Politics and Society

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POLITICS AND SOCIETY

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Reflections on the Fifty Years of Independence

ASOK MUKHOPADHYAY

The occasion of celebrating the golden jubilee of India's independence provides an opportunity for reflecting on the achievements and failures of independent India . The stock-taking can be done from diverse angles but it is proper for a political scientist to confine the discussion within the contours of social science.

Adventure of the Idea of Democracy

The public life of independent India has presented, during the last half a century, both unexpected achievements and unforgivable failures . Millions of Indians, led by brilliant political leaders, fearless revolutionaries and dedicated public figures, waged relentless battles in course of the struggle for independence and finally compelled the British imperialists to leave India. But in August 1947 the colonialists and imperialists triumphed over the freedom-fighters in an indirect way. The country was divided on the basis of religious-communal considerations, and the imperialist trading and other interests in India were protected . This was the fundamental tragedy of India's independence which was finally gained by a leadership which became impatient to taste power and was therefore bent on compromising and bargaining with the imperialists.

What was significant however was the dream and desire of the people of the truncated subcontinent to make India a modern state. During the past fifty years the new-born Indian nation state had to face a series of challenges, the most important of which was the challenge of socio-economic development and national integration . Social scientists must not look at the post-1947developments in terms of nationalist hagiography. To them, the history of independent India is the history of a State which is the first, largest and poorest of the many created by the ebb of European imperialism . During the

last fifty years this State has grown and tried to consolidate itself against the rising tides of the people's aspirations for a better life and higher living standard . The states of modern Europe met similar challenges in gradual sequence over a period of three hundred years but independent India had to meet many demands simultaneously and rapidly and, more importantly, in a democratic way . In fact, India's post-independence experience may be seen as the adventure of the political idea of Democracy.

Compared to the experience of a large number of Asian and African countries, one important achievement of free India has been to maintain the apolitical character of the military . The failures of the civilian authority have been many but the Indian military has never felt tempted to intervene in the politico-administrative matters . Asia today is the most economically dynamic continent in the world but it is also one where vast numbers of people remain politically mute . In the developing world one sometimes comes across the argument that the idea and practice of democracy would be inappropriate for achieving economic development and maintaining the sober cultural tradition of the people . The example set by India is perhaps the most pointed challenge to these arguments . India, in a restricted sense, can be described as "the Athens of the East " and the burning lamp of democracy in the developing world .

Passage to Modernity : Contending Visions

For all its magnificent antiquity and historical depth, the basic ethos of contemporary India is unequivocally a product of the ideas and agencies of modernity : European colonial expansion, the secular state , nationalism, democracy, economic development . These ideas and agencies helped expand the intellectual horizons and the sphere of action of India's modern, educated, urban elite . But the elite itself produced diverse, often contending, visions of independent India . "One way of defining diversity for India", wrote poet and critic, A.K. Ramanujan, "is to say what the Irishman is known to have about trousers . When asked whether trousers were singular or plural, he said, singular at the top and plural at the bottom."

Politics, understood as a space of constantly competitive, strategic and practical actions undertaken in conditions of imperfect and partial information and with diverse motives, has been at the heart of India's passage to, and experience of, modernity . During the last fifty years India has been basically constituted by politics . India today is the most intensely political society in the world. The Indian people have placed their faith in politics, pinning their hopes initially in the once-great nationalist forum called the Indian National Congress and recently in its current challengers like the Hindutva movement and the surging movements of the lower caste and dalit people .Politics at once divides the people and constitutes them into a single shared, crowded space, proliferating voices and claims and forcing

negotiatiation and accommodation . It is through politics that Indians are entering into the contemporary world . Politics in India has no doubt continued to be generally democratic, except during the 22-months of internal emergency (June 1975- March 1977), operating in circumstances that conventional political theories identify as unpropitious for democracy : amidst a poor, illiterate and staggeringly diverse citizenry . Indians now appear to have accepted democracy, learning about it through actual experiences of life marked by deprivation and maldistribution.

During the fifty years of independence four different visions competed with one another : Gandhi's vision of low-cost economy and panchayati democracy; Nehru's vision of western egalitarianism and economic development through centralized planning ; Bose's vision of a socialist democracy with all powers to the people (the leftists of all hues vaguely share this vision); and Ambedkar's vision of parliamentary democracy with full empowerment of the dalits and backward castes . No single vision by itself has received universal acceptance to the people . In addition, from the early nineties India has begun to open her economy and culture to greater international exposure and competition. This liberalization policy raised high hopes in the initial years for India achieving an economic "miracle" like "the Asian tigers ." In 1997 this hope does not appear to be high and bright . India's "tryst with Destiny" beginning in August 1947 has led India's millions to a widely-shared sense of despondency fifty years after . The gloom has descended on the political, economic and social horizons . The nationalist euphoria and confidence of 1947 has given way to frustration of living in a "waste land" in course of the last fifty years .

Good but Not-so-Bright Record

Compared to the conditions of 1947, the economic conditions of Indians of all social strata have improved . The consumption pattern has changed for the better but not to the same degree for all classes of people. Since the mid-sixties great achievement has been made in agricultural production.In industrial production also the advancement has been significant,though not impressive.The average rate of economic growth has been around 4 per cent.The achievement has been remarkable in technologi-cal progress, especially in computer engineering, defence production and space science technology . But the remarkable feature of the economic development of independent India is the huge contrast between the rich and the poor. Some rich Indians are definitely richer than the rich people of the developed western countries and, at the same time, the poor in India continues to live in abject poverty . About one-third of India's population now lives below the subsistence level .Then, again, literacy rate has gone up from 17 per cent in 1947 to 52 per cent in 1997 but the total number of illiterates in

1997 still remains equal to India's total population in 1947 . Since inde-
pendence there has been a sort of explosion of colleges and universities
but the standard of higher education has fallen sharply.

There are some bright things in India's democratic set-up for which
Indians can reasonably feel proud . First, the press and the print media
have achieved a reasonable success in holding their fort . Except in the
dark days of the internal emergency in the mid-seventies, the press has
generally maintained an independent stance of its own . The role of the
Fourth Estate in India in highlighting the conditions of the people and
resisting the unjustified onslaught of the executive has been , more or less,
praiseworthy . From time to time , attempts have been made by the power
that be, to muzzle the voice of the press but the press in general has tena-
ciously resisted the anti-democratic moves.Secondly, despite some inher-
ent weaknesses of a multi-party system in a plural society marked by per-
sonal and factional bickerings, the Indian party system has maintained
itself with some resilience and served the democratic state.From the domi-
nant party system in the first two decades there has been a gradual devel-
opment of a genuine multi-party system reflecting all shades of political
principles and opinions : conservative Right, radical Left and the middle-
roaders .True, India has failed to develop a stable two-party system in the
model of Britain and the United States, but the two-party system is not the
only model of democratic party life.The political parties and pressure groups
in India have successfully played the role of the "gate-keepers" of the In-
dian political system.They have brought forth the reasonable demands of
the people to the policy-making levels but have not allowed the extreme
demands challenging the political system itself. Thirdly, the judiciary in
independent India has creditably served the political system and the soci-
ety at large . From the very beginning of the Indian republic, the higher
judiciary has functioned as the champion of the democratic process and
thwarted the intermittent attempts of the executive and the legislature for
curtailing the rights of the individual and group. By enunciating the doc-
trine of "the basic features of the Constitution" the Supreme Court has
successfully resisted the power-hungry politicians and their ill-designed
schemes of undermining democracy in India. The two expressions,'socialist'
and 'secular', inserted with much fanfare in the Preamble to the Constitution
by the 42nd amendment (1976) , have sometimes been seen to be misused
for the purpose of achieving parochial political interests .The judiciary has
come to the help of the ordinary people by negating the moves of the authority
for curtailing democratic freedoms and the fundamental rights of the people,
and by its efforts to put a brake on the systematic loot of the nation's resources
by unscrupulous politicians . In the nineties the widespread political, financial
and administrative corruptions have induced the higher judiciary to be "ac-
tive" for safeguarding the Constitution and the interests of the public . In
the context of all-round corruptions"judicial activism" seems to have been

welcomed by the people and the press . Many people consider it a silver lining to the otherwise dark clouds gathering in many fronts of public life in free India. The judiciary's independence was threatened during the Emergency period but "the second freedom movement" of 1976-77 halted the spectre of 'committed judiciary' in India . In the golden jubilee year of independence the functioning of an independent judiciary, despite its shortcomings, needs to be recognized as a great achievement of Indian democracy.

The Debit Side

The debit side of the fifty years of independence however is causing increasing concern . The consensus of the Constituent Assembly has already been challenged in regard to the Union-State relations in the Indian federal system . Since the late sixties , when crack appeared in the Congress monolith and the party lost its dominance over the Indian political system, there have been persistent demands from the non-Congress political parties as well as the informed public and academics to have a fresh look at the constitutional relations between the Union government and the State Governments . The demand proved irresistible as the power equation between the major political parties underwent a sea-change and the Sarkaria Commission on the working of the Constitution was appointed in the early eighties. Not much concrete came out of the long-drawn-out academic exercise by the Sarkaria Commission. The demand for readjustment in the Union-State relations is still on the agenda of the political parties . This remains an unfinished task at the time of the golden jubilee of independence.

This point assumes further importance in view of the fact that the Indian polity currently seems destined to live with the culture of coalitionpolitics in the foreseeable future . Except in Kashmir and the North-East, there is no danger to national integration, but throughout India the regional aspirations of the people are becoming more and more vociferous and assertive.The Lok Sabha elected on the eve of the golden jubilee year of Indian independence is typical of the prevailing political scenario.There are only two major national political parties—the Congress and the BJP— but each of them is too weak to win absolute majority on its own . Both of them are trying to assemble together small parties and groups in a workable coalition but in the process have been compelled to make some compromises on principles and give concessions to regional pressures . The other parties are either openly regional in their objectives, orientation and activities or restricted to particular regions in their appeal and organizational effectiveness despite their formal ideological orientation to national politics . India has to learn the art of running coalition governments . The commitment to democratic politics combined with ethnic and cultural diversities and regional roots of most of the political forces would make coalition government a natural form

of organizing political power . With the weakening of ideological extremism of the rightist and leftist brands of politics, a sort of a vague national consensus has already emerged on economic policy and foreign policy . There may be programmatic differences among the political parties but the area of consensus in 1997 is definitely larger than what was in 1947.

What is however most alarming at present is the near total absence of probity in public life . It is a fact that independent India's first scam was the jeep scandal (1948) of V.K. Krishna Menon whom Prime Minister Nehru protected in all possible ways . Soon came the LIC scandal (1956) of Mundra involving Nehru's finance minister T.T. Krishnamachari and the Prime Minister was found vascillating on taking any strong step . The nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and criminals originated in Nehru's time and it was almost institutionalized during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi . Things started deteriorating at a fast rate during Rajiv Gandhi's stewardship of the government . Since the late eighties huge financial scams started surfacing with sickening regularity . Today people have developed a complete distrust about the politicians . What is most distressing at present is the cynical disregard shown in practice by the politicians towards probity in public life . To the ordinary intelligent citizens, politics itself has become suspect . As a result of the folly and indulgence practised these past many years, politics has become the full-time occupation of criminals, the unscrupulous and the dishonest . Politics has come to be criminalized in the sense that criminals in considerable number have gained entry into almost all political parties . Legislatures shelter the dregs of society . Criminal cases are pending against as many as 7 per cent of the members of the current Lok Sabha .Compared to the previous Lok Sabhas, this is a unique feature noticed in the year of the golden jubilee of independence.Since the days of pre-independence riots, criminals have been taking shelter under the umbrellas of political parties for political protection and they have been used by the politicians for partisan purposes. The latest developments however show that criminals no longer seek protection and patronage of political parties, rather they want to control the parties by winning seats on the decision-making bodies at all levels from Parliament to panchayats.Criminals use politicians: hence politicisation of crimes has come to be replaced by criminalization of politics.

Corruption has affected not politicians alone; it has eaten the vitals of public administration as such . The intellectual honesty and moral stature of the members of the All-India services have touched the all-time low . The rot started in a big way with Indira Gandhi's attempt to create a "committed bureaucracy ." During the Emergency period the subservience of the elite section of the Indian administration to the extra-constitutional authorities was a regular feature at all levels . Today a considerable number of IAS/IPS officers are either serving jail terms or facing chargesheets for different types

of crimes committed by them . In most cases, administrators are found to be willing collaborators of politicians in power in their nefarious games of misusing power and public funds . People's interests will always remain vulnerable unless the unhealthy politician-bureaucrat-business men-criminal nexus can be broken. The Vohra Committee Report has revealed only the tip of the iceberg . The selfish, career-minded administrator's greed to get better transfer, quick promotion, foreign posting and financial fortunes is one of the factors responsible for the degradation of the standard of public administration in India today . Supersession of senior and meritorious officers is not at all uncommon today. Time has certainly come to review the issue whether the higher bureaucracy in India should be allowed to enjoy constitutional protection any more . It is urgently necessary to think in terms of creating a built-in system of professional autonomy for the civil service . The golden jubilee of independence offers a convenient point of time to decide on this vital aspect of administering a populous and democratic polity like India . Public accountability of the politicians in power as well as the administrators in action must be established if the fruits of independence are to be enjoyed, even partially, by the laity.

Another serious issue, which demands serious consideration in the fiftieth year of independence, is the system of ever expanding reservation in elective bodies and government services on caste and communal considerations. What was accepted initially for ten years has been allowed to get new lease of life continually and grow in dimension .A completely new kind of politics seems to have overtaken the style and postures of Indian politics, especially since the episode of "Mandalisation" in the late eighties. Commissions of Inquiry set up to identify "backward classes" were flooded with demands for more entities to be so declared . Backwardness is politically exploited to serve as the new badge of distinction. Clearly a vested interest has been created in being backward . The emergence of OBCs, in addition to SCs and STs, into electoral prominence has put unbearable pressure on the ethos and practices of Indian democracy. The leaders of the caste-based political outfits are not trained in conventional styles of political functioning . They prefer to engage in "grassroots politics," politics of action without much respect for discussion, debate and rule book . On achieving independence India chose to achieve socio-economic change through parliamentary means, but the activities and the *modus operandi* of this new brand of politicians, in and out of office, for liberating their downtrodden followers are not in accord with the norms set by the Constitution . It is dangerous to accept the logic that being backward, poor and disadvantaged is a sufficient justification for disobeying the norms and rules of civilized behaviour. If political anarchy is to be avoided, this trend needs to be recognized, checked and reversed.

At the same time it is a matter of great regret that the record of

independent India in respect of human rights is not at all encouraging even after fifty years of democratic governance . Today incidents of unwarranted and unbelievable atrocities and violence on the weaker sections are frequent, deaths of undertrial prisoners in police custody are on the increase, cases of rape and sexual harassment are verbally condemned but effective remedial steps are seldom seriously taken in practice . Draconian laws are framed to deprive the political dissenters of their right to life and liberty, and exploitation of hapless women and children of the marginalized sections of society is the order of the day . Injustice for these categories of people seems to be the order of the day . Although India is a signatory to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments of international law, the effectiveness of the National Commission of Human Rights is yet to be established. No government, the Union or the State, has till date shown in actual practice any serious concern for protecting and promoting human rights.

Structure of Governance

The golden jubilee of independence should provide a suitable occasion for taking a hard look at the structure of governance and seeking necessary remedies. India's experience of parliamentary government has shown that more often than not pressures from parochial and vested interests weaken the executive and encourage corruptions as these interests through their representative legislators blackmail the executive. The executive's dependence on legislature for survival, which is the main principle of parliamentary form of government, has been the cause of political corruption and governmental instability in India's case . What proved suitable to the British character has proved unsuitable in the Indian political climate. The fractured verdict of the electorate as seen from time to time has increased the vulnerability of the executive and thereby incidences of political corruption also . Over the years not only the quality and standard of debates in Parliament and state legislatures have steadily gone down , but the legislative forum itself has been deplorably misused by the new generation of politicians to extract unjustified concessions from the executive . Sometimes the executive has even been denied of a tolerable degree of stability and policy consistency . This situation not only encourages corruptions but also creates hindrances for steady economic growth . It would be a very relevant issue today to ask for a national debate whether India should opt for a presidential form of government, not necessarily of the American variety but a modified version of it, both at the national and state levels . France offers a model but other variations may also be considered . If governmental leadership is given to a stable executive, whose term of office is not terminable by an adverse vote in the legislature, it would be easier for the leader and his team enjoying clear mandate of the people to ensure steady economic growth and policy consistency for securing

social justice . A rotten parliamentary system encouraging all sorts of partisan blackmailing and parochial bargaining is ill-suited for managing India's present multifarious problems . A government worth its name should mean serious business and not drift aimlessly and strive for its survival only.

A country of 950 million, which currently finds itself in a total debt trap, external and internal, of a huge amount, and also during the last decade has been at the receiving end of dictations from the IMF and the World Bank, desperately needs strong leadership enjoying clear mandate of the people . Parliamentary democracy, as practised during the last fifty years, has failed to produce strong democratic structure of governance . During this period India had either weak, vascillating governments or strong, personalised autocratic governments.

Along with the reform of the executive, some fundamental reform of Parliament and of the state legislatures would be in order for restoring some semblance of a genuinely representative body . The popular chamber should consist of members elected in two different methods : one half is to be directly elected by the people from single-member constituencies on the basis of simple majority vote and the other half is to be elected on the basis of proportional representation by the List System in order to ensure representation of all viable political parties or shades of opinion . The German model would be helpful on this point.

It would be necessary to redraw the political map of India by creating larger number of small states (provinces) and thereby satisfying regional aspiration for political identity and ensuring better administrative supervision. Decentralization of political-administrative powers and sources of revenue to the States and further down to units of local government to maximum practicable extent would definitely strengthen the basis of democratic polity and promote national integration .

Establishing a Confederation

In yet another respect a completely new political approach to the polity seems overdue . India attained independence at the cost of partition of the subcontinent and with the blood of millions, which has been vividly portrayed in Govind Nihalni's film *Tamas* .The subcontinent enjoyed for long some degree of ethnic, cultural and economic unity of its own . Partition has been unnatural . Fifty years of real-life experience shows that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh can ill-afford to engage in continuous internecine tensions and occasional military confrontations . Time seems to be ripe now to think in terms of these three sovereign countries forming themselves into a confederation . If only the management of defence, foreign affairs and communication could be entrusted with the confederal government and all other matters are left to sovereign care of the respective governments, the people of the

subcontinent would be able to develop their scarce economic resources in their own way for the uplift of the common masses . Such a change would certainly not come in a day but a beginning may be made without any delay. The example set by the European Union serves as an eye-opener . An intense soul searching by the political leaders and the intelligentsia of the three countries is urgently called for at this hour of celebrating the golden jubilee of independence . What is needed is not an *ad nauseum* rhetoric of peace and friendship but some concrete, time-bound programmes of action for negating the evil consequences of the imperialist design foisted on the people of this subcontinent fifty years ago . Such a step would be a fitting reply to the designs of neo-imperialism of the West and expansionist hegemonism of the East.

Celebrating the golden jubilee of independence would be meaningful and significant only if the first step towards rejuvenation of the currently sinking spirit of this subcontinent is taken up with the seriousness that the occasion deserves . To form a confederation of the countries of the subcontinent would be a fitting salute to the wishes and visions of two great leaders of India's freedom movement : Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, both of whom had abundantly made clear their total opposition to the vivisection of India . One meaningful pledge to be taken on the fiftieth year of independence should be the one of living up to the principles and visions of Mahatmaji and Netaji, the only two leaders who concretely embodies in their lives and activities the noble principles of selfless love for their motherland and for humanity.

Demand for Small States and the Questions of Democracy, Self-Determination and India's Unity

DEBNARAYAN MODAK

With the announcement of a separate state of 'Uttarakhand' by the then Prime Minister,H.D Deve Gowda, in his address to the nation on the Independence Day of 1996, the issue for formation of some small states has come to the fore . It has inspired and even revived some agitations—a few of which had already receded into the background—like the movements with the demands for the creation of separate Jharkhand, Gorkhaland, Bodoland, Chattisgarh and Vidarbha states.However, the issue of the creation of some more states within the Indian Union should not be taken as an isolated phenomenon; it is rather associated with the multifaceted problems of regionalism manifesting itself in different forms in different parts of the country and also has much to do with the broader questions of democracy, self-determination and India's unity.

The present paper seeks to consider the demand for the formation of such states in the broader context of the national question in India . Analysing the past and present of the problems associated with it, it tries to bring out the specific features of national question in India today, which gave birth to an atmosphere congenial to the rise of such movements. The paper seeks to examine the arguments put forward by the protagonists of those movements and attempts to evaluate their democratic content keeping the genuine grievances of the people of those areas in view , and also the question of the unity and integrity of the country.

I

The demands for the formation of new states are not new in contemporary Indian political history . But before going into the question of state reorgani-
zation in one form or another, it should be remembered at the very outset-that the nation-building process in our country did not correspond to the

experiences in the West . The transformation of our people into a nation
actually took place as a consequence of a long and protracted colonial rule
and it has a distinct character of its own. Amalendu Guha observed that
there was no nationalism or subjectively conscious nationality in pre-colo-
nial India. He contended that there might be certain objective marks of
identity (such as a common language, script, typical psychological make-
up, belief-system etc.) indicating a territorialized community of culture;
but the nation-building process in our country was definitely a phenom-
enon subsequent to the British rule. Analysing the impact of British rule on
India's socio-economic and political life, he tried to conceptualize national
configurations in India and concluded that 'there appeared two streams of
national consciouness—one pan-Indian and the other, regional' during the
British rule. He argued that the Indian national movement was a combina-
tion of both of these streams .[1]

Reviewing the article of Guha, E.M.S. Namboodiripad observes
that it 'exposes two mistakes originating from opposite ends : (a) consider-
ing India as a whole to be the 'nation' , negating the multinational character
of the country; and (b) absolutising the multinational character, or negat-
ing the unity of the country as a whole.'[2]

Irfan Habib also points out that, although there has been a con-
sciousness of India as a country down the centuries, 'there was no basis for
the emergence of nationalities before the British conquests....' To him, it is
a 'phenomenon subsequent to British conquest.' Answering to the question
as to whether India can be regarded as a nation, he offered a negative view
and opined that it is 'a country which contains a number of emerging na-
tionalities with different languages and cultures of their own .[3]

Thus until the advent of British rule India had been a fragmented
subcontinent with different nationalities at varying stages of development,
it was only after the British conquest that political and administrative uni-
fication was brought about for the first time throughout the subcontinent.
Even after the British conquest the developments of various nationalities
were, due to several reasons, neither simultaneous nor even . But the emer-
gence of nationalities in course of their bitter struggle against imperialism
resulted in an anti-imperialist character of our national outlook which in
its turn has given birth to a remarkable unity of the Indian people in the
face of a common enemy. From this aspect of reality, it is erroneous to
conclude that India is one nation. Such an over-simplification does not
stand either the test of science or historicity . In view of the great diversity
of people belonging to different regions, having distinct languages and
cultures, the multinational character of the Indian state must be recog-
nized . At the same time one should not miss that aspect of unity which has
developed in course of our struggle for independence.

It indicates that the national movement of our country during pre-

independence days represented a combination of both the pan-Indian and regional streams and they did not often come into contradiction with each other in view of a common struggle against the common enemy . This was because of an aspiration shared by different nationalities to usher in a new era of progress and development in a free and united India shorn of poverty, backwardness and any other forms of subjugation. Again, the promises made by our national leaders towards democratization of our society and polity and also the granting of national autonomy have further strengthened the bond of unity. Thus, regional nationalism, without receding into the background, gave way to pan-Indian unity during our struggle for freedom.

II

With the attainment of independence, however, the national question in India has undergone profound changes . In a sense , the demand for self-determination and secession from the British empire had been won; and it is, therefore, no longer the question of a nation's external dependence on imperial/colonial power . It now refers essentially to the internal political arrangement of the Indian Union comprising a number of linguistic and ethnic communities united with a variety of regional pressures. The adoption of the capitalist path of development during post-independence period and its coalescence with the pre-capitalist social forces and imperial interests, instead of minimizing the gaps, widened regional disparities and unevenness to a great extent . As Javed Alam observes

> The development of capitalism and of the manysided changes and forms of unevenness brought about by it have been key factors in the emergence of national awareness and national movements. The subsequent differences in the levels of national crystallizationof people with different expressions of ethnic identity have also been conditioned by the nature and varyin₃ consequences of the capital ist transformation. [4]

Indeed, capitalist transformation in India has shown a strong tendency towards self-perpetuating unevenness both regionwise and communitywise. The policies adopted by the ruling elites resulted in the perpetuation of pre-capitalist social divisions, and it fails to create new social unity based on equality of nationalities.The promises were forgotten and the democratic policies adopted by the ruling elites resulted in the perpetuation of pre-capitalist social divisions, and it fails to create new social unity based on equality of nationalities. The promises were forgotten and the democratic aspirations of different nationalities neglected , which , in turn, has created a sense of deception particularly among the backward communities which nurtures

regional sentiments and fosters national movements of different forms .

But one should remember that the question here is not one of an oppressor-nation dominating economically and politically upon one or several oppressed-nations. It is primarily a question of class oppression responsible for regional disparities and subsequent backwardness of a large section of our people belonging to different nationalities .Ajit Roy, in one of his studies , has analysed the national affiliation of 75 monopoly houses , and concludes that 'there is no evidence of a particular nationality thriving at the cost of others .'[5] Corroborating his views, Prakash Karat also observes that the 'Indian big-bourgeoisie—the most important section of the ruling class — is a composite strata derived from various nationalities.' To him, 'the holdings of the landlords are generally confined within their own national boundaries.' He adds that in the cases of bureaucracy and armed forces also, there is no evidence of any one or other group of nationalities monopolizing them.[6] This is unlike the 'national oppression' model which was prevalent in the czarist Russia. Hence, the struggle of the different nationalities of India for their socio-economic and cultural advances is not necessarilly to be a struggle against one or the other oppressor nation. So, any attempt to understand the backwardness of the people belonging to different nationalities and to seek remedies for their problems without relating those to the underlying basic and deep socio-economic factors is bound to prove a futile exercise .

Again, it is important to note that the 'national question' today has visibly become a matter of 'great concern' and a special field of operation for the imperialist forces, who have suddenly found themselves as new champions of the 'right of nations to self-determination' in the third world countries.[7] By providing ideological, finacial and military support to all sorts of traditional, conservative and reactionary forces in the name of solving 'national question,' they have been fomenting troubles in various parts of the globe . The Indian subcontinent is not immune from this global design. Indeed, it is the strategy and tactics of imperialism to encourage secession and separatism where national inequality exists. The national policy of our ruling classes often plays into their hands .

In such a situation, it is very important to realize the multinational character of our polity with nationalities having distinct and separate languages and with varying degrees of development and corresponding cultural frames of mind, notwithstanding the existence of a certain common features of an all-India cultural background and economic and political interests. The unity of the Indian Union can effectively be safeguarded and the process of national integration can be carried forward only by a consistent application of democratic principles and methods to all aspects of this complicated issue .

III

As we have already said that the aspirations of the people belonging to different nationalities in India merged into the single demand of national

liberation, the differences were temporarily shelved during pre-independence days. With the attainment of independence, however, they began to assert themselves and it took the shape of the demand for linguistic reorganization of states . In fact, Indian polity began to show unmistakable signs of multinational character right from the days following independence.

The movement for linguistic reorganization of states leading to the creation of linguistic provinces actually began with the advance of anti-imperialist movement. It was due to the fact that the British rulers divided India into provinces convenient to colonial administration .They established and changed administrative borders without taking account of the different nationalities and languages making up Indian population. Several national areas were often combined within the boundaries of one administrative unit, whilst at the same time many national areas were found to be divided by the borders of provinces and principalities. Boris I . Kluyev rightly observes that 'in colonial India there was neither a single nationality , nor a nation whose boundaries of settlement coincided with the borders of administrative units.'[8] The British authorities paid very little attention to the demands of the Indian people and were engaged in re-demarcating the boundaries of the existing provinces to weaken our national liberation movement. The partition of Bengal in 1905 was a very pertinent example in this regard .

As such , the anti-partition movement in 1905 actually marked the beginning of the movement for creation of linguistic provinces . Later in 1912, a Telugu organization, 'Andhra Mahasabha' came into being with the demand for the creation of a Telugu-speaking state. Subsequently, such demands were taken up by Tamils, Malayalees, Marathas, Gujratis, Oriyas and Bengalees. Between 1918 and 1922, during the upsurge of the anti-imperialist struggle, the movement for creation of linguistic provinces greatly extended its range and embraced most Indian nationalities .[9]

The Indian National Congress (INC) virtually lent its support to the linguistic-nationality principle as early as in 1905 by opposing partition of Bengal and supporting its annulment . However, the concrete issue of linguistic reorganization made its first appearance in its Calcutta session in 1917; and after much debate, in 1920 at the Nagpur session, a resolution was drawn up with a scheme for division of India into linguistic provinces . In the following year, the INC reorganized its provincial committees on the basis of linguistic formula . In many subsequent resolutions, the organization put forward its strong support to linguistic principles . Prakash Karat observes that it was ' imperative for the Congress under Gandhi—if it had to become a mass organization — to canalize the linguistic nationality sentiment and use the national languages as vehicles of political communication and propaganda .'[10]

However, the reverse trend began immediately after the achievement of independence . Signals were coming out in the opposite direction right from the formation of the Constituent Assembly . INC wanted to defer

the issue under one plea or another and raised the bogey of administrative inconvenience, economic instability, and, above all, the disruption of India's unity etc. But the question of linguistic reorganization was an issue that agitated the minds of millions so intensely that even a large section of Congressmen found it difficult to endorse the official line and justify it before the people. Such differences were even reflected on the floor of the the first Indian Parliament and the prominent Congressmen like P. R. Deshmukh, Raghu Ramaiah, N.V. Gadgil, S. Nijalingappa and others were vocal in demanding the immediate formation of some linguistic states.[11]

In view of the growing upsurge of the people, particularly in the southern region, the Government at the Centre, at long last, had to concede the demand for linguistic reorganization of states . The States Reorganization Commission(SRC), under the Chairmanship of Fazl Ali with two members, H. N. Kunzru and K.M. Panikkar, was formed on 22 December 1953 . The first linguistic state of Andhra was carved out of the multilingual province of Madras after violent agitations following the death of Potti Sriramalu . It was a partial victory for the Telugu people as they had to continue their struggle for three more years to get 'Vishalandhra,' i.e., the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 after the dismantling of Hyderabad state . On the recommendations of the SRC in 1956, the major linguistic states were formed; but the Congress government at the Centre acted in a half-hearted manner in this regard, and it kept the proposals of the formation of several linguistic states, like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Punjab outside its purview . By mid-sixties, however, the major states had been reorganized on linguistic lines, which has no doubt, promoted democratic consciousness as the state administration and the medium of education could be conducted in the language of the people.

IV

Following the states reorganization, for the first time in India's modern history, there was not a single state or province in the country in which all linguistic minorities combined, comprised more than half of the total population.[12] Yet in a complex and multilingual and multiethnic country like ours, even after the linguistic reorganization of states, it was inevitable that there would exist substantial linguistic and ethnic minorities in a number of states . So, the formation of the linguistic states did not cover the whole ground, and very important aspects of the whole issue that remained unsolved were the problems faced by smaller nationalities, nationalities yet in the process of formation, tribal peoples and regions inhabited by tribals, linguistic or ethnic minorities .In a democratic society, the rights of such linguistic or ethnic minorities would have to be safeguarded while legitimizing the aspirations of the majority linguistic groups . But scant attention had been paid to the recognition of the rights and status of the important minority groups having distinct linguistic / ethnic identities through constitutiona / legislative provisions. Hence, in the absence of a distinct and clear-cut democratic language and cultural policy as well as lack of any proper initiative to do away with the

problems of economic deprivation and backwardness on the part of the state, the demands of separate statehood were being raised even after linguistic reorganization .

In the face of such agitations, a second round of state reorganization took place when the North-Eastern states like Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were formed in the 1970s . Some of them previously autonomous district councils under the state of Assam, later became Union Territories and then full-fledged states . This process went ahead as the distinct tribal entities asserted their rights and its non-recognition has led to separatist movements too .

Demands for separate statehood also arose in certain regions aiming at the disintegration of linguistic states . The Telangana movement in the late 60s and its counter-agitation in Andhra region in early 70s,separate Vidarbha demand in Maharashtra and Chattishgarh movement in Madhya Pradesh were some examples in this regard . All these developments seem to establish the fact that the language alone cannot always play the cementing role in maintaining unity. It is the problem of regional backwardness/ imbalance and/or the issue of recognition of ethnic identity which has proved more powerful in fomenting the urge for separation .

In spite of the fact that there have been manifestations of regional movements of different forms in different parts of the country right from the beginning of post-independence days, proper initiatives have not been taken to minimize those gaps . Added to this, newer problems arose due to the ongoing socio-economic developments in our country . After decades of capitalist development, further unevenness in development caused serious regional imbalance which led some regions to become more backward than others . The hill peoples and the peoples belonging to tribal communities became worst victims of it and their problems need separate consideration.

The tribal communities in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra have suffered a steady and rapid erosion of their traditional rights on lands and access to forests . Brutal disruption of their collective social life is being brought under the heel of the most rapacious exploitation at the hands of contractors, big traders, landlords and mine-owners . Simultaneously the class differentiation has led to a greater strata of educated petty-bourgeoisie who see their language, culture and way of life being destroyed or brought into the process of forcible assimilation.[13]

While the bulk of the tribal people are forced to live under wretched conditions, and thereby reduced to cheap and unfree wage slaves, a strata of petty-bourgeoisie emerges with a component of the intelligentsia in it with the spread of education and the impact of reservation for the Schedule Tribes. This latter group is a distinct and prominent feature among the tribal communities . This strata is in the lead in asserting tribal identity and interests.Their movements for autonomy/ separation are essentially protests against the present

order of oppression and the drive for assimilation and against a system incapable of fulfilling their genuine aspirations.[14]

It is very important to note that the problem of regional disparities and the resultant backwardness is not new; what is new is the perception of it and the generation of a sense of deception which has given birth to the assertion of different regional forces and the demands for separate statehood in recent years .

<div align="center">V</div>

Now, the question arises as to whether the formation of some small states on grounds of regional / ethnic/ tribal identity will contribute to the solution of the genuine grievances of the people belonging to those areas . The supporters of such demands often put forward the arguments that the granting of the rights of people can prevent regional disparities and expedite the pace of economic development . To them, the breaking up of the large states and the formation of smaller ones are essential to enable the people to have their share in governance, which, in turn, will be able to stop 'neo-imperialist' exploitation . On grounds of administrative convenience too, the demands for small states are acceptable to them . They also claim that, instead of weakening our national unity, it would foster the spirit of oneness not only among the people belonging to the region; but also among the people of the country as a whole and pave the way for true national integration.

Such arguments prompted many political parties, journalists and research scholars to come out in support of the demand for the formation of some smaller states within Indian Union . Nikhil Chakraborty, a renowned journalist, while analysing the factors in Jharkhand movement, called for the setting up of a fresh states reorganization commission. [15] Advocating a "Second Round of States' Reorganization," Pradeep Kumar argued that 'quite a large number of these subregions within the states have a sizable population and area to make them administratively and politically viable .' He contended that in some states, 'the second reorganization can really take care of the intra-regional imbalancees in addition to providing separate states to several full-fledged dialects, which for many practical purposes are almost languages and have rich and developed literary forms'. According to him, 'Far from strengthening any fissiparous tendencies by way of betting a chain reaction in other states as feared by some, these large scale reorganization will actually lead to 50 or 60 smaller states .' He concludes : 'Such a large number of states will, in fact, act as an insurance against any one state dominating the others .' He, however, admits that 'there is seemingly no end to an individuals' craving for separate identity,' and emphasizes the need for drawing a line .[16]

Taking the clue from Pradeep Kumar himself as also from others, it

may be argued that the creation of small states will not automatically lead to the reduction of regional imbalances unless the policy of the state and their approach towards planning and development changes . One has to identify the root-cause of the problems of inter-regional and intra-regional disparities and suggest remedies for the same . It is the inevitable consequences of the adoption of the capitalist path of development which has given birth to the massive problems of poverty, unemployment and backwardness for the bulk of the population cutting across nationality-barriers . The backward sections of our people became the worst victims of it . Until and unless the system of exploitation which has produced miseries to our people is put to an end, can the formation of a separate state alone solve the problem in root and branch? Again, the degree of political participation and accessibility of the people to the administration does not always depend on the size a state . It primarily depends on the nature of the polity, extent of democratic decentralization it permits, and also the quality of governance . The argument that the unity of the people can be maintained in a smaller state is not always tenable . Our experiences of some smaller states, particularly in North-Eastern regions, do not substantiate such claims . The plea of administrative convenience may also prove fatal to the smaller states, because separate administrative system involves an expenditure which may prove too great for the meagre resources of a small state . Above all, in a multiethnic and multilingual country like ours, the demand for separate states on such grounds will inspire a never-ending stream of similar demands that might jeopardize both the well-being of the people themselves and also the unity and integrity of the country .

Again, our experiences relating to the relationship of different political parties and some forces of vested interests, both internal and external, with such movements over the years have raised certain doubts about the future of those agitations .

The development of the Jharkhand movement is a case in point. The politics of factionalism associated with it and the alignment of their leaders with different political forces over the years indicate that the leadership of such movements might play into the hands of ruling classes for a small share of the cake. While most of the national political parties, at present, are not the supporters of smaller states,Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP)'s recent demand for a fresh re-organization of states deserves serious attention. In fact, the support for creation of smaller states is relatively new for the BJP which for a long time (as its predecessor the Jana Sangh) objected to such demands and instead supported a strong Central Government to protect the unity and integrity of India. Moreover,the fatricidal strife which is taking place as a consequence of such agitations should also be taken note of while making a decision in this regard. In an era, when the issue of 'Social Justice' has achieved its momentum, the case of Uttarakhand may be a pertinent example. Pradeep Tamta, the chief convener of "Uttarakhand Dalit Pichhada, Alpasankhayak

Morcha" in an informative article tries to point out the 'castiest' character of the movement and concludes that 'the demand for separate Uttarakhand State is fraught with fatal consequences for the weaker sections.' According to him, 'It will be a negation of social justice. It will shrewdly circumvent the constitutional sefeguards for the backward class.'[17]

VI

In view of the above, it may be said that the formation of some more states cannot be an end in itself. New states may be formed in some regions on grounds of administrative and other requirements.But the solutions to the basic problems like economic backwardness,unemployment, poverty and social oppression do not seem to lie on the formation of seperate states only. Instead of seperation,what are needed most are the balanced and speedy development, the removal of disparities, and overall democratisation of our polity through decentralization of power up to the grassroot level. Steps are to be taken immediately to remove the obstacles that come in its way and it presupposes the broadest unity of the people belonging to all regions. It ought to be a common struggle against class oppression waged jointly by different nationalities in India. Herein lies a historic task for the left forces in our country.But it is no denying the fact that they have proved their utter incompetence in their historic task of uniting the oppressed people against their common enemy, and the vested interests of different hues have been capitalising from their failure.On the other hand , the breaking up of the existing linguistic states will be detrimental not only to the development of class-based movements and the unity of the toilers, but also the development of those regions and the unity and integrity of the country . Such small states will never be economically and politically viable and it will pave the way for further instability in our political system . This does not mean, however, that the grievances of a particular section of a state's population on matters relating to language , ethnic/tribal identity, economic development and /or any other special problems should not be looked into and remedied through constitutional/ legislative provisions. Actually, it is the neglect of their long-standing grievances, real or assumed, which has aroused a sense of deception among them and provided a very fertile soil for the cropping up of the demands for separation . Hence,every possible step should be taken immediately to remove the genuine grievances of the people of those areas . What is very much necessary is to create conditions so that the fruits of development must reach the entire population keeping in view the special problems of the backward sections and regions. Restructuring of our federal polity, particularly in respect of Centre-state financial relations and the steps towards empowerment of people by ensuring wider political participation can go a long way towards short-term solution to those problems .

Accordingly, the granting of regional autonomy may become a meaningful alternative to the endless division of states on the basis of sectional and regional demands. The empowerment of the people of those sections / regions may help them to come back to the mainstream of our social and political life and initiate actions for the betterment of their own fortunes.Such arrangements may be effective for the compact and contiguous areas inhabited by the tribal people who have been experiencing a tradition of being neglected, and also for the hill areas with a distinct ethnic identity. In this connection , it should be remembered that the formation of the autonomous councils will not automatically lead to the solution of all problems . Our experiments with different autonomous councils may prove to be very important in this regard. The success or failure of such arrangement is invariably linked up with the extent of devolution of power and also the political will of the state governments. So, at this present juncture of our polity, it is very much necessary not only to implement it properly within the scope of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution,but also to strengthen it through constitutional amendments to ensure further demonstration of our polity so as to enable the people to shape their own lives .

Thus regional autonomy may be granted to different national minorities living in a compact areas in accordance with certain well-defined norms and they should be given the right to administer their own internal affairs inconformity with the wishes of the great majority of the people.Assistance must be given to them to facilitate the exercise of those rights. This is very much necessary so as to make them feel that they are the masters of their own affairs.

But , the adoption of the system of regional autonomy together with the assurance in every respect of the right of national equality does not imply the solution of national question . The real solution of our national question has to await the emancipation of our national minorities from their political, economic and cultural backwardness which is a kind of historical liability for us. It is this backwardness which has hampered their full enjoyment of the rights of national equality as well as the consolidation of unity among various nationalities . Such consolidation is very much inseparable from the consolidation and the unification of our country as a whole .

Therefore, the final solution will require proper understanding of the roots of those problems. If it is admitted that poverty, caused by underdevelopment and exploitation of resources in the interest of the ruling elites, is the real problem its eradication involves the question of restructuring of power relations, which again calls for radicalisation of our politics and an organized struggle of the exploited throughout the country . That alone can usher in a new era of equality of nationalities and the country will become united on a voluntary basis embodying the principle of "unity in diversity" in the true sense of the term .

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Politics at the Grassroots : the West Bengal Model of Development

ANIL KUMAR JANA

West Bengal has attracted the attention of scholars from both within and outside for its unique achievements at least in two respects . It has sustained a democratically elected state government under the absolute leadership of a communist party for an uninterrupted period of more than two decades . Secondly, it has adopted 'An Alternative Approach to Development' with a view to raising people's 'political consciousness along with giving them relief so that they can distinguish between truth and falsehood and friends and enemies, and realize the alternative path which will free them from the shackles of capitalism and feudalism and usher in a new modern progressive society.[1] The perspective and the objective of the Left Front government in West Bengal can never be explained in a better way without comprehending this policy statement of the government . The socio-political situation in which the Left Front was voted to power in 1977 was unique . Apart from implementation of modest but genuine redistributive programmes, it demanded the resolution of the 'crisis of governability' through the strengthening and consolidation of democratic institutions and forces which underwent corrosion during the Emergency.[2]

The development strategy of the Left Front government was directed towards carrying out agrarian reforms and implementing the policy for redistribution of power in favour of the weaker sections of the society simultaneously. Such a strategy emerges out of the fact that electorally the rural areas constitute almost 75 per cent of the state population and that the state enjoys the highest authority in matters of agrarian reforms under our scheme of constitutional federalism .The agenda for development through decentralization in West Bengal was put into practice by the Left Front government just after it came to power . It adopted the land-reforms-based development strategy which was closer to the structuralist view [3] of development. It was convinced that the equity-oriented policies and programmes due to their confinements

to the structural constraints of ownership of assets would not be able to bring about fundamental changes in the society .Therefore , the Government planned to launch an attack on poverty with simultaneous attacks on the structures which generated it . Thus the alternative approach undertaken by the West Bengal government is a class by itself and reasonably be classified as a distinct model of development.

The State government introduced some changes in the organizations of government functioning .[4] In the first place, the Department of Community Development was taken out of the Agriculture and merged with the Department of Panchayats to speed up the process of rural development in an organized and co-ordinated manner . Thus the issues of economic development was mixed up with those of political development . Secondly, the District Magistrate was made the Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad . The Zilla Parishad had been provided with the services of all the officers and employees of the State government at the district level .Likewise , the BDOs were placed with the Panchayat Samities in the similar capacity . Again the services of the VLW (Gram Sevaks) have also been placed at the disposal of the Gram Panchayat . These structural realignments overshadowed to some extent the so-called dichotomy between general (regulatory) administration and development administration [5] on the one hand, and that between the functional jurisdictions of the State government and the Local Bodies, on the other.

The Community Development Projects and the institution of Panchayati Raj aimed towards comprehensive upliftment of the rural society but these experiments were not met with desired success . Various evaluative studies including those of the Government of India [6] have found that through these programmes the rural elites had prevented the flow of benefits to the weaker sections of the rural community and had effectively established control over Panchayati Raj institutions and co-operatives .Land reforms measures undertaken in 1950s concentrated on the abolition of zamindary and could achieve only marginal progress although significant strides were noticed in West Bengal and Kerala due to a different correlation of political forces in these two States . A certain amount of differences is inescapable in a country as vast and varied as India but the situation in West Bengal could not really be considered to be progressive with regard to the equitable distribution of benefits to the majority . Two major characteristics of development policies pursued in the first three decades of independence, however, became manifest over the years. First, contrary to the objectives and priorities, benefits of the process of development did not reach the poorer sections of the society .Secondly, as a related matter, people in general, and the poor   in particular, were not involved in the process of decision-making and implementation of the development schemes and projects . The state government led by the Left Front realized that the tardy implementation of planning and

development programmes was mainly due to lack of popular involvement
in the formulation and implementation of the projects .[7] It look a policy
decision to reverse both these trends at the state level, within the constraints
and limitations imposed on it by the bourgeois - landlord class character of
the Indian State . [8] Rural development, the government emphasized, could
come primarily through the rural poor, and planning for development should
also be done primarily by involving the rural poor in an organized manner
. The Panchayati Raj institutions which were considered to be a platform
for organizing people's participation in rural development works, prior to
1978 , failed to give shape to the people's aspirations in reviving the rural
economy as they were not formed with elected representatives of the people.

The State government decided to reactivate the 'moribund' Panchayati
Raj system with the aim of ensuring people's participation in decentralized
planning and development . The politicized Panchayat in West Bengal is an
institutional innovation of the CPI(M) to consolidate its power base at the
grassroots .[9] The decision of the State government to revitalize the Panchayats
through election and to allow the political parties to field their own candidates
in 1978 was a total break with the previous practices . Since the Left Front
leadership was convinced that ' if *panchayat* fails, the CPM experiment fails,[10]
it would be difficult to understand the dynamics of its development strategy of
the last two decades without analysing the total context in which this 'institu-
tional innovation' pursued the methods of decentralized planning . The three-
tier Panchayat system comprising Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity and Gram
Panchayat came into existence on 4 June 1978 . Fifty six thousand representa-
tives contested the Panchayat elections with their respective party symbols to
get directly elected to different tiers .[11] Subsequently, the Second , Third and -
Fourth General Panchayat elections were held in 1983, 1988 and 1993 respec-
tively . Interestingly in all these elections, the Left Front established its politi-
cal hegemony over the rural polity in West Bengal .

The State government viewed rural development as a process of as-
sisting primarily the rural poor with a view to increasing production in
agriculture and allied activities, and in rural industry, and to maintaining a
certain balance between agricultural and industrial development . It was
convinced from different studies on Farm Management and Agricultural
Census of different districts as well as from several other States that agri-
cultural production, in terms of per acre yield and cropping-intensity to-
gether, was higher for the small and marginal farmers in comparison to
those of the rich farmers . The lack in resources and other non-labour in-
puts were compensated by them (small and marginal farmers) through in-
tensive application of their labour which increases yield per unit .[12] Natu-
rally such a perception led the government to develop an 'Alternative Ap-
proach' to rural development and planning the basis of which was land reforms
.For more than two decades, Land Reforms Acts were in practice in West Bengal

though there was a gulf of difference between the provisions of the law and its application .[13] Immediately after being voted to power the Left Front government resolved to change the scenario by enforcing those laws and in each area of land reforms programmes, co-operation of the peasant organizations and active participation of the newly elected panchayats were sought for and encouraged . This was for the first time in West Bengal that direct participation of the people and their representatives were ensured in development programmes.[14]

In any comprehensive planning for rural development the importance of land reforms cannot be overlooked . The main target of land reforms is to abolish intermediary rights and to establish legal rights of the actual peasants on land . Through imposition of land ceiling provisions arrangements were made to vest surplus land in government and to distribute the same among the cultivators . The achievement of West Bengal was much spectacular in comparison to all-India figures . So far as the present position is concerned, approximately 51 lakh acres of agricultural lands have been vested throughout the country of which 12.80 lakh acres of agricultural land has been vested in the State .[15] So far 10.10 lakh acres of land have been distributed to about 23.07 lakh beneficiaries . Thus total area of land distributed in West Bengal is not only the highest in the country but also accounts for about one-fifth of the total area of the surplus land distributed in all the States taken together .[16] Another important point that needs to be mentioned here is that the poorest section of the poor, i.e., the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes constitute more than 37% and 19 % respectively, of the total beneficiaries . The percentage is much more than the percentage of this population in the State.[17]

Alongside the land reforms measures directed towards vesting and distribution of surplus land beyond the ceiling, the Government of West Bengal launched the scheme of 'Operation Barga' after the formation of newly elected panchayats in 1978 . The underlined objective of the scheme was to record immediately the names of *bargadars* (share-croppers) in the field in order to protect the rights of the cultivators against forceful eviction by the landlords.Most of the share-cropping arrangements hithertoprevalent were of oral nature without any record or documentary evidence at the hands of *bargadars* and as such the system was completely at the mercy of the landowners so far as the continuance of the *bargadars* was concerned . The remedies available under the traditional system of revenue courts were scanty and were not easily available to the common people.Very often the landowners were represented by their lawyers at the revenue courts and thus they were always placed in advantageous position . In most instances the *bargadars* were implicated in false cases and were harassed by the police .[18] Accordingly, the Left Front government was keen on effecting a change in land system and it considered land reforms as the

basis of rural development strategy in West Bengal . Therefore, it decided
to supplement the bureaucratic apparatus of land reforms developed over
the years by establishing functional linkages among bureaucracy, panchayats
and peasant organizations .[19] It also brought about a vital change in the
statute book, namely, the onus of proving that a person lawfully cultivating
the land in question lies on the landowner and not on the *bargadars* culti-
vating the land. This simple amendment incorporated in the Land Reforms
Act changed the entire situation and restored a sense of confidence against
the owner-bureaucracy combine . Related to this statutory change, the rev-
enue officials were directed to move to the localities inhabited by a large
number of unrecorded *bargadars* in the evenings to organize joint sittings
with the active help of the panchayat members and peasant workers to
explain the need and method of *barga* recording to the *bargadars*. This
change in the *modus operandi* of recording the names of share-croppers
besides instilling a sense of confidence in them, led them to organize col-
lective actions against the onslaught of the landlords whenever necessary .
After the publication of the provisional lists of share-croppers for display
at public places with a view to inviting objections, if any, 'certificates of
barga (share-)cropping' recordings were issued to the share-croppers . As a
result of 'operation' *barga* till December 1996 the names of more than
14.74 lakh *bargadars* could be recorded out of which 4.48 lakh belonged
to the scheduled castes, and 1.70 lakhs to the scheduled tribes.[20] Of the
cultivable lands coming under the purview of 'operation *barga* ', 32 per
cent belonged to the scheduled castes and 21 per cent to the schedule -
tribes.[21] Apparently not much revolutionary but 'reformist' [22] in nature, the
West Bengal chapter of land reforms has achieved what is still lacking in
other States . In most of the Indian states share-cropping is a matter of
purely bilateral, oral and informal arrangements . West Bengal has at last
recorded the names of the share-croppers and has ensured their access to
the land revenue administration of the State.

      To ensure the participation of the poorer section of society in rural
development planning, the government has also taken measures for allot-
ment of homestead plots to the agricultural workers and share-croppers in
addition to the distribution of ceiling surplus land and the recording of the
names of the share-croppers through 'operation *barga* ' . It is a fact that a
large number of *bargadars* and *kshetmajoors* (agricultural workers) used
to live on the lands owned by others as permissive occupiers . They were
allowed to live on the implied condition of rendering services at the beck
and call of the owners . Whenever *bargadars* recorded their names or the
kshetmajoor demanded higher wages they faced the fear of eviction which
affected their position adversely and put them in immense difficulties . To
obviate this situation the government undertook the programme of confer-
ring titles on such permissive possessors in rural areas up to 0.08 acres of
land . So far 2.80 lakh persons have been provided with the title of their

homestead plots.[23]

These changes in land reforms introduced in the spheres of both the distribution of surplus lands to the landless and the recording of the names of share-croppers, raised a very pertinent issue, that is, the problem relates to the economic viability of the schemes of distribution and recording among the landless poor people from the point of view of increasing production .[24] The Government of West Bengal was conscious of such a problem. In order to make the land reforms viable it introduced programmes of assistance for the poor in the form of non-land inputs, such as irrigation facilities, implements, manures, and fertilisers . The arrangement for institutional credit support system was an important element which could not be found in other States . It helped to protect the share-croppers and the poor peasants from their subjection to 'distress sale' of their paddy . The government organized the Co-operatives and Commercial Banks to provide short-term loans to the *patta* - holders (allottee of vested lands) and *bargadars* through the Rural Agricultural Co-operative Credit Societies . Apart from preparing credit plan, the government provided huge subsidies for the small and marginal farmers.The number of beneficiaries under the category of share-croppers and *patta*-holder so financed increased from 59,114 in 1979-80 to 3,74,538 in 1982-83.[25] Along with land reforms, a special emphasis was given to the extension of irrigation facilities . As a result, it has been possible to increase the proportion of cropped areas under irrigation from less than thirty per cent in the first half of the seventies to nearly fifty per cent in 1995-96, and this proportion has further increased to 52 per cent in 1996-97 .[26] Apart from this developmental aspect, 'a great beginning' in the process of participatory planning can be traced in the management of minor irrigation projects. The government has already undertaken a scheme to transfer the operation and maintenance of the tubewell command area to the local people through the formation of beneficiary committees under the supervision of panchayats. Experience has shown that in such cases, not only have the operation and maintenance costs being fully recovered, but enough surplus has also been generated which has been ploughed back by the farmers for installing new tubewells. In co-ordination with overall plan priority and organization, this experiment is an example of efficient and accountable decentralization .

Because of these steps taken on the basis of land reforms, extension of irrigation facilities and also the provisions for other inputs like improved seeds, fertilisers etc., the curve of agricultural production in West Bengal has become noticeably upward-rising, and it has also been possible for the State to attain, over a period of ten years from 1980-83 to 1990-93, the annual rate of growth of foodgrains production amounting to 5.9 per cent against the all- India average annual rate of growth of 2.8 per cent .[27] During the Seventh Plan period all the previous records were surpassed and the new height of 115 lakh tonnes was reached thus already significantly exceeding

the Seventh Plan period all the previous records were surpassed and the new height of 115 lakh tonnes was reached thus already significantly exceeding the Seventh Plan target of a 105 lakh tonnes .[28] It should, however, be admitted that the achievements of land reforms cannot be judged solely in terms of increase in production . The land reforms measures aided by other pro-people policies of the government may be viewed from the angles of psycho-social rehabilitation and political mobilization of the peasantry for bringing about a change in the correlations of class forces in favour of the poor and working people by involving them in an organized manner in the process of planning and development .[29] Thus the land reform measures have not only generated a sense of confidence and participation among the beneficiaries who constitute the majority of the rural population but also brought about a change in the rural power structure . Rajni Kothari rightly comments that without socio-political movements at the grassroots attempts towards people's participation in development planning is meaningless and subject to manipulation by the entrenched classes . The experiences gained so far in West Bengal give testimony to such a view.

Generation of employment under different programmes with twin objectives of providing employment to agricultural workers and other rural poor especially during the slack agricultural season, and creation of assets to promote infrastructural development in rural areas was viewed as an important area of activities by the State government . Under Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP), poor families were assisted through credits (the government acted as the surety for this purpose) from banks and subsidy from the government . Similarly Food for Work Programme (FWP), Rural Reconstruction Programme (RRP), Drought Relief Programme (DRP) were undertaken during the initial days of the Left Front government . Subsequently through a variety of other Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) like National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Scheme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), launched in 1989-90 by merging NREP and RLEGP together, Millions Well Scheme (MWS), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) , Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), and the like, the landless rural poor were provided employments by involving them in the construction of social assets like dug wells, irrigation schemes, rural roads, sanitation, construction of Anganwadi houses and repair of primary school buildings. Performance evaluation has been made in terms of achievements in creating employment opportunities or mandays and infrastructural assets but the crucial significance lies in developing a sense of active participation, motivation and confidence in the larger section which consolidates the base of democracy .[30]

Thus the reconstitution of the Panchayati Raj bodies, effective land reform measures and the alternative approach to rural development planning aiming at changing the existing pattern of distributions and inequalities in lands

and resources constituted the basis of decentralized planning in West Bengal. The ideological regimentation coupled with strict discipline in theCPI(M), the leading partner of Left Front government provided the new ecological   framework for implementation of such decentralized policies . The Left Front government at the first instance decided to restructure the panchayat organizations in the State in order to devolve power to the rural poor . It took a realistic view of bringing about a genuine reform in decentralized democracy and the CPI(M) was convinced that it could enhance its possibilities in coming to the centre of politics in most Indian states if it could bring about effective and meaningful reforms at the local level in West Bengal through restructuring the panchayat system in the State.[31]

The CPI(M) participates in the State government to use it as an instrument of class struggle against the bourgeois-landlord combine for the cause of people's democracy apart from providing reliefs to the poor . [32] Thus, to the marxists, the State government is viewed as an agency of people's mobilization and struggles and not of solving the basic problems .[33] The main objective of such mobilization is to help the people to learn from their day-to-day experience of organized participation in planning and implementation of schemes and projects about the constraints posed by the state apparatuses and the need to organize people's democratic revolution to overcome these limitations .[34]

As a first step towards decentralization in planning, the panchayat bodies were given the tasks of implementation of FWP . NREP took its place later on . The Zilla Parishads and Gram Panchayats prepared the schemes on receipt of districtwise allocations of funds and implemented them . The Gram Panchayats undertook the small schemes and the Zilla Parishads executed the bigger ones so that infrastructure could be created for the total development of the village . The intensive participation of the Panchayats in the implementation of rural development schemes was appreciated by the Project Evaluation Committee set up by the Planning Commission . It is appropriate, in this connection, to mention here that the 'second generation panchayats' are more pro-people in their attitudes and represent the poorer segments of the society . After the first general panchayat elections (1978) a survey of a representative sample of 100 Gram Panchayats was conducted by the Economic Planning Stream of the State Development and Planning Department in 1978-79, which revealed that the members of the panchayats, by a significant majority, represented the poorer sections in villages . Of the following two tables, the first shows that over eighty per cent of the panchayat members elected, came from the occupational groups like owner-cultivators, teachers, unemployed, landless labourers, *bargadars* and artisans, and the second exhibits that more than seventy per cent of them originated from the small and marginal farmers with land holdings below 5 acres.

Table - 1
Distribution of Gram Panchayat members
according to occupational groups (1978-79)

Sl. No.	Occupation	Percentage
1.	Owner-Cultivators	50.7
2.	Teachers	14.0
3.	Unemployed	07.5
4.	Landless Labourers	04.8
5.	Bargadars	01.8
6.	Artisans	01.6
7.	Shop -owners	01.4
8.	Doctors	01.1
9.	Technical Workers	01.3
10.	Tailors	00.6
11.	Students	00.6
12.	Fishermen	00.4
13.	Others	14.0

Source : Department of Development and Planning, Government of West Bengal.[35]

Table - 2
Distribution of landholdings of Gram Panchayat members
in West Bengal (1978-79)

Area (in acres)	Percentage
Below -02	42.9
02 -05	28.2
05 -08	13.0
05 -10	08.1
Over -10	07.8

Source : Department of Development and Planning, Government of West Bengal .[36]

Subsequent studies , both macro and micro, on the social background of panchayat leaders elected in 1983 and 1988 also confirm the domination of poor and small farmer over these rural bodies . An empirical study conducted by Lieten has shown that poor peasants, agricultural labourers and the Scheduled castes have come to the forefront of development politics in rural Bengal.[37] Thus the panchayat system in West Bengal represents a total break from the past political pattern. The panchayats in West Bengal, not to speak of the other States, have never been so free from the controls of landlords and rich peasants as found in contemporary West Bengal .[38]

With this experience and perspective in the background and a highly organized and politicised panchayati system, the State government undertook decentralized district planning formally in 1985-86 , the first year of the Seventh Five Year Plan . Prior to that, almost two years were spent in revamping the planning machinery so as to enable it to shoulder the responsibility of decentralized planning . [39] Institutional devices in the form of committees and conferences were required for formulation and implementation of decentralized planning . Inspite of a laudable beginning being made with the involvement of common people through the revitalized panchayat bodies in the formulation and implementation of development schemes and plan projects, it was noticed that the implementation of important programmes in major departments like Agriculture, Irrigation and Public Works were still being done through the vertical hierarchy of the respective departments at the district level. Sectoral implementation of schemes led to the lack of co-ordination between the panchayat-run and the departmentally- executed programmes and also among the departmental programmes themselves . Hence the government decided to establish a three tier organizational structure below the state-level for decentralized planning . For the present, the government did not dwell on the question of a separate machinery at the Gram Panchayat level though the involvement of the Gram Panchayat was sought for in the actual implementation of schemes and projects . Thus the West Bengal Model exhibited a sharp contrast to the Karnataka system where the responsibilities for sub-plan relating to local works, such as water supply, sanitation, rural communications, etc. have been assigned to the Mandal Panchayats (redesignated as Taluk Panchayats under the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act of 1993.[40] The scheme for organizational structure at the district level (in West Bengal prior to the Act of 1994) was composed of two bodies . First, there was a larger body with the functions of deliberations and approvals, called the District Planning and Co-ordination Council (DPCC) . A minister of the State government hailing from the same district and the Sadhadhipati of the Zilla Parishad were designated as the chariman and vice-chairman respectively of the DPCC. The MLAs and MPs of the district and the Chairmen of the Panchayat Samities, Municipalities and the Notified Areas, beside all the District level officers, were included in this larger body. Thus a scheme of functional linkages between the lower bodies and higher authorities was established through the DPCC. Secondly, the District Planning Committee (DPC) headed by the Sabhadhipati of the Zilla Parishad as the Chairman and the District Magistrate (DM) as the secretary was the *real planning body*. The *Karmadhyakshas* of the *Sthayee Samities* (standing committees) of the Zilla Parishad, the *Sabhapatis* of the Panchayat Samities, the Chairmen of the Municipalities under the concerned district, representatives of the statutory or other authorities functioning within the district (like the Sundarban Development Board in 24 Parganas), the heads of all line departments

(district level) of the State government were included in the DPC[41]. The State government resolution also constituted the Block Planning Committee (BPC) at the same time since the government decided to introduce decentralized planning at the block level simultaneously with the district planning since the beginning of the Seventh Plan . The BPC was formed with the Sabhapati of the Panchayat Samiti as the Chairman and the Block Development Officer as the Member-Secretary . The members of the BPC were the *Gram Pradhans* (head of the Gram Panchayat consisting of a cluster of villages), the *Karmadhyakshas* under the Panchayat Samity and the Block level officers under the line departments of the State government and other agencies functioning in the Block, in the same manner as in the DPC. Both the DPC and BPC were assisted by a team of technical experts with the supports from administrative staff . [42] In these committees the elected representatives of the panchayats and municipalities and the government officials of various departments at the relevant levels were tied together organizationally.

The DPC thus formed was solely responsible for the formulation of the District Plan which required to be placed before the DPCC for approval. After final approval by the DPCC the implementation of the plan proposals were entrusted to the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samities, Municipalities, Gram Panchayats and the line departments of the government as the case may be. It was expected that with the passage of time all the schemes of various line departments of the govenment would be subjected to the approval of the DPCC . In the decentralized planning framework the BPC had a special role to play . It was invested with the authority to create a planning culture, to have the plans of the lower tiers correctly prepared , and , to assist the Gram Panchayat in the formulation and implementation of plans and projects . The crucial role of the BPC was designed mainly in two ways: one, integration of the needs and priorities of the village plans and panchayat plans fully into the Block Plans, and two, vertical co-ordination and linkages between the village plans, panchayat plans and the district plans . The DPC thus constituted in West Bengal during the Seventh Five Years Plan and continued to function during the major part of the Eighth Five Years Plan (1992-97)[43] had to work under the overall supervision of the DPCC . In this arrangement the State government ensured total representation of the people in the district planning bodies . Inclusion of the ministers, all MLAs and MPs of the district in the DPCC was found to be advantageous as this established effective linkage between the district and the State . The inclusion of the members of the State Legislature and the Parliament paved the way for the representation of different shades of opinion and for co-ordination of all planning and developmental activities within the state . Apart from this, the composition of the DPCC accommodated the national and the State level politicians in a local politico-administrative framework . The majority of the States where decentralized district planning has gained some footings have created a separate

organization for planning and development at the district level and have made attempts for inclusion of these politicians through the creation of separate organizations at the district like the District Level Vigilance and Monitoring Committee in West Bengal.[44] In other States similar attempts were made through the establishment of the District Planning and Development Council in Maharashtra or the District Planning Board in Gujarat.[45]

The district planning machinery as existed in West Bengal was different from that of Karnataka prior to the constitution of the DPC under the new Act.[46] In the Karnataka decentralized district planning set-up, the role of the DM was minimal. Practically he had no functions relating to district planning which was being assigned to the chief secretary of the Zilla Parishads in Karnataka, (the designation 'chief secretary' has been dropped under the Act of 1993). The involvement of the DM in district planning process has at least one advantage. He is the head of the law and order affairs of the district, proper maintenance of which leads to an endeavour for effective implementation of the district plans. In fact, there can be no watertight compartment between the functions of law and order and those of planning. For better co-ordination it is desirable that either the DM is designated as the Member-Secretary of the District Planning authority or the law and order functions are brought under the purview of the Zilla Parishad. However, there was a strong opinion in favour of West Bengal structure of district planning.[47] But the provision for holding the executive body responsible to the people's body by integrating the sectoral departments under the aegis of the Zilla Parishad in Karnataka was a step forward towards effective decentralization.

Planning is not a unidimensional process, decentralized planning is never so. It involves a variety of factors and a number of actors. The involvement and interaction of these elements require a clear demarcation of task-boundaries among the different agencies at different levels. There can be no rigid principle for sorting out the tasks and the agencies to be assigned with these tasks. It depends upon a number of variables ranging from circumstances, experiences, and capabilities to political supports. Given this organizational structure, district planning was introduced in West Bengal quite successfully. Decentralized planning in West Bengal starts with the Gram Panchayats which prepare statements of priorities based on the immediate needs of the locality. Again, at the intermediary level, the Panchayat Samities prepare schemes of urgent concern to the Gram Panchayats, keeping in view the State's priorities.The line departments of the State government are required to furnish the district and blockwise distribution of these schemes to the DPC at the district level and the BPC at the Block, after disaggregating the plan budget .The district and block level beneficiary-oriented special programmes are also integrated within the district plan.To ensure flow of funds from banks and other financial institutions.the representatives of the

banks are invited at the meetings at the district level . The involvement of the banks through the 'Lead Bank Scheme' is a good beginning in the direction of formulating a comprehensive credit plans for the district . The preparation of the district plan involves a choice, a choice between two alternatives: one, to earmark separate amounts for each Block, municipality and the district, and the other, to let the district plan emerge at the district level, taking all the block-specific and municipality-specific schemes into consideration . The State government decided to follow the second method as an experiment . Under this procedure the district authorities had to exercise judgement in choosing the schemes on a priority basis after these were prepared and submitted by the block and municipality authorities . In a sense such a practice goes against the principle of decentralized planning by concentrating the power of judgement at the district level and thereby negating the autonomy of the lower level bodies . Considered from another perspective, devolution of funds in small and equal sums to the grassroot bodies of the Panchayati Raj is a self-defeating exercise and may be the negation of planning. The distribution and redistribution of funds into small and smaller amounts would help the authorities neither to prepare any worthwhile scheme nor to create any durable assets. After careful consideration of different aspects, the government decided to transfer the responsibilities of implementation of schemes to the lower authorities and to keep the tasks of co-ordination and approval reserved for the district level organization.[48] At the outset the procedure thus initiated may appear to be akin to the previous one but in actuality it differs from the centralized practice in the sense that under this methodology plans are formulated with specific reference to the needs of the local people themselves and are subsequently approved by them through their representatives at a higher level.

The decentralized district planning had been passing through the stage of initiation in West Bengal during the Seventh Plan and Eighth Plan periods. During this period a further innovation was introduced . Under the changed methodology, budgetary provisions of the various departmants for district level items are communicated to the District Planning authority and a significant part of the allocations are transferred to the Block level planning bodies. Within the budgetary allocations, the BPC formulates the block plan taking into consideration the plan proposals submitted by different Gram Panchayats. The block plans are sent to the district authorities and are integrated into the district plan which constitutes an integral part of the State plan. The plans thus formulated are placed at the hands of the DPC and the BPC for implementation and monitoring .Through this process of decentralized district planning funds are dovetailed from the state to the districts.The trend in this respect is encouraging and shows a positive sign towards gradual improvement in district planning process.Started with a meagre 25.62 per cent component of the approved state plan outlay of 1986-87 the share of the district

plans in West Bengal increased to 39.75 per cent in 1988-89 and then to 47.52 per cent in 1989-90 . [49] Thus there is a gradual increase in the percentage of disintegrated outlay during the Seventh Plan period . Through this process of decentralized district planning it has been possible to devolve more than 50 per cent of the entire plan budget of the State to the command of the District and Block Planning Committees.[50]

Apart from disintegration of plan funds to meet the critical gaps between their percentage of outlay from the budgetary provisions of the concerned departments, a separate budget head is being operated since the beginning of the Seventh Plan, namely 'District Plan Schemes' (DPS) fund and funds from this budget head is entirely placed at the disposal of the DPCs . These committees have been advised to utilize these funds to meet the 'critical gap' between their requirements (according to the district plan) and the available funds from diverse sources . The yearwise allotment and expenditure on account of the DPS indicates a healthy trend . The scheme of district plan fund introduced in 1985 incurred an actual expenditure of Rs 64.04 crores in 1994-95 as against Rs 17.75 crores in 1985-86.[51]

The experience gathered in the decentralized district planning during Seventh Five Years Plan period induced the state government to extend it below the district level. Under the existing methodology along with the formulation of block as well as district plans attempts are made to integrate the plan with the credit plans of the blocks and the districts . Need for credit planning as an important volume of credits disbursed in different parts of the country through co-operative credit organizations has been an issue of contention among the States.[52]

Success of decentralized rural development and planning depends very much on the effective resource mobilization at the lower levels. Apart from the statutory arrangements for resource mobilizations at the levels of Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity and Gram Panchayat[53] continuous efforts have been made since the beginning of the Seventh Plan for gradual increase in resource mobilization .As for example, in 1988-89, the targets of small savings collections were fixed for the Blocks and the municipalities, and the panchayats and municipalities were involved in the process . With the built-in incentive that if the collection exceeded the target, 50 per cent of the resources related to this additional collection would be returned to the area for meeting development expenditure. As a result the total collection of small savings in the State was nearly doubled in 1988-89 in comparison to the previous year.[54] In keeping with this spirit of decentralization and also having regard to weightage to the item of resource mobilization in the Mukherjee Formula of plan assistance, the State government has launched the scheme of Decentralized Resource Mobilization in the districts in the Eighth Plan.[55] This collaborative programme was designed in such a way as efforts of the district level would enhance the revenue collection of four

specific items, namely, (a) Stamp duty and Registration fee, (b) Amusement Tax, (c) Motor Vehicle Tax, (d) Royalty/Cess from Major / Minor Minerals which, in turn, benefit both the State and the individual district . The individual district is benefitted in that if the collection of the district over any time exceeds the stipulated target, then 50 per cent of the additional collection would be shared back to the district for the purpose of development expenditure to be decided by the DPC . Moreover, with a view to mobilizing additional resources for significant industrial projects, a new Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation has been set up which in co-ordination with the State Planning Board (SPB) , concerned departments and the DPC will provide funds to the tune of Rs 50 crores in the current year (1997-98) for important schemes of infrastructural development . [56]

All these are however of peripheral importance.The ultimate success of decentralized development process depends on the people.A responsive administrative system must have an in-built arrangement for fulfilment of public needs and for being sensitive to public grievances . In West Bengal , the State government has made certain structural changes, in planning and development administration network through the introduction and implementation of some effective measures like (i) delegation of some functions of the government departments to the local bodies ; (ii) arrangement for ensuring timely and regular elections to the local self-governing institutions and the provisions for the establishment of State Election Commission ;[57] (iii) the establishment of the State Finance Commission, decentralized district planning along with clear provisions outlining the subjects to be dealt with below the State level and the constitution of the DPC,[58] and (iv) statutory mechanism for involvement and participation of the people at the lowest levels even at the villages through the creation of *Gram Sansads* and *Gram Sabhas*.[59]

Statutory provisions of mandatory accountability of the panchayats to the people have made the Panchayati Raj institutions the agencies of responsive and democratic administration . Through the successive amendments of 1992 and 1994 in the Panchayat Act, .the State government has made elaborate provisions for annual and half yearly meetings of the *Gram Sansad* under the statutory initiative of the Gram Panchayat to have public deliberations, interactions and recommendations on different development issues of local nature and to ensure accountability of the representatives. [60] Under the amended provisions, the Gram Panchayat is required to place its budget, a report on the works done during the previous year, a proposal of activities to be performed and the latest reports on audit of the account of the Gram Panchayat for deliberation, recommendation and suggestion at the meeting. [61] Similar provisions have also been inserted in the Act requiring the Gram Panchayat to hold within the local limits of the 'Gram' an annual meeting of the Gram Sabha for consideration of the above issues.[62] The Act also includes a time-schedule of such meetings. Apart from these

routine works, the Gram Sansads and the Gram Sabhas are authorized to guide and advise the Gram Panchayats in identification of schemes, construction of beneficiary committees, identification of beneficiaries and the mobilization of people's participation in development and planning activities . [63] It is insisted on that the accounts and the list of works executed by the Gram Panchayat are notified in public places . In addition to this open publication of accounts, verbal direct communications with the people in an open meeting is considered essential .Thus the process of democratic participation and organized monitoring has been introduced in West Bengal through the revitalization of Panchayati Raj institutions.In fact, the functioning of rural self-government bodies has added a new dimension to the perspectives of popular participation in decentralized planning and development . Almost all the States have amended the provisions of their Panchayat Acts in conformity with the 73rd amendment, to create and establish Gram Sabhas within the area of Gram Panchayat . In west Bengal the system has been fairly well since it was introduced in 1992 [64] when the idea of grassroots democracy was a debating concept at the national level .

There is no dispute in the fact that development cannot be ensured in a vacuum . It takes place within a stable political conditions, and the political atmosphere must fulfil at least four necessary preconditions for augmenting sustainable development : first, constitutional and statutory provisions for local governments below the State level with adequate devolution of both financial and administrative powers; second, organized political mobilization of the poor and disadvantaged to countervail the dominating influence of the propertied class and the elites ; third, and related to the second, effective land reforms; and fourth, organization of a suitable and responsive administrative machinery for effective implementation and proper co-ordination both vertically and horizontally . The Left Front government can claim the credit that it has made all these conditions satisfied in the last twenty years in West Bengal.

The process of decentralization has further been accelerated in West Bengal in the aftermath of the passage of the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts which have provided constitutional berth for the local governing institutions in both urban and rural areas . These two legislations of historical significance provide for the creation of rural-urban symmetry and the abolition of the existing differences, in election, reservation and functioning between the urban and local self-governing institutions . But the most important innovation is the provision of the constitution of the DPC in every state at the district level to consolidate the plans prepared by the panchayats and the municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole [65] It is interesting to note that the Planning Commission of India and the SPBs are not the creation of the Constitution; these are the products of cabinet decisions at the respective levels . Thus the 74th Amendment Act , though planting the seeds of contradictions and

conflicts in future has widened the periphery of local politics . The 73rd Amedment Act includes the provisions for Gram Sabha, uniform panchayat raj structure, reservation for the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and the women, the Finance Commission , the State Election Commission and a uniform five year term for PRIs throughout the country . But in a way it is a skeletal legislation. By leaving maximum initiative and discretion to the States, the amendments have recognized the historical fact that most of the issues of local government fall within the spheres of the State governments . Thus the State governments hold the key to the activization of the Panchayati Raj institutions.

West Bengal, well placed to be in the first category of States with self-governing panchayats, [66] again took the initiative to strengthen the PRIs further . Both the Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1994 and the District Planning Committee Act 1994 were enacted in succession during the first half of 1994. Subsequently the State government formulated the District Planning Committee Rules in September 1994. Through these statutory provisions detailed schemes have been outlined for composition and functions of the DPC, the Gram Sansad and the Gram Sabha in West Bengal . These changes introduced in the statutes have strengthened the already stable grassroots political institutions of West Bengal.

Outside the statutory arrangements political conditions play an influencing role in the process of democratic decentralization, for the shaping of which the political parties are the essential elements . The CPI(M) , the dominant partner of the Left Front government through its organizations working at the concerned level of the local government bodies has always been playing a major role in planning and implementing the development programmes. Party officials frequently visit the worksites, panchayat offices and government departments to take regular stock of the situation . In some districts arrangements for internal audit by party functionaries have been made . Check-up meetings for monitoring development programmes are organized at the organizational levels of the party at scheduled intervals.[67] In this way, the regime established in West Bengal under the leadership of the CPI(M) offers a greater promise for success of development planning due to its pragmatic approach, effective leadership, ideological and political commitments and a disciplined organization . Thus the Left Front government in West Bengal through its development policy has been able to pursue two important tasks : 'first penetration of the countryside without being captured by the landed classes; and second, controlled mobilization and incorporation of the lower classes to buttress state power as a tool of social reform .'[68]

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43. Statutory recognition was given to the DPC under the *West Bengal District Planning Committee Act,* 1994.

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46. Section 310 of the *Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act,* 1993.

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49. See note no.28.

50. *Annual Plan 1995-96*, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, vol. I, p. 14.

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52. Sukhamoy Chakraborty, *Development Planning : The Indian Experience,*
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55. Introduced by the Government of West Bengal since 1.11.1992.

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58.*The West Bengal District Planning Committee Act 1994* was passed and subse
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Seventy Fourth Amendment Act 1992) of the Constitution of India .

59. Sections 16A and 16B of *The West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act* ,1994.

60. Section 16A of *The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act,*1994.

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Ambedkar's Ideas on Socialism : A Critique

TARUN KUMAR BANERJEE

A voracious reader, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar had come across the writings of Karl Marx during his student days in London. In 1938 he boastfully declared that 'the number of books he had read on communism exceeded the number of books read by all communist leaders of India put together.'[1] He had also acquaintance with Sidney Webb to whom he was introduced by his teacher, Professor Edwin R.A. Seligman.[2] This much we could know from his biography about his initiation , if there was any, with the idea of socialism. But, at the same time, it is known to us that Ambedkar, though a prolific author of a class by himself, never took any care to elaborate his views on Marx or Marxism throughout his intellectual life . A glimpse at his profuse writings would evidently reveal that he accepted the spirit of Marxism, not its contents; rather he was deeply imbued by the idea of Fabianism. And in course of time he developed his own brand of socialism.

I

Ambedkar's obsessive concern with Hinduism ultimately induced him to believe that it was not congenial to the promotion of the socialist causes. To him, Hinduism was antithetical to socialism for it advocated *Chaturvarna* system that divided the Hindu society into four classes, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra . Caste system owed its origin to the *Chaturvarna* arrangement in the society dominated by Hinduism. Contesting the argument that caste system was 'another name for division of labour,' Ambedkar pointed out that it was not merely a division of labour, it was also 'a division of labourers.' According to him,

> Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour .But in no
> civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural

division of labourers into water-tight compartments.Caste system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour — it is an hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above the another .[3]

Hinduism however did not simply create classes but, according to Ambedkar, it also made it a matter of unalterable dogma. It gave an 'official gradation', 'fixation' and 'permanency' on the principle of 'graded inequality' in society . In the absence of uniformity among its people, Hinduism could only create classes without helping them to form a society . On the other hand, what was required for the formation of a society was the individual's participation and share in a common activity so that the emotions aroused in him would animate the others . But the caste system prevented common activity and by doing so it had prevented the Hindus 'from becoming a society with a unified life and the consciousness of its own being .'[4]

In addition , due to the caste system, untouchability was looked down upon by the caste Hindus who also denied human rights to the untouchables . The inhuman treatment meted out to the untouchables had been vividly depicted by Ambedkar:

> ...the Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to take water from a well.The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables' entry in schools. The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to travel in buses . The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to travel in the same railway compartment . TheHindus will not allow the Untouchables to wear clean clothes. The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to wear jewellery .The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to put tiles on the roofs of their houses .The Hindus will not tolerate the Untouchables to own land . The Hindus will not allow the Untouchables to keep cattle.The Hindus will not allow an Untouchable to sit when a Hindu is standing . They are not isolated acts of a few bad men among the Hindus .They are the emanations of the permanent anti-social attitude of the Hindu community against the Untouchables .[5]

Furthermore, as against the system of slavery in which the master had at any rate the responsibility 'to feed, cloth and house the slave and keep him in good condition' lest the market value of the slave should decrease, in the system of untouchability the Hindus took no responsibility for the maintenance of the untouchables. As an economic system untouchability permitted 'exploitation without obligation.' Therefore, Ambedkar felt, untouchabil- ity was not only' a system of unmitigated economic exploitation , ' it was also ' a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation.'[6]

The root of social inequality and socio-economic exploitation lay therefore in the caste system which was an integrated part of Hindu civilization and culture. As such Hinduism did not believe in a 'casteless society' and therefore did not aim at the establishment of a 'classless society' at which, on the contrary, socialism aimed. Moreover, the basis of socio-economic segregation under Hinduism, Ambedkar noted philosophically, was contempt.[7] And in an atmosphere where contempt pravailed, socialism could not operate effectively.

II

Given the inegalitarian nature of Hindu society characterized by inequality and socio-economic as well as political exploitation, Ambedkar considered that social reforms would precede economic reforms . He contended that 'the makers of political constructions must take account of social forces.' To substantiate his views Ambedkar quoted Ferdinand Lasalle (1825-1864),
a prominent figure in the German working class movement, who in an address to a Prussian audience, said in 1862 :

> The constitutional questions are in the first instance not questions of right but questions of might . The actual constitution of a country has its existence only in the actual condition of force which exists in the country : hence political constitutions have value and permanence only when they accurately express those conditions of forces.which exist in practice within a society .[8]

Ambedkar joined issues with the Indian socialists on whether 'economic reform by equalization of property' should have precedence over every other kind of reform . Having analysed different factors involved in the realization of socialism, Ambedkar observed that the economic reform contemplated by the socialists could not come out unless there was a revolution resulting in the seizure of power . And, the 'seizure of power must be by the proletariat.' But men would not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution was achieved they would be treated equally and that there would be no discrimination of caste and creed . Therefore, if.the socialists were not gratified with mere mouthing of fine phrases, if the socialists cherished the victory of socialism then they should recognize the fact that the problem of social reform was 'fundamental' and that for them there was no escape from it .[9] Therefore, a socialist

> will be compelled to take account of caste after revolution if he does not take account of it before revolution. This is only another way of saying that, turn in any direction you like, caste is the mon-

ster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster.[10]

III

For the liquidation of exploitative Hindu society, Ambedkar did not adopt the marxian methods . Instead, like the fabians he resorted to steady, effective and constitutional mechanism . Thus in his Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly, dated 15 March 1947 on behalf of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation , he suggested :

> The way out seems to be to retain Parliamentary Democracy and to prescribe State Socialism by the law of the Constitution so that it will be beyond the reach of a Parliamentary majority to suspend, amend and abrogate it . It is only by this that one can achieve the triple object , namely, to establish socialism , retain Parliamentary Democracy and avoid Dictatorship.[11]

Ambedkar's idea of Constitutional State Socialism with Parliamentary Democracy was detailed out in his Memorandum to the Constituent Assembly as well as in his deliberations in the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD) over the Directive Principles of State Policy.[12]

A staunch believer in constitutionalism as well as liberalism, Ambedkar wanted the objectives of the Indian Constitution to be 'to remove social, political and economic inequality by providing better opportunities to the submerged classes,' and 'to make it possible for every subject to enjoy freedom from want and freedom from fear .[13] He also wished the Constitution to lay down that subjecting a person to forced labour or to involuntary servitude 'shall be an offence.'[14]

As regards the protection against economic exploitation Ambedkar suggested *inter alia* that the State should declare as 'part of the law of its constitution:'

1. that industries which were, or might be declared to be, key industries should be owned and run by the state;
2. that industries which were not key, but basic industries should be owned by the state and should be run by it or by corporations established by it ;
3. that insurance should be a monopoly of the state, and the state should compel every adult citizen to take out a life insurance policy commensurate with his wages as would be prescribed by the legislature;
4. that agriculture should be a state industry;

5. that the state should acquire the subsisting rights in such industries,insurance and agricultural land held by private individuals, whether as owners, tenants or mortgagees and pay them compensation in the form of debenture equal to the value of his or her right in the land; provided that in reckoning the value of land, plant or security no account should be taken of any rise therein due to emergency, of any potential or unearned value or any value for compulsory acquisition ;

6. that the state should determine how and when the debenture holder should be entitled to claim cash payment ;

7. that the debenture should be transferable and inheritable property but neither the debenture holder nor the transferee from the original holder nor his heir should be entitled to claim the return of the land or interest in any industrial concern acquired by the state or be entitled to deal with it in any way;

8. that the debenture holder should be entitled to interest on his debenture at such rate as may be defined by law, to be paid by the state in cash or in kind as the state would deem fit ;

9. that agricultural industry should be organized on the following basis :

(a) the state should divide the land acquired into farms of standard size and let out the farms for cultivation to residents of the village as tenants (made up of group of families) to cultivate on the following conditions : (i) the farm should be cultivated as a collective farm ;

(ii)the farm should be cultivated in accordance with rules and directions issued by the government, and (iii) the tenants should share among themselves in the manner prescribed the produce of the farm left after the payment of charges properly leviable on the farm;

(b) the land should be let out to villagers without distinction of caste or creed and in such manner that there would be no landlord, no tenant and no landless labourer ;and ,

(c) it should be the obligation of the state to finance the cultivation of the collective farms by the supply of water, draft animals, implements, manure, seeds, etc.[15]

On the whole, Ambedkar's plea was evidently for a state ownership in agriculture with a collectivized method of cultivation and a modified form of State Socialism in industry . For, he thought, without the supply of Capital by the state neither land nor industry could yield good results .

State Socialism is essential for the rapid industrialization of India. Private enterprise cannot do it and if it did it would produce those inequalities of wealth which private capitalism has produced in Europe and which should be a warning to Indians .[16]

Nationalized insurance was also planned with a two-fold objective : to provide an individual 'greater security' than a private insurance farm because the former could pledge the state resources as a security for the ultimate payment for his insurance money, and, to enable the state to have necessary resources 'for financing its economic planning in the absence of which it would have to resort to borrowing from the money market at a high rate of interest .'[17]

In his urge for the need for State Socialism in important fields of economic life, Ambedkar was however reluctant to leave its establishment to the will of the legislature . He made it categorical that the State Socialism should be established by the law of the constitution and be 'unalterable by any act' of the legislature and executive . For, according to Ambedkar, one 'essential condition' for the success of a planned economy was that it should not be 'liable to suspension or abandonment'; instead it should be 'permanent'. He was not however hopeful that this permanence could be secured under parliamentary democracy inasmuch as in that type of government the policy of the legislature and executive was the policy of majority for the time being . Under this government, the majority in one election might be in favour of State Socialism in industry and agriculture . At the next election the majority might oppose it . The anti-State Socialism majority would use its law-making power to undoing the work of the pro-State Socialism majority and *vice versa* .[18]

Those who want the economic structure of society to be modelled on StateSocialism must realize that they cannot leave the fulfilment of so fundamental a purpose to the exigencies of ordinary Law which simple majorities—whose political fortunes are never determined by rational causes—have a right to make or unmake.[19]

Ambedkar at the same time for obvious reasons refused to accept dictatorship as an alternative which could give State Socialism permanence for its fructification, as it denied individual freedom and parliamentary democracy as a proper form of government for a 'Free Society'. The problem was therefore, according to him, 'to have State Socialism without Dictatorship, to have state socialism with Parliamentary Democracy, ' and for its solution he suggested 'Constitutional State Socialism with Parliamentary Democracy .'[20]

Now, the soul of democracy, Ambedkar emphasized, was the

doctrine of 'one man, one value.'As early as on 19 January 1931 he ob-
served:

> I belong to that class which takes its stand on democracy and
> which seeks to destroy monopoly in every shape and form.Our aim
> is to realise in practice our ideal of one man one value in all
> walks of life, political, economic and social .[21]

But democracy had attempted to give effect to this doctrine only
so far as the political structure was concerned 'by adopting the rule of one
man, one vote which is supposed to translate into fact the doctrine of one
man, one value .' As such economic structure was left to take the shape
'given to it by those who are in a position to mould it .' Ambedkar cast
aside the 'antiquated conception' that all that was necessary for a democ-
racy was to frame a Constitutional Law that would make government re-
sponsible to the people and to prevent tyranny of the people by govern-
ment . He did not believe that the Constitutional Law of democracy should
go beyond adult suffrage and fundamental rights . But he thought that the
scope of Constitutional Law was not only to prescribe the shape and form
of the political structure of society; 'it was equally essential to prescribe
the shape and form of economic structure of society, if Democracy is to
live up to its principle of one man, one value .[22]
Side by side with the establishment of political democracy
Ambedkar thus urged the need for economic democracy as the ideal of
Indian Constitution . While participating in the CAD he emphasized :

> While we have established political democracy, it is also the desire
> that we should lay down as our ideal economic democracy . We do
> not want merely to lay down a mechanism to enable people to come
> and capture power . The Constitution also wishes to lay down an
> ideal before those who would be forming the Government .The
> ideal is economic democracy, whereby so far as I am concerned, I
> understand to mean, 'One man, one value .' [23]

For , the object in framing the Constitution, in the opinion of Ambedkar,
was not only to lay down that 'our ideal is political democracy ' but also to
lay down that 'our ideal is economic democracy' and to prescribe that 'every
Government whatever it is in power, shall strive to bring about economic
democracy. '[24] While commenting on the 'Objectives Resolution' moved by
Jawaharlal Nehru on 13 November 1946,[25] Ambedkar thought that it should
have included some provision 'whereby it would have been possible
for the State to make economic, social and political justice a reality.' It should
also have stated 'in most explicit terms that in order that there may be social
and economic justice in the country that there would be nationalization of

industry and nationalization of land .' He said : ' I do not understand how it could be possible for any future Government which believes in doing justice, socially, economically and politically, unless, its economy is a socialist economy.'[26]

IV

Ambedkar also championed the cause of labour . As a Labour Member of the British government he made it clear that in all battles between the owners and workers, he would side with the labour .[27] He observed that there were two enemies of the Indian working class : Brahminism and capitalism . By Brahminism he meant the negation of the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity, and considered that the effects of Brahminism were not confined only to such social rights as interdining and intermarriage .Under this system civic rights were also denied . 'So omniscient is Brahminism that it even affects the field of economic opportunities.' [28] As such he urged the workers to uproot Brahminism, 'the spirit of inequality from among the workers .' He however felt sorry at the plight of prevailing trade union movement which was 'stagnant and stinking pool' caused by the timidity, selfishness and misguidance of its leaders . 'The warfare between different unions was far more deadly than what existed, if any at all, between workers and owners.' He also accused the communists of misusing the power that they had once secured .[29]

In this connexion it may be pointed out that Ambedkar criticized M.N. Roy (with whom under the pseudonym of Mahmood, he incidentally met earlier in April 1931[30] for opposing the existence of a separate party for the labours within the Indian National Congress . Keer records Ambedkar's assessment of Roy in these words :

> He [Ambedkar] said that Roy was a puzzle to many as he was to him. A communist and opposed to separate political organization of labour! A terrible contradiction in terms ! A point of view which must have made Lenin turn in his grave .[31]

Commenting on Roy's assertion that the first and foremost aim of Indian politics would be to destroy imperialism, Ambedkar observed that if after the disappearance of imperialism in India, the labour would have to fight the landlords, millowners and moneylenders who would remain in India to bleed the people, it should have its own organization from the moment to fight capitalism as much as imperialism .[32]

As regards the labour's right to strike, Ambedkar was of the view that it would be applied sparingly . A strike was, to him, nothing more than a breach of contract of service . But he considered it to be a 'civil wrong', not

'a crime'; it was another name for the 'right to freedom'.[33]

While discussing labour problems, Ambedkar had in his mind not only industrial labour but also agricultural labour too . He opined that similar conditions of work, provident funds, employer's liability , workmen's compensation, health insurance including invalidity pensions should be open to all sorts of labour, whether it was industrial labour or agricultural labour.[34]

V

The philosophical underpinnings of Ambedkar's views on social-ism may be summed up thus : (1) the existing social , political and eco-nomic order is condemned as unjust; (2) the attitudes of Hindus and cor-rupt social institutions account for the immorality of the established order ; (3) the idea of a new order based on one man, one vote and one value, is realizable in State Socialism and parliamentary democracy; (4) the idea is to be achieved by a programme of actions through constitutional means only; and (5) in order to carry out the programme of social solidarity, there must be a 'revolutionary will' to establish social democracy.[35]

VI

That Ambedkar was not inclined to marxian socialism is obvious from the above elucidation of his views on socialism . True, he considered Marx's philosophy as 'satisfying' one 'to the lower order,' but in his opin-ion, it was 'a direction not a dogma.' [36] However, he refused to accept marxian theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. That it could not have been otherwise was revealed from his apathy to-ward communism, which he never intended to conceal in his more than forty years old political life.

Ambedkar was deeply concerned with the fact that if the social structure in India were not altered, the prevailing system would likely to collapse pretty soon, and was afraid that if democracy did not work in India, the alternative was something of communism.[37] But in the same breath he poohpoohed the theory of co-existence of democracy and communism as 'utterly absurd'. Ambedkar opined that communism 'is like a forest fire; it goes on burning and consuming anything and everything that comes in its way.' [38] Once he called Russian communism 'a fraud.'[39]

Such pungent anti-communist vituperation of Ambedkar was not confined to theoretical plane only; that he developed somewhat a pathologi-cal contempt for it could be seen in his political activities too. For example, in September 1938 while addressing a district conference of the Depressed classes at Masur, Ambedkar categorically cast aside any idea of his joining the labour movement led by the communists .[40] In that speech, he was

reported to have declared :

> It is absolutely impossible for me to keep relations with the communists . I am an implacable enemy of the Communists .[41]

Similarly, in the same vein he opposed earlier the famous Bombay Textile strikes of 1928 and 1929 led by the communists.[42]

Notwithstanding his contempt for communism, however, Ambedkar supported along with the communists, a strike of workers waged by about 60 trade union organizations in Bombay on 7 November 1938 as a protest against the Industrial Disputes Bill introduced in the Bombay Legislative Council (1938) . However, that was the 'first and last ' occasion when Ambedkar and the communists joined hands against the vested interests .[43] That is was the 'last' occasion of co-operation between them became evident from Ambedkar's political activities till his death . While preparing for his party, All-India Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF)[44] for the country's first general elections in 1952, Ambedkar formulated its election manifesto in which it was stated, among others, that the SCF would have no alliance with the Communist Party of India .[45]

Practically speaking, Ambedkar was never in agreement with the communist assertion that 'industrial growth and class struggle would by themselves sweep away caste divisions and that therefore no special campaigns or struggles were necessary for the purpose .' It was the avowed purpose of the communists 'to unite the working people against oppression and exploitation irrespective of caste and community' and to promote and facilitate this unity through 'common struggles' . This objective assessment and the ensuing programme of action was not taken 'kindly ' by Ambedkar. Moreover, it has been pointed out, Ambedkar was deeply disturbed by the unity of the textile workers, displayed during the strikes in Bombay and the nation-wide strike wave led by the communists in early thirties . He warned his followers to beware of the communists who were 'like ants attacking themselves to a jaggery piece .' He also alleged that in spite of their support to the strikes the untouchable workers were prevented from working in the weaving department in the textile mills because of pollution prejudices of caste workers, which the communists could not overcome despite all talk of class unity.'[46]

Three factors could be identified as having contributed to Ambedkar's disinclination for communism. First, he believed in constitutional means (as has been noted above), and in reforms to achieve his goal, in opposition to revolutionary communist methods . Secondly, he was reluctant to accept the Indian working class to be a 'homogenous' class capable of 'leading a radical reconstruction of society as it was divided on caste lines and practised caste discrimination .' Thirdly, and more significantly, Ambedkar was instinctively distrustful of most of the early Marathi communist leaders who hailed from

the educated higher castes youth. [47]

<div align="center">VII</div>

Ambedkar's aversion to Marxism / Communism is also evident from
his advocacy of, and conversion to, Buddhism . It may be recalled here that at
the fag end of his public life he embraced Buddhism . [48] Before his conver-
sion, in May 1956, he gave a talk entitled, "Why I like Buddhism and how
it is useful to the world in its present circumstances, " which was broadcast
from the BBC, London. In that talk Ambedkar reasoned his fondness for
Buddhism and accused Marxism/Communism of having 'shaken the reli-
gious systems of all the countries .'To him, 'Buddhism was a complete
answer to Marx and his Communism .' For, 'Communism of the Russian
type' aimed at bringing it about 'by a bloody revolution' while Buddhist
Communism believed in 'bloodless revolution.' [49]

Later, in an essay, "Buddha or Karl Marx"(presumably written a
few months before his death), Ambedkar made an effort to identify certain
common grounds between Buddhism and Marxism/Communism, in order to
justify his preference for the former . First of all, according to Ambedkar,
marxian notion of exploitation of the poor could be found in the Buddhist
concept of *dukkha* (sorrow). Secondly, to him, both the Buddha and Marx
thought that private ownership of property brought 'power to one class and
sorrow to another through exploitation.' Thirdly, in his opinion, both of them
considered that for the good of society it was necessary to remove sorrow by
the abolition of private property . Despite these similarities, Ambedkar
developed a distrust for Marxism/Communism for two reasons . First, Marx-
ism was an alien ideal . And, secondly, it was based on the ideas of force,
violence and dictatorship while Buddhism relied on the principles of non-
violence and democracy . [50]

From the marxian point of view, Ambedkar's perception of Marx-
ism/Communism while contradistinguishing it from Buddhism, may be sub-
jected to a close scrutiny . First, the similarities between the Buddhist con-
cept of *dukkha* and marxist notion of exploitation, are more apparent than
real . For, to the Buddha, the world was full of sorrow and that sorrow was
common to all, the exploiter and the exploited alike . Thus, as a commentator
on Buddhism notes that instead of focusing attention on 'class greed', the
suffering engendered by the domination of one class over another the Bud-
dha 'spoke of greed in general, suffering and misery in general, and hence the
path of human salvation pointed out by him' was also 'general', and
was'incapable of alleviating, much less removing altogether, the specific
human suffering of a given social epoch.' And, what is more, instead of fighting the
oppressor the Buddha advised the oppressed 'to eradicate impurity from
within.' Perhaps for the sentiments thus expressed the Buddha 'did not touch

upon the basic contradictions of feudal society, the contradiction between the small producer and the exploiter of his labour, the prince and the merchants.'[51]

On the contrary, exploitation in the marxian sense is used to refer to 'the production and distribution of goods in societies where the mode of production provides a surplus over subsistence requirements .' In other words, exploiters are those 'who acquire the benefits of production, in cash or kind, by virtue of their control over tools, machines, land or raw materials necessary to production .'[52] Moreover, Marxism thinks it to be imperative to overthrow the system which generates such exploitation, by revolutionary means, instead of by appealing to the moral wisdom of the exploited in uprooting 'impurity from within himself.'

Secondly, the Buddha's efforts for abolition of private property were concerned only with the Buddhist *Bhikshus* who could not have private property excepting the eight articles as prescribed by the rules of the *Bhikshu Sangh* . The articles were three robes or pieces of cloth for daily wear, a girdle for the loins, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle and a water strainer. More- over, a *Bhikshu* was completely forbidden to receive gold or silver for the fear that with those two items he might buy something beside the stated eight articles he was permitted to have .[53] Thus the Buddha, as has been observed by Rahul Sankrityayan, attempted to eradicate economic inequality for the monastic communes alone without removing its basic foundation in society.[54] What is more, even the rules stated above were flouted by his disciples after his death . Citing inscriptions at Sanchi and Bharhut, Rahul Sankrityayan had shown again that in the Second Century B.C., the monks and nuns 'were already constructing pillars and railings with their private income, which meant that now they had other personal property apart from the eight items of personal use .'[55] This fact seems to have escaped the attention of Ambedkar while making a comparative evaluation of Buddhism and Marxism on the issue of private property .

It is to be noted here that in the marxist parlance, private property does not mean mere personal belongings but private ownership of, and control over, means of production, resulting in exploitation . Therefore one should not see in the Buddha's contempt for private property 'more significance than it has, ' as had been attributed to it by Ambedkar . As the renowned marxist philosopher, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya points out,

> It [Buddha's condemnation of private property] is nothing, for ex ample, comparable to the demand for the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production as an essential precondition for the positive emanci- pation of man, which is above all an eman cipation from class exploitation and therefore possible only by the overthrow of class structure of society.[56]

Thirdly, as against the accusation of Ambedkar that Marxism believed in dictatorship, it may be contended that Marx nowhere implied that the dictatorship *of* the proletariat would mean a dictatorship *over* the proletariat devoid of any element of democracy .[57] Contrarily, Ambedkar failed to note that notwithstanding the Buddha's preference for the political system of republics *(gana)*, in the contemporary prosperous and powerful Lichhavi *(Vaishali)* republic' democracy existed only for those who belonged to the Lichhavi clan.' The numerous slaves who were movable property, had no place in that republic . Even the non-Lichhavi Brahmin or trader castes— though they were free—had no right to vote for the senate *(samsad)*; they were at the mercy of Lichhavis .[58]

In addition, not every one was permitted to get admission into the Buddhist order . Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya has again drawn our attention to a rule laid down in one of the Buddhist texts that no runaway slave should be admitted into the order . In fact, before his admission into the order, a candidate had to testify whether he was a free man . In the same way, the soldiers who had deserted the army of the kings were denied admission into the *Bhikshu Sangh.* Chattopadhyaya thinks that laws like these apparently 'implied that [the] Buddha would not have gone a long way against the vested interests.'[59]

The position of women in the Buddhist order was even more deplorable . Sindhu S. Dange argues that the Buddha permitted the women in the *Bhikshu Sangh* only at the instance of Anand, his disciple and considered them to be ' an obstacle in the way of achieving salvation .'

> When Anand asked the Buddha, "How should they behave with the ladies ?", the Buddha replied , "Avoid their sight. "Anand again asked,"If it is unavoidable, then?" The Buddha replied, " You keep silence." Anand continued, "If we talk to them ...?" The Buddha replied "that they should try to be *smriti- sampanna* (moral)."[60]

Needless to say, as Dange concluded, the Buddha's attitude towards women was 'reactionary.'[61]

Fourthly , on the issue of violence, it may be argued that despite his belief in non-violence, the Buddha permitted even the use of force where the question of justice was concerned . As the Buddha observed :

> A man who fights for justice and safety cannot be accused of *Ahimsa.* If all the means of maintaining peace have failed then the responsibility for Himsa falls on him who starts war . One must never surrender to evil powers .[62]

Ambedkar was perhaps influenced by these teachings of the Buddha as he expressed his faith in the principle of *absolute non-violence as an end* and in *relative violence as a means* .[63] In his criticism of Gandhi's idea of absolute non-violence,

he maintained that although love and kindness towards all creatures was a part of the principle of non-violence, to destroy all evil-doers was the principal element in the doctrine of *ahimsa* .[64]

Marxism, on the other hand, never favours the application of violence for its own sake . It uses violence only as a repellant measure . Thus Herbert Apthekar succinctly puts it, 'where violence has accompanied revolutionary culmination, it has appeared because the old class, facing elimination due to social development, has chosen to postpone its internment by resorting to the violent suppression of the challenging classes and forces .'[65] In other words, reaction is the source of violence when it appears . Resistance is offered in response to that challenge, and when it succeeds the revolutionary process comes to fruition .[66]

Finally, the whole effort of Ambedkar to prove the superiority of Buddhism as an ideal, over Marxism, seems to be naive . For, the socio-political universe in which these two respective world philosophies emerged was poles apart.The Buddha lived, and formulated his ideas, in a society which had been passing through a stage of transition from tribal democracy to feudalism . On the contrary, Marxism originated as an ideological reaction to the socio-economic demands of capitalism in its hey-day. Even if for argument's sake it is held that there is any similarity between the Buddhist communism and Marxism, it is *in form* at best, not *in substance*. As Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya rightly comments : the Buddha 'was not living in the modern world and as such his class affiliation cannot be judged by our contemporary standards .'[67]

In the ultimate analysis, it is evident that Ambedkar's indictment of Marxism was guided by the logic of vulgarized and oversimplified version of that ideology . It seems that he had developed his views on Marxism by reading some trashy books on it , not the original works of the founding fathers of scientific socialism themselves . This is evident from the fact of his cricicism of Marxism on the grounds of violence and dictatorship, which is reminiscent of hackneyed bourgeois and social democratic critiques of Marxism .

VIII

It is true that in practice Ambedkar had identified himself with the most deprived and exploited section of Indian society . Thus he castigated everything that extolled poverty . For this, he was averse to accept the traditional norms of bourgeois democracy and market economy . This motivated him to prescribe State Socialism aiming at the eradication of poverty . But at the same time it may be recounted that while accepting the reality of class exploitation, he refused to take note of its 'political revolutionary implications,' as he had no class programme . That is why he wanted the right to private property to remain sacrosanct,[68] and as such was reluctant to liquidate the moneyed class . It is somewhat inconceivable how he could achieve socialismby eliminating socio-economic inequality without undermining the basic economic foundation of society on which the system of

inequality was founded ! The inability to resolve this contradiction ulti-
mately led Ambedkar to find solace in Buddhism, with an attempt to present
its teachings 'in a new light to suit modern class realities.' [69] In fact,
Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a 'self-deception' and channelled
the whole movement of workers and peasants led by him into ' reactionary
and metaphysical conceptions .'[70] Thus Eleanor Zelliot was absolutely right
when she remarked that 'Ambedkar's embracing of a new religion was meant
to act as a bulwark against communism . '[71]

In fine, Ambedkar's predisposition to State Socialism within the
orbit of the bourgeois liberal - democratic political framework and his
antipathy toward marxian socialism, manifested itself in the best tradition
of Fabianism.

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16-17 . ibid., p. 31 .

18, 19 and 20. ibid ., p. 34 .

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35. G.S. Lokhande, *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar : a Study in Social Democracy,* Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi 1982, p. 35 . Mr. Justice R.R. Bhole (Retd.) observes that Ambedkar even had 'a plan to include socialism in the list of Fundamental Rights but unfortunately it was turned down by Sardar V. Patel, Acharya Kripalani, Dr.Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru .' Ambedkar also had a desire to appoint an Economic Planning Commission for examining his proposals on socialistic planning and other matters relating to social and economic life of the people in India, 'but that proposal met the same fate.' - 'Foreword' to G.B. Lokhande, loc. cit., p. xi. See also K.C. Markandan, op. cit., pp. 139-40 .

36. Cited in Dhananjay Keer, op. cit., p. 391.

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41.P.P.Sanzgiri,loc.cit.,p.18.

42. ibid. p. 16. However, W.N. Kuber informs that while Ambedkar co-operated with the first general strike in textile mills in 1928, he opposed the second, launched in April 1929.—See *Dr. Ambedkar : a Critical Study* , op. cit., p. 221 .

43. P.P. Sanzgiri , loc. cit., p. 18; W.N. Kuber, loc. cit., pp. 160 and 211-2 .

44. This party came into being as a result of disbanding of Indian Labour Party by Ambedkar in July 1942. — See W. N. Kuber, loc. cit., p. 222 .

45. Quoted in W.N. Kuber, loc. cit., p. 226. Kuber also cites another example of Ambedkar's anti-communist stance. When the Peasants' and Workers' Party (PWP) had accepted Marxism in its Dabhadi Thesis, Jayaprakash Narayan reported to Ambedkar that S.S. More, the leader of PWP was a pro-communist and intended to merge his party into the Communist Party of India . Ambedkar was reported to have reacted that if this was to happen then More was ruining the masses .— See pp. 224-5 .

46.P. P. Sanzgiri, op. cit., pp. 16-7.

47. ibid., p. 16.

48. Earlier in 1935 he for the first time resolved to get converted into Buddhism and made an announcement too to that effect . Ultimately, he was proselytized into this religion on 14 October 1956 .

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Towards Sustainable Human Settlements: Habitat II and After

AMBARISH MUKHOPADHYAY

The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul, Turkey from 3 to 14 June 1996 . It, in fact, represented the culmination of decades of efforts by the UN and other agencies to deal with the vast panorama of problems affecting the sustainability of planet Earth in supporting a rapidly increasing and urbanizing human population . Habitat II has its roots in Habitat I, which was held twenty years earlier in Vancouver in 1976, and which for the first time had planted urban issues on the global agenda and offered visions of what a future city would look like .

> The difference today is the context - the overwhelming scale and immediacy of the crisis. Problems of rapid urbanisation— unemployment,homelessness, hunger, crime, random violence and declining air and water quality— have reached almost unmanageable proportions.[1]

The Urban Explosion

The urban transformation of the globe can be seen as the lasting legacy of the twentieth century . Already close to half the world's population lives in urban settlements . World population has doubled in the last 20 years from 3 to 6 billion . Urban population has increased more rapidly, at a rate 2.5 times faster than rural areas . In 1950, 30 per cent of the world's population lived in cities and only London and New York had a population of more than 8 million . By 1995, the world's urban population had tripled to 2.5 billion , amounting to about 45 per cent of the planet's population . The UN estimates show that by 2015 , the world will contain around 560 cities with more than 1 million people and dozens with more than 10 million.[2] The lastphase of the urban transformation is now unfolding in the developing

countries of Asia,Africa and Latin America . At present, nearly two-thirds of the world's urban population, more than one and a half billion people, live in the cities of the 'South' and it is estimated that within little more than a generation their number will triple. [3] By the year 2025, 80 per cent of the world's urban population will live in developing countries.

The Challenge of Urban Management

The fact that the bulk of urbanization is occurring in developing nations is of particular concern to policy makers. Increasing concentration of people in cities and towns leads to growing demands for basic civic amenities and services . And this in turn puts pressure upon the governments, most of which are ill-equipped to deal even with existing urban problems . Unsanitary housing conditions have wreaked havoc in the developing world . Increasing inequalities in cities has led to social exclusion . Developed countries too face growing problems . Fiscal crisis have prompted city governments to cut employment rolls, leading to widespread protests . Income disparities amongst urban dwellers continue to increase . The problems faced by the urban population are many and of diverse nature . The growth in the infrastructural facilities in cities cannot keep pace with the growth in urban population . This is more so in case of developing countries.

> The size of urban population as also its rate of growth has serious implications for the municipal authorities who are required to provide basic civic services and urban infrastructure .Every person coming to urban areas puts a direct demand for civic services and infrastructure, thereby putting additional pressure on an already overstretched supply situation.[4]

As the number of people living in the world's cities and towns grows, environmental concerns such as adequate housing and sanitation, clean air to breathe, and access to potable water are increasingly *people* concerns. Global poverty is being urbanized as well. Within a few decades, the number of households living in poverty in urban centres will far exceed those in rural areas . At least 600 million people , most of them poor, already live in health-and-life-threatening situations in decaying urban environments . One out of every three city dwellers lives in substandard housing . Most of the urban residents have no ready access to safe piped water and lack sanitation . 'Without a doubt, rapid urban population growth is exacerbating the often mutually reinforcing effects of poverty and environmental damage .'[5] The amount of environmental resources being used by urban residents is reaching alarming proportions. It seems fair to ask, " Are the cities of the world sustainable? "If so, how are resources to be managed at a time when population

growth and urban sprawl are putting more and more stress on city managers? This underscores the crucial role of urban management in improving human and economic development in a rapidly urbanizing world. In all major developing regions in the world , the rapidly changing socio-economic and political environment calls for new approaches to the issues of urban development .

As population growth will be virtually synonymous with urban growth in the coming decades, the focus of efforts to develop sustainable human settlements must be on cities . They are where most economic activity will take place, pollution will be generated and natural resources consumed . As spatial and physical environments , cities and towns have their own special problems that have produced new environmental phenomena and behaviour. The rapid rate of urban population growth, and the consequent congestion create problems of space, housing, sanitation, water supply and pollution.Moreover these problems have disproportionately large impacts on the urban poor . For example , housing policies that force the poor into unserved settlements keep people poor by denying them the opportunities to use their scarce incomes to improve their physical environment. Thus, because they directly affects people and interests, policies become an eminently political affair. It is high time to recognize that the challenge of the urban environment is a human problem . The manner in which people have organized themselves, increasingly concentrated in urban areas of all sizes, has important consequences for environmental resources . Today, the question is not simply whether cities are sustainable, but rather "what needs to be done to improve their sustainability ?" We must look at examples of best practices from around the world to learn what policies and approaches would be successful in managing environmental problems . Thus, the crucial issue is that of urban environmental governance . 'Does preoccupation with environmental degradation imply a new set of challenges for urban government ? How will mayor and other public officials deal with the environmental problems their cities are now facing ?'[6] This then is the urban challenge . Policy makers around the globe are becoming more receptive to the need for new institutional responses to this challenge, and to urban management initiative at both country and regional levels. It was in this context that the Habitat II Conference intended to revisit the issues addressed in Vancouver in Habitat I focusing on housing and the pattern of human settlements within both industrialized and developing nations.

From Vancouver to Istanbul

The Vancouver meeting (1976) , which was held during a period of relative optimism regarding the economic prospects of developing countries, defined its mandate in narrow terms . Participating governments did not

establish the linkages between the 'urban' agenda and the broader issues of widening economic and social disparities between and within countries, the growing importance of the environment and the role of global trade in development . The Conference adopted the 'Declaration of Vancouver' and 64 recommendations for national implementation . The legacy of Vancouver is a modest one and the Conference is remembered for the heated debates it generated about lowcost housing for the poor .

Following the Vancouver Conference, a new United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat) was organized and located in Nairobi under the supervision of the 58-member UN Commission on Human Settlement.[7]

In contrast to the relative stability of the 1970s, the last two decades have witnessed momentous change . Predominantly rural countries have experienced rapid and sustained urban growth . Large cities have continued to expand their population and territories and secondary cities and towns have mushroomed.

> Economically, the 1980s were a decade of debt and adjustment in LatinAmerica and Africa, resulting in lowered expectations for the future . In contrast, East Asian economies prospered at unprec edented rates . Politically, the developing countries of Africa and Asia have gone through their first generation of post-independence political leadership, and Latin America has shed its military dicta torships for democratic regimes .[8]

Meanwhile there were several key developments in the housing and habitat area . One was the initiative in Sri Lanka for an International Year of Shelter for the Homeless to be celebrated in 1987 . In response, the UN General Assembly adopted a Global Strategy for shelter to the year 2000. This is still in effect, buttressed by a special component on housing and urban finance .[9] Later, the private sector became engaged and the National Association of Realtors sponsored three International Shelter Conferences in Washington D.C .(1984) , Vienna (1986), and Washington D.C again in 1989. The main message was that governments should serve as facilitators and *not* providers of housing. This was a reversal of one of the fundamental Vancouver recommendations. In May 1992, the World Urban Forum, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Urban Management Programme (UMP) took significant initiative for the inclusion of human settlement issues in its meeting in Curitiba, Brazil. [10] By 1990s, the world's leaders had been alerted to the risks of global environmental deterioration and the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, was expected to feature problems of the urban environment . However, in the preparatory meetings, human settle-

ments had no place on the agenda . Finally, a special chapter in the UNCED Agenda 21— the conference's impressive Global Plan of Action— was ultimately allocated to human settlements .

In September 1994, the World Bank held its second Annual Conference on Environmentally Sustainable Development (ESD) in Washington D.C. Coming at the halfway point between the 1992-UNCED Summit in Rio and the 1996 Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the ESD Conference focused on the drawing together the 'Green Agenda' of natural resources, and the 'Brown Agenda' of the urban environment . The Conference brought together mayors, ministers, academics, professionals and non-governmental organizations from both industrialized and developing countries to consider the environmental problems that confront all cities . These attempts and initiatives towards finding solutions to the problems of urban governance, during the last twenty years, have culminated to Habitat II which had the twin objectives of "Adequate Shelter for All" and "Human Settlements Development in an Urbanizing World", through a new partnership involving governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Habitat II : Premises and Promises

The Habitat II Declaration, which was adopted on the last day of the Conference, while recognizing the role of cities as 'Centres of Civilization' and as generators of economic development and social , cultural and spiritual and scientific advancement, identified a "continuing deterioration of conditions of shelter and human settlements."[11] There was a broad consensus over the need to address the world's bourgeoning urban crisis and to bring together the two definitions of the word 'habitat' that emerged at Vancouver and Rio. At Vancouver in 1976, 'habitat' referred to human settlements, i.e., people in cities, and in Rio(1992) it meant ecosystems . The Istanbul Conference promised to integrate these two different discourses and concerns : people and natural resources . Habitat II participants agreed on several key points: the future of the Earth will be heavily determined by the quality of life in cities ; the economic, social, political, and environmental futures of countries will depend on how urban issues are addressed, and local and national capacities must be strengthened to solve urban problems . Another agreed-upon approach was identification of 'best practice' cases that might serve as examples for governments and communities to consider, as they develop their own local solutions to problems. As Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General, UNCHS (Habitat) states :

> Best practices are community actions, initiatives, or projects that demonstrate a commitment to implementing lasting solutions to

> urban problems.The best practices database will allow these suc-
> cess stories to be celebrated and shared around the world.[12]

The Heads of State, Government and official delegations of countries in the Conference endorsed the universal goals of ensuring adequate shelter for all and making human settlements safer, healthier, more livable, equitable, sustainable and more productive, and recognized the particular needs of women, children and youth for safe, healthy and secure living conditions . The Conference promised to intensify its efforts to eradicate poverty, promote and protect human rights for all, provide for basic needs such as education, nutrition and health care, and especially adequate shelter for all. This added emphasis on problems of 'housing' was due to the realization that the environment which a city creates for its citizens, that is, its internal impact, is to a large extent dependent upon the state of housing . The quality of shelter is one of the major contributing factors towards ensuring a decent quality of life for the citizens.

> Haphazard squatter settlements, which are largely unserviced, are both
> wasteful in land use and environmentally degrading and polluting be
> cause of squalor . Properly planned housing, therefore, becomes a pri-
> mary environmental consideration . Whilst poor housing may be physi-
> cally degrading , it also gives rise to a great deal of social tension, which
> is an environmental hazard.[13]

The delegates at the Conference declared that they would work to ex-pand the supply of affordable housing by enabling markets to perform efficiently and in a socially and environmentally responsible manner . They will thus en-hance access to land and credit and assist those who are unable to participate in the housing market . Last, but not the least, the Istanbul Declaration states :

> We adopt the enabling strategy and the principles of partnership and
> participation as the most democratic and effective approach for the
> realization of our commitments . Recognizing local authorities as
> our closest and essential partners in the implementation of the *Habitat Agenda*,
> we must promote, within the legal framework of each country, decen
> tralization through democratic local authorities and work to strengthen
> their financial and institutional capacities. ...[14]

Conference Highlights

Over 3,000 delegates from 171 countries, some 300 parliamentarians, around 600 local authorities, 89 special agency representatives, 340 people from intergovernmental organizations, and 2,400 NGO representatives attended the Habitat II Conference (3-14 June 1996).Besides significant shifts in issues

and approaches to human settlements since Habitat I, there have been significant changes in the voices heard as well in Habitat II. For the first time in UN history, the NGOs were invited to speak at a major conference, participate in working groups, and help draft agenda recommendations .The NGOs were also entrusted with a key responsibility for activating and implementing the *Habitat Agenda.*

Another major breakthrough of Habitat II was to enlist the participation of mayors and representatives of local governments. They will be the basis of a permanent and growing constituency for participation in future UN and other international events .

In the Conference, reports for 140 nations were prepared and received . Many countries also established National Committees for Habitat II . The 'City Summit' launched numerous fora, including the World Business Forum, the Forum of National Academics of Science and Engineering, and the Forum on Human Solidarity. Several of the fora developed ideas for supportive actions for Habitat and /or supported establishing special task forces for this purpose .

Ten thematic one-day dialogues were organized by various sponsors. These feature eminent presenters and panelists dealing with major issues confronting human settlements at the end of the century. With the decision to feature housing finance prominently in the *Habitat Agenda,* several organizations, such as the Regional Development Banks and the Eco-Hab International Foundation, organized special round tables or fora on suitable financing strategies for housing .

In short, as there was a spirit of Vancouver, a spirit of Rio, just as certainly there was a spirit of Instanbul . Habitat II had the ambitious goal of "gearing up public understanding and institutional capabilities to finance andimplement habitat building and renovation in communities, large and small, while improving the quality of life they can offer in the third millennium."[15]

Lofty goals - Little gains

Despite some achievements, the Instanbul Conference was disappointing in several important respects . On a closer analysis, it may seem that the Summit turned out to be yet another self-serving, 'much -ado-about-nothing' meeting replete with rhetoric but short on concrete commitment .

To start with, Habitat Agenda's Global Plan of Action itself is not legally binding. It has no specific targets to eliminate the growing problems of slums and homelessness in many cities which it highlights, particularly in the developing world.Neither is there a mechanism to ensure the implementation of the plan.Instead, it stresses on the sovereign right of each State to institute their own national programmes to achieve the goals of the agenda.The sovereignty which member states guard so zealously gives them leeway to

interpret the Habitat Agenda.' [16]

Most of the discussions in the Conference remained largely sectoral.

> Housing experts talked about housing without focusing sufficiently on
> social or environmental dimensions, environmentalists did not refer to the
> financial or economic costs of environmental management, social activists
> did not place the dilemmas of communities against the broader prob-
> lemsof mobilizing financial resources for social welfare policies or
> social safety nets.[17]

This lack of cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary thinking did not offer many
new solutions to old problems . Few delegates reached across sectors to find new
combinations that would suggest new approaches .

Also, few delegates raised the broader issues of how national reform
processes —such as welfare reform in the United States or Europe—would af-
fect the economics, social fabric, and physical landscape of cities . This is even
more surprising because the urban impact of these processes are conditioning the
very social and economic character of cities .

Another disappointing feature of Habitat II was the weakness of the
discussion on building capacity to solve urban problems . In recognizing the need for
decentralized, multiple solutions to urban problems, one would have expected that
participants in the Conference would engage with the problem of strengthening the
training of urban professionals and citizens in the process . There was, in fact, no
reference to seeking an appropriate balance between, for example urbanplanning
and economics or environmental science, or architecture and social analysis.

The greatest controversy at Habitat II centered around the responsibility
of governments to provide housing . The debate pitted supporters of 'housing as
a human right' against those States, especially the United States of America,
which opposed housing as a 'stand-alone' right . The US position was that hous-
ing is a derivative right —along with food, clothing, and other basic elements —
of an adequate standard of living; this right should be realized progressively
based on the availability of resources . After prolonged negotiations in the days
that followed, the United States stood out as the bad guy, persistently fighting to
omit any references to the 'sight of adequate shelter' on the Habitat Agenda for
fear of litigation by its citizens to gain access to housing . This reluctance to
recognize the right to adequate shelter prompted NGOs from all over the world
to stage a protest in the streets of Istanbul with the slogan 'Right to Housing
Now.' The Group of 77/China and the European Union supported the move .
Finally a compromise was reached with the United States that all references to
housing must be precluded with the phrase 'progressive realization to the right to
adequate housing .' This was a clear example of the domination of the developed
North in formulating policies for sustainable human settlements.

The NGO activists raised the issue of forced evictions, including removal of residents for development projects and raids on squatter settlements.But here also,they had to settle for a compromise.'While the activists secured language protecting residents from forced, not just illegal evictions, governments merely agreed to oppose forced evictions that are contrary to the law. '[18]

Habitat II was marked by the virtual absence of world leaders, a fact that does not bode well for the future of decentralization . On the final day of the Conference, the Cuban President, Fidel Castro blasted the world's rich nations, almost nine of which had sent top leaders to Istanbul, for their apparent lack of political support . Castro told a packed house :

> How many heads of state and government, from the developed countries are attending this meeting today ? Those who have almost destroyed the planet and poisoned the air, the seas, the rivers and the soils, are presently showing little concern over saving hu mankind . Is it perhaps that governments do not care about this ? Can the state dissociate itself from its responsibility with the solution of these problems ?Is it fair not to consider housing an essential right of man ? [19]

The Cuban President took the North to task for failing to provide the financial resources to tackle the South's urban crisis for which it is , in a large measure, responsible .

Conclusion

In fact, with so many competing subjects, Habitat II became a victim of tug-of-war . There were too many issues raised and the summit lost its focus.Just when it thought it had overcome one major hurdle, another cropped up. Unfortunately, Habitat II became a summit seeking ways to cure the symptoms of urban decay rather than going to the source of it.The Summit failed to effectively attain its ambitious objective of integrating to effectively attain its ambitious objective of integrating the concerns expressed in Vancouver and Rio and make the issue of 'sustainable development' a really *people's* one.

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Sociology of Talak : Text and Context

S.A.H. MOINUDDIN

In this paper our main focus will be on the problem of *talak* which has become a subject-matter of wide discussion . This issue got momentum during *Shah Bano Case*, i.e., *Criminal Appeal No. 103 of 1981, D /23.4.1985*. First, we shall try to understand the theoretical aspect of the problem and then, recall our field experiences regarding it . Here we examine the two broad perspectives of the *talak*, i.e., *mahr,*(bride money) and *iddat*(three menstrual cycle) . It is needed for filling up the gaps in our understanding about it .

I

In Islam marriage is a contract between persons belonging to two opposite sexes . It is said to be a contract signed by two parties, one for each side . Marriage is looked upon as essential and compulsory for both males and females . Muslim parents are said to be 'not free ' unless they see their sons and daughters married . It is also looked upon as a *Sunna,* and therefore, it is regarded as an obligation which must be fulfilled . The consideration of the contract is *mahr,* gift to the bride, the amount of which, not being fixed by law varies from one dinar upwards.

Mahr is defined as a sum of money or other property which the wife is entitled to receive from the husband in consideration of the marriage (Mullah).[1] Paraṣ Diwan[2] has contradicted this view . He criticises this definition on the ground that *mahr* is not payable ' in consideration of marriage' but is an obligation imposed by law on the husband as a mark of respect for the wife, as is evident from the fact that non-specification of *mahr* at the time of marriage does not affect the validity of marriage.

Without entering into the debate we are here concerned to find out whether *mahr* is an amount payable by the husband to the wife on divorce. The main reason behind our confusion is that, under the Muslim Personal

Law, the amount of *mahr* is usually split into two parts, one of which is called "prompt" , which is payable on demand, and the other is called "deferred", which is payable on the dissolution of marriage by death or divorce. But the fact that deferred *mahr* is payable at the time of the dissolution of marriage, cannot justify the conclusion that it is payable on divorce.

Islamic law permits a man to take to wife up to four women at any given time, subject only to the proviso that he must treat them alike and justly. The uttering of the *Quran* in this regard is as follows:

> And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among (other) women such are lawful to you—two, or three,or four; but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness,then only) one—or (from among)those whom you rightfully possess.This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right of course.[3]

II

Islam permits dissolution or rather break of relation between husband and wife . The Arabic word, *talak* is usually rendered as "repudiation," it comes from a root, *tollaqa* , which means to release (an animal) from a tether; hence, to repudiate the wife or free her from the bondage of marriage.

Regarding *talak* the prophet had a mixed reaction . The teaching of the prophet Muhammad on the general subject of divorce is expressed in the traditions as follows :

> The thing which is lawful but disliked by God is divorce.
> There are three things which, whether done is just or in earnest, shall be considered serious and effectual, namely, marriage, di vorce and taking a wife back .
> Every divorce is lawful except a mad man's .
> Cursed be the second husband who makes the wife (divorced) lawful for her first husband, and cursed be the first husband for whom she is madelawful.(Mishkat, XIIIe. XV.)

III

There can be no greater authority on this question than the Holy *Quran* . Arthur J. Arberry [4] has interpreted the *Quran* as 'the Sacred Book of Islam, comprises in its 114 *Surahs* or Chapters, the total of revelations believed to have been communicated to Prophet Muhammad, as a final expression of God's wil' '

Now we take note of the teachings of the *Quran* on *talak* which are as follows :

The Cow
Surah 2,226
Those who swear to keep away from their wives (with intent of divòrcing them) have four months to grace; then if they reconcile (during this period), surely God is forgiving and kind.
Surah 2,227
And they are bent on divorce, God heads all and knows everything.
Surah 2,228
Women who are divorced have to wait for three monthly periods, and if they believe in God and the Last Day they must not hide unlawfully what God has formed within their wombs . Their husbands would do well to take them back in that case, if they wished to be reconciled . Women also have recognized rights as men have, though men have an advantage over them . But God is all-mighty and all-wise.
Surah 2,229
Divorce is (revokable) two times (after pronouncement),after which (there are two ways open for husbands), either (to) keep (the wives) honourably,or part with them in a decent way.You are not allowed to take away the least of what you have given your wives, unless both of you fear that you would not be able to keep within the limits set by God. If you fear you cannot maintain thebounds fixed by God,there will be no blame on either if the woman redeems herself. Do not exceed the limits of God, for those who exceed the bounds set by God are transgressors .
Surah 2,230
If a man divorces her again (a third time), she becomes unlawful for him(and he cannot remarry her) until she has married another man . Then if he divorces her there is no harm if the two uniteagain if they think they will keep within the bounds set by God and made clear for those who understand.
Surah 2,231
When you havedivorced your wives,and they have reached the end of the period of waiting, then keep them honourably (by revok ing the divorce),or let them go with honour, and do not detain them with the intent of harassing lest you should transgress . He who does so will wrong himself . Do not mock the decrees of God, and remember the favoursGod has bestowed on you of the consequences of doing wrong . Have fear of God and remember, God is cognisant of everything.

Surah 2,232
When you have divorced your wives and they have completed the
fixed term (of waiting), do not stop them from marrying other men
if it is agreed between them honourably . This warning is for those
among you who believe in God and the Last Day .
This is both proper and right for you, for God knows and you do not
know.
Surah 2,236
There is no sin in divorcing your wives before the consummation
of marriage or settling the dowry; but then provide adequately for
them, the affluent according to their means, the poor in accor
dance with theirs as is befitting. This is surely the duty of those
who do good.
Surah 2,237
And if you divorce them before the consummation of marriage, but
after settling the dowry, then half the settled dowry must be paid,
unless the woman forgoes it, or the person who holds the bond of
marriage pays the full amount. And if the man pays the whole, it is
nearer to piety . But do not forget to be good to each other, and
remember that God sees all that you do.

In *Shah Bano Case* , the main problem arises with the interpreta-
tion of the two *Aiyats* (verses), 241 and 242 of *Surah* 2 of the *Quran* , which
argue that there is an obligation on Muslim husbands to provide for their
divorced wives . The Arabic version of those *Aiyats* and their English trans-
lations are as follows.[5]

Arabic Version   *English Version*

Aiyat No. 241
WA LIL MOTALLAQATAY   For divorced women
MATAUN   Maintenance (should be provided)
BIL MAAROOFAY   On a reasonable (scale)
HAQQAN   This is a duty
ALAL MUTTAQEENA   On the righteous .
Aiyat No. 242
KAZALEKA YUBAIYYANULLAHO Thus doth God
LAKUM AYATEHEE LA ALLAKUM Make clear His Signs
TAQELOON   To you; in order that you may
                                                           understand .

To some, the main problems arise with the word, *Mata,* in *Aiyat
No. 241* which means 'provision' and not 'maintenance.' For having some
clear idea of these two *Aiyats,* we can quote some translations done by some

learned scholars on the subject.

The translation of *Aiyats* 240 to 242 in *The Meaning of the Quran*[6] reads thus:

> *Surah 2,240-241*
> Those of you, who shall die and leave wives behind them, should make a will to the effect that they should be provided with a year's maintenance and should not be turned out of their homes. But if they leave their homes of their own accord, you shall not be answerable for whatever they chose for themselves in a fair way; Al lah is All powerful, All-wise. (Likewise, the divorced women should also be given something in accordance with the known fair standard.This is an obligation upon the God-fearing people .)
> *Surah 2,242*
> Thus Allah makes clear His Commandments for you; it is expected that you will use your common sense.

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation[7] runs as follows :

> For divorced women maintenance (would be provided) on a reasonable (scale). This is a duty on the righteous .

Ahmed Ali[8] translated it in the following way :

> *Surah 2,241*
> Making a fair provision for women who are divorced is the duty of those who are God-fearing and pious .

Marmaduke Pickthall[9] reads it as :

> *Surah 2,241*
> For divorced women a provision in kindness :A duty for those who ward off (evil).

Then again we find some provisions on *talak* in the Chapter 4 under the heading ,'The Women':

> *The Women*
> *Surah 4,35*
> If you fear a breach between them appoint one arbiter from the people of the man and one from the people of the woman . If they wish to have a settlement then God will reconcile them, for God is all- knowing and cognisant.

Surah 4,128
If a woman fears ill treatment from her husband or his tiring of her, there is no harm if they make a peaceful settlement, and peace is an excellent thing. Yet avarice is part of man's nature. If you do good and fear God, God is cognisant of all that you do .
Surah 4,130
If both (decide to) separate, God in his largesse will provide for them; for God is infinite and all wise .

Then again in the Chapter,'The Allied Troops' we find that :

Surah 33,49
O you who believe, when you marry believing women then divorce them before having (sexual) contact with them, you have no right to demand observance of the 'waiting period' of them.
But provide suitably for them, and let them go with honour.

In Chapter 65 of the *Quran* there are some provisions on *talak.*

Divorce

Surah 65,1
O Prophet when you divorce women, divorce them at their appointed period, and calculate that period, and fear God, your lord . Do not expel them from their houses, nor should they go away themselves, unless they are openly guilty of adultery . These are the limits set by God. And any one who exceeds the limits set by God sins against his own self.
Surah 65,2
When they have reached their appointed time , then either keep them lawfully or let them go honourably; but have two witnesses from among you, and give truthful evidence for (being acceptable to) God.This is to warn him who believes in God and the Last Day. God will furnish a way out for him who fears Him.
Surah 65,4
As for your women who have lost hope of menstruation, and in case you have a doubt, the prescribed period (of waiting)for them is three months, as also for those who have not menstruated yet. As for those who are pregnant, their prescribed period is until the delivery of the child . God will make things easy for him who is mindful of God.
Surah 65,6
House the (divorced) women where you live, according to your

means;but do not harass them so as to reduce them to straitened circumstances .If they are pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth to the child . And if they suckle the child for you, then make the due payment to them, and consult each other appropriately . But if you find this difficult, let some other woman suckle (the child) for her.

IV

From the above discussion we can broadly mention different modes of divorce . The contract of marriage in Islam may be dissolved in any one of the following ways : (1) by the husband at his will, without the intervention of a court; (2) by mutual consent of the husband and wife, without the intervention of the court; and (3) by a judicial decree at the suit of the husband or wife. The wife cannot divorce herself from her husband without his consent, except under a contract whether made before or after marriage, but she may, in some cases, obtain a divorce by judicial decree.

We are to remember that when the divorce proceeds from the husabnd, it is called *talak* ; when it is effected by mutual consent, it is called *Khula* or *mubara'at* according to the terms of the contract between the parties.

Ram Malik [10] and Mallah's [11] Mohammedan Law discussed divorce under three broad headings : *ahsan talak, hasan talak* and *talak- al -bida.*

To divorce his wife according to the most acceptable form *ahsan talak* the husband utters a single *talak* and abstains from marital intercourse with her for a period of three months during which reconciliation is possible and the divorce revokable . If the husband explicitly revokes it by resuming co-habitation , the effect of the *talak* is nullified and the marriage continues. If the husband does not revoke the *talak* during the said period, the divorce becomes final at the end of the three months.

M.Hidayatullah opines that when the marriage has not been consummated, a *talak* in the *ahsan* form may be pronounced even if the wife is in her menstruation.

Where the wife has passed the age for periods of menstruation the requirement of a declaration during a *tuhr* (period between menstruation) is inapplicable; furthermore, this requirement only applies to an oral divorce and not a divorce in writing.

The less approved form of divorce *(hasan talak)* involves a procedure by which the husband pronounces a *talak* once a month for three consecutive months . Revocation, reconciliation and resumption of cohabitation can take place at any time prior to the third pronouncement which immediately terminates the marriage.

The most reprehensible form of divorce and by far the most common

(*talak-al-bida*) is when the husband simply makes three pronouncements immediately to terminate the marriage and no recommendaion and reconciliation is possible.

Islam also retained the women's right to divorce . In the *Khula* form of divorce, the release of marriage tie occurs not by *talak* but by an agreement between the husband and wife .

> A divorce by Khoola is a divorce with the consent, and at the instance of the wife, in which she gives or agrees to give a consideration to the husband for her release from the marriage tie . In such a case the terms of the bargain are matters of arrangement between the husband and wife, and the wife may, as the consideration,release her *dyn-mahr* (dower) and other rights, or make any other agreement for the benefit of the husband (*Monshee Buzul-ul- Rahum v.Luteefutoon-Nisa,* 1861).[11]

In general this kind of divorce is effected by an offer from the wife to compensate the husband if he releases her from his marital rights and acceptance by the husband of the offer . Once the offer is accepted, it operates as a single irrevocable divorce (*talak-i-bain*), and its operation is not postponed until execution of the *Khulanama* (deed of *Khula*) .

Some jurists agree that if woman seeks divorce then she is not entitled to get back the *mahr* money.

So we can say that the *Quran* is explicit on the conditions of divorce as well as the possibility of reconciliation . Muhammadan interpreters argue that the prescribed time mentioned in the *Quran* is a period of roughly three months which serves the dual purpose of allowing temper to cool and for pregnancy to be established.

Except in the case of adultery, the husband cannot turn the wife out of his house until the period of *iddat* has expired . Punishment of such act is severe but the establishment of the fact of adultery is not easy . The *Quran*[12] is very specific regarding such act . It observes :

> And those who accuse honourable women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them (with) eighty stripes and n ever (afterwards) accept their testimony. They indeed are evil-doers.

Muhammadan doctors opine that Islam calls for enough thought before the final announcement . It is found that Islam forbids remarriage between a divorced couple until the woman has not only married someone else, but the marriages have been consummated . To them, it is nothing but deterrent of thoughtless divorce .

VI

This is all about the scriptural view of *talak*. But while analysing our field experiences in the gram panchayat of Mongolkote of Burdwan district and that of Panchthupi of Murshidabad district, we find that in this respect for this or that reason there is a wide divergence between theory and practice. Before entering into detailed discussion about this, we deem it necessary to explain the methodology we used in our field.

In our field we have collected our data from two categories of the population, i.e., divorced, and separated Muslim women . For gaining an understanding of the problem it is imperative to define at first the above two categories of the population .

Divorced Muslim women are those whose *talak* or release from marriage tie has occurred in the presence of legal authorities or local elderly people. Here legal authorities mean Maulana,Maulavi, and Imam while elderly people mean those who have their authority for witnessing such action. It also includes those cases in which release from marriage tie has occurred in the court .

On the other hand, 'separated' Muslim women are those who at present are living with their parents and do not have any connection with their husbands . These women, however, harbour the fond hope that their husbands would one day give due recognition to them and take them back with honour .

In Mongolkote gram panchayat we interviewed 70 divorced/ separated Muslim women among whom 31 respondents were divorcees and 39 separated . We have also interviewed 51 guardians in the said gram panchayat. Among them, 16 respondents were fathers, 28 mothers, 7 brothers, one elder sister , while the remaining 18 respondents have no guardians .

In Panchthupi gram panchayat of Murshidabad district 58 respondents were interviewed among whom 36 respondents were divorcees and 22 separated . We have also taken the interview of 47 guardians among which 17 respondents were fathers, 27 mothers , 3 brothers and 11 respondents have no guardians at all . The justification for having an interview with the guardians was that as the heads of the family they control all channels of communication. It is useful to know how they rationalize their action even though some of these actions are at variance with the injunctions of great traditions .

VII

In our field we found that knowledge of rules and regulations about *talak* as laid down in the *Quran* and *Hadith* was limited to a very small group of interviewees in Burdwan . Strangely enough, none of the interviewees from Murshidabad —all divorced / separated Muslim women — possessed

any information about the religious viewpoint of the practice—indeed, a traumatic one, through which they had all passed .

The wide divergence between theory and practice is clearly found in the case of *iddat* and *mahr* payment . The *Quran* is very specific on the question of *iddat* . The condition of a woman during *iddat* is dealt with not in *Sura Al Bagar* , Chapter II of the *Holy Quran* but in the *Sura Al Talaq* , Chapter LXV . The relevant provisions are in *Aiyats* 1-7 . The passages are as follows:

> LXVI.1. When ye have to divorce women, pronounce divorce only when they are in a free state (i.e., free from menses or pregnancy) ...Do not turn them out of their houses. ... God may perhaps bring about a reconciliation between you. ...
>
> 2. And when they reached their prescribed term, either retain them with kindness or part from them in a just and gentle manner . Take two upright witnesses to the transactio.... God will show a way to the righteous for an honourable reconciliation or an honourable parting ...
>
> 4. The prescribed term of waiting is three months except for pregnant women for whom time is extended till they have laid down their burden....
>
> 6.Lodge them (women in *iddat)* where ye yourselves lodge and let them live in a style that ye yourselves live....
>
> 7. Let him who hath abundance spend from his abundance and let him who hath his resources limited spend according to what he hath. ... On none doth God lay a burden that he cannot bear .

But none in Murshidabad and Burdwan has observed it . If we look a bit deeper into the data collected, the said divergence between theory and practice regarding divorce becomes even more marked . 53 per cent of the *talaks* in Murshidabad as per our survey had their origin in extramarital affairs of the husband and dowry problem—the former being the dominant reason (26 cases). In Burdwan, these two reasons accounted for 51 per cent of the divorce/separation —with the spectre of extramarital affairs casting its shadow over the lives of 40 per cent (28 out of 70) of the interviewed women. In sharp contrast, the tradition of Islam do not approve of such wanton divorce.

Wide variation is also to be found in case of *mahr*. It is the right of the woman as a protection against indiscriminate use of *talak* .Without *mahr* a marriage cannot be said to have been properly solemnized . It is the exclusive right of the woman or bride to determine the amount And the *mahr* belongs to the wife alone.The *mahr* money has been given to the bride as a token of love, fidelty and sincerety.The *Quran* [13] repeatedly exhorts men to

give *mahr* to the women they intend to marry . It says :

> And give women their dowries as a free gift . But if they of them-
> selves be pleased to give you a portion thereof, consume it with en-
> joyment and pleasure .

The amount of money fixed for *mahr* varies from $\frac{1}{4}$ *surkh dinar*
to any amount . In the present survey it was found that the highest amount
of *mahr* money was Rs 50,000 . $\frac{1}{4}$ *surkh dinar* is the *Sharai mahr* or the
mahr which is adjudged as the ideal amount fixed by the prophet . The
families of the Maulana and Maulavi and some religious-minded people of
every society fix a *Sharai mahr* . But in all other cases, the amount of *mahr*
depends on the girl's family status . The more financially well-established
and renowned the family is , the more is the amount of *mahr* fixed . Some
people consider it as security for woman and fix high amount as *mahr* . Yet
bargain ing occurs over the amount of *mahr* . Sometimes such bargaining
leads to unpleasant situation and cancellation of marriage . The girl's par-
ents always desire to fix a high amount which ought to be beyond the means
of the bridegroom so that their daughter will not have to face the threat of
divorce from her husband in future .

We have already mentioned that the fixed amount may be of two
types, i.e.,"prompt" , which is payable on demand, and the other called
"deferred", which is payable on dissolution of marriage by death or divorce
. But in our field survey, we found that only two out of 128 women inter-
viewed got *mahr* . It is usually asserted that the *mahr* money is a good
security for the woman in case of any difficulties in her marital life, and
when she is divorced the *mahr* money has to be given to her . But if divorce
has occurred due to her own fault, she is not entitled to get back her *mahr*
money . After her husband's death, the sons have to pay her the *mahr* money
. In case the woman dies, then her father and brothers can demand the *mahr*
money from her husband . [14]

That women have been discriminated against is sharply evident in
our findings . So one may argue that one of the characteristic features of
Islamic law is the completely unfettered right it gives to the husband to
terminate his marriage for any reason or for no reason at all. There is noth-
ing to deny that the law of *talak* that was evolved by the Muslim jurists has
become the main source of suffering for Muslim women . It creates most
pitiable conditions for the divorcees and children .

Thus a sociologist observes :

> A Muslim man can have up to four wives, with no legal protection to
> the woman against the exercise of this privilege . The law does not
> admit polygamy as a cause for seeking divorce by a Muslim woman

Of course, the corresponding right of a woman to have more than one husband in any circumstances is inconceivable, much less if granted under law.... A man can divorce at will just by uttering the words, 'I divorce you ', three times, anywhere, at any time without any witness . He is also not required by law to give any maintenance to the wife beyond the period of *iddat*, which is three months and a few days after divorce . If a man divorces to his wife, he is obliged topay *mahr*, a sum of money agreed upon at the time of marriage This provision is also taken as a security for Muslim women against easy divorce . But as long as the right to have four wives continues to be enjoyed by a man, he need not divorce his wife if he does not wish to pay *mahr* , he can simply discard her, or ill treat her, while taking another wife.... . So as to every stage, Muslim law is fettered with inequalities, with the women in every case being less equal.[15]

So,we can conclude our discussion with the observation of J.N.D. Anderson, who rightly observes,

It is true that there are parts of the Muslim World where divorce is commendably rare; but elsewhere it is appallingly common . The Muslim indeed has always lived, under the everpresent shadow of divorce, a shadow mitigated only in comparatively rare cases by certain precautionary devices .... The unjustified repudiation of a wife is regarded by the jurists, as a sin, but it is nonetheless held to be legally effective .[16]

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Review Article
The United Nations and the Third World

RADHARAMAN CHAKRABARTI

The present work * by a Senior Member of the Indian Revenue Service with IMF exposure reflects certain political and social convictions which arise from a fascination for globalization and its impact on the system of nation states . The author seeks to trace a paradigm shift in the whole frontier-eroding process which also involves a reconceptualisation of the United Nations . A security-oriented UN, he believes, has become a development-oriented one . From a value-neutral posture it has moved into a value-laden position.

It is interesting to note the way supranationalism is defined by the author as "founded on shared values" with the market as its plinth and free trade its common bond . Empirically, this is certainly a good approximation of the emerging reality . But that need not warrant the prediction : "in the long run there will be prosperity" after a short-term pain . The question is : whose prosperity and at whose cost ? His castigation of third world plurality as 'infranationalism' and 'organized insanity' contains undue verbiage.

In one respect, at least, the presentation is honest . The author admits in the preface that his work "advocates opening up of the LDCs so as to counter petty nationalism " and absorb "internationally shared values." In the same breath he calls new technologies, more foreign investment as "various crutches which the world outside can offer." But, are all third world nations limping entities to need these crutches ? Yes, colonialism mutilated many of them economically and culturally but efforts at nation building during the post-colonial decades have not gone in vain . It was the incremental strength of these fledgling political units that gave rise to the solidarity movement called non-alignment and placed the third world face to face with the developed countries in a bid to change an iniquitable international economic environment.

The West was naturally reluctant to make amends but nonetheless was wary about one thing, viz., ensuring the dominance of global capitalism in an inhospitable environment . It was not in a mood of fair play but to make a virtue of necessity that the North faced the South in a plethora of fora and conceded their culpability . That was how the third world made its presence felt in global diplomacy . True, they were not in a hurry to be junior practitioners of what the author praises as a 'proper business culture' or readily embrace foreign direct investment as the cure-all of their economic ills. Their suspicions and reservations about the intrusive propensities of the West have strong empirical foundations and were not coloured, as the author believes, by "an accusatory and confrontational attitude" born of colonial misgivings and teachings of Marxism . It makes strange reading as one comes across sentences like :

> The West was viewed through a haze of suspicion.Consequently it did not accelerate the pace of modernization.

Or,

> The strongly held orthodoxies of the developing world can be dispelled through international exposure . It may minimize the cynical outlook that blurs the line between self-delusion and reality . (Preface).

No doubt the author has fully imbibed the kind of "paradigm shift" one unhesitatingly accepts to uphold early integration of the LDCs into the global economy . It is also not surprising that the author is convinced that third world's flirtation with socialism was a "sad story of missed opportunities and stolen times ." It has to be regretted if indeed it was a flirtation and not a serious alternative to capitalism and socialism.

In the long run, it was deceptive democracy and / or bad government in collusion with a non-risk-taking national bourgeoisie which doomed the fate of many third world countries . In their case at least the nomenclature used by the author "irresponsibility incorporated " is quite appropriate . He is also correct in pointing out how "powerful first world countries create events, make rules and monitor history while the third world is overtaken by it." (p.xxxvi).True, "the symbolic triumph of the third world at the UN do not alter its profile of dependence " and "too much dependence on the first world for technology or aid by the third world may stiffen the ongoing dominance-alter its profile of dependence " and "too much dependence on the first world for technology or aid by the third world may stiffen the ongoing dominance-dependence paradigm into a mere master-slave relationship ..." Had this observation not been ascribed to Evan Luard in the Notes and References, one would be at a loss to reconcile it with the author's revealed preference for a globalist

paradigm .

In fact, this discrepancy is littered in the entire text . For instance, in a reference to the commodity agreements on tropical products, the author shares the view of foreign analysts that "the political strength of the poor countries was growing fast " in 60s and 70s. Yet he would not accept a confrontational attitude as having produced any great advantage for the South in their economic negotiations with the North and advise co-operation instead. (p.16).

Again, the author while describing the constraints of the third world, presses the right key when he calls attention to 'inequality in knowledge leading to international stratification' and 'informal colonialism.' But his prescription to bridge the chasm by trading 'anything for scientific knowledge' is a tall order . It is unfortunate that the developing countries have to acquiesce in an international order in which knowledge is marketized.

The issue of infranationalism and its debilitating effects has been well taken ; civil wars and tribal divisions in various parts of the world are viewed as justifying 'UN military response to such sub-wars .' But the point remains if the UN in its present shape with an oligopoly of big powers dominating decision process can really do justice to the task of bringing order to chaos or evenly distribute humanitarian aid . Subcontracting the job to the last remaining superpower or the military outfit of NATO would be a disturbing divergence from the Charter with the consequences not very reassuring either (as in Gulf, Bosnia and Somalia).

On the White regime in South Africa continually flouting UN resolution on Namibia, the key to its defiance has been located "in the erstwhile metropolitan powers and the US," (p. 41) and the limited abrogation of the domestic jurisdiction clause at that time is believed to be a catalytic agent of UN benevolent interference in internal affairs of failed states.

This new-found concern of the global organization for the internal order of its member- nations calls for greater scope of effective participation of the third world in the UN decision making process . This is something to be distinguished from quantitative extension of third world membership such as has taken place in the Security Council (non-permanent category) or in theECOSOC . Interest aggregation of these nations in the General Assembly may have had important effects of hastening decolonization or fighting recialist and anti-human rights policies of governments but the absurdity of passing heaps of recommendations without the power of implementation still keeps the great majority of nations at the receiving end of major UN dispensations.

The Chapter on UN intervention in third world affairs though containing excellent synopsis of a number of leading cases, stops short of going beyond the Congo crisis . Extended discussion on the myriad peacekeeping operations the UN has been engaged in would have brought the analysis up-to-date and further substantiated the tail piece where emphasis is put on

'neutrality' as the most legitimising and endearing feature of UN interven-
tion, which, quite sensibly, needs to be distinguished from a 'reprisal game.'

In discussing the role of the third world in facing and trying to miti-
gate global economic problems, the analysis comes to the plausible caution to
the rich nations that "the quintessence of NIEO was an ideal combination of the
industrial world's technology and the agricultural world's resources ." For
technology, the sky might be the limit but the supply of raw materials is finite."
Does it not point to the wisdom of redefining interdependence of the two worlds
and placing technology in the service of economising resource-use and a more
equitable distribution of global wealth ?It is not a question of charity or bar-
gaining but one of ensuring the survival of humanity at large . To this the third
world's moral commitment should be toward effecting a drastic reduction of its
demographic pressures on this little global village and the first world's toward an
exemplary reduction of wasteful consumerism at home and an honest rejec-
tion of unequal terms of trade imposed on the primary producing countries.

Survival of humanity, in a way, rests on many slender threads fas-
tened to not very stable hanging pegs . One of these is the slowly emerging
consensus in favour of arms limitation, especially of weapons of mass de-
struction . The third world delegates also express concern at rising defence
expenditure to the neglect of development. But the most lamentable con-
trast to this well-meaning concern is provided by indiscriminate purchase
and development of military arsenal by some conflict-prone third world
nations which justifiably drew a Bolivian jibe at small nations (p.159) .
There is also a dangerous source of uncertainty associated with the spread
of fast breeder reactors capable of turning out weapon grade fissionable
materials . This new plutonium economy may attract fortune hunters insensi-
tive to human insecurity.If technology cannot be 'uninvented', it needs at
least to be cut to size and not consciously pampered . The author's conclu-
sion can be approvingly cited :

> This is an extra-ordinary expectation from a selfish world. It presup-
> poses sacrifices, a willingness to shed national pride ... to bury old
> feuds and seek regional and global accommodations .(p.165).

A chapter on 'World without Communism' can certainly have some
bearing on the main theme of the third world vis-a-vis the UN. Instead
however, of expanding on the developing nations ' plight in a unipolar set-up,
the Chapter contains critical appraisal of the stultifying bureaucratic system
that passed for communism in the former Soviet Union, which degenerated
over time into a despotism of the 'privilegentsia' and made people desperately
want to come out of their 'ideological trench.' (p. 193). But the discussion soon
strays into a discourse on social philosophy —at places quite engaging and full
of interesting allusions . Yet the way it indulges in dichotomies (such as social

justice and rule of law, socialism and welfarism, collective identities and individuality) gives the impression of an over-stretching argument that the West holds the key to the solution of human predicament . While one can admire the kind of 'intellectual liberation' which resulted from Renaissance and the rationalism which was further buttressed through Reformation, there is reason to doubt if 'the democratic heartland' which the author locates in the Christian part of the northern hemisphere and its Australasian rimland, still represents the pure spirit of renaissance humanism and really behaves rationally with the non-western parts of the world . The spirit of liberation of which it is supposed to be the exponent is not only kept confined to a space it jealously guards but commodified . Its material fruits are available only at a price . It is indeed a romantic conception that makes the author proclaim :

> The Western world .... relies on values which are universalist in nature and not exclusive, because the pivot of western civilization is the man,the individual (it) incorporates the entire humanity . The scale is global. (p. 196) .

It will be unfair to contrast this pristine conception of the Western ideals with the degenerate realities of today's autocracy-ridden societies of the third world and ridicule their original quest for the collective identity of the individual— the organic bond between man and man and hence between man and society—which could as well be a great universal value, a necessary alternative to atomisation of society steeped in sheer competitiveness utterly oblivious of its dehumanising consequences . It is also unfair to echo Adda Bozeman's oversimplification : "All great non-western orders with the possible exception of Achamenid Persia have always been despotisms." Rather it is the post-feudal, half-modernized third world societies which made a mockery of traditional values and fooled around vulgar versions of socialism. So far as the liberated man and woman of the West are concerned they are far from 'self-moving' entities but part of a system that gives each a space in the national and global economy to extract surplus from others, the pricing mechanism of mystified market being used as a convenient rationalisation of possessive instincts and differential rewards . The only saving grace of the competitive market economy and its political umbrella of multiparty democracy is the opportunity of free expression and dissent it must offer to keep society moving away from the status quo and received wisdom. In the same logic, if any brand of party discipline entails willing suspension of rational thinking, it cannot be conducive to that refined collective awareness and that freedom from bondage for which Marx wanted all men who *produced* unite and struggle against those who *appropriated* . There can be no " infallible righteousness" within the dialectics of social movement . If marxism failed in Russia, and got disfigured elsewhere, the third world really had no occasion to

try it seriously .

For the third world countries which are now at the crossorads, a state-guided market of the Korean type or a business-bureaucracy tie-up of the Japanese type may appear attractive but there is a caveat—one cannot transplant the cultural greenery in which Korea and Japan blended the Orient and the Occident . The author correctly quoted someone as saying, "Japaneseness is a creed which by definition offers an example but little inspiration to other LDCs." In fact, the numerous citations throughout this Chapter are apposite but their sources remain obscure.

The epilogue not only sums up the preceding contents but makes a projection about more intense supranational role on the part of the UN as there are distinct signs of erosion of nation state authority and the inadequacy of the nation state to filfil the needs of its members . On such a recent issue, one cannot expect enunciations with any finality . On the whole, the work contains refreshing insight.

Notes for Contributors

1. The contributors are requested to send *two* copies of the manuscript, typed in double space one side of each sheet, with pages numbered serially . The maximum length for papers is 6000 words. Longer papers may be accepted only in special cases.

2. The contributors are also requested to use single quotation marks while quoting brief phrases, and the extracts quoted in the body of the text of the paper should be indented without any quotation marks. An example is appended below :

> So the coexistence of different modes of production in any society implies an hierarchical order where one mode of production overdetermines the others. And this is why Marx observed in one of his later writings that :
>
> > There is in every social formation a particular branch of production which determines the position and importance of all the others, and the relations obtaining in this branch accordingly determines the relations of all other branches as well.
>
> But instead of identifying the dominant mode of production in India,Bhambri has denied the dominance of the capitalist mode of production and asserts that different structures coexist with each other without exercising any dominance over other .

Interpolations within an extract quoted may be given only within square brackets.

3. (a) Footnotes should be numbered consecutively and typed on a separate sheet at the end of the article .

   (b) Authors and texts should be cited in the following manner :

   Books and Monographs
   Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*,Oxford University Press,Oxford 1977, pp.69-72.
   Articles
   Hamza Alavi, 'Peripheral Capitalism,' *State and Society,* vol. 2, no. 1, January-March 1981, p. 71 .
   Hamza Alavi,'The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh,' in Harry Goulbourne (ed.), *Politics and State in the Third World,* Macmillan,London 1979, pp. 40-1.

Editorial Notes

Politics and Society intends to provide a forum for intellectual cross-fertilization in different segments of the disciplines of Political Science and Sociology . It also seeks to promote interdisciplinary researches in social sciences having direct linkages with the broad areas of these two subjects . With this end in view, the Journal would make its best efforts to ensure an academic interaction not only among the members of the Vidyasagar University community but also with other scholars engaged elsewhere.

Politics and Society also offers to leave room for discussion of various ideas and points of view in order to deepen and clarify one's own understanding of different aspects of social and political issues. It is hoped that in addition to evoking debates, the contributions made/to be made in this Journal would be able to add to our readers' stock of information and their knowledge and comprehension of our socio-political universe.