, have sorrowed over the sufferings and miseries to which the common people are subjected, and thought about ways of alleviating their sufferings (दुःख)

Our **Upanishadic** seers held up the ideal of a society where '*sarve sukhinah santu sarve santu niramayah*'.

**Gautam Buddha** spoke of a society where '*sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta*'.

Closer to our times, **Jyotiba Fuley** exhorted the '*shudra, atishudra and women*' — the *shetkari, adani, balutedar, kunbi*, to strive and struggle for a new '*satya samaj*'.

**Vivekananda** visualised a '*shudra raj*', of a New India emerging from the peasants' cottage, the fishermen's hut, from the factory and so on.

It would be stretching rather far to call Vivekananda a socialist, but nevertheless he had the courage to declare, "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting".

Our rishis and poets sang the glory of man and gave the message of humanism: "Na hi manushyat sreshthataram hi kinchit". **Chandidas** gave the motto: "sabar upare manush satya tahar upare nahi".

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There in the West, many social thinkers who were sharply

critical of the capitalist system, also set forth their views and dreams on what the society of the future should be. They created models of such an ideal society, which were half lamentation and half echo of a golden past, and half criticism of the soulless capitalist system. But these utopian socialists could not show the practical ways by which these dreams were to be realised, how they would emerge from the existing order of things.

In the '**Communist Manifesto**' itself, Marx and Engels pointed out that all these socialist dreams could not comprehend the march of modern history.

It is only with Marx that modern socialism acquired a real and scientific basis. Socialism that is worth the name, is the socialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin. With Marx, "socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie". (Engels)

Socialism has now become the objective of growing and militant classes and their class struggle against the exploiters of society. Parties have inscribed it on their banners, led revolutions, made immense and untold sacrifices, and despite terrible defeats and heart-breaking set-backs have continued to march towards that goal. It has become the goal of social progress.

More than a century back, the bloodthirsty French bourgeoisie with the help of the Prussian army had drowned the **Paris Commune**(1871) in blood. Then too, they had announced from the housetops, "Now we have finished with Socialism for a long time".

But only six years after, "when many of its fighters were still pining in penal servitude or in exile, a new workers' movement rose in France. A new socialist generation enriched by the experience of their predecessors and no whit discouraged by their defeat, picked up the flag which had dropped". (Lenin)

A century later, socialism in eastern Europe and in Soviet Union itself collapsed. Once again, the exultant imperialists and the local bourgeois in all countries proclaimed, "*socialism is dead*". Renegades and stooges hand-in-glove with the imperialists and the new bourgeois mafia in the former socialist countries set about smashing all resistance in their own countries, even using tanks



and cannons against their own parliaments and other democratic institutions.

But within less than no time, renewed left and socialist parties were on the comeback trail both in elections and on the streets, there and elsewhere. The attempts to restore capitalism was proving disastrous. It was not the Eldorado that they had promised. In its own home, capitalism was in crisis,—recession, unemployment, cut in social security etc. were plaguing all these countries and making life for the workers and common man miserable.

*Despite an inhuman blockade, imposed by its arrogant and powerful neighbour, Cuba is standing firm in defence of its independence, its Revolution, and Socialism.*

China, Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Korea are advancing along the path of socialism chosen by them, undertaking reforms necessary to their conditions.

In South Africa, where a grim and long-drawn out battle has been fought for several decades against racialism and the apartheid regime, and where the African National Congress is now poised for victory, the role of communists has been acknowledged by all. They hold important positions in the ANC led by Nelson Mandela. No wonder, the South African Communist Party is today, "the fastest growing party" as one of their leaders proudly stated in a recent interview.

Socialism and its scientific ideology is thus invincible. Its cause is immortal. And after every defeat, it rises up again, renewed and richer from the experience. It is because only socialist theory as expounded by Marx, Engels and Lenin reveals the causes of misery of the workers and the kisans, as well as the root of disappointment among the youth and the intellectuals with the present order, more correctly than any other theory. The ideas of humanism and justice, long cherished by our people and others, find their fullest expression in Marxism. That is why socialism and its theory have an universal appeal.

"Marx based his work on the firm foundations of the human knowledge acquired under capitalism".(Lenin)

Marxism has not only interpreted the world as other

philosophers and their systems have hitherto tried to do, but has stressed the point to change it. It has indicated how this change will come about.

But since the time of Marx and Lenin, the world has changed a lot. The store of human knowledge has vastly expanded. A veritable scientific and technological revolution has taken place. Revolutions and counter revolutions have occurred in several countries. Colonies enslaved by imperialism have attained freedom. The spread of the democratic movement in recent days has woken up many hitherto dormant and deprived sections, the backward and lower castes in our society, and the tribals, who are laying justified claim to a share in power and in the task of shaping their as well as the country's destiny. New social contradictions are claiming priority in our political life. In addition, there are the complexities and the dramatic changes in world politics and economics in recent years. All these pose new challenges and problems before marxists in each country including ours.

The science of Marxism-Leninism has to take these changes as well as the advances in science, technology and knowledge etc. into account. It has to keep pace with life. It has to integrate itself with our country's history, progressive tradition, culture and the specific situation and social reality as it unfolds itself. It has to develop and enrich itself on the basis of revolutionary practice.

Marxism provides us with the tool for understanding the situation as it presents itself and the method which can guide action. But the social reality, — caste and the part played by caste, or the role played by communal and divisive forces by involving religion and mixing it with politics, and so on, has to be investigated, analysed and assessed and the tactics worked out concretely. Isolated quotations from books of Marx and Lenin provide no solutions, nor can they serve as proofs of opinions already held.

The three integrated components of Marxism as Lenin pointed out are :

- (i) The philosophy of dialectical materialism;**
- (ii) The theory of surplus value; and**

(iii) The doctrine of class struggle as the motive force of history.

## V

### Indian Philosophical Thought & Marxist Philosophy

The philosophy of dialectical materialism is a powerful instrument of knowledge, and our cognition of nature. As applied to social and historical development, it is the materialist conception of history. The succession of dates, of kings and dynasties, of invasions and conquests which all go by the name of history, are now comprehended as social development, as the growth and development of productive forces in the course of man's constant striving to produce his material needs and accumulate surplus, as the struggle of social forces and classes. History now takes on a semblance of scientific order, of one social system yielding place to another, with new classes connected with more developed productive forces and yielding higher productivity coming to the top.

**D.D.Kosambi**, one of our most learned sociologist and historian, had this to say: "If History means only the succession of outstanding megalomaniacs and imposing battles, Indian History would be difficult to write. If however, it is more important to know whether a given people had the plough or not than to know the name of their king, then India has a history..."

It is usual to attribute the philosophical development created by Marx to western thought, to Greek and German philosophical heritage. But both materialism and dialectics are also to be found in our own rich philosophical heritage.

Indeed, **Rahul Sankrityayana** who carried out a deep study of Buddhist philosophy from original sources, has pointed out that there are several elements of dialectics in Buddha's teachings. Later, the great Buddhist philosopher **Dharmakirti** formulated it, and this then made its way to Europe through Arabia. It formulated the doctrine of eternal change, the tenet that all is non-eternal, momentary and dynamic (*anitta*). It propounded '*anatmavad*' as against the '*atmavad*' of the Upanishads. Buddhism's denial of God follows from the above approach, so does its rational outlook.

it is to Dharmakīrti that the following is attributed:

“Vedapramanyam kasyachit kartrivadah snane dharmechha  
jativadavalepah santaparamth paphanya ceti dhvastaprajnanam  
panca lingani jadye”

(Accepting the authority of the Veda and someone as the creator, the desire of getting merit through the holy dip, the vanity of casteism and torturing the body to redeem the sins— these are the five characteristics of stupidity).

Though there is no evidence that Marx or Engels had occasion to delve into the various schools of Indian philosophy, Engels refers to the Buddhists as a source of dialectical thought. Thus:

“Dialectical thought—precisely because it presupposes investigation of the nature of concepts themselves— is only possible for man and for him only, at a comparatively high stage of development (Buddhists and Greeks); and it attains its full development much later still through modern philosophy...”

However, the inadequacy and inconsistency in Buddhist philosophy, its social compromises and later vulgarisations persuaded Rahulji to move forward and embrace Marxism, — an ideology to which he was committed till the end, and which he tried to popularise among the common people of the country.

Materialism also had adherents in several schools of Indian philosophy. Among the great philosophical schools of thought that took shape in ancient India, *Samkhya* was a materialist and an atheist philosophy. Its founder **Kapil** is described as the First Knower or *Adi-vidvan*. *Lokayata* was similarly a consistent materialist school. Atheism followed from its philosophical outlook.

On the other hand, *Mahayana Buddhism* believed in an extreme form of philosophical idealism, but was an atheistic school. The great philosopher of *Jainism*, **Gunaratna** was similarly an upholder of atheism.

The *Nyaya-Vaisesikas* were materialists, but were theists. The *Purva-Mimamsikas* were however opposed to the theism of the *Nyaya-Vaisesikas*.

There were also a few schools of Buddhist philosophy (*Vaibhasikas*, for instance) who believed in the objectivity of the

external world, and that our sense perception, our practice is the source of all knowledge. In this, they were close to materialism.

The *Advaita Vedantic* was the most prominent idealist school, but not the sole inheritor of India's philosophical legacy and its pinnacle of thought, as is made out to be. All the sub-sects of Vedanta admitted God as the creator and moral governor of the world. The Advaita Vedanta adopted the standpoint of super-theism, something like a super-God. (This is only an enumeration of some of the schools of philosophy in ancient India. But for a fuller understanding one will have to refer to the excellent works of Prof. **Devi Prasad Chattopadhyaya** on the subject).

The battle between these various philosophical systems constitute the history of philosophical thought in India. What has been said is enough to show that neither dialectics, nor materialism and atheism are alien to India. Quite the contrary. But serious efforts have been made to ignore and suppress this truth. They are very much a part of the philosophical heritage of India, rooted in the ancient Indian soil

Today, Marxism is looked upon as the highest achievement of modern thought, which the whole pack of bourgeois propagandists are working overtime to refute, but without much success. Some are therefore talking about the 'end of ideology', so as to put a stopper to all arguments on the subject. Their Indian counterparts do not forget to add the epithet that it is an alien thought process imported from the West, which as we see is not quite true.

If modern thought has coqe to be identified with western thought, it is only because, it is in the west that during the last two or three centuries modern social development has proceeded unhampered, while the Orient was kept enslaved in colonial bondage, and therefore left behind in its natural development. Marxism developed its philosophical materialism on the foundation of modern thought, which is not without the considerable contribution of Indian philosophy, culture and heritage. But as 'modern thought' is now universal, Marxism also has universal relevance and application.

It would be foolish and unhistorical of course, to look for seeds or elements of Marxism in the sayings and writings of the past, or

to draw comparisons. One should not try to find modern content in ancient historical or philosophical contexts. The times and circumstances are entirely different.

But one should note the dialectical continuity of man's thought whether here or abroad, his attempt to understand and interpret the world, his criticism and condemnation of the prevalent iniquities and injustices, and his urge to change it for a better world, where man can attain his full glory and overcome his alienation.

## VI

### **Dialectical Materialism**

The philosophy of Marxism urges us to regard the material world as an objective reality, not a 'माया', an illusion. What is primary is matter. Ideas, consciousness are reflections of the world, of nature in the course of evolution and change. There is no परब्रह्म or आत्मन existing independently. The world of reality exists apart from our consciousness of it. Man started to live, and to interact with nature before he began to have ideas about it. Institutions, laws etc. that have evolved during the course of time are the reflections of changes taking place in the world of man. In their turn, ideas, laws and institutions have influenced and effected changes in the world as it exists.

Every part of this reality is changing, whether growing and developing, or decaying and dying away according to their laws of motion, — some of which are already within the bounds human knowledge, and others have yet to be known.

Nothing is static, eternal or सनातन in that sense, whether we measure time in moments or in historical periods. Man and human society as part of this reality, are also subjected to this process.

So it is incorrect to think of any phenomenon as 'mysterious' or 'unknowable' though at the moment it may be unknown. Nor is it correct to think that 'it has been so, and will always be so'.

There is an interdependence in all natural and social phenomenon and must therefore be looked at not in isolation but in their interdependence. Two events looked at in isolation may look similar, but may have quite different significance when looked

at in connection with their interdependence in space and time.

The changes that occur in nature and society arise from the contradictions, the conflict of opposites that are inherent in them. The conflicts arise from the rising strength of some new factors, and the declining strength of others which are becoming obsolete but tenaciously hold on to their existence.

Also, when a gradual process of development reaches a stage where there is a break, a qualitative jump, then something new appears. In terms of social change, this is what we call a revolution, — its character depending on the historical circumstances.

All these are matters of independent study and not an attempt to reduce them to a few simple formulas. This is only to illustrate that the philosophy of dialectical and historical materialism, is in essence a discovery of the laws which govern the world and human society, that it is drawn from reality, and is an analysis of this reality. It is not a system, a scheme into which life and its problems are to be fitted, an outlook to be artificially imposed on living phenomenon. It is a tool which equips us to understand our own society and the world around us, and to know how to change it for the better. How to use this tool depends on our collective competence. But it is not the kind of knowledge which only a few leaders (and intellectuals) are entitled to and capable of learning, but rather a knowledge which the rank and file of party members and the masses should be acquainted with. Like the old Brahminical injunction that the Vedas are forbidden to the masses, and only the द्विज the twice-born can know it, we cannot accept that Marxist philosophy is only for the privileged few.

## VII

### **Struggle against Alien Ideologies**

There is an attempt, especially by the protagonists of Hindutva to show that the Indian people are of a special spiritual mould, far removed from the material world. They are metaphysical and 'other-worldly' in their approach and guided in their everyday life by scriptures and mythology. The motive behind this propaganda is to strengthen the hold of traditionalism on their minds, to emasculate them and wean them away from practical revolutionary activities. But this is only a half truth and a futile

effort. Basically, the Indian mind is rational, inquisitive and practical, and there are enough traditions of struggles against foreign and local exploiters and oppressors that are sources of inspiration and guidance. What hampers the ongoing and growing struggles in the present situation are divisive trends that have roots in our 'civil society' and are exploited by reactionary political forces from within and without the country. But of this, we shall see later.

In the present day world, a number of 'modern ideologies' dressed in the most fashionable clothes are gaining currency, with the help of the electronic and print media, through glossy magazines etc. Some appear profoundly philosophical in content. Some others are frankly 'epicurean' and 'consumerist'. Some are downright pornographic. The individual and his material and sensuous pleasures are at the centre of these 'market ideologies', if they can be so called. In political and social life, this is reflected in opportunism and careerism. Making one's own 'way to the top', no matter what method is employed, and what principles and values are sacrificed, is the avowed objective.

This type of people, (and this includes even party members), go around belittling and pooh pooing communist values of austere living, personal integrity and incorruptibility, the ideal of sacrificing for the cause, of service of the masses and close contact with the masses. They try to infect all around them with their own opportunist thinking and action. It may be natural that bourgeois vices affect the party members also, for they do not live in an isolated world. But it is not natural that they should be allowed to corrupt and corrode the party. Here, they have to be fought and not allowed to grow. The great saint-poet Sant Tukaram has beautifully expressed what a man who works for the downtrodden is :

“जे का रंजले गांजले । त्यांसी म्हणे जो आपुले ।

तोचि साधु ओळखावा । देव तेथेचि जाणावा ॥”

(He who identifies

With the oppressed and the downtrodden

Mark him alone as a good man

And God is with him)



At the other end, there is a marked increase in individual or collective faith in 'godmen' and holy shrines. This is a form of escape from the harsh realities of life, into a world of illusions.

Before you win the actual battle, you have to win the ideological battle, It is Marxist philosophy alone that can instil a sense of revolutionary optimism among the masses.

The task on the ideological front for every communist is :

i. to combat all the fashionable trends of so-called ' modern ideology'.

ii. to fight the grip of mediaeval/feudal traditionalism which is at the root of communal and fundamentalist distortion of religion; to combat the enormous pull of conservatism derived from the survival of the past, and reflected in the force of habit of the majority of people.

iii. to educate the popular masses in a rational, scientific spirit.

iv. Inside the party too, the abovementioned tasks have to be carried out. Ideological education inside the party is also a continuous task. At the same time, the atmosphere of 'ideological permissiveness', which finds expression in an attitude of 'live and let live' with all types of ideological hotch-potch and opportunist thinking substituting for Marxism-Leninism has to be combated. The counterpart of 'permissiveness' and non-Marxist thinking is organisational liberalism. Creative thinking and writing is surely to be encouraged. But this does not mean a licence to spread anti-Marxist views inside and outside the party.

## VIII

### **Laws of Motion of Capitalism**

The theory of surplus value expounded by Marx, for the first time revealed the secrets of capitalist production. It explained the constant attempts by the capitalists, — the owners of the means of production, to increase surplus value and thus increase profits. It described the process of accumulation of capital and the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation. It exposed their attempts to replace workers by machinery and to this end constantly strive for new technological changes in the means of production. Its corollary is creation of an ever expanding army of

unemployed at the beck and call of the capitalists; growing extremes of wealth for the few at one end and of grinding poverty for the many at the other end. It showed the inevitable result in the occurrence of periodical crisis of overproduction (what they euphemistically term as 'recession' in the capitalist world) arising from lack of purchasing power among the masses while improved technology enables ever expanding production, and so on.

Alongside this process there goes on the impoverishment and ruin of the rural population, their dispossession from land and migration of the landless to urban centres swelling the army of labour looking for jobs. A similar fate awaits the village artisans who had a place in the earlier village economy. The exchange between the town and the countryside is constantly weighted against the latter.

Capitalist production develops technology for increased profits, and in the process damages and destroys the environment, "sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the labourer". (Marx)

Marx analysed the laws of development and motion of capitalist society, and from this deduced the inevitability of the transformation of this society into socialist society. This was not a fatalistic forecast, but because the contradictions and antagonisms which he laid bare within contemporary society, and the struggles of all the exploited classes and sections against their exploiters would bring this about.

After Marx, Lenin analysed the further developments in capitalism, and the characteristic features of this new stage,— the stage of Imperialism. He pointed to the immense growth of cartels and monopolies, the increasing domination of finance capital, the export not only of commodities but of capital, race among the main imperialist powers for colonies spheres of influence and markets, resulting in conflicts and devastating wars, etc. This he stressed, would lead to further intensification of contradictions, leading to outbreaks of revolution and of national liberation movement in the colonies.

The 20th Century has witnessed all these events, including the rise of fascism — the most vicious dictatorship of capital, the

horrors of the Second World War, and all that followed. They require no narration here.

## IX

### **Neo-liberalism : The New Face of Imperialism**

With the onset of the **Scientific and Technological Revolution**, one speaks of a new epoch. It is said, classes and class struggle have now lost reality. The working class, generally understood, has ceased to be. Imperialism has changed its character. Through the welfare state, there is now a growing convergence between the two systems, capitalism and socialism. This point of view received further fillip after the collapse of the socialist model in the Soviet Union and of its crude imitations in countries of eastern Europe. Without going the whole hog, some sections entertain doubts and confusions on one or the other aspect and about the continued relevance of Marxism.

It is claimed that the STR has made Marxism outdated and irrelevant, and one must now talk of a post-Marxian era. The criticism of the Soviet model has turned in the thinking of these people, into a wholesale criticism of Marxism-Leninism and of Socialism itself.

Talks about 'globalisation', about the world having shrunk into a 'global village' are bandied about, slurring over the distinction between social systems, between the developed G-7 countries and more than 150 of the developing or least developed countries. These talks ignore and hide the increasingly rapacious, unscrupulous and aggressive nature of imperialism, —American imperialism in particular, in what looks like an unipolar world today.

The talk of '**reforms**' — uncontroversial where they cut down red tape, loosen bureaucratic control and simplify the maze of laws and regulations, is actually camouflaging the real essence of '**neoliberalism**' which is expressed in the new economic policies and the acceptance of the Dunkel Text. Behind this is an imperialist attack on the developing countries. Incidentally, the 'reforms' do not do away with government intervention, since it is through government intervention that public sector enterprises are closed down, made 'sick', disinvested, denied budgetary support, transnationals are wooed with special concessions, and so on.

And it is to government intervention that the 'free marketeers' appeal, to curb the trade unions, put down the opposition, change the laws, and hand over the economy into their hands.

Actually, the present era is marked by a concerted offensive of multinational corporations, the IMF/World Bank and other financial institutions, and the governments of the G-7 countries standing behind them, to force their way into the developing countries; enmesh them in debts; buy up their major and vital industries through collaboration or technological agreements, through participation in equity or outright take-over; dominate their markets; invade their media and culture; dismantle their public sector and erode their self-reliance through privatisation, handing over the public sector built through three or four decades of hard work and public investment for a song; extend grip on agriculture and trade; and dictate their economic and political policies.

It is not only the public sector that is under attack. The MNCs are squeezing out our private sector establishments too. Some of the local monopoly houses have signed new collaboration agreements giving the MNCs a big slice of equity and a determining say in management, so as to jointly exploit the market and share in the profits, going on the principle that, "If you can't beat them, then join them". Others who had some sort of technical arrangements already, are now left out in the cold, because the MNCs have suddenly tightened the screws encouraged by the new policies, and moved over to the drivers' seat. Still others find that the market is being taken over by foreign firms dumping their goods here. The contradiction between the imperialists, their MNCs and our bourgeoisie has started to grow. These bourgeois sections are now waking up and shouting to the high heavens that they must have a 'level playing field', loudly complaining about the invasion of the MNCs into their preserves. Some of them are adopting 'nationalistic' postures, but being bourgeois are afraid of following the lead of the Left, or of acknowledging the Left warning and initiative against the anti-national implications of the government's economic policies and Dunkel. Industrialists in the small scale sector and our artisans are more frankly vocal.

Our R & D is seriously jeopardised, and there is even an exodus of scientific personnel from some of our prestigious research institutes. They are being lured away by the MNCs with high

salaries and perks. Patriotic and well-qualified scientific workers are genuinely concerned at these developments.

All these are aspects of the imperialist offensive, hiding under the mask of 'neoliberalism', and all struggles against them are part of the anti-imperialist and patriotic struggle today.

The structural adjustment models of the IMF/WB have brought disaster to Mexico and the Latin American countries. Yet, they and their counterparts in India do not tire telling us to copy the example of the so-called 'Asian tigers' — South Korea and Taiwan for instance. These little 'tigers' developed under the American umbrella, with special facilities, with large doses of capital and technology made available for strategic reasons, and with assured markets.

## X

### **Imperialist Offensive against Developing Countries**

The earlier imperialists used to talk about the 'white man's civilising mission'. Their present-day heirs talk loudly of 'human rights' and 'democracy', 'social and labour standards', pretending to be the moral governors of the world. Of course these rights have to be fought for and won by the people of every country, with support from well-meaning people all over the world. But what right have the imperialists to sit in judgment over the rest of world?

We have seen how 'human rights' were respected by American tanks and guns in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haiti, Panama, Grenada and Puerto Rico. We have seen the gory hi-tech war launched against Iraq, and the air-strikes in the Serb-Bosnian conflict which only complicated the bad situation further. We saw how humanitarian aid was thrust down the throats of the Somalians and Ethiopians at the point of the gun, and how 'democracy' and 'human rights' are defended by imposing a harsh blockade against little but heroic Cuba brushing aside two United Nation resolutions condemning the blockade. And then, what about the rights of the Blacks, the Hispanics, the indigenous Indians in the USA? Imperialism has never been a respecter of human rights. Their pious pose today reminds one of the proverbial cat which is counting beads and is on a holy pilgrimage after devouring a

hundred mice.

Against whom, one might ask are the armed preparations of the USA and NATO going on when the 'Soviet threat' no longer exists, and the 'cold war' is officially over ? Is it for holding out threats to the whole world, policing the high seas, teaching lessons to those who refuse to buckle under, and for igniting tensions in different theatres, like for instance selling F-16 fighters to Pakistan?

With a fraction of the world's population, the developed capitalist countries are monopolising for their use and consuming, the overwhelming share of the world's raw material and energy resources. For their own accelerated development, they will go on appropriating an increasingly larger share, leaving little for the developing countries in their painful struggle for development.

In their craze for profits, they have polluted the world environment, dumped atomic wastes in the high seas, depleted the ozone layer, spoilt the flowing and underground fresh water sources, degraded and denuded the world's forests. Even the former socialist countries in their haste to industrialise and overtake the capitalist world were guilty of this crime. But it is clear that only a system which has concern for man and society, and where profit is not the only god, can protect nature and the environment.

The imperialists now intend to shift their chemical and other highly polluting industries to the developing countries, as if one experience of Union Carbide was not enough. And yet, they hypocritically turn round, and want to add a clause on environment standards for shutting off our products from their markets. And the same is the case in the matter of cheap labour. Their MNCs wish to muscle in here so as to take advantage of our cheap labour. And then they turn round, and use the plea of cheap labour of developing countries to block exports and protect their own markets.

To solve the agricultural and dairy products dispute between the European Union and the US, relating to subsidy and to dumping in each other's market, they agreed to slaughter millions of cows, when crores of children go without a drop of milk. This is in addition to other protectionist clauses. In the USA, they

subsidise farmers to keep a part of their agricultural land fallow, so that prices of wheat and other products should not fall. Meanwhile, starvation and malnutrition stalk the land in Asia and Africa.

Are these actions motivated by humanism and respect for 'human rights', or are they derived from capitalism's urge for superprofits based on its monopoly?

With chronic recession in their own countries, with burgeoning unemployment, reduced social security benefits the developed capitalist countries are trying to stave it off by entering the markets of the Third World, palming off second-rate technology and used equipments at dollar rates. Venal politicians in the developing countries and their governments may have fallen for the blandishments of the developed west, and supinely carrying out what the imperialists want. But this does not change the essence of imperialism.

The imperialist G-7 countries have also their mutual and sharp contradictions. We see these between USA and Japan, between the US and the European Union, between US and Canada, and within the European Union. But every time their attempt is to solve their contradictions by passing the burden onto the shoulders of the developing countries. They act like a consortium to exploit the rest of the World.

The real face behind the mask that they wear cannot be missed. It is an imperialist face, uglier and more vicious than what Lenin had written about. Its new and more complex and intricate methods of exploitation and domination have be studied by Marxists and others. Times have changed. Imperialism does not have to physically occupy and rule the colonies (though of course, American soldiers are present in many countries of the world). With control over technology, media, finances, and even international forums, the task is done in more subtle and sophisticated form, making the task of fighting them a hundred times more difficult than before.

Imperialism is however lasting longer than socialists and communists had imagined. The capacity of capitalism to have a second, and a third breath, to use technology for its ends and to repeatedly restore itself, has been underestimated. Marxist study

and science has to be carried forward in these matters.

But one thing is for sure. Capitalism had looked all-conquering and victorious barely three years back. Today, it is as clear as light that, neither in the former socialist countries where they are trying to rebuild capitalism, nor in its own home fields, has capitalism any solution to the problems of poverty, disease, illiteracy, unemployment. It cannot ensure justice and fair distribution. On the world plane, most of the wealth is accumulating in a few countries, whose per capita income is a hundred, or even two hundred times greater than in most of the developing countries. The gap between rich and poor countries is widening, and so are the contradictions. Within each country, the gap between the rich and the poor is growing, —with a handful of the rich at the top and the overwhelming mass of poor at the bottom. It is foolish to talk of social peace under these circumstances.

The laws of capitalist development, and the historical tendency of capitalist development as formulated by Marx and Lenin are proving to be relevant, though with new dimensions added on, and in a much more complicated form.

## XI

### **Doctrine of Class struggle : New Dimensions**

The doctrine of class struggle is a fundamental principle of Marxism.

Classes and class struggle are not inventions of Marx. They have been existing in society. Marx and Engels underlined their significance when they wrote in the Communist Manifesto, the famous words, "The history of all hitherto existing society (with the exception of the primitive community), is the history of class struggles".

We find even in our old classics— the *Mahabharat* (*Shantiparva*), and the Buddhist canon — *Mahavastu Avadan*, how the primitive community, a nonclass society, gradually changes into a class-divided society with its private property, greed and acquisition, conflict and exploitation. That led to the rise of the state, the king or the ruler, the paraphernalia of laws and 'danda' ( दंड ) for transgressing those laws.

Before we proceed further, let us be clear what is meant by



'class' in sociological terminology, as an economic category.

What defines and distinguishes a class in any specific social system (feudal, capitalist, socialist etc.), is, first of all, what relation that group of people in society has to the means of production prevalent at the time. Following from this, what its place is in the production process, i.e. its place in the social organisation of production. Thirdly therefore, what share it has in the wealth that is produced and its distribution; and finally, in what form it acquires this share.

Where one group of people, or a class owns the means of production, and can thus make the other group or class work and produce, that relation enables the former to appropriate the labour of the latter.

The interests of the two classes are thus antagonistic, and give rise to the struggle between these two classes.

Of course, these two main are not the only classes in any given society. In any historical period, there are other classes in addition to these two. For instance, at the present moment of capitalist development in our society, there are in addition to the capitalists (the owners) and the workers, other classes such as:

i) Those engaged in other processes of production and their relationship — the kisan working on his own land, the landlord surviving from the earlier period but in new form, the tenant working on the land owned by the land owner;

ii) The landless and agricultural worker whose main source of livelihood is working on the land possessed by others;

iii) The artisan working with his own tools, the self-employed;

iv) Those sections which perform subsidiary functions — shopkeepers and others engaged in the distribution process, officials and employees engaged in government, mercantile, financial, and other institutions, teachers, doctors, engineers, scientists, managers and other intellectuals — broadly termed the 'middle classes'. Some of these are engaged in the production of value and surplus value, and others in its realisation.

Apart from the workers, the other toiling masses, who constitute a vast majority of our population, are exploited by a small section of capitalists and land owners, whether of the old or

new variety. This is the basis of the broadest alliance of workers, kisans, agricultural workers, the intelligentsia,— in short, all those who find no future in capitalism.

Explaining this in simple and forthright language, while addressing the youth, Lenin had occasion to say: "The present society is based on the principle: rob or be robbed; be a slaveowner or a slave. We have to change this".

There is today a deliberate mixing up of concepts by bourgeois propagandists. New meanings are injected into words of common usage, so as to confuse the common man. Thus the word 'reforms' so liberally used, has come to mean today, an open field for unbridled capitalist profiteering, privatisation of public sector enterprises, invitation to MNCs to invest and even take over vital sectors of economy, and so forth. Imperialist policies are glorified as 'neoliberalism' and 'globalisation'. They shy away from using the word imperialism.

One must be clear therefore about these concepts, and about the language of discussion and discourse, so as not to get lost or disoriented.

The concept of 'class' is similarly used in broad and several sense. When the Indian Constitution speaks of 'socially and educationally backward classes', and the courts discuss it in their judgements, what they mean by 'class' is 'a homogenous social section of the people with common traits and identifiable by some common attribute', and not class in the sense of a social group distinguished by its relation to the means of production. While noting that caste and class are not synonymous, the court has ruled that if a caste as a whole is socially and educationally backward, it can be identified as a part of the socially and educationally backward classes. Of this more later. We are noting it here in order to clear up the concept and the use of the word in different circumstances.

Pointing out the objective reality of classes and class struggle in capitalist society, Marx showed us the necessity of organising the workers as a class, of leading the class struggle for the ultimate conquest of political power by the mass of toilers.

He showed us the need to forge a class alliance between the working class and the peasantry, to draw in the intelligentsia, the

revolutionary youth and other oppressed sections, so as to overcome the rule of the capitalist and the landlord.

He showed us the need to educate the exploited sections not so much through preachings, books and lectures as through the experience of struggles, to raise their class consciousness and consolidate the alliance of classes, so that they become a social force capable of bringing about revolutionary social transformation, of changing society.

All this, Marx, and after him Lenin, pointed out cannot take place spontaneously. Spontaneous resistance or fight is only the beginning of organisation. But it has to be further organised and carried forward consciously through an organised party. Such a party can only be a communist party which is based on the working class and other toiling people, and has both, an immediate programme and an ultimate goal.

It is nobody's case that a worker *ipso facto* is a born revolutionary. But due to his place in the production process, lending himself easily to organised and collective action as a class, it is a social force that can rally round it other sections opposed to capitalist and other forms of oppression.

The most numerous sections in Indian society are the agricultural workers and the kisans. Without their participation and action any social progress, leave alone social transformation, is unthinkable. When roused and drawn into struggle, they are tenacious, militant and capable of tremendous sacrifices, as the history of our own movement testifies to. Who can forget Telengana, Punnappra-Vayalar, Tebhaga, land occupation struggles, and several others, both before and after Freedom. The combination of their struggles with those of the working class, can give the movement the desired direction and force.

It has become the fashion these days to play down the role of the working class, and even question his historic mission. It is being said, the worker is more concerned with his own narrow interests. Some say that in India, the agricultural worker or the kisan has taken his place. Some others claim that only the intelligentsia in contemporary society is equipped to play the role of leader, and so forth.

It has to be stressed that continuous denigration of the working

class and its role in the social movement, does not thereby enhance the role of other classes or sections.

Firstly, it has always been emphasised that it is only a united coalition of the exploited and oppressed classes, with the worker-peasant alliance as the basis, that the struggle can achieve its victorious goal.

Secondly, other sections or classes can carry forward their struggles successfully, when guided by the ideology of socialism and helped and led purposefully by the party of the working class. Militant and massive struggles by themselves are not enough. They only reflect the mood and the preparedness to fight. The role of 'ideas' and of a leading and guiding force in social development should never be underplayed.

Thirdly and finally, the facts themselves show, that the working class,—several sections and contingents, both severally and all together, has been leading a powerful movement today not for its own narrow interests, but against government policies which harm the country's interests and adversely affect the people's livelihood. It is this initiative which has helped to rally other sections, such as the agricultural worker, the kisan, the student, youth and women, not just once but several times over during the last few years in very massive nationwide actions.

Admittedly, there has been 'economism' in the workers' movement. It is the primary duty of the trade unions to fight for the workers' demands. That is why they are brought into existence, to begin with. But from struggle for demands as the starting point, trade unions and the entire workers' movement have to go forward to and join in the struggles for political demands and social justice.

Then again, there has been too much preoccupation with the organised workers, those who are in organised industries, whether in the public or private sector. If the working class has to assert itself and carry along the rural and urban poor, then the entire class has to be organised and moved, — at least the majority of them. The vast mass of workers who are still outside the fold of organisation have to be brought into the fold.

These are weaknesses and shortcomings of the movement and organisation. But they do not therefore negate the role of the working class.

Sometimes it is argued that the organised worker has attained a reasonably higher standard of living, and cannot therefore be relied upon to come out in the streets and put up a prolonged fight. The rise in the standards of the organised workers, while the unorganised mass is still hovering around the poverty line, has no security, and crores are unemployed, gives rise to problems. This has to be solved by giving a helping hand to the weaker class brothers to organise, unite and fight, and steadily improve their lot.

Incidentally it would be interesting to note what Marx had to say in his time, about the relative improvement in the workers' living standards. Writing in "Wage Labour and Capital", Marx said:

"Although the enjoyments of the worker have risen, the social satisfaction that they give has fallen in comparison with the increased enjoyments of the capitalist which are inaccessible to the worker, in comparison with the state of development of society in general. Our desires and pleasures spring from society; and we measure them, therefore, by society not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature".

Trade unions, are 'schools of class struggle'. But for quite some years in our trade unions, class struggle has been reduced in the main to economic struggles, or understood only in terms of struggle for the economic betterment of that section which is within the fold of the trade union. This is a 'trade union deviation', and the 'schooling' one might say, has been imperfect and one-sided. Therefore the class struggle has not intensified to the point required under the circumstances, and has not had that impact on the rest of the toiling masses. Of late, life has compelled this partial and imperfect class struggle to undergo a change. The imperialist offensive, the new economic policies, the Dunkel Text and all that is following from them is forcing the movement to take up basic national-political issues. Then again, the rise of the backward and lower castes, their urge for a rightful share of power, their new-found assertiveness and self-confidence, has brought new forces on the political scene. This is a spread of democratic consciousness. But there are parties and forces which are trying to give it a casteist colour for their political purpose. Those who

have been monopolising power for so long, are scared by this phenomenon, and they too are therefore raising the bogey of 'casteism' in order to give it a bad name and damn it. Class struggle cannot advance in the peculiar conditions of our country, without taking this factor into account.

Since class struggle is a vehicle, a means of social transformation, it must embrace economic, political, social and ideological issues. Struggle against economic exploitation has to be combined with the struggle against social injustice, against all forms of social oppression and discrimination, and against all ideological pretensions which tend to justify the social status quo. The form and context of class struggle in the Indian context has to undergo radical restructuring.

## XII

### **Has Class Struggle Abated ?**

Gandhism has always preached about class peace and class collaboration, and inveighed against class struggle. But now, there are some intellectuals (who pretend to be leftists), and proclaim that class struggle has become irrelevant in modern times, and more so in Indian conditions.

One argument is that, democracy and adult franchise from the parliamentary level down to the gram panchayat, has made class struggle unnecessary and an anachronism. The majority, the 'bahujan', that is to say the vast toiling mass, can attain political power through the ballot box. Then what is the need for class struggle?-they argue. We are not concerned here with the bullet versus ballot debate, which can be addressed to a tiny naxalite fringe. But can the vast majority of the toilers be roused to the level of making a bid for political power at different levels, even upto the national, without an all-embracing class struggle? Ballot box and democratic institutions do not eliminate the class struggle. Actually, they lay bare the mechanics of money power and muscle power, the power of the mass media to manipulate and control public opinion. They show up all the means which the bourgeoisie and the landlords use to divide the masses and divert their attention. At the same time they help to enlighten the masses and to organise wider sections for taking an active part in political events. They give ample opportunity to the working people to rally

their forces against the capitalists, landlords and their agents. Elections and democratic institutions are themselves the fields of class struggle. That is one reason why communists support these institutions and stand for further extending democracy and democratic rights. But as we see, the election battle is not a substitute for a class battle, and does not make it irrelevant.

Then there is an argument that the Scientific and Technical Revolution has made class struggles unnecessary. This too has been proved false by the course of events, not only in India but also in the West, where the STR has had maximum impact. The STR has not eliminated classes. It has certainly changed the composition and character of the working class. Manual labour may change to mental. The blue collar worker may become a white collar worker. But the question remains who is holding the collar on leash? STR has made exploitation more brutal and intense though camouflaged. It has increased physical and mental tension for the worker on the job without any real reduction in working hours. In Japan many deaths are reported from overwork (karoshi). It has led to redundancy, increased unemployment, part-time employment, and job insecurity for the workers, while greatly expanding the profits of the MNCs and other corporates. Contradictions have intensified, and this is seen in the outbreak of massive and militant struggles in the entire capitalist world. In India we have seen the effect of the structural adjustment policies dictated by the IMF and the World Bank. They are a reflection of the new technological revolution as applied to the developing countries. The class struggle has therefore become more intense rather than abated.

Coming to India, the question is asked from some quarters: Have not castes and caste conflicts done away with, or at any rate, greatly reduced the role of classes and class struggle? We will have to examine this question at some length to clear up doubts and misconceptions, and also to correct past mistakes. At this point let us state that the existence of caste division and conflict, of caste oppression and even atrocities perpetrated in the name of caste, emphasise the necessity of combining class struggle with the struggle against caste inequality, discrimination and oppression. A new dimension is added to class struggle in the specific Indian conditions. But class struggle is neither eliminated nor substituted.

# XIII

## Class and Caste

It is not necessary for our purpose to go into the origin and evolution of the caste system in India. We can leave this task to the historians and sociologists. Both, Marxist and non-Marxist scholars have been engaged in the task for long. **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** has written authoritatively and passionately on the subject. The historical debate is on. But nowadays a few non-scholars are pouring out a number of pseudo-scientific books and articles on the subject of race, varna and caste, out of purely political motives. Especially busy are the 'Hindutva' protagonists who are engaged in acrobatics trying to reconcile their aggressive Hindu revivalism and communal outlook, with a demagogic concern for the backwards and dalits. Their ideological Guru, Shri Golwalkarji has in his 'Bunch of Thoughts' asserted unhistorically, that, "The feeling of inequality, of high and low, which has crept into the *varna system* is comparatively of recent origin". He eulogises the varna and the cast system as an Indian phenomenon which has relevance even in the present situation, may be after purging its of some perversities and restoring its 'pristine purity'. How can it be, that the erudite Guruji has not read about the story of Shambuka and Eklavya in our classics? Surely, they are not isolated incidents, but reflect a social reality as old as the *Itihas* which these classics relate?

The Sangh parivar's slogan of Hindutva (which Advani has declared as their 'mascot'), is a call for Hindu consolidation, or '*Hindu pehchaan*' as a 85 per cent majority as against the rest of the 15 per cent minorities.

But after all the *rath yatras*, *ekta yatras*, *raksha yatras*, the demolition of the masjid and the bloody trail of riots, killings and incendiarism that accompanied all these, the elections have brought out that the BJP was naive in thinking that the Hindus are an undifferentiated mass, and one could rally all sections by propagating about their '*Hindu pehchaan*'. The BJP tried to ignore or play down the sharp contradiction that exists between the slogan of Hindu consolidation and the very real caste fragmentation of Hindu society. But without success.



Now, one of their leader is advocating a cautious 'social engineering', hoping that, "the rise of dalit power will eventually merge with the larger entity of Hindutva for the wellbeing of the whole society".

'Social engineering' cannot like other engineering, rivet or weld together the entire system of castes and subcastes, with their sense of superiority-inferiority, their exclusiveness, ritual purity and pollution, untouchability etc. It is no substitute for a revolution in man's mind and in society as a whole, which will annihilate the caste system and establish genuine social equality. It is a camouflaged attempt to rally all including dalits and backwards under *brahminical* influence.

What stands out, and has to be taken note of as a stark social reality is that in India, in addition to class differentiation based on production relations, there is a caste divide, — a system of castes and subcastes, carried over from the past several centuries.

Class as we have noted has a secular socio-economic origin. It has inner mobility. One who is a worker today, or is born in a workers' family can hope to become a capitalist or at least a manager serving the capitalist, tomorrow. As to the middle class, there is always a layer at the top which tries hard to climb up the ladder and become bourgeois. There are others at the lower layers who are thrown down the ladder to swell the ranks of labour. There is nothing hereditary, except that a son born to a worker starts with a handicap, has few opportunities and is more likely to remain a worker; the idle sons of the rich inherit their father's estate and continue to enjoy it, till they quarrel among themselves about the spoils and squander it.

Caste may have had a socio-economic origin in the hoary past. Along with it there have been fusing of clans and tribal elements into a general society, and gradually being transformed into castes, with a specific status within the caste system. There have been castes and subcastes which are products of varna-sankara. There are castes which arose out of the series of conflicts between Aryan, Dravidian, and other ancient people inhabiting the country, getting assimilated into the system, along with their gods and rituals and acquiring status depending on the aftermath of the conflict. There have been tribes and clans, who were defeated and

crushed after sanguinary battles, enslaved as '*panchama*', a group of untouchables who are to be kept down, assigned the lowliest tasks and allowed no privileges.

But whatever the earlier origin, the division was legitimised, sanctified by the scriptures, given the stamp of divine origin, with a '*dharma*' (caste duty) attached to each, which fixed its hereditary and hierarchical status in society based on natural superiority or inferiority by birth, and with degrees of punishment for transgression of '*dharma*' in inverse proportion to caste status. For these reasons, caste is not just hereditary, it is also endogamous, unchangeable and unbridgeable.

Even if the origin and basis is socio-economic, necessarily every sub-caste is not occupational. In the course of agricultural and industrial development, of migration and rural-urban mix, many of them have not remained occupational. But what has remained is the hold on the minds of people, the consciousness of inherited status, its survival as something ordained.

Caste is not thus coterminous with class. The new stratification of class is based on secular attributes. The caste system with its hierarchical and hereditary attributes has scriptural sanction. What started with the Varna division proliferated into a system of castes in the course of development of an exploitative society

Ambedkar had occasion to emphasise that caste cannot be considered as an isolated unit by itself. It has to be considered as a group within and with definite relation to the system of caste as a whole.

In his writing on the '*Annihilation of Caste*' Ambedkar underlined the difference between social reform in the sense of widow remarriage, child marriage etc., and social reform in the sense of abolition of the caste system. But Ambedkar was clear that this is a social struggle, and not a struggle against individuals of the upper castes.

At the time of the Mahad satyagraha led by him, Keshavrao Jedhe— a prominent leader of the '*Brahmanetar*' (i.e. non-brahmin) movement had objected to the presence of many brahmins along with Dr. Ambedkar. Referring to this, Dr. Ambedkar published a strong reply in his journal "**Bahishkrit Bharat**" (of July 1, 1927) as follows:

“I can never agree to the condition proposed by Shri Jedhe and Jawalkar. I wish to declare that we are not against brahmins. We are against brahminism. Not the brahmins, but those who are infected with brahminism are our enemies. Inspired by this outlook, we find ourselves alienated from the non-brahmins who are victims of brahminism, and are close to those brahmins who have discarded brahminism..”

Jyotiba Fuley, whom Ambedkar regarded as his guru, was even more forthright and had many collaborators from among brahmins who were helping him in the struggle. He spoke in terms of the exploiters and the exploited, and listed among the exploited, the 'shetkari, the illiterate (adani), and also some occupational castes. His was a '*satyashodhak movement*' not a caste versus caste movement.

If we look at history, caste and the caste system had come to mean a sort of 'civil society', quite distinct from the 'political society'—the state. This civil society, in a manner of speaking, kept the mass insulated from the wave of invasions and conquest, that overtook India, indifferent to the changes of rulers and dynasties at the top.

An outstanding Communist scholar, **Gramsci** writing in his '*Prison Notebook*' while languishing in fascist Italy's prison, had graphically outlined this concept of 'civil society' thus: "The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks". Therefore any attempt at changing this civil society necessitates 'an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country'.

Here in India, caste had come to serve as a protection for the individual, an employing agency, an insurance against disability and death, a fraternity ( बिरादरी ) for all social occasions, including birth and death. 'Society' ( समाज ) had come to mean the caste samaj. This made the caste and the caste system more rigid, conservative, fragmented. It obstructed change and progress.

Industrial development has given rise to a new social division of labour. It has forged a new class of the 'exploited, the propertyless, the proletariat, distinguished not by the earlier caste attributes, but by a new relation in opposition to the owners of the means of production.

In the vast rural sector too, deep-going changes in agrarian life have shaken up the age-old caste structure, especially land distribution and decentralisation of power, howsoever partial and incomplete. It has changed the character of the landless too. Earlier, he had a 'jajmani' relationship (patron-client). Now, he is a wage-labourer.

Incidentally, the history of the caste system shows that no caste has been able to assert its relative superiority over others merely by virtue of its higher position in the hierarchical scale, unless this has been reinforced by economic power and buttressed by political power. This applied more to the lower castes, who have to overcome the load of oppression and deprivation from both economic and political power down through the centuries. Their present awakening has basically a democratic content. Economic and political power is getting redistributed.

There are some who however say, that even a wretchedly poor brahmin continues to regard himself a superior being compared to a rich baniya in the village. Well! in this harsh world, things do not proceed on the basis of what a man thinks of himself, or how he tries to keep up his lost dignity!

Industrial and agrarian development have brought up numerous issues, leading to class struggles in urban and rural areas. But a great many of these conflicts are clothed by a type of 'false consciousness', substituting unconsciously motives which carry social approval for their real motive.

What sort of struggle is it, when the landless in a given village, who may belong overwhelmingly to the dalits, fight against an oppressive landlord ( who may belong to any of the forward or even backward castes ), for land, for house-site, for wages and for self-respect? It is obviously a type of class struggle. But both, in the 'false consciousness' of the clashing parties, and in the general propaganda among other sections, it is made to appear as a caste conflict.

In some other adjoining villages, the conflict may involve the landless, who belong to several castes, dalits as well as non—dalits, including a few from the impoverished and ruined forward caste people. What happens then?

The pronounced caste colour, ending in caste slaughter and

bitterness, which the struggle is assuming in some rural parts of Bihar, is a fall out of such false consciousness. There are deliberate attempts to fan such caste consciousness.

This layer of false consciousness has to be removed, if the real class struggle has to develop and widen. The attempt to use caste appeal for creating a 'vote-bank' in elections, is the biggest obstruction in removing this false consciousness.

We must welcome the rising assertiveness and confidence among the backwards and dalits. This is a factor in politics, which can act powerfully against the reactionary forces of Hindutva, attract the minorities and give confidence to them. We must interact with this new rising force, and spread the influence of the Left among them, drawing them towards the left as the most consistent fighters against all forms of exploitation and oppression messiahs. We have been in this struggle much before the new self-proclaimed. We must rebuff all attempts by vested interests to give this upsurge a casteist colour. We communists have put in Herculean labour to rouse class consciousness and forge class solidarity of the rural poor. We should not allow caste passions to take over and not only destroy this solidarity, but also distort the movement.

We should take note of the logic of capitalist development. It is increasingly bringing about stratification and differentiation within the castes themselves. Today a caste that is economically homogenous and solely engaged in its hereditary occupation, is a rarity.

Among the lower castes and the tribal people, a middle class has emerged, more in some cases, less in others, though there is not yet, anybourgeois class to speak of. Among the backward castes, the situation is a bit different. At least within some castes, a strong rural bourgeoisie has emerged, and evidence is not lacking of an industrial and commercial bourgeoisie also coming up from among them. On the other hand, there has been a pauperisation of sections of the so-called higher castes. They are now compelled to rub shoulders with the mass of the lower castes in fields and factories.

It is an oversimplification, and a distorted view, when it is said that all the exploiters are from the upper castes, and all the

exploited belong to the lower castes,— the backwards and the dalits. Such a simplistic view does not take into account the differentiations that are taking place within society, and within each caste. A majority of the dalits are of course in the ranks of the agricultural workers, but there are substantial sections from other castes too. Likewise, most of the upper castes are not exploiters, because only a few can become capitalists and land owners, or their managers and supervisors.

It is true, that the new consciousness among dalit and backward youths, has brought a sense of self-respect, so that they say with passion, that they can tolerate hunger, but not dishonour any longer. As to the group of exploiters among the upper sections in the rural areas, they are trying to strike back against the self-respect movement among the lower castes by increasingly stripping and assaulting their women-folk, for that is the ultimate mark of dishonour and humiliation. The class struggle led by the left parties, by the communists, has to intervene promptly and effectively against all types of atrocities, especially caste atrocities.

The struggle of the exploited classes cannot advance without simultaneously fighting against caste injustices, discriminations and prejudices. It is the top layers of each caste that can rally their caste brothers, and utilise them in their own interests. The class struggle, especially in the rural areas has therefore to be combined with the struggle for equality and social justice, against caste oppression.

Class consciousness and class struggle unite all sections of the exploited masses against their exploiters. But caste consciousness and caste struggle generally divide the exploited masses according to their castes while claiming to fight the exploiters.

## XIV

### **Struggle Against Casteism**

There has been a tendency in the past, to underestimate the problems of caste oppression and injustice, and concentrate only on the economic and political struggle. In regions, where the survival of the feudal and semi-feudal past is quite strong in

people's mind, this is hampering the development of the class struggle and of the communist movement.

Industrial growth and agrarian changes are shaking up the system, no doubt. But the caste system would not automatically disappear as a result of these. The hold of caste feeling on people's minds is strong for several reasons,— traditional, religious, social rituals and so on. Even a worker may work shoulder to shoulder with men of other castes at the same work place for 8 hours a day, and fight common battles, but thereafter he returns within his own caste 'biradiri' which still regulates important aspects of his social life.

That is why the struggle for overcoming caste consciousness and for abolition of the caste system is an extremely prolonged struggle, on the ideological, social and practical plane. Ignoring caste discrimination and caste oppression, and limiting the class struggle to only economic and political demands, does not take the socialist movement forward.

The struggle for toilers' unity has to be tackled from both ends: viz. fighting against caste discrimination for ensuring that the lower castes are brought upto the level of the rest (reservation, land reforms, educational facilities, easy loans for self-employment, drinking water facilities in every village open to all, etc.), and at the same time insisting on common class and mass organisations, on common and united struggles etc., firmly opposing all attempts to disrupt such unity on the basis of caste or community.

It has to be noted, that just when more and more joint actions and closer trade union coordination and unity are taking place against government policies, and imperialist and capitalist attacks, there are moves from some quarters to divide the workers on the basis of caste or community

Along with the socialist ideas of humanism and brotherhood, on end to all forms of exploitation and injustice, we have from our past a wealth of teachings based on social equality, opposition to caste hatred and oppression of lower by the upper castes etc. We have to invoke and utilise these preachings of **Kabir**, **Chaitanya**, **Ramanuja Basaveswara**, **Namdeo**, **Guru Nanak** and other saints and reformers. The religious form may be of no concern to all, but the humanitarian content is. In recent times, we have the

teachings of Periyar, Jyotiba Fuley, Ambedkar and others, though some of those who claim to be their followers have distorted the democratic and humanitarian content of their ideas.

We have to expose those who are trying to confuse and obfuscate the fight against casteism, and real social reform. The Sangh Parivar is the main culprit in this matter. Take for instance the question of Civil Code: It is a matter of history, that they had opposed the Hindu Code Bill, which Dr. Ambedkar was insisting upon. '**Organiser**' wrote then:- "We oppose the Hindu Code Bill. We oppose it because it is a derogatory measure based on alien and immoral principles". Shri K.R.Malkani, in his 'RSS Story' had this to say in 1980: "When the Hindu Code Bill was passed (?) he (Guru ji Golwalkar) objected to its concept. He saw no reason why Hindu Law should break its ancient links with the Manu Smriti". Their latest pretensions must therefore be exposed.

The party should be exacting in enforcing the principle that party members belonging to any caste do not display any vacillation in fighting the exploiting elements of their own caste. Party principles require that they unflinchingly fight against oppressors of their own caste, and do not shy away from this task. Insulting or deliberately hurting, or expressing contempt for a supposedly inferior caste should not be tolerated.

Trade unions should champion the justified demands of the SCs/STs/BCs for reservation, for promotion. They should point out that privatisation of the public sector in effect curtails reservation opportunities. So does retrenchment and ban on recruitment in public services.

The problems we are dealing with, are of concrete application of Marxism-Leninism to Indian conditions, further developing, updating and renewing it. We are aware of our shortcomings and mistakes, unlike others who have never admitted mistakes. We are only at a certain and extremely complex stage in mankind's struggle, in the Indian people's struggle for a more humane and just society. Our socialist future will emerge out of our struggle, in the context of world developments, carrying the stamp of our characteristics.