

REQUIEM FOR OUR TIMES

T. Vijayendra



SANGATYA

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THIS VALLEY OF DEATH IS NOT MY COUNTRY

This valley of death is not my country
this executioner's theatre is not
my country
this vast charnel-ground is not
my country
this blood-drenched slaughter house is
not my country.

Nabarun Bhattacharya
(June 23, 1948 – July 31, 2014)

PREFACE

This is a follow up of my earlier book, *The Losers Shall Inherit the World*. Readers have been very kind to that book as it has gone through three editions. This has encouraged me to think that maybe there is a readership for my writings. Hence this collection.

Like the earlier book, these articles first appeared in *Frontier*, the weekly published from Kolkata. They deal with a series of contemporary socio-political-cultural issues. Marx has written somewhere that we should be ruthlessly critical of our times and that the new will arise out of the ashes of the old. I have tried to follow it and hence the word ‘Requiem’¹ in the title.

While composing his last piece of music, the famous *Requiem*, Mozart wrote, “It feels as if I am writing a requiem for myself”. Having completed this book at the age of 71, I also feel the same way.

T. Vijayendra

Hyderabad
October 8, 2014

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1. A Requiem or Requiem Mass, also known as Mass for the dead or Mass of the dead, is a Mass in the Catholic Church offered for the repose of the soul or souls of one or more deceased persons, using a particular form of the Roman Missal. It is frequently, but not necessarily, celebrated in the context of a funeral.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost is my gratitude to Timir Basu, Editor of *Frontier* who published these articles first. *Frontier* remains a premier journal in English for Left wing cadre education in India.

For the rest, I will have to be satisfied with just listing a few names alphabetically, even though I owe them my very existence - material, mental, emotional and cultural. There are many others, I am sure, who I have not been able to name for varied reasons.

Alka Saraogi, Anant Krishna, Anuradha Naik, Arvind Gupta, Augustine Veliath, Binayak Sen, Bhashwati, Chetana Kallakuri, Hredai, Ilina Sen, Janardhan V., Janet Chawla, Jyoti Mudgal, Kalpana Ram, Karnika Palwa, Kiran Shaheen, Kishwar Shirali, Lindsay Barnes, Lorry Benjamin, Madhu Sarin, Man Mohan Sharma, Mansoor Khan, Mariette Correa, Mohan Mani, Moyna, Nilanjana Biswas, Nyla Coelho, Ponnamma George, Rabin Chakraborty, Ranjan Ghosh, Ravi Srinivasan, Renu Khanna, Ruby Hembrom, Rukmini Rao, Sagar Dhara, Sajai Jose, Sandhya Srinivasan, Sara Jolly, Saral Sarkar, Shailaja Kalle, Shreekumar, Soujanya M., Suresh Kosaraju, S. Srinivasan (Chinu), Usha Rao, Usha Seetharam, Vidyadhar Gadgil, Vijay Kundaji, Vina Bhatia, Vinish Gupta, Vir Bharat Talwar and Yogesh K.

I thank them all.

Vijayendra

CONTENTS

Sanskrit and the Indian Language Families -	11
Religion and Politics: Understanding Contemporary Hindu Politics -	24
Bhimsen Joshi and North Indian Classical Music -	40
The Logic of Small States -	44
Education Manifesto for the State of Telangana -	53
The Discourse of Non Violence in Indian Politics -	59
Yugant: Capitalism, Climate Change and Peak Oil -	70
On Population -	84
Peak Oil, Dying Cities and Cities of Tomorrow -	94
Old Age and Peak Oil -	101
Euthanasia, Suicide and Sanyasa -	106
On Liberation -	112
On Passion -	116

SANSKRIT AND THE INDIAN LANGUAGE FAMILIES

Introduction

In the making of the modern Indian nation, a lot of myths and popular notions got created in the 18th and the 19th century. One of the common threads among these was that ancient (read Hindu) India was great and that India became backward and decadent during the medieval (read Muslim) period. This article attempts to explore two of these myths and popular notions about the Sanskrit language and its relationship to Indian languages. These are: 1. Sanskrit is the mother of all Indian languages and 2. Indian languages are divided into two large families known as Dravidian and Indo Aryan families. The article argues that Sanskrit is not mother to any Indian language. It also traces the history of the creation of this notion. Then it argues that the division of Indian languages into Dravidian and Indo Aryan families is false. It goes on to explain the true relationship of Sanskrit to Indian languages and argues that all Indian languages form one family.

I. Is Sanskrit the Mother of Indian Languages?

What is Sanskrit?

Sanskrit is the classical language of India. Today there is no speech community of Sanskrit, that is, nobody uses it as the language of everyday use (except a couple of Brahmin villages in Shimoga district, Karnataka). But, it is not a dead language either. It continues to be

taught in many schools, though practically no one learns it. Also, many upper caste Indians would know a few phrases/couplets of Sanskrit. In the vocabulary of standard modern Indian languages, there are a large number of words derived from Sanskrit. It is also the language of rituals for the upper castes. There are probably a few hundred people in India who know Sanskrit well, most of whom are Brahmins. There are also a large number of Brahmin priests who know enough Sanskrit to perform rituals. The level of their knowledge varies a lot from priest to priest.

Sanskrit is also the language of the Shastras, of knowledge of the Indian tradition. Even in the 20th century, the musicologist V.N. Bhatkhande wrote his book in Sanskrit. Over the last two thousand years or more, there have been books in Sanskrit on politics, philosophy, religion, theology, ethics, mathematics, astrology, medicine and a host of other fields of knowledge. Manu's Dharmashastra, Panini's grammar, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Chanakya's Arthashastra, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira in mathematics and astronomy are among the most well-known treatises among the Shastras. Today, many of them have been translated into English and into some Indian languages and are used mainly by scholars. However, in the mainstream of Indian life, knowledge and industry, Sanskrit has practically no role. English and modern Indian languages rule.

Historically, Sanskrit was the language of the people in the North-West Frontier Provinces, west of the river Ravi (a tributary to Indus), in today's Afghanistan, Baluchistan and western parts of Kashmir, and Punjab. The area probably extended up to Iran, whose language and culture had close affinity to the Vedic Sanskrit. The important centre was in Pakhtunitsan (the land of Pathans) or the North West Frontier province (today in Pakistan) and was known as Gandhar, whose main town Takshashila (today's Taxila in Pakistan) was famous as a seat of learning roughly between 5th century B.C. and 5th century A.D.

The Sanskrit that we know today got the present classical form between the 3rd century B.C. and the 3rd century A.D when it received

patronage from the Hindu kings. During this period Kautilya's Arthashastra, Manusmriti or Dharmashastra and an elaborate and perfect grammar by Panini was created. The other important language of the era was Pali, with its centres in Pataliputra (today's Patna) and Nalanda under the patronage of Buddhist kings. Sanskrit and Pali coexisted and competed to be known as the language of the State during the 1000 years between the 5th century B.C. and the 5th century A.D.

With the arrival of the Muslim rulers starting in the 12th century, both the languages gradually ceased to be languages of the State. Persian replaced these languages, although no Persian ever ruled over India! Pali more or less vanished from India, although it remained in use in Sri Lanka. And as everyone knows, English replaced Persian and today in spite of many efforts by the supporters of modern Indian languages, English remains the language of power and knowledge.

Several questions arise. Why and how has Sanskrit survived? Latin does not have this kind of presence in Europe. Why was such a perfect grammar created? What is the relationship between Sanskrit and modern Indian Languages?

The Indian Language Families

For the purpose of this article, India is linguistically defined as the area east of the Indus river system, south of the lower Himalayas. In the east it covers western regions of Bangladesh and finally it is bounded by the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. In that sense the political boundaries of present day India do reflect, at least linguistically, a homogeneous region: it was in this same territory that Sanskrit once prevailed. By the same count, Sanskrit would appear as a language from across the border, a foreign language, although there are no takers of Sanskrit in its original land west of the Indus.

According to one estimate (SIL Ethnologue), India today has 415 languages, 196 of which are endangered and 9 are extinct. However the majority of these have small speech communities. While

the 18 languages recognized by the constitution have large speech communities of a few crores, they do not include many languages which are equally large, like Bhojpuri or Dakhni.

The two large families popularly known as the Dravid of the South and Indo-Aryan in the North make up the majority of Indian population. There are tribal languages in the Jharkhand area and in the North East which have relatively small speech communities, from a few thousands to a few lakh. But here we would only discuss the Dravid and Indo Aryan families because they are the ones that are influenced by Sanskrit.

The Notion of Sanskrit as the Mother Language

The popular notion about Sanskrit is that it is the mother of all modern Indian languages. The main argument is the profusion of Sanskrit words in all Indian languages. It is also noticed that in South Indian or Dravid languages relatively more Sanskrit word occur in their original 'tatsam' (as it is) form than in the North. In the North many words acquire a 'tadbhava' (as it has become) form.

The development of modern Indian languages is traced as: Sanskrit-Prakrit-Apabhransh-modern languages, for both the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan language families. Although this formula is more applicable to the North Indian languages than to the South, it is taken as a given.

These notions have been challenged by modern scholarship in many ways. First, there is no Indian tradition of this kind of linguistic history. Secondly they have been challenged empirically too. However they not only remain popular, but are also in the text books, and many Ph.D.s on languages subscribe to these notions.

Where did this Notion Come From?

As we said above, these notions do not occur in the Indian tradition. So where have they come from? They are essentially of European origin and they came through the British to India, through a new discipline called Comparative Linguistics. As Pandit Kashiram Sharma says, 'In the last two hundred years, in the name of

Comparative Linguistics, absolutely irrelevant and useless propositions and fictional accounts have been created which have poisoned the political, social and cultural environment of our country.’

It is said that Comparative Linguistics was born with a lecture at the inaugural function of the Asiatic Society in Bengal by a learned judge called William Jones. William Jones was a judge at the Supreme Court of Calcutta and had learnt Sanskrit and Persian. In 1786, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Sir William Jones announced that:

‘The Sanscrit language, whatever its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure: more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in root of verbs and in the form of grammar (...) No philosopher could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which perhaps no longer exists.’(‘*On the Hindus*’, The Works of Sir William Jones, III, London 1807, 34-5)

Where did William Jones get his Ideas From?

There is a long European tradition of these ideas. Umberto Eco in his book *The Search for the Perfect Language* has told this story. It starts from the Bible. “In the Bible, the linguistic theme is taken in a very explicit fashion. In Genesis 11:1 we are told that after the Flood, the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. ‘Yet, men in their vanity conceived a desire to rival the Lord, and thus to erect a tower that would reach up to the heavens. To punish their pride and to put a stop to the construction of their tower., the Lord thought: Let us go down, and confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech...Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” (Genesis 11:7, 9).

It occupied the European mind to search for this original one language and one speech, the perfect language. The search for this perfect language is called the ‘Monogenetic Hypothesis’ which

assumed that all languages descended from a unique mother tongue. William Jones' hypothesis comes from this world view and the theory that Sanskrit is the mother of all Indian languages originated here, just as Latin is popularly considered as the mother of European languages.

Once launched, the Comparative Linguistics approach took a bizarre form in the colonial context, eventually giving rise to colonial historiography and colonial anthropology.

First, it gave birth to the Indo-European hypothesis which says that Latin, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit belong to one group and that Sanskrit was the mother language of the group. This got extended to the claim of a common root for the family - the Aryans. Thus was the Aryan myth created, followed by the ideal of the 'white man's burden'. The myth of Aryan invasion to India got created. Thus, Adolphe Pictet, the great Swiss linguist sang the hymn to Aryan culture: 'It is not perhaps curious to see the Aryans of Europe, after a separation of four to five thousand years, close the circle once again, reach their unknown brothers in India, dominate them, bring them the elements of a superior civilization, and then to find ancient evidence of a common origin?' The Aryan myth was to have tragic consequences later, during Hitler's regime, when it was used to justify the genocide of the Jews, gypsies and others.

Why did these so called Aryan languages travel? Apparently there was a famine and the Aryans in search for grass for their herds went wandering in search of greener pastures and landed in India. Not only that, waves of these invasions occurred and the later invasions pushed the earlier settlers in concentric circles, with its centre in North West, outwards to the East and the South and to deep jungles. Linguistic and anthropological evidence were created for all these mythologies, and the excavations in the Indus Valley Civilization regions further 'proved' the Aryan invasion and even dated it!

But, why did Indians buy these theories when there was no evidence in the Indian tradition to corroborate it? The answer is that nineteenth century Indian upper castes/classes were eager to

denounce the negative aspects of Hindu religion and were ready to embrace Western Civilization, and found this theory only too convenient. The dominant Western civilization had common roots with India, ancient India was great and all the ills of Hindu society were due to the Muslim invasion! This was convenient to the colonialists too. It eventually created the 'Brown sahibs' and the Hindu Muslim divide.

Sanskrit is not Related to any Indian Language

The first major attack on this concept came from Rt. Rev. Albert Caldwell in 1856 when he showed that the Dravidian languages are not related to Sanskrit at all. Then it was shown that Prakrit languages were not related to Sanskrit either. Using the same logic, Pt. Kashiram Sharma demonstrated that Hindi is not related to Sanskrit either. Serious linguists do not believe that any of the Indian languages are related to Sanskrit.

In the struggle between Pali and Sanskrit, that is, in the struggle between Buddhism and Hinduism during 3rd century BC to 8th century AD, Hinduism and Sanskrit won. Sanskrit became the official language of India – of the courts, of learning, of the 'Shastras'. The story of how and why Hinduism and Sanskrit starting from Magadh in the North 'conquered' the rest of India is a fascinating story and is still being explored by historians. But it did happen and Hinduism, with its caste system, untouchability and the power of Arthsashtra and Manusmriti occupied the regions from U. P. to Kerala and from Bengal to Gujarat. It created a stable rural society based on hierarchy of castes and occupation, on caste based exploitation and oppression, impervious to change of rulers at the State level. Brahmins and Sanskrit played the legitimising role for the rulers.

For this, learning Sanskrit became very important, just as learning English is very important today. Initially the Brahmins and the bureaucrats had to go to Takshashila to learn Sanskrit for several years. Even today in the ritual of Yagnopavit (which declares young Brahmins as 'twice born'), the Batuk (learners) has to perform a ritualistic trip to Kashmir (of a few steps) to start his education. It

was unrealistic for scholars and bureaucrats to do this from all over India and face that extreme cold weather, but it was the norm, and had to be acknowledged at least in a token manner.

As a result, at Takshashila, the Sanskrit scholars developed wonderful methods of teaching Sanskrit to Indians. Since it was a case of 'adult learning of a foreign language', they created special learning tools, one of which was the creation of the most perfect grammar in the world. In the discipline of grammar and phonetics, no author had a greater influence than Panini with his *Ashtadhyayi* (5th century AD). Now, one does not need a grammar to learn one's own language, but it was very useful when learning a foreign language. They also created rules for pronunciation and it was so perfect that after two thousand years, today it is still possible to hear the same pronunciation and recitation of Sanskrit from any part of India. They created dictionaries in verse form so that scholars learnt them by heart.

We have mentioned that Sanskrit vocabulary has penetrated many modern languages. This is due to the official status it enjoyed. It is the same as the profusion of Persian legal term, and in modern times, that of English words, that have entered all the Indian languages. Today, any FM radio bears eloquent testimony to this. With the arrival of Islam and Sufism, social changes occurred at a faster rate in the North and influence of Sanskrit decreased rapidly. In the South, where Islamic influence was relatively weaker, Sanskrit remained stronger and that is why there are more Sanskrit tatsam words in the South Indian languages.

However, there is another side to it. All Sanskrit words themselves are not originally from Sanskrit. Sanskrit too has borrowed many words from Indian languages, Sanskritising them (gave them tatsam form) in the process. Fr. Caldwell provided long lists of such Tamil words. For example: *Amba* (mother), *Atavi* (forest), *Neer* (water) *Pattan* (town), *Palli* (village) *Meen* (fish) *Shav* (dead body) and so on. Other scholars have done similar works with other Indian languages.

This is very similar to how English has borrowed thousands of words from India. In fact there is even a dictionary of these

words called *Hobson Jobson*. It is possible to create a similar dictionary of Sanskrit words borrowed from Indian languages. But unlike with English, today we are made to believe that many Indian words are vulgarised (tadbhav form) of the original Sanskrit word.

The Future of Sanskrit

D. D. Kosambi once wrote that Sanskrit had literally no future since it did not have a normal future tense. Vir Bharat Talwar in *Rassakashi* (Tug of War) wrote that although Hindi had won the right to be the Court language in North India, it could not replace Persian words. Now English words have replaced the Persian words. It is not possible to go back in time. Dharamveer wrote in *Hindi Ki Atma* (The Soul of Hindi), that a language absorbs those foreign words that suit its nature or genius. He gave the classic example of 'Table Kursi', where 'table' got absorbed in Hindi but not the 'chair'! Modern Indian languages have definitely replaced both Sanskrit and Persian and have absorbed Sanskrit, Persian and English words according to their nature.

Sanskrit will remain as a language of ritual to some upper caste Indians and a language for scholars of linguistics. Some experts opine that it may be useful for computer programming. The Backus-Naur Form or BNF grammars used to describe modern programming languages have significant similarities with Panini's grammar rules. Great libraries will have Sanskrit classics available for serious students.

II. The Myth of Indo-Aryan and Dravid Language Families

Terms referring to Dravidian and Indo-Aryan language families do not occur in the Indian tradition. They have been introduced by the linguistics developed in the colonial era. So do these language families have any validity? Why and how did these concepts get created?

As we have seen above, Comparative Linguistics gave birth to the Indo-European Hypothesis which says that Latin, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit belong to one group and that Sanskrit was the original language of the group, spoken by the original Aryans.

After Caldwell established that the Dravidian languages are not related to Sanskrit, the idea of two groups evolved. The North Indian languages were called Indo-Aryan and the South Indian group was called Dravidian. However, as we have seen, scholars like Pt. Kashinath Sharma have since shown that the so-called Indo-Aryan languages are not related to Sanskrit either. So it leads to explore the possibility that the notion of two large groups of languages - Dravidian and Indo-Aryan - is false.

Indian Languages form One Family

It was Pt. Kashiram Sharma who proposed that in fact all Indian languages form one family. He published a booklet called: *Dravid Parivar ki Bhasha: Hindi*, (Hindi: A Language of the Dravid Family) from Roorkee in 1968. The provocation for publishing and distributing this pamphlet is also interesting. "I will never forget an incident I saw in Roorkee in 1967. The Angrezi Hatao (Remove English) movement burnt 'Gandhi Vastra Bhandar' because its name was written in Devanagari and Roman. However the 'Motel Polaris' got saved because they changed the name plate to Devanagari overnight!"

What is the basis to argue that in fact Indian languages form one family? The Dravid and the Indo-Aryan families share a lot:

1. They are in one large geographical contiguous area bounded by the seas, the Indus river system, the Himalayas and the river Brahmaputra.
2. There is a 'morph by morph' equivalence between these languages. That is if you write the same sentence in the two languages one below the other they will match vertically. In other words the sentence structure is similar in all these languages.
3. There is a 'Dravidian sub stratum' in all these languages.
4. There is an overlay of Sanskrit vocabulary in all these languages, particularly in the written form and that spoken by the upper castes/classes.

5. The ease with which Khari Boli and Braj Bhasha, spread all over India. Braj spread in the medieval period, courtesy the Krishna Bhakti and Vaishnavism movements, to the East and even to South India. Khar Boli also spread from the 12th century onwards up to Tungabhadra in the South, due to the Sufis and Nirgun saints. In the South it became known as Dakhni. Later variants of Bombay Hindi and Calcutta Hindi also came into being during the colonial period. Similarly, the Dravidian languages, numbering 29, extend as far north as Jharkhand (the Oraon language) Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (Gond languages) and even in the North West beyond the Indus river system (The Brahui language).
6. The scripts of all Indian languages are syllabic in nature and the order of the letters in the scripts is same with a few regional variations.
7. The Indian Standard Sign Language: Sign language is a language used by deaf people to communicate with each other with the help of signs made by hand. In theory each language or speech community has its own separate sign language. In other words there can be as many sign languages as there are languages. However this is not practical for purposes of teaching. So normally a family of languages evolves a common sign language. As we have tried to argue above, Indian languages as a whole form one family, so it is no surprise that people working with deaf people have in fact evolved a standard Indian sign language. This is one more 'proof' to indicate that Indian languages form one common family and their division between Dravidian and Indo-Aryan may not be correct.

The Real Nature of Relationship Between Languages

Different languages are born in different eco regions. Malwa has Malwi, Awadh has Awadhi and Mithila has Maithili. Different forms of Marathi, Telugu or Kannada exists in different regions. If they share a larger eco region, a family of language gets created. Thus Hindi is a set of some 30 languages, and Marathi is of six. Similarly

India, as we have defined it ecologically and linguistically above, has one large group or family of modern Indian languages.

III. Concluding Remarks

A ruling language can be super imposed on local languages, and in the case of India, they have all been 'foreign'. First it was Sanskrit, then Persian and now English. Is there something special about Indian people or the Indian climate that they are ruled by foreigners or at least by foreign languages? Such a colonial idea has been around for quite some time and was eloquently expressed in the book, *The Continent of Circe* by Nirad Chaudhuri.

In fact, India twice had an Indian language as a ruling or official language. First it was Pali. It remained from the time of Ashok to 9th century or so – more than 1000 years! Second, of course, is Hindi, although English has practically taken over. Why did Hindi fail? Among others, one of the reasons was that its proponents subscribed to the Sanskrit origin theory and filled it with Sanskrit words and used Sanskrit grammar to teach it! However, Hindi, in its various popular forms, remains the link language in India.

Another way of looking at it is that India is a federal entity and it is artificial (imperial) to have one common language. In fact, these imperial periods have been of relatively short durations but their linguistic impact is of much longer duration. And during all these 'imperial periods' - the present Indian State included - some provinces were always in a state of revolt. The only difference is that in the past, the revolting forces were mainly local kings or satraps (though there were exceptions), whereas today a large number of people are involved in these revolts against the centre.

The rest depends on the political course that India will take in the coming decades. If the centralised Indian State remains, English will dominate. If it breaks into federal units, modern Indian languages will take over with appropriate absorption of Sanskrit, Persian and English language words as well as words from each other. There may even be a move to de-Sanskritise the languages and to discover

very good local words of lower caste/working class origin. This has happened before. In Kannada, the great poet D.R. Bendre discovered and used many original Kannada words in his poems. Similar things have happened in many Indian languages. One can only hope that this will not give rise to a new kind of chauvinism like that of the Shiv Sena or Kannada Abhimanis.

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RELIGION AND POLITICS :

UNDERSTANDING

CONTEMPORARY HINDU POLITICS

Introduction

This is not meant to be a definitive essay on Hinduism. It does not deal with the theological, spiritual or ethical aspects of Hindu religion. Readers who want to explore those aspects can start with the excellent monograph, *Hinduism* by K.M. Sen. Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen was at Shantiniketan with Tagore and was an authority on medieval Indian religion. His *Madhyajuger Sadhana* (Medieval Mysticism of India) is a classic contribution in this field.

This article is meant mainly to remove a lot of confusion and vagueness that surrounds the term Hindu and Hinduism, and to understand the how and why of the mischief and violence carried out by the Sangh Parivar in the name of Hinduism. It is addressed to the so called layman, who has the wisdom to understand but may not have access to technical and academic jargon.

Terminology

The political and social system we live in today is called Capitalism. It is a system based on exploitation of labour and natural resources by the bourgeoisie or the capitalist class. Since it is a complete social and political system, it affects every aspect of life including religion. The way it does this is referred to as ‘the project of the capital’. As opposed to this, the working classes too struggle against capital in various ways, including in the religious domain. This is referred to as ‘the project of the proletariat’ or ‘the project of the people’.

The word Hindu comes from the river Indus (*Sindhu* in Indian languages) and was used by medieval Arabs and Europeans to refer to people living east of the river. Hinduism or Hindu Dharma is a relatively modern term (the traditional word in India was *Sanatan Dharma*) and is an omnibus word referring to the religious practices, rituals, philosophical and theological ideas of these people. The words Hinduism or Hindu Dharma do not signify a homogeneous religion or people. The word Dharma does not mean religion. It means a set of duties and obligations according to one's station in life. This could be based on caste or role - that of husband, wife, father, son, teacher, and student and so on. These are believed to have been defined originally by Manu in Manusmriti or Dharmashastra around 200 BC. The word for religion in the Indian tradition is *Sampradaya* and not *Dharma*. In this article, the word Hinduism is used in both the senses, that is, as a set or group of religions (sampradayas) and as Dharma, that is, a set of duties and obligations or code of conduct.

What is Hinduism?

Hindus trace their origin to the Vedic period (1200 BC-600 BC), but the Hinduism as we know today dates from the Arthashastra and Dharmashastra (or Manusmriti) around 200 BC. These texts got consolidated between 200 BC and 300 AD. Buddhism and Jainism, dating from 500 BC, were a big challenge to Hinduism which lasted up to 800 AD. Buddhism then almost vanished from India, but Jainism has survived as a small but powerful sect of traders. However, their daily life is indistinguishable from other upper caste Hindus except for their strict vegetarianism. For all practical purposes, Jainism is treated as one of the Sampradayas of Hinduism.

What happened during this period that allowed Hinduism to consolidate? The answer in one word is 'iron'. The coming of the Iron Age made settled agriculture the mainstay of the economy. Iron ploughs and tools helped clear forests and improve agriculture production. This in turn supported the formation of a stable State in two ways. It made it possible to impose taxes and also supported an urban population and army with food. The taxes helped to pay the army and bureaucracy. Iron also gave better weapons to the army.

Now a State is an instrument of the ruling class to serve its interests and keep the ruled classes under control. This control is rarely done by force, although it is always there. Most of the time however, this control is done through a set of cultural processes which legitimise or justify the system of State power. Among them, religion is one of the most important. In modern times democracy and elections also perform this role. In ancient India, Arthashastra by Chanakya and Dharmashastra or Manusmriti by Manu helped legitimise the State and consolidate Hinduism.

But what is Hinduism? How does Hinduism legitimise or justify the system? The scholar Rahul Sankrityayan defined Hinduism as having three characteristics:

1. Belief in the Karma theory and rebirth This answered the classic question that all religions must grapple with: Why do good people suffer? And why does the ruling class get away with all the injustice and corruption? The answer is that you get what you deserve because of the Karma or deeds you did in the past birth. If you behave well, that is, obey, follow ethics etc., then in the next birth you will have a better life. The idea of rebirth came from Buddhism as Vedic Aryans did not believe in rebirth. The Karma theory was developed as both Buddhism and Hinduism developed into full fledged religions.

2. Taboo on cow slaughter and beef eating This was a classic case of a totem turning into a taboo. Earlier the totemic food for the cattle herding communities was beef and cow sacrifice was a major Vedic ritual. This transformation occurred due to agriculture becoming more important. Buddhism and Jainism also contributed to it. This also distinguished Hindus from the tribals.

3. Creation of the caste system This was the Arthashastra and the Manusmriti's way of consolidating peasant society. Many tribal communities were probably forced out of their habitat to clear land for agriculture and later were absorbed in to Hindu society as *Shudras* and *Panchamas* (untouchables). Untouchability was the Indian form of slavery which continued unhindered till Independence in 1947. It was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Hindu reformers who finally

managed to abolish it legally through the Indian Constitution. However Ambedkar's dream of abolishing caste probably cannot be realised because caste is quintessentially a Hindu phenomenon. Abolish caste and you abolish Hinduism itself!

Who are the Hindus?

More than 90 percent of the people called Hindu live in today's India. Nepal is the only other country that has a significant number of Hindus. There are a small number of Hindus scattered all over the world, particularly in the USA, UK, Canada, Fiji, Mauritius, British Guyana and East Africa.

Within India, out of a population of 100 crores, about 20 crore account for Muslims and Christians, seven crore tribals and 23 crore account for Scheduled Castes. These are round figures for convenience of tackling them. These 50 crores are by most yardsticks not Hindus, though the Sangh Parivar would claim the SC/ST population of 30 crores as Hindus. The remaining 50 crores are unambiguously Hindus. They live in today's political India. North East India and Kashmir have very few Hindus and Hindu Indians are treated as foreigners/exploiters/enemies by the majority of these people.

The position of the Scheduled Castes is ambiguous. Traditionally, they were the shudra and panchamas, the lowest castes within the Hindu religion. As has been said above, they might include many tribal communities that were absorbed into Hindu society. The daily life of the Shudras and Panchamas is closer to the tribals because of this history. Their gods and goddesses are not the normal Hindu deities like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama and Krishna. Nor are their festivals same as Diwali, Dussera, Holi, Ugadi etc. Even in the 20th century, there have been instances of tribals becoming Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Castes going into the forests to become tribals. This probably has happened throughout the last 2000 years, the reason why these communities (today known as Scheduled Castes and Tribes) are viewed outside Hinduism.

The political leaders of these communities also do not see a

future within Hinduism. Today there is a sense of revolt against mainstream Hinduism, and large scale conversion to other religions (Christianity, Buddhism and Islam) have occurred much to the anger of Sangh Parivar. What is clear is that the ideology of the Sangh Parivar wants to keep them as slaves and second class citizens within the Hindu fold.

The Project of Capital

The project of capital represents the project of the ruling classes. In India, while all the members of upper castes are not rulers, almost all the rulers are from upper caste or identify themselves with upper caste culture and religion. Dalit politics refers to this as Brahminism. So, we will first examine this Brahminism/upper caste project. We should remember that members of the ruling class are not conscious that they are exploiters just as men do not think that they oppress women. On the other hand, if the oppressed classes have to oppose, they have to become conscious. Finally, many critics of the system too are those members of the upper class/castes who become conscious.

Hinduism: An Upper Caste Phenomenon

Even today two thirds of India lives in rural areas where the Hindu religion and caste system plays a major role. The American economist Daniel Thorner once described the rural Indian caste system in terms of 'Malik, Kisan and Mazdoor', thereby identifying the class aspect of the caste system. The 'Maliks' or larger landowners were, of course, the upper castes like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Kayasthas. Of the 'Kisan' or peasant farmer castes, the vast majority were what are known today as Backward Castes, whereas the 'Mazdoor' or agricultural workers were Shudras and the Panchamas as well as castes dealing with dead animals, wastes and so on.

In fact Hinduism is mainly a signifier of the upper castes, known as OCs (Other Castes - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Kayasthas) and BCs (Backward castes – peasants, artisans and their sub-castes.) Let us have a closer look at it.

The Big Tradition

The term 'big tradition' refers to the cultural and religious tradition of upper castes and the term 'small tradition' refers to those of lower castes. In India, we can trace this to the medieval period, when Buddhism declined and popular socio-religious movements generally categorized as 'Bhakti' (Devotion) emerged. The Bhakti movement has two distinct strands, referred to as Sagun and Nirgun. Both trends contributed to the emergence of modern Indian languages through Bhakti literature. As a rule, the Sagun tradition is identified with big tradition and Nirgun with the small tradition.

The word Sagun means 'with qualities' and it refers to a concept of God who is all powerful and all knowing. In practice it means identifying God with king and in the temples there will be an image of God looking like a king with his queen and other court people. Almost all the founders and saints of this tradition were Brahmins. As against this, there is a Nirgun (without qualities) tradition. In this there are no deities in a temple and God is regarded as formless. Most of the saints in this tradition were artisans or belonged to the lower castes (except Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, who was a trader).

Compare the popularity of the Bhakti movement with those founded by the three so called great Hindu theologians, Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, and Ramanujacharya. Only Ramanujacharya (12th c.) of Vishishtadvaita has a bigger constituency than them, which goes by the name of Vaishnavism. Apart from Brahmins many traders, peasants castes are also Vaishnavas, although their priests are normally Brahmins. The Sagun tradition of Bhakti, founded among others by Chaitanya in Orissa and Bengal, other Vaishnavas of Braj, Gujarat, Western M.P., and Rajasthan etc., all belong to it. The highly articulated Advaita (of Shankaracharya, 8th c.) and Dvaita (of Madhwacharya 13th c.) sampradayas are restricted to Brahmins. But, like the Jains, though small in numbers, they have access to much greater power.

The Modern Period - The Apologist Hindu - The Reformist Era

Colonialism presented a dilemma to the Hindu upper castes. The Christian missionaries criticised the Hindu religion and society severely for its cruelty to lower castes, practice of untouchability, its differentiation between different people, its Gods in the form of animals and made of stone images etc. Islam too had criticised Hinduism on similar premises and managed to convert a section of the artisan castes.

The first response of the Hindu upper castes was to convert to Christianity. The second was to reform Hinduism to suit to modern times. So it was that reformist organization like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj came up. But they did not turn to the small traditions of the lower castes for egalitarian inputs, but instead went to 'Ancient India' and the big tradition. Why?

The colonialists colluded with the upper castes to create this 'Glory that was India'. This was started by William Jones in his famous inaugural address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. In it he showed the similarity between Sanskrit, Persian, Greek and Latin. Thus Ancient India had an affinity to the white man. Nay, it had even taught the white man!

This achieved two purposes for the colonialist. It brought the upper castes to their side and also created the Hindu Muslim divide. For, it created a discourse which blamed the Muslim for all the ills of Hindu Society. The slavery of the poor remained relatively untouched.

Of course many reformists were patriots and they also contributed to the anti-colonial movement; but as it chose the discourse of the big tradition, the reformist movement lacked the support of the poor. It remained an upper caste movement.

Vivekananda and the Birth of Assertive Hinduism

By the turn of the century, the upper caste Hinduism began to regain some confidence. A lot of texts were translated into European

Languages because of the efforts of scholars like Max Mueller in Germany, Asiatic Society and the support of princely states like Mysore, Travancore, and Baroda.

It was in this atmosphere that Vivekananda appeared. He was a young man with some unusual skills. First he had tremendous energy to propagate his cause. He was a very skilled promoter and good administrator. All this came useful after his return from the United States, where he delivered a speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. On its own, his performance was not very different from other representatives, including the one from Buddhist Sri Lanka. However one newspaper reported it very enthusiastically and Vivekananda used the report very effectively in India to promote himself and the Ramakrishna Mission. Upper caste Hindu society was pleased to receive this foreign certificate to its greatness.

It was Vivekananda who gave Hinduism an all India image and made it in to a religion, neither of which is the nature of Hinduism. As we had said earlier, Hinduism is not a religion but a set of several religions (sampradayas), many of which have deep contradictions with each other. Theologically, Vivekananda identified Hinduism with the Advaita of Shankaracharya (8th century AD). Within the Indian tradition, as we have noted above, Advaita was a small sect and was heavily criticised in the theological debates of medieval India, often accused of borrowing from Buddhism and passing itself off as the correct interpretation of the Vedas, the Gita and Brahmasutra Bhashya. However it suited the imperial design of 'one great India' because Shankaracharya was supposed to have set up places of pilgrimages in the four corners of India viz. in the North (Badrinath), the East (Puri), the West (Dwaraka) and the South (Rameshwaram).

In the form of Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda also gave it the character of a Christian Mission. In fact, the Ramakrishna Mission is modelled on the Jesuits, one of the most prominent congregations of Catholic Christianity with its celibate priests, schools, colleges and hospitals and more recently with its 'rural development' programmes. Not surprisingly, over time it developed

all the ills of the Catholic Church. That is, high handed authoritarianism, corruption – both material and moral, enormous wealth, landed property and real estate.

Post Independence: The Rise of Aggressive Hinduism

The assertive, grand and imperial image of India that Vivekananda created inspired Hindu chauvinists starting from V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, the founders of the Sangh Parivar, to BJP leaders like Advani and Vajpayee. It is this missionary Hinduism that the present generation of leaders like Narendra Modi have used to capture political power. The Sangh Parivar also publishes and sells a lot of literature about Vivekananda. They campaigned for the land at Kanyakumari, (the southern tip of the Indian peninsula) and created a Vivekananda memorial. This had been a place of joint spiritual worship for both Christians and Hindus. While it is true that Vivekananda spent some time there, so did various spiritual leaders of the Hindu and Christian communities. The agenda of the *Sangh Parivar* is to use the different images of Muslims and Christian to portray them as danger to Hinduism, create hate propaganda and carry out mass killings whenever they can get away with it.

What is the basis of this aggressive Hinduism? Aggressive Hinduism aims primarily to achieve political power in post-independence India through elections. Not all upper-class Hindus support it; nor do the really religious people support it. But, most of them do not oppose it either. And for these communal forces it is enough if they are not opposed. The discourse they use is that Hinduism is threatened by conversions and by reservation policies. Hinduism is threatened by Muslims, Christians and SC/ST population because of their aspirations to acquire education, a share in power, and so on. The aim of Hindutva politics is that these communities should stay as second class citizens and be available as slaves and workers to the mainstream upper caste Hindus. This, of course, strikes a sympathetic chord in the hearts of many upper caste Hindus, many of whom have power and wealth in the present society.

There is, in fact, a real basis for upper caste Hindus perceiving such a threat. It was Ambedkar who first said, 'I am born as a Hindu, but I will not die as a Hindu'. For centuries, Hinduism faced this threat because of its practice of inhuman slavery towards the lower castes. First, a large section of the artisans converted to Islam and later a large section of tribals and scheduled caste communities converted to Christianity. While a part of Hindu society did respond to the threat through social reforms and legally abolishing untouchability and creating the reservation policy through the Indian Constitution, many did not accept it in their hearts.

This battle has raged throughout post independence India. It took an ugly shape in 1975 when reservation did not get abolished as envisioned in the Constitution, and the anti-reservation agitation shook the country. The Mandal commission in 1987-88 added fuel to the fire by prescribing reservations for the Backward Castes as well. The crisis came to a head with the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. The Hindu fascist block threw its challenge with the Sangh Parivar putting out the message that Muslims and Christians can exist in India only as second class citizens, obedient to the upper caste Hindu society. If you condemned the Babri Masjid demolition, you are opposing this agenda and vice versa. The battle lines were clearly drawn.

The rest of India stood aghast and helpless at this naked flexing of muscles. Why helpless? Because, the ruling classes themselves had been following a similar agenda within a secular and religious discourse since 1984. On the one hand, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi appeased Hindus by opening the locked gates of the makeshift temple at Ayodhya in the Babri Masjid premises, changed the Indian Constitution to appease the Muslim clergy in the Shah Bano case. On the other hand, he allowed Warren Anderson, the then Chairman of Union Carbide to escape from India despite an arrest warrant holding him responsible for the Bhopal gas tragedy that killed more than 3000 people. It were these actions that prepared the ground for the neo liberal policy initiated by India from the early 90s, what came to be known as liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

This policy was scaled up during the tenure of P.V. Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister in 1991. Hence Narsimha Rao's government stood frozen, time stopped, while the masjid was being demolished over several hours. All the parliamentary parties had been complicit in the Sangh Parivar's agenda. What bothered them was election politics, and how to stay in power. So, the 'secular' political parties, in their turn, began to woo Muslim clergy and Muslim political parties and the *Sangh Parivar* rightly dubbed them as pseudo-secularists and Muslim appeasers.

India Today

Today, the agenda of neo liberalism has overshadowed even the communal agenda, as can be seen by the response to the Court judgement on the Ayodhya issue. Even though the communal forces, once they got power in Gujarat, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh etc. have been busy in pursuing these policies, they also keep the communal agenda alive. These neo liberal policies have resulted in:

1. Enormous creation of wealth. The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. However a 'creamy layer' has emerged from each section of the middle and poor classes
2. Incredible levels of corruption
3. Ecological disaster
4. Enormous rise in conflicts
5. Enormous increase in violence against the poor, women and even children
6. Growth of unemployment and lumpenisation of youth

With the global recession, all these are reaching crisis proportions and Indian society may be on the verge of collapse. However the Indian poor, Muslims and Christians continue to face the twin attacks of the Hindu right and the attack of the neo liberal policies.

Religion, Politics and Lumpen Youth

The neo liberal policies have created a large population of youth between the ages of 18 to 25 years who have nowhere to go. Their education is not good enough to give them any capability to be employed either by the government, industry, in agriculture or even for self employment. They are often called 'lumpens' or 'goondas'. They are constantly in need for money for fulfilling some basic needs as well as youthful fancies like tea, smoking, mobile phone etc. They are easy prey to political agitators and also are the goonda elements in public religious functions such as Ganesh Puja, Durga Puja or even Warkari walks in Deccan region.

The Project of the People

The project of the people, in a broad sense, is defeating Capitalism and building Socialism. It is captured in the slogans 'Our short term goal is unionisation. Our long term goal is achievement of Socialism'. So the immediate task is always organising people.

The people's project in the religious and cultural front is visualised as uniting the oppressed people belonging to lower castes by reviving the small tradition. In Dalit politics, the lower castes refer to themselves as the 'Bahujan' (majority), because, in fact, they are.

The Small Tradition

The small tradition to which the lower caste (mainly the BCs) Hindus belong, is called small not because of number of people involved, but because they are in small local groups, unlike the 'great' tradition which is highly articulate, powerful and tends to have an all India face. This tradition in the North is that of Nirgun Bhakti saints, the most famous of them being Kabir. Theologically, they maintain that between God and man there is no need of an intermediary like the Pandit or the Mulla. They do not have rich temples or expensive religious rituals. Typically the artisan castes are the followers and their saints also came from these castes. In India, the Muslim Sufi tradition is very similar and most of the converts to Islam came

from the artisan castes. This small tradition tended to oppose the division between man and man based on caste and birth and generally had a more egalitarian approach. They used simple language and have contributed to the emergence of modern Indian languages in a big way. This tradition has different names in different parts of India and in many places it is close to the Sufis.

The BCs have a dual religious allegiance. The peasant caste subscribes to mainstream Hinduism, often Vaishnavism, whereas the artisan castes subscribe to the Nirgun tradition of the Bhakti movement. There are regional differences too. Deccan, for example, is not a very productive region and has relatively poorer peasants. Here, therefore many peasants too tend to belong to the Nirgun traditions. Most of the twentieth century peasant movement involved the peasant caste and today they are ruling groups in many of the regional states whereas the centre is still dominated by the OCs.

The Shudras and the Panchamas do not belong to any of these traditions and as we have said above, there is a tendency among them to leave Hinduism for other religions, although the Sangh Parivar tries very hard to keep them in the Hindu fold. Their political aspirations and its articulation is a relatively modern phenomenon, Ambedkar being the most famous of them.

The small tradition left to itself could have contributed to the emergence of a modern egalitarian society. However this was not to be. Colonialism intervened and the development of the Indian society took a different route. It is only today with the birth of a poor people's movement that this tradition is receiving more attention.

Reviving the Small Tradition

The small tradition or the anti-authoritarian trend in religion carries the seeds of democracy and secularism. As has been said above, in India, it has been suppressed by Capitalism under colonial conditions. The present crisis gives an opportunity to revive and make it a tool for the liberation of the poor.

Politically it was Ambedkar who tapped the potential of Buddhism for dalit liberation. However even before Ambedkar,

Buddhist scholars like Acharya Dharmanand Kosambi, Rahul Sankrityayan and Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan had recognised this potential. Rahul Sankrityayan personified this kind of blending of Communist, Buddhist and Rationalist ideas coming together.

After the Emergency, by 1977, a new political-ideological platform started emerging. The Rationalist movement in parts of India has been joining the Buddhist and other dalit and religious groups like Kabir panthis and creating a lot of literature and activities representing the small traditions. These play the sort of role that Communist literature does in cadre education. In fact, many of these groups also use Communist literature for this purpose.

Culturally, the small traditions of Hindus and Muslims in India have lived together peacefully for centuries. Sufi mazars (shrines) are visited by both Hindus and Muslims. Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen has recorded this tradition in his *Hindu Muslim Jukta Sadhana* (The Shared Mysticism of Hindus and Muslims). In as much as the Hindu right is attacking the poor both economically and on the religious front, it opens a possibility for the coming together of the anti-authoritarian religious tendencies of the small traditions. There is a possibility of genuine secular forces helping this tendency as has been witnessed at the Kabir festival in Bangalore last year. This was followed by similar events elsewhere. In Hyderabad, we had a performance about Lal Ded, the 14th century Sufi woman poet from Kashmir, followed by a performance of her songs by Muzaffar Ali and Abida Parveen. The theatre movement in India has a long tradition of this kind of work. Some trade union activists and some dalit activists are also exploring these possibilities. There is also a regional spread of these ideas and movements. For example, the performances of Prahalad Tipanya, a musical exponent of Kabir in the Malwa region has very large regional followings among the local dalits.

However, these ideas are not new. Even during the independence struggle, people were familiar with these ideas, although no one carried it forward much. Ambedkar rejected them outright because these involved mainly peasant and artisan castes

and dalits had no place in them. Secondly, they did not reject caste outright. Ambedkar correctly realised that within Hinduism there is no possibility of egalitarian politics. That is why at the Depressed Classes Conference in 1935, he made the famous statement, 'I was born a Hindu but I will not die as one'. His slogan for the dalits was 'Educate, Organise and Agitate'.

Today, while there is a certain amount of solidarity between Dalits and backward castes, tribals appear to be on their own, although in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh some amount of political consolidation has occurred among them too.

The challenge is to unite the entire Bahujan Samaj with a political struggle of the poor for liberation, equality and peace. Some observations in this regard are:

1. This struggle is possible mainly at a regional level, using local language and culture. This at a positive level means using local people's religious festivals, such as Jatras, Urs or mass pilgrimage walks in Deccan like Warkaris. One should however note that Capitalism has penetrated many of these festivals and it needs to be combated. Only local traders with local wares should be allowed. Multinationals, particularly of electronic gizmos – mobiles, iPods and their clones, bottled water and soft drinks, plastics etc. can be banned. This can be done by local organising committees. They can also be enriched by secular independent inputs, like secular interpretations of these traditions.
2. At a negative level, the so called national or imperial festivals like Ganesh Puja and Durga Puja, Diwali, Dussera, Holi etc., can be boycotted, and controlled by not allowing/restricting forced collections, use of public tanks and rivers to dump the idols, use of loudspeakers, use of roads for erecting pandals etc. Similarly pilgrimages to Tirupati, Sabrimalai, and the four great traditional places of Badri, Puri, Dwaraka and Rameshwaram should be discouraged as they all have become capitalist money grabbing institutions.
3. The biggest threat to all this is the nexus between politics,

religion and the lumpen youth. However youth also like idealism and given a realistic goal which also gives them a purpose, they can be a great asset. In fact, organising Bahujaan youth will be the biggest project. Many green ideas can be combined around religious festivals to create jobs for youth. We have the example of Gadge Maharaj who repaired all the Ghats of religious places on the river banks in Maharashtra. Today, instead of polluting the rivers and lakes by immersing the idols in them, we can have projects to clean these bodies. These festivals can also be used to promote local and green products and boycott multinationals.

4. Organising contract, informal sector and municipal cleaning workers, agricultural labour, shepherds, dais and so on who largely belong to the lower castes, and are unorganised. This opens the scope of uniting the revival of the small tradition with secular movements.

There are anti-authoritarian trends in other religions also which represents dalit interests, like Sufism in Islam and Quakers in Christianity. Almost all Buddhists in India are dalits. Similarly there are dalit Muslim, dalit Christian, dalit Sikh organisations. The challenge is to unite all these tendencies with the secular project of the people, which is Socialism!

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BHIMSEN JOSHI AND NORTH INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

With the death of Bhimsen Joshi, an era of North Indian classical music (also known as Hindustani music) which dominated the last four decades of the 20th century has come to an end. This era had luminaries like Kumar Gandharva, Amir Khan, Gangu Bai Hangal, Hirabai Barodekar, Begum Akhtar, Pannnalal Ghosh, Bismillah Khan, Vilayat Khan, Ali Akbar and Ravi Shankar.

Although I have listened to Bhimsen Joshi since my early youth, hail from the same region as him and my father was a musician, this article is not meant to be a tribute to him. He had a large following and I am sure a large number of tribute articles will appear. For me, he had a wonderful voice and will be remembered more for his bhajans in Kannada and Marathi than his renderings in the more 'classical' mode.

This article instead offers a few critical comments on North Indian classical music and its place in Indian culture. In the late sixties, P. C. Chatterjee (the then director of All India Radio, Calcutta) asked me, "How does Indian classical music reflect contemporary sensibilities?" He added that when he asked this question to the musicians themselves, it made no sense to them. I can understand it not making any sense to the musicians, but what surprises me is that this question has not been raised at all (Hereafter in this article, the word Indian music refers to North Indian music only). Indian classical music does not reflect contemporary sensibilities as does art or writing. Why so? Classical music in the West reflected the triumph of the bourgeoisie, Napoleonic wars and so on. Can Indian classical

music be actually called classical?

But, before we come to comment on it, let us have a look at the terrain we are dealing with. Indians like to trace everything back to the Vedas. However, the living and continuous tradition of this music dates to after the Mutiny (The First War of Indian Independence) of 1857. At the time, many Indian princely states, having their wings clipped politically, turned to patronizing the arts, especially music. In as much as the Mutiny was mainly a north Indian affair, it is not surprising that six of these music *gharanas* (schools/traditions) found patronage in the small kingdoms in Deccan, in the border districts of today's north Karnataka and Maharashtra. Bhimsen Joshi also belonged to this region. These musicians rendered a refined version of the folk music. Later, with the increase in competition they developed styles (some quite unmusical) to distinguish themselves. With the advent of railways, they began to travel and participate in musical conferences in various Indian cities, where they were patronised by the 'patriotic' gentry.

It was the musicologist V.N. Bhatkhande who systematised the knowledge of North Indian classical music in the early decades of the 20th century. First, he published two volumes of dialogues discussing aspects of each raga and the way they were rendered by different schools and tried to fix a standard. Later, he published six volumes of *Kramik Pustakmala* which was a proper course in Indian music and was taught in Banaras by Pt. S.N. Ratanjankar and others.

Bhatkhande and others by this time were part of the 'nationalist' discourse, taking pride in the 'great Indian traditions'. In Bengal, the Brahmo Samaj used music in their assemblies and was probably the first to publish Indian notations in the Devnagari script by the 1880s. Rabindranath himself took keen interest and a school of aesthetics and divinity through music (one can reach God through great music!) came into being with Dilip Kumar Roy as its chief exponent.

We must remember that in spite of the varying styles these *gharanas* developed, their music was still very musical, melodious and pleasing even to ordinary people, unlike the post-independence era, particularly the post 60s period to which Joshi belongs. In the

50s and even up to middle of 60s, the musical conference tradition of the pre-independence period continued. 1967 changed all that.

We need hardly delve into the details of the sea change this period brought in. It was the end of the Nehru era, or the euphoria of independence. By now, the Indian people knew that a new ruling class had entrenched itself and they had to fight it.

In music, classical music was driven to the drawing rooms of the rich and, of course, it went abroad. An affected sense of appreciation came into being and musicians also began to perform to cater to this class and moved away from the larger middle class audience, although individually they nostalgically craved for it. Kiran Seth in Delhi tried to revive interest in classical music among the children of the rich in the universities by starting SPIC MACAY (Society for Promotion of Indian Classical Music Among Children and Youth). It was patronised by these classes, but is now more or less dead.

Coming back to the questions that we raised about classical music's relevance to contemporary sensibilities, the answer is that largely it does not reflect them. The reason being that it was always mainly a performing art for the patrons, and with increasing alienation of the ruling classes from the people, it too distanced itself from its folk origins and got into musical gymnastics. For example: the 'great' jugalbandis between the percussion and the instrument/voice that were totally meaningless, unmusical and unmelodious. As one musician put it, music without M(melody) is 'sic(k)'. I am afraid Bhimsen Joshi was no exception, along with Ravi Shankar and almost all the others.

So the era to which Bhimsen Joshi belonged is gone. I am afraid it will be quickly forgotten, except for what it did to popular music particularly in the Hindi cinema and also in Bengali and other north Indian cinema. It gave great lyrics sung in a melodious and meaningful style that appealed to everyone during those decades. Even today, they still live in the albums and are heard everywhere. As an aside, classical music also rendered itself very nicely to humorous music. The great Manna Dey singing play back for

Mahmood exploited it fully. Between him, Mahmood and Kishore Kumar they immortalised the caricature of the teaching of North Indian classical music in the film *Padosan* and in a perverse way, it is the best tribute to it.

Among the classical musicians, Bhimsen Joshi himself will be remembered for his 'lighter' renderings of devotional songs. Probably, the survivors among the greats from this era will be Begum Akhtar and Bismillah Khan, who never gave in to the gymnastics that these greats went into to please the new class. They remained melodious and meaningful.

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THE LOGIC OF SMALL STATES

With the formation of the new state of Telangana, the demand for other small states has gained strength, and a new phase of agitation has already started around the demands for Gorkhaland and Bodoland, among others. Many more are sure to follow. The number of states in India, including Telangana is now 29.

Since Independence, formation of states within India has been a more or less continuous process. To begin with, first there was an integration of some 500 princely states of British India into the Indian Union, comprising provinces inherited from the Raj era. Some of these princely states were even smaller than today's districts! Then the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 created the present day basic structure of linguistic states. However, there were some basic anomalies in these efforts, which led to the emergence of more states.

On May 1, 1960, Bombay State was split into Gujarat and Maharashtra. In 1961, Goa was included as a Union Territory, and in 1962 former French colonies were incorporated as Union Territories. Nagaland was carved out of Assam on December 1, 1963. The Punjab Restoration Act of 1966 divided Punjab into Haryana and Punjab. Statehood was conferred upon Himachal Pradesh on 25 January 1971, and on Meghalaya (carved out from Assam) and Manipur and Tripura (upgraded from Union Territories) on 21 January 1972. The Kingdom of Sikkim joined the Indian Union as a state on 26 April, 1975. On 20 February 1987, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (both carved out of Assam) became states, followed by Goa on 30 May. In 2000, three new states were created:

Chhattisgarh (1 November, 2000) was created out of eastern Madhya Pradesh; Uttaranchal (9 November, 2000), which was renamed Uttarakhand in 2007, was created out of the hilly regions of north-west Uttar Pradesh; and Jharkhand (15 November 2000) was created out of the southern districts of Bihar. The process will undoubtedly continue in coming years.

Many of these new states have resulted from demands made by movements for the creation of these states. What is the source of energy for these movements for small states and who opposes these demands?

Federalism vs Centralism

While India is supposed to be a federal State, in reality it is a centralist state. The autonomy of the states is very limited. In a genuine federal State, the constituting states will be autonomous, collect their own taxes and pay the federal Government a part of their tax collections towards federal activities such as foreign affairs, defence, central reserve bank, post and telephones, railways, national highways and civil aviation. The energy behind the demand for small states essentially reflects this reality and the aspirations of the people for strengthening federalism.

The Indian ruling classes were opposed to this process from the very beginning. The story begins with the Partition of India. While the history of partition is complex, one major contributing factor was federalism. After the Second World War, the Indian bourgeoisie had grown strong and wanted to control and exploit national resources. An undivided India would perforce be in need of a federal structure; yet the Indian bourgeoisie was prepared to accept Partition but not a genuinely federal structure. They preferred Partition to losing control of a united but federal India.

But federal tendencies kept expressing themselves in the form of reorganisation of states on linguistic lines. The bourgeoisie completely opposed this and said that Indian state boundaries should be drawn with parallel and vertical lines across the map, like in the United States.

Capitalist development resulted in uneven development of different regions, and aspects of internal colonies soon appeared in various parts of the country. Bihar and Bengal felt discriminated against. Within states too, uneven development occurred, and demands for Telangana, Jharkhand and Vidarbha emerged quite early. In response, new states kept being formed and the process goes on even today.

Capitalist development also further accentuated class differences, with growing inequalities and the rich and powerful becoming richer and more powerful. This also became a factor in the movement for smaller states. Both Telangana and Jharkhand regions have powerful histories of class struggle.

What is the basis for these federal tendencies? India is a group of nations and nationalities with highly developed regional and linguistic identities, and is by its very nature a federal entity. The basis of these identities can be sought under several heads.

Language

Since everybody uses language everybody has some ideas about it. Often these ideas are popular ideas absorbed uncritically. Like most things, language is in reality quite a complex subject.

Most people think that there are languages like Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, etc and then there are dialects of these languages. Usually it is understood that 'languages' are those that have a written literary tradition, whereas dialects are mainly oral traditions. But if one looks closely, complexities soon appear.

Let us take the case of Hindi. Hindi is supposed to be a language, and Braj, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magadhi are its dialects. One can also add all the languages of the region where Hindi is the official language: Dogri, Garhwali, Kumaoni, Himachali, Haryanavi, Marwari, Mewari, Malwi, Bundeli, Nimari, Bhageli and Chhattisgarhi, among others. One may add Urdu and Dakhni which belong to the same group. Scholars like Rahul Sankrityayan quote a figure of 30 such 'dialects' for Hindi alone.

Now the problem is that Hindi has a written literary history of only about 150 years, whereas Braj, Awadhi, Maithili, Urdu and Dakhni have a much longer history!

In reality, languages have many aspects. They can be literary languages, official languages, link languages, languages for limited use and languages that are only spoken and have no scripts. Linguists treat all of them as languages and sometimes they even use the term 'code' for language, which can cover every possible meaning. Standard languages are usually languages of a powerful community that dominates a region and are sometime referred to as languages with a gun! On the other hand, 'link language' is one that spreads over a region due to trade, travel, religious and cultural communication. There is also a term, 'adequate language', which separates some languages from inadequate languages such as baby talk or pidgins which serve a limited purpose.

As a rule, all so-called 'dialects' and all adequate languages are treated as languages, and can thus form a basis of a 'speech community' and hence can also form a basis for a community or a small state. Languages are born in specific biogeographic or ecological regions. A large eco-region can have several small regions and each region will have a separate dialect or language. The language of the whole region can be considered as a set. For example, Hindi is the name of a set of 30 languages and Telugu is the name of a set of three or four languages.(1)

There is a relationship between language and biodiversity. In a region of greater biodiversity, there will be a correspondingly greater number of languages. North East India, which has a large biodiversity boasts of a large number of languages (sometimes every valley has a different language) and hence the demand for smaller states is higher in that region.

According to one estimate (SIL Ethnologue), India today has 415 languages or speech communities, 196 of which are endangered and 9 are extinct. Evidently, endangered languages have very small speech communities and many others also have relatively small speech communities. There are 13 languages with more than a crore speakers,

29 languages with more than 10 lakh speakers, 57 languages with more than a lakh speakers and 67 languages with more than 10,000 speakers, based on census results (languages with less than 10,000 speakers are not listed). However, there are another 147 languages recorded by ethnographers, which have 10,000 to a lakh speakers. And some languages like Dakhni and Bhojpuri don't even find a mention although there are more than a crore speakers in each! A more recent People's Linguistic Survey of India by Bhasha Trust, Vadodara, lists 860 languages! It includes languages with very small number of speakers also.

So which languages or speech communities can form the basis of a small state? It will have to be large enough to be viable, and people of such communities should have shown some political presence in terms of identity politics. By identity politics, it is meant that these people feel a sense of oneness and that some injustice has been done to them for example, that they are treated as second-class citizens in their own land. Most probably, such communities will range in population from a lakh to a crore or more. Also, these communities will have to be settled in one contiguous region. The Lambadas or Roma gypsy community is united by a language, but is spread in many parts of Western and South India as well as in Russia and Eastern Europe! Evidently they cannot claim a state of their own.

Socio-Cultural Sub-Regions

Socio-cultural sub-regions have existed for a fairly long time. They have existed before the Indian Constitution came into being, before the British came to India.

The late Dr Rasheeduddin Khan used this term to designate 56 such regions in India (2, 3). What are these regions and how did Dr Rasheeduddin come to select them? Actually it was fairly simple. He started with the existing states in modern India and looked into the sub-regions within them. In most cases, they were already identified —like Marwar, Awadh, Bundelkhand, Malwa, Saurashtra, Kutch, Konkan, Ladakh, Rayalaseema, etc. He put them on the map

of India with boundaries marked with population in parantheses. In his scheme, the smallest population was of Ladakh with just one lakh people followed by Kutch with 8.5 lakh. Awadh, Braj, Bhojpur, Malwa, Mithila etc. had populations of more than a crore. With the formation of Telangana, this map was uploaded to the internet, and several references to his article also have also appeared. On the whole, it is a fairly reasonable picture and will match with the language picture that has been given above. In fact the number of such regions will be slightly larger (up to 65 by this author's count) if one takes the languages into consideration.

Bio-Geographic Regions

Bio-geographic regions are even older than socio-cultural regions. Based as they are on environmental features they were formed even before the human species evolved. These are eco-regions with definite geographic boundaries such as rivers, hills, soil type, rainfall etc. A bio-geographic region defines its flora, fauna and human society. Thus, it defines a people, a speech community or, if you like, a nation/state. They are defined in terms of the food they grow and eat, the kind of houses they live in, the kind of clothes they wear, and the kind of religions and local deities and festivals they have. While all humans belong to one species, they differ in appearance due to having lived in different eco-regions. Earlier, the term 'race' was used to describe this feature, but today it is considered politically correct to use the term 'people' with a definite identity and name like Bengali or Santhali. Thus, a bio-geographic region provides a 'natural' basis of defining a subcontinent, a country and a state within a country.

India as a Bio-Geographic Region

It is possible to define the idea of India in terms of biogeography. It is the region east of the Indus river and to the west of the Brahmaputra/Padma river. It is bounded on the North by the lower Himalayas and in the South by the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Scholars have demonstrated the socio-cultural unity of the Indian people and some have even shown that all Indian

languages form one family. (4)

Dr Kumar Ghorpade has done a remarkable job of defining the sub-regions and the sub-sub-regions of biogeography of India. His primary purpose, of course, was to study the flora and fauna of India, but he is also aware of the possibility of these regions defining the small states in India. (5 and 6)

Logical (Natural) Unity of Linguistic, Socio-Cultural and Bio-Geographic Regions

There is thus a natural basis for defining a small state, combining the linguistic, socio-cultural and bio-geographic sub-region. (7) This modifies Dr Rasheeduddin's description, but also adds more strength to it. The final decision of course lies with the people of the region—whether they want a separate state or not. For example there was not much of a people's movement (as compared to Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh) demanding Uttarakhand and recently one has heard voices that they want to go back to Uttar Pradesh! Many regions designated above are not seeking separate states and there is no reason to assume that there should be new states created in every case of a distinct socio-cultural region. However, as of now there is a demand for at least ten new states, which will take the number to 39 and if one adds the seven Union Territories, it will be 46!

Viability as the Basis of Size

Very often one hears the argument that small states are not economically viable. This is a question of history. For the last two hundred years, people have lived in an era of cheap energy resources based on fossil fuels like oil and coal. This has given rise to industrialisation, nation states, and large states. This has also given rise to environmental destruction and Climate Change that threatens the very existence of life on earth. The idea of the viability of a state in terms of economic growth is valid only for this era.

However, in the coming decades this will no longer be valid. The fossil fuel sources of energy are declining rapidly and people are envisioning a transition era of reducing energy consumption to

reach an era of a fossil-fuel-free future. This involves local self-sufficiency based on renewable resources and a sustainable economy. The idea of small states suits this vision admirably. In medieval India, there were more than 600 states, which paid an annual tribute to a central authority. This was a kind of federal authority which changed from time to time. But the basic constituting units remained the same. So, theoretically there can be some 600 viable units—the same as the number of districts in today’s India! The idea is not to go back to the medieval period, except in that main source of energy will once again become the Sun. Also one can look forward to a war-free, worldwide federation of small states based on principles of ‘a free association of free people/communities’!

However such a transition will not come about solely on the basis of resource depletion and threats due to Climate Change. It will require a total change of human values.

It is very well to have a vision and wish list, but who will bring about the change? Class struggle has also been a contributing factor in the demand for small states. Thus, the demand for change will come from people who need the change most; that is, the people who have been exploited and oppressed by the system the most. It is the working classes who will provide the energy and manpower to bring the required changes. Unless the middle classes in general share their concern with the working classes and join with them in their struggle, change will not come.

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EDUCATION MANIFESTO FOR THE STATE OF TELANGANA

Introduction

The recent announcement by the Chief Minister of Telangana about quality education for all is very welcome. The actual modalities need to be discussed and worked out to make it possible. This “Education Manifesto for State” was written for a meet of the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) members on October 19, 2013 in Hyderabad. We would like it to reach a wider audience for discussion.

It is written from a radical perspective and is addressed to the working classes and the people of Telangana and their organisations to put pressure on the government for implementation. We can also use this manifesto to implement small projects in people’s sector (voluntary organisations) to show its viability. There will be stiff opposition to many articles in it or they may be accepted without implementing. It is thus a Manifesto of struggle.

Education Manifesto

We will first state the Manifesto and then give some explanatory notes at the end.

Article 1 Education at all levels will be free. There will also be compulsory education up to class 12 for all children.

Article 2 There shall be a single system of education for all children. All schools will have good standards – appropriate and local-situation specific standards with levels of physical infrastructure similar to the level of Central Schools.

Article 3 However there will be no English medium schools. The main reason is that we do not have human resources (teachers) to cater to all children, nor is it recommended by educationalists. On the other hand acquisition of English language will be available to any child who wants it as first language. (See later – Article 8).

Article 4 All children will go only to neighbourhood schools. Children will either walk or may use bicycles to go to school. There will be no school buses, auto rickshaws or cars to drop children to school.

Article 5 There will be a five-day school system – Monday to Friday. On Saturdays and Sundays the school premises can be used for community purposes focusing on rebuilding the local community. The children should participate in various community activities according to their age.

Article 6 All schools will have provision for mid-day meal, drinking water and good toilets for girls and boys.

Article 7 The school curriculum will reflect the current social, political and economic concerns without compromising the basic disciplines of knowledge. Thus, apart from language and mathematics, the Science curricula will focus on restoring the degraded ecology (agro-ecology) and Social Science curricula will focus on rebuilding the community that has been destroyed and fragmented by capitalist culture.

Article 8 There are four languages used in Telangana: Telugu, Dakhni/Urdu, Hindi and English. There are significant populations of Kannada and Marathi speakers in border regions and small communities of Tamils, Bengalis and Gujaratis in Hyderabad. The language teaching policy will address the needs of all. The three language formula will be used from Class 1 and children can choose any three languages from the above. Sanskrit will not be offered as a choice. The child can choose its first language, second language and third language - the standard will be high in the first language, medium in the second language and low in the third language. As a rule, most children will be learning Telugu, English and one other Indian language.

Article 9 The medium of instruction will be any of the Indian languages mentioned in Article 8. Basically in most cases it will be Telugu or Urdu or Hindi. However, for Classes 9 and above, the children will have a choice of choosing English as their medium of instruction in Science and Mathematics.

Article 10 In Social Sciences, while basic disciplines of History, Sociology, Economics and Geography will be used, the focus will be on rebuilding the community with modern sensibilities. Thus social evils of discriminations on the basis of caste and gender, evils of black magic, human sacrifice, mindless waste of resources in rituals and festivals will be discussed and discouraged. Positive things like building neighbourhood associations, mutual care and help, cooperation, local self sufficiency and local production, caring for nature, caring for pets, using and caring for parks, play grounds and other community resources properly will also be taught.

Article 11 In Natural Science, the disciplines of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology will be taught with a focus on restoring our degraded ecology and to ensure adequate water, food, fuel and fodder security for the population. The new science of Agro-ecology should be introduced at all levels.

Throughout the state, the international form of Indian numerals, that is, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 0 will be used. Telugu, Hindi, Kannada numbers will not be used.

Article 12 At all levels, the use of manual work and acquiring of manual skills will be encouraged and taught. The children should be taught to do all their work like washing their clothes; community work of cleaning and maintenance and productive work like growing vegetables, carpentry, and so on.

Article 13 All education above Class 12 will be part time. The student will work part time in productive work and earn their living and continue their education, if they want to, along with it. All entrance tests like EMCET will be abolished. Rational and less wasteful method of selection exist and can be decided upon.

Article 14 A lot of substandard and fraudulent professional colleges

has come up. They should be closed down. On the other hand, the standard of existing colleges will be improved to appropriate and local-situation specific standards and should have levels of physical infrastructure equivalent to the level of NIT for technical colleges, and similar levels in all other professional colleges. These institutes will be spread across the state with a minimum of one institute per district in each of the basic disciplines. New centres of Agro-ecology will be set up in each district. There should be proper planning for higher education – the numbers needed for society in various professions – teachers, health service providers, para-vets, village level technical workers and so on.

Some Notes and Explanations

The first issue of debate will be about private schools. There are several very good private schools which have been around for decades. However, most of them are not free, do not follow the principle of neighbourhood school and have English as medium of instruction. If this Manifesto has to be applied, they will have to change. There should be a dialogue with them and change should be brought about over a period of time so that none of the existing batches suffer. Fresh batches should follow the Manifesto. The salaries of teachers should come from the State and for other expenses, these organisations can raise money from donors but they cannot charge fees from the students. On the other hand, in the last twenty years a large number of sub-standard private English medium schools have come up due to the craze for English medium schools among middle class and working class people. These must be closed and replaced with high standard government free schools.

Compulsory does not mean coercion. It is used in the context of poverty and child labour. Home schooling as a choice will be there and experimental schools to try new ideas will be supported, provided the resource per child is of the same level as other schools. In case of special education for physically and mentally handicapped/challenged children, the resource per child can be higher.

Abolishing of English medium schools will be very

controversial. In the past, large scale mass movements have been seen for both the sides of the argument. It is nobody's case that English is not important or should not be learnt. The point is how to do it effectively, economically and democratically and sticking to the principle of a single system of education for all children. Many schools have achieved this by the 'golden mean' of teaching the language from Class 1 and introducing it as a medium of instruction from Class 9 onwards for Science and Mathematics, thus adhering to the principle of mother tongue education as well as acquiring skills in English. Even at lower levels those children who want to, can take it as first language from Class 1 onwards and will acquire higher standards in the language. Others will have the option to take Telugu or Urdu or Hindi as the first language.

Compulsory local, neighbourhood schools will be a radical change and it will save lot of resources in terms of travel time and petrol. There is an estimate that in money terms it will save Rs. 1000 crore per year and in terms of oil, a trillion passenger kilometres will be saved for the city of Hyderabad alone! And a lot of harassment for children and parents will also be saved. These resources should be used to improve the local schools and help special education projects for the handicapped. Well-off members of the community should be encouraged to use their resources to improve the local school by way of improving the building, the library, the laboratory and even as part time teachers.

Mid-day meals and health care are very important because the poor are not able to make use of the education even if it were available and free. Malnutrition is a major cause of drop outs and failure rate among the poor.

Article 13, about college education being part time, would invite some debate. The idea is that parents should not be burdened with responsibility even after the children have become adults. Prolonging childhood should be avoided. Also, there should not be one section which goes through education and others having to work. Every adult should contribute to productive work in the society.

Abolition of entrance tests can also be contested. These tests

do not contribute anything to the student's abilities, nor are they good methods of selection. In fact, they are a huge waste of human and material resources. Several methods (including the well known BITS Pilani method) exist which can select candidates without entrance tests on the basis of results at +2 level. The BITS Pilani method involves equalising scores of different states. Abolishing the test will release huge material and human resources that can be used to strengthen the education system. It will also save children from unnecessary stresses.

Finally, this is only one person's view and obviously a final manifesto can only be arrived at by a large number of meetings by various groups all over the state. It is a plan for transition and implementation will occur step by step over a period of 10 years so that people do not suffer due to sudden changes.

(Draft text of a talk given to Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF)
members on October 19, 2013 in Hyderabad)

THE DISCOURSE OF NON-VIOLENCE IN INDIAN POLITICS

Introduction

This article is addressed to political activists who are on the side of the poor. At present, the poor are engaged in several major struggles, and the activists involved in these struggles belong to a range of political ideologies and tendencies. The issue of violence and non-violence is often raised, and sometimes this divides the people's movement. The aim of this article is to clarify these issues, encourage healthy debate and avoid splits in the people's movement.

For the purpose of this article, the meaning of the word 'violence' is restricted only to human beings wreaking violence on other human beings. Killing of animals for food is excluded. Though we would not be discussing it in this article, the massive destruction of flora, fauna and ecology for the explicit purpose of reducing the enemy food supply and livelihood base should also be considered as violence.

The politics of non-violence is different from its philosophy and ideology, just as the politics of religion is different from each founder's spirituality and philosophy.

The two great religions that have advocated non-violence are Buddhism and Christianity. We must separate the religions from the lives of their founders. Buddhism became a State religion during Emperor Ashoka's (304-232 BC) time and Christianity became one in 380 AD, during the Roman Empire under Theodosius I (378-395).

Now a State is an instrument of the ruling class meant to serve its interests and keep the ruled classes under control. This control is rarely done by force, although the threat is always present. Most of the time, however, this control is exercised through a set of cultural processes which legitimise and justify the system of State power. Religion is one of the most important among these processes. Religions ask people to be ethical and good while allowing the ruling class to carry on exploitation and oppression. The theory of non-violence has played a crucial role in this process. It disarms the people, while allowing the state and the ruling class to remain armed and use violence.

For example, Emperor Ashoka is reported to have been struck with remorse after the brutal victory in Kalinga, and then adopted Buddhism as a State religion and spread the message of the Buddha. But he did not disband his army! In the year 185 BC, about fifty years after Ashoka's death, the last Maurya ruler, Brihadrata, was assassinated by the commander-in-chief of the Mauryan armed forces, Pushyamitra Sunga, while he was taking the Guard of Honour of his forces. During Ashoka's regime, the relation between the State and religious organisations also became institutionalised. The king was anointed by the religious organisations and the king in turn supported them through land grants and financial backing. Religions provided legitimacy to the king and the State and disarmed the people, asking them to be ethical. As a rule, they were on the king's side whenever the king punished the 'guilty' or waged war.

Buddhism died in India around the 8th century AD, but spread to Nepal, Sri Lanka, South East Asia, China and Japan. The Chinese and Japanese even developed 'non-violent' or 'unarmed' martial arts for self defence in the Buddhist tradition! Today these techniques are used in police training all over the world to punish protesters or even kill them without anybody able to prove violence. Nor did Buddhism prevent the rulers of China and Japan from having armies and waging violent wars. The Japanese fascists were also known for extremely brutal practices in the Second World War.

Before the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its official

religion, it would persecute Christians. Adoption of Christianity did not prevent any Christian king or emperor from having armies or waging wars. In fact the Crusades were carried out in the name of Christianity. A firm symbiotic relationship existed between the church and the king/emperor. Even with those within the religion, the Catholic Church was extremely cruel in punishing people who differed from the official version.

Thus the theory of non-violence in history is part of the ruling class's cultural tools to disarm the people and rule them. It is a part of what is called the 'Project of the Ruling Class'.

Modern Period

In the modern period, however, this theory has also helped the people, particularly in the case of Gandhi. But, as we shall see later, the matter is not so simple. The three great names among modern votaries of non-violence are Thoreau, Tolstoy and Bertrand Russell. Thoreau's (1817-1862) *Civil Disobedience* has inspired generations of peace activists. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was very upset by the practice of Christianity by the churches and the churches' support to governments in their war efforts. For years, he consistently wrote inspiring articles and books on the issue and inspired generations of people, including Gandhi. He also consistently protested against Czarism in Russia and helped many revolutionaries in their cause. Lenin paid glowing tributes to Tolstoy. Tolstoy maintained that violence by the State was cold-blooded murder since it was carried out by paid functionaries. He had a different position about violence among the people. He maintained that we do not know under what provocation this violence was carried out and so we cannot condemn it outright. Bertrand Russell, mathematician, philosopher and pacifist was a consistent anti-war activist. He was a campaigner against nuclear weapons and for disarmament, and also a vocal critic of the US war in Vietnam. He belongs to the secular trend in the non-violence movement.

Pacifism

The secular proponents of non-violence call themselves pacifists. They oppose wars and call for disarmament. Pacifism covers a spectrum of views, including the belief that international disputes can and should be peacefully resolved. It calls for the abolition of the institutions of the military and war, and is opposed to any organisation of society through governmental force. It rejects the use of physical violence to obtain political, economic or social goals, and aims for the obliteration of force except in cases where it is absolutely necessary to advance the cause of peace. It is firm in its opposition to violence under any circumstances, even for defence of self and others.

All non-violent resistance is by no means based on a fundamental rejection of all violence in all circumstances. Many leaders and participants in such movements, while recognizing the importance of using non-violent methods in particular circumstances, have not been absolute pacifists. The interconnections between civil resistance and the use of force are numerous and complex.

In contrast to the principle of non-violence stands the non-aggression principle which rejects the initiation of violence, but permits the use of violence for self-defence. So, it does not apply when someone is subject to violence initiated by others, and hence self-defence is not morally rejected.

Proponents of Violence

There are not very many articulate proponents of violence. Most of the proponents of violence in modern history have been right-wing fascists and religious fundamentalists. Today this is even more so. There are Hindu fundamentalists who carried out a mass killing of Muslims in Gujarat, the Christian fundamentalist who gunned down 80 youngsters in a school in Norway or the jihadis among the Muslim fundamentalists who killed hundreds of innocent people in Mumbai during the '26-11' attacks.

Are Marxists Proponents of Violence?

The Marxists are also generally considered to be proponents of violence and are supposed to believe in violence as 'a means to an end'. It is, however, difficult to demonstrate the truth of this statement. The slogan of the Russian revolution was 'Peace and Bread'. Communist countries took initiatives in the peace and disarmament movements. In non-Communist countries too there have always been significant numbers of Marxists in support of these movements. Their programme is a revolutionary programme for social change towards equality and the end of exploitation of man by man. Violence per se is not their programme. They accept that revolutions engender violence but by no means do they propagate it or theorise its virtues. The most familiar argument for violence is 'Violence is the midwife of revolution', where violence is compared to the necessary pain experienced by a mother during childbirth. But it would appear that Marxists are considered violent by default because they do not propagate non-violence, or because they do not agree that the State has a monopoly of violence.

There is, however, a real problem of sectarian and fratricidal violence among the revolutionaries and Communists. It has existed from the beginning, but it reached a huge scale during the Stalin era in the Soviet Union. Votaries of non-violence normally cite this to say that violence per se is wrong and can never bring any social change and will always bring a new ruling class. Communists themselves treat it as a problem that has to be worked upon. They see it as more a problem of correctly organising and leading the movement, and resolving the problem of democracy and debate within the movement.

However in Indian politics the Marxists and Communists have been dubbed as 'believers' in violence and condemned by the so called votaries of non-violence. This, as we shall see later, was and still is an attempt to hide the agenda of class collaboration and oppose the communist agenda of class struggle.

Frantz Fanon

One of the theoreticians of violence in Left-wing politics was Frantz Fanon (1925 -1961), who wrote the book *The Wretched of the Earth*. It was published shortly before Fanon's death in 1961. Fanon defends the rights of a colonized people to use violence in their struggle for independence. His argument is that colonizers in Africa do not consider the colonized Africans as human beings. Therefore such human beings – who are not considered as human beings – shall not be bound by the principles that apply to humanity. Fanon's book was censored by the French government.

He was a psychologist with the French army in Algeria. He had the unenviable task of counselling French soldiers who were torturing Algerian revolutionaries. These soldiers could not sleep well and had disturbing dreams! The book is a powerful description of colonialism and how the colonialist does not recognise the blacks as human beings at all. It describes how racism is constructed. Fanon also describes how a black African internalises this low estimation of himself and how violence plays a role in liberating him, how it gives him the courage to revolt against the white colonialist. When the black man raises his head, he finds that the white man is not any bigger than him in size. When a black man hits the white man and draws blood and sees fear in his eyes – that is the point when he realises that he can revolt against the colonialist and win! Violence is liberating! He receives a baptism of blood!

Fanon's exhortations to violence can be seen in these quotes: "For in the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity: killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free." And, "Violence is man re-creating himself."

The Politics of Non-Violence in India

Although our focus is present-day India, we will have to start with Gandhi to understand the issues involved. Also while there will be a critique of Gandhi, it needs to be stated that there is a difference between what Gandhi thought and said and what his

followers interpreted it to mean. Also, actions often lead to results different from what the proponents say or mean.

The story begins with the publication of *Hind Swaraj* by Gandhi in 1908. It is an important book and even after 100 years of its publication, it is still available in print in several languages and is still being discussed. It is a curious document. At one level it presents a dream of India which resonates with today's ideas of a post-fossil fuel era, along with reducing the scale of energy use and working towards ecological restoration. At another level it announces Gandhi's arrival in Indian politics after his success in South Africa and lays out his agenda which was different from the existing agenda of other politicians seeking independence. The book's main aim, however, was to isolate the revolutionaries who, according to Gandhi, believed in violence. This was because Gandhi believed that the independence struggle should be fought by non-violent means and that means and ends cannot be different. The tone of book is paternalist and Gandhi chides the supporters of these revolutionaries. This was Gandhi's manifesto.

Very few believed in his manifesto wholly, and most of his followers in the independence movement supported and used his method of non-violence tactically. The irony was that independence was not achieved without violence. Up to a million people died in communal riots during a few months. No revolution in history was so violent!

Gandhi himself was aware of this contradiction and was deeply anguished by it. "Gandhi's anguish was centred around his tragic discovery that the freedom struggle led by him had not been the unique non-violent struggle that he and the whole world believed it to have been. The discovery forced itself upon him when the country erupted into savage violence on the eve of independence" (Sudhir Chandra: *Gandhi: Rethinking the possibility of non-violence*, CSSS, Surat. 2012)

Gandhi's Critics

Gandhi was opposed by large sections of freedom fighters. Some opposed him openly, while others were opposed to him but used him and his methods to serve their own agenda. In fact, except for a few, almost all his supporters even within the Congress party were 'opportunistic' supporters with their own agenda. Many of his Congress supporters were looking forward to forming the government in New India.

One critique of Gandhi runs as follows. Unlike his guru Tolstoy, Gandhi was not consistent in his practice of non-violence. Even after the publication of *Hind Swaraj*, he recruited soldiers for Britain in the First World War. He did not condemn State violence, and did not ask Indian soldiers to resign from the army though he asked Indian students to leave schools and colleges. When some Indian soldiers refused to fire at an armed Indian people's protest, Gandhi did not defend the soldiers but said that they should have the moral courage to bear the punishment of their defiance of authority.

According to some, Gandhi succeeded because of one fatal flaw in his ideology: the theory of trusteeship. Trusteeship meant that the rich can keep their wealth but should act as its trustees. Many of his colleagues pointed out the contradiction between this doctrine and that of non-accumulation. This doctrine gave him the support of the Indian bourgeoisie and ensured complete press coverage of his point of view because the bourgeoisie controlled the press. As Arundhati Roy has observed, Gandhi's methods were like theatre, they required an audience. Many critics also pointed out that without a 'free press', Gandhi's methods cannot succeed. The Indian bourgeoisie supported Gandhi, welcomed him into their homes and donated land and money. After the Second World War, when their purpose was served and it became clear that they would inherit the country, Gandhi was completely dropped by them.

The Indian bourgeoisie supported Gandhi not just because he had an ideology of trusteeship. They saw that Gandhi was opposed to the Communists and was able to perform the magic of mass mobilisation while appearing as the messiah of the poor. They saw

Gandhi's methods as a road to smooth transition of power from the British to the Indian bourgeoisie. Gandhi's agenda also successfully isolated the Communists. Only a part of the Socialist movement had veered towards Communism and there has been a bitter struggle between the Socialists and the Communists ever since.

Some critics say that the issue was never between violence and non-violence, for no one was advocating violence per se. The issue was independence with social justice or independence with the brown bourgeoisie replacing the white. To them Gandhi's agenda appeared clearly for the latter (although Gandhi was very concerned about injustice in the Hindu society towards the lower castes). As events proved, the bourgeois agenda succeeded. It needs to be reiterated that we are not accusing Gandhi of having such an agenda, but objectively speaking, the logic of his policies facilitated such an agenda.

Finally, some say that Gandhi's discourse on non-violence was deeply religious, asking people to disarm and to be ethical, and that this legitimised the violence of the ruling classes.

Post-Independence India

Post-Independence India continued to harp on how India won independence through non-violent means, even while the huge shadow of a million deaths during Partition hung over it. Also there was not a single day since then till today when the Indian State has not been at war with some sections of the Indian people. Immediately after independence, we had the Kashmir issue which has not gone away. Then there was the Telangana peasant movement in the mid fifties. The problems in the North-East started erupting in late fifties and resulted in formation of Nagaland in the early sixties. Since then the Indian state has a brutal presence in North-East and in Kashmir.

Gandhi's legacy, such as it was, passed over to figures like Vinoba Bhave, who did not oppose any injustice done by the Indian State. Whatever little militancy Gandhi had, was completely blunted by Vinoba and his ilk. Both the Indian State and Vinoba Bhave continued the Gandhian tradition of isolating the Left by calling

them believers in violence. Bhavé started his Bhoodan movement in Telangana explicitly to oppose the Communists. In 1967, Jayaprakash Narayan, another of these Gandhians, went to Musahari to oppose the Naxalites. Both of them eventually failed.

Today, a hundred fires are burning against the Indian State. There are the CPI (Maoist)-led movements which engulf more than 100 districts of India; there are identity movements in the North-East, Kashmir and several Indian states, notably in Darjeeling and Vidarbha. There are anti-mega project movements by peasants and rural people whose livelihood is endangered by these projects and which are also environmental hazards. In most of these cases, at some stage the State opposes them violently, often killing several people. It also harasses the so-called 'non-violent' people through the police and judiciary. And all the time it calls for using democratic means and exhorts people to give up violence. Thus, the most violent people are calling upon others to become non-violent!

The most blatant case is the case of violence in Chhattisgarh. The State created a vigilante army called Salwa Judam with the express purpose of fighting the Maoists. When the Maoists fought back, then the State created the discourse that the poor tribals are caught between the two fires of the Maoists and the Salwa Judam. The real purpose of the State was to get land for industry by displacing the tribals. More than a lakh tribals were driven out of the area to Andhra Pradesh. The State's track record in Bastar has been repeatedly exposed by the press, civil liberty organisations, Gandhians like Himanshu Kumar, scholars, and finally by the Supreme Court.

To sum up, the discourse on non-violence is mainly used to isolate the forces who are fighting on behalf of the people, by labelling them violent and undemocratic and dividing the people's movement. The proponents are by and large those who unleash violence on the people. Yet there are people who fall into this trap and start criticizing the Left and the Maoists on this count. It should be noted that many of these advocates of non-violence are not actually fighting for the poor whereas those who are (Gandhians like Himanshu Kumar in Chhattisgarh and earlier Man Mohan

Chaudhuri in Orissa) usually avoid getting into this debate.

Conclusions

Violence exists because we live in a class society where the ruling class rules with the help of the State. The State employs violence, using its standing army, armed police and store of arms to keep the ruled classes under control. The State is the primary source of violence in society.

Violence is undoubtedly evil and every effort should be made by all of us to minimise and ultimately eliminate it. However, in Indian politics the discourse of non-violence is used to disarm the people and divides the people's movement while allowing the State and the ruling class to remain armed. It labels the politics of class struggle as violence and hides the politics of class collaboration under the garb of non-violence. Its aim is to isolate the Socialists and Communists and condemn them as believers in violence. The discourse of violence and non-violence in Indian politics is, therefore, a false discourse. It is a bourgeois agenda. The way out is to firmly oppose the State and the ruling class by uniting all opposition. Those who want to use peaceful means should use the secular discourse of peaceful, democratic means of struggle. There is scope for plurality of approaches. But there is no scope for this false discourse of violence and non-violence. We should not fall in the trap of condemning violence per se.

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YUGANT: CAPITALISM, CLIMATE CHANGE AND PEAK OIL

Yugant means the end of an era. Two crises have come together that have endangered life on our planet and spell the end of the capitalist era. The first is Climate Change and the second is Peak Oil. Climate Change, since it threatens life on earth, demands, on moral grounds, to reduce consumption of fossil fuels immediately. Peak oil, as we show below, brings down consumption of fossil fuels. Together, they will spell the end of the capitalist era.

Introduction

The system we live in today is called Capitalism. Large parts of the world, notably North America (USA and Canada), Europe, Japan, Australia and India are the main followers of this system. Many other countries like Russia, China and Vietnam who call themselves Socialist also follow this system in a modified form. This system is based upon exploitation of the working classes and natural resources, resulting in creation of immense wealth, huge inequalities and environmental disaster.

The Industrial Revolution and Capitalism began in the 18th century with the steam engine; that is, conversion of heat into motion. This heat primarily came from burning fossil fuels. Initially, it came from coal but in the 20th century oil and gas were added to it. Fossil fuels have concentrated energy stored in them by degradation of plants slowly over millions of years. Because of its high density of energy, it is possible to control ownership, mining, processing and selling of fossil fuels by a small class of capitalists. Capitalism as a

system depends on availability of fossil fuels, which run all the transport and generate most of the electricity.

Capitalism is beset with several crises. The first is the contradiction within its own class due to competition. Second is the contradiction with the working classes which are exploited and oppressed by it. Many other poor people are also directly and indirectly affected by it and are increasingly opposing it. The third is the over-exploitation of natural resources, particularly fossil fuels.

Growth is a necessity for the capitalist system. That is why we constantly hear of GDP (Gross Domestic Production, which is an overall indicator of growth of the country), in the newspapers. Now economic growth requires consumption of resources. This consumption of resources occurs at a 'compound rate' (like the compound interest rate that we learn in school) with respect to growth rate. A good way of understanding the relation between growth rate and consumption of resources is to find out that at a given growth rate, how many years it would take to double the consumption of resources. A simplified (but fairly accurate) formula is:

$70/\text{growth rate} = \text{No. of years in which the consumption of resources doubles}$

Thus, if we have one percent growth rate, the *rate* of consumption of resources will double in 70 years. If we have two percent growth, then in 35 years it will double and in 70 years it will be four times! If the growth rate is 10 percent, the resource consumption rate will double in seven years - like our fixed deposits used to double in seven years when the interest rates were 10 percent. Thus, Capitalism has resulted in an enormous consumption of resources. Also, this growth results in using up and corporate takeover of the commons - resources like public land, rivers, forests etc that the poor depend upon.

However, the actual amount of resources consumed depends upon the rate at which you are already consuming them. Thus, say an advanced capitalist country consumes 100 units of a resource, while a developing country consumes only 10. Doubling for the

former means 200 units consumed, whereas for the latter it means only 20 units. That is why developing countries aim at a growth rate of 10 percent or so, whereas the advanced countries cannot hope to have growth rate of more than two- to three percent.

Another factor about doubling the consumption of resources is that with each doubling the consumption is greater than the **sum total of all the consumption** that has gone before it. Let see how this happens. The doubling means a series like 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024 and so on. Now each successive term is greater than sum of all the previous terms. Thus 8 is greater than $1+2+4=7$. Similarly 1024 is greater than $1+2+4+8+16+32+64+128+256+512=1023$. As you can see, with each doubling the total increases to bigger and bigger numbers. So, after a time it will be astronomical. The total quantity of fossil fuels and other mineral resources available is finite; and with time, a crisis must come. With the growth imperative of Capitalism remaining undiminished, that crisis has come now. In fact, we are facing two interlinked crises: 1) Global Warming and Climate Change and 2) Peak Oil.

Climate Change

The main cause of Climate Change is the burning of fossil fuels in astronomical quantities by automobiles and coal-based thermal power plants. The consequent release of greenhouse gases (GHGs), mainly Carbon Dioxide CO₂, is so huge that it far exceeds the earth's capacity to absorb them.

This consumption of fossil fuels is not evenly distributed across the globe or among the people within a country. An average American puts into the atmosphere 18.5 tons of CO₂ emission per year as compared to a mere 1.8 tons by an average Indian. These averages hide the fact that most of the carbon output is contributed by the 20 percent rich of these countries and that the poor consume far less energy. Thus, there are extreme inequalities in GHG output within and across countries.

This level of release of GHGs is relatively a new phenomenon. For tens of thousands of years, humanity has existed by slowly

changing the natural environment and ecology to meet its survival needs. However, human activities of the present day that lead to increase in greenhouse gases are very specific. They do not pertain to the tribal or community-based village life that humanity led in the past and which even today billions of poor people lead. Emission of GHGs is the direct consequence of coal-based steam technology that led to the Industrial Revolution and the mass production of goods. In the 20th century, oil replaced as well as supplemented coal, causing further pollution and Climate Change.

The capitalist system has consumed so much coal and oil in such a short time that we are close to a critical point at which Climate Change becomes irreversible. If that happens, most life on earth will come to an end. Many experts believe that we have only 10-20 years left to stop it. All attempts within the capitalist system have failed miserably and there is no alternative but that this system itself be dismantled. As we have seen above, since the growth imperative is inherent in Capitalism, this crisis cannot be solved within Capitalism. So on moral grounds, to save ourselves and life on earth, Capitalism must come to an end and it is our moral duty to bring it to an end as soon as possible. (1)

Peak Oil

At the same time, the other crisis, that of 'Peak Oil' makes the end of the capitalist system imminent. Although wide scale use of petroleum and its derivatives has a history of only about 100 years, it has become central to the very existence and functioning of modern societies. This is mainly because transport and power are essential for modern societies. Moreover, there is always an annual increase in the demand for fossil fuels, because the system survives through constant growth. Any decline in the supply of oil threatens the very basis of modern societies. Peak Oil does exactly this and leads to the collapse of the system.

What exactly is Peak Oil? At the present rate of consumption, all available oil will be used up within this century. But Peak Oil is not about when we run out of oil, but rather, when the production

of oil reaches a peak and stays there for some years and starts declining. This process has already started (2005 - 2008). The production has plateaued despite growing demand, and mostly American shale gas has made up for the difference due to fall in production of traditional oil. We are witnessing the effects in a global dysfunction of Capitalism which manifests as 'economic recession.'

The Peak Oil crisis starts with a rise in petroleum prices. In 2008, it reached USD 147 per barrel of oil. This was one of the major factors in ushering in an economic recession in North America, Europe and Japan. This crisis is leading to a worldwide collapse of the global economic system. Since the 2008 recession, Capitalism has been beset with one global crises after another. The three traditional bastions of capital, USA, Europe and Japan, have been in a permanent crisis. The new powers - China and India - are also heading towards a crisis. Within a few years the whole capitalist world will plunge into a crisis. (2)

The Coming Famine

Climate Change and Peak Oil are combining to create a famine in the world. Due to Global Warming, the summers are getting hotter and hotter. The summer of 2012 was so hot that crops got burnt in the USA, Canada, Russia and Australia.

Due to Peak Oil, a large area of the world's farmland is being used to produce biofuels. And again, due to Peak Oil, the inputs to agriculture: fertiliser, pesticide and farm machinery - all dependent on oil - have become prohibitively expensive. This is in turn driving up food prices all over the world.

As is well known, famine is caused both by decrease in production as well as increase in prices, which pushes food beyond the reach of the poor. Famines do not just happen on their own account. They are perpetrated as the result of policies that privilege the rich and powerful, and, by implication, harm the poor. In coming years large scale famine is expected all over the world. (3)

The capitalist system is imploding and collapsing. Whether the collapse comes in a couple years or a decade, is not predictable.

There are too many fast changing variables, the most important being the people's struggle against it and the vision of an alternative society. But irrespective of when it happens, the world has to face either chaos or prepare for the transition into a society based on lower energy and equity. Such a society will have different forms in different parts of the world, depending upon their history.

Chaos or Transition

Many scientists believe that the time for action is over and we are facing 'Apocalypse Soon!' A recent article in *Scientific American* outlines the possibility of such a scenario.

'Four decades ago, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology computer model called World3 warned of such a possible course for human civilization in the 21st century. In *Limits to Growth*, a bitterly disputed 1972 book that explicated these findings, researchers argued that the global industrial system has so much inertia that it cannot readily correct course in response to signals of planetary stress. But unless economic growth skidded to a halt before reaching the edge, they warned, society was headed for overshoot - and a fall that could kill billions. Dennis Meadows, professor emeritus of systems policy at the University of New Hampshire who headed the original M.I.T. team and revisited World3 in 1994 and 2004, has an even darker view. The 1970s program had yielded a variety of scenarios, in some of which humanity manages to control production and population to live within planetary limits (described as 'limits to growth'). Meadows contends that the model's sustainable pathways are no longer within reach because humanity has failed to act accordingly.'

"We're in for a period of sustained chaos whose magnitude we are unable to foresee," Meadows warns. He no longer spends time trying to persuade humanity of the limits to growth. Instead, he says, "I'm trying to understand how communities and cities can buffer themselves" against the inevitable hard landing.'

When will collapse occur? Climate Change theorists talk of 2040-50, whereas Peak Oil theorists talk of as early as 2015! (4) What does this imply for human society? Without doubt, there will

be chaos and a scramble for remaining resources - the best high density fuel remaining is charcoal. Whole forests will be burnt to make charcoal to serve the ruling class. Evidently, the poor will resist and attempt to survive the crisis, and a period of lawlessness can occur. It will be a grim period lasting maybe several decades, but once humanity exhausts itself fighting over shrinking resources, a recovery may occur. It is difficult to say how this scenario will unfold, but it will definitely take place in some parts of the world and unfortunately it might happen in large parts of our country too.

What else can happen during this period? With the arrival of Peak Oil, the curtain has closed on Act 1 of the drama Petroleum Man. What will happen in Act 2? Chekhov said, 'If there's a gun on the wall at the beginning of the play, by the end it must go off.' In the world's nuclear arsenal there are many guns on the wall. If life copies art, will there be an Act 3 in which the players, having learned their lesson the hard way, live sustainably? So if we do face a nuclear holocaust then we may have a situation where the 'living shall envy the dead.' However as humans, we are optimistic, so let us look at some of the more cheerful scenarios.

Transition

The concept of transition implies that we should go through a period of transition where we bring forth changes in our community/ country incrementally, so that a smooth transition occurs towards a fossil fuel free society. ***Three things must happen if anything worthwhile emerges out of all the chaos and suffering that these crises will cause. The first is the end of capitalist/industrial society; the second is a transition to a society, based on equity, scaling down of energy use and local self sufficiency; and the third is to change humanity's attitude towards nature.*** In this, we have two paths or models before us - one is Cuba, the other is that of Transition Towns.

Cuba

It is possible that in some countries social revolution can occur with an explicit aim of equality and of reducing energy consumption. It

is not an impossible dream. There is already a living example of it: Cuba.

Cuba is a small country in the Caribbean, with a population of about 11 million. In 1959 they had a revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The original revolutionary agenda, like that of most socialist revolutions - like that in Soviet Union, China, Vietnam etc. was industrialisation with equity. Cuba too took this route, but because of the US embargo on trade, the Soviet Union was the only source of oil for the country. But in 1989, something happened.

In 1989, the Soviet system had begun to collapse, and Cuba stopped receiving petroleum from the USSR. That is, 'Peak Oil' hit Cuba in 1989, though in an artificial manner - because in the world as a whole, there was no shortage of oil. The year 1989 ushered in the 'Special Period' in Cuba, where the country had to manage with extremely limited supplies of oil, a scenario that has begun to hit the rest of the world now.

It began with a nation-wide call to increase food production by restructuring agriculture. It involved converting from conventional large-scale, high input monoculture systems to smaller scale, organic and semi-organic farming systems. The focus was on using low cost and environmentally safe inputs and relocating production closer to consumption, in order to cut down on transportation costs. Urban agriculture played a significant part in this effort.

When oil supply stopped in 1990, transportation nearly ground to a halt. There were no cars running; public conveyance collapsed; and the streets were empty. People walked. Around 1993, Cuba imported 2,00,000 bicycles from China. To begin with, trucks were converted to buses by simply welding steps to the back. A skeletal frame of rods and a canopy were added. The concept was refined into the Cuba's mass transit bus or 'El Camello' (The Camel) as it is called by the locals. Built on a long chassis vehicle, it can accommodate 250 persons. For shorter distances, there were cycle and auto rickshaws. In smaller towns, horse drawn or even mule drawn 'cabs' were to be spotted. Car-pooling and ride sharing is common in Cuba. There are designated government officials in

yellow uniforms who have the right to pull over even government vehicles and seat people in need of transport.

Cuba provides us with a 'live experiment' where we can observe the whole cycle of Peak Oil, economic crisis and recovery. Even with regards to Climate Change, which has become a major crisis now, Cuba has achieved all the goals of reducing its carbon emissions. Thus Cuba has lessons for all on how to meet the present challenge. The Special Period in Cuba is like a real time model that has proved viable on a large scale, which other countries too could follow (5).

Cuba is the only country which has consciously and successfully met this challenge of transition. Its ultimate success depends whether the rest of the world also follows this road or plunges into a world war.

Meanwhile local initiatives are also coming up in many parts of the world to meet this challenge. The Transition Town Movement represents one such initiative.

Transition Towns

As we said above, *three things must happen if anything worthwhile emerges out of all the chaos and suffering that these crises will cause.* In Cuba only two conditions were fulfilled, those of *end of industrial society, and transition to a society based on lower energy.* For fulfilling the third condition, *to change humanity's attitude towards nature,* we have to look at the work done by the Transition Town Movement.

Transition Towns are a more recent phenomenon. It is a grass roots network of communities that are working to build resilience in response to Peak Oil, Climate Change, food insecurity and economic instability. Transition Towns is a catchword for environmental and social movements founded upon the principles of Permaculture. Today Permaculture has come to mean a whole life system encompassing various strategies for people to acquire all those resources, including access to land, needed to evolve self-financing and self-managed systems to provide for all their material

and non-material needs, without depleting, polluting and destroying the natural resources of the biosphere. The Transition Towns brand of Permaculture uses David Holmgren's 2003 book, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability*.

These techniques were included in a student project overseen by Permaculture teacher Rob Hopkins at the Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland. Two of his students, Louise Rooney and Catherine Dunne, set about developing the Transition Towns concept and took the far-reaching step of presenting it to Kinsale Town Council, resulting in the historic decision by councillors to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence.

The Transition Towns movement is an example of socio-economic localisation. The idea was adapted and expanded through 2005, 2006 and beyond in Hopkins' home town of Totnes, where he is now based. The initiative spread quickly, and as of May 2010, there are over 400 communities recognised as official Transition Towns in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Italy, and Chile. The term Transition Towns has morphed into 'Transition Initiatives' to reflect the range and type of communities involved - e.g. villages (Kinsale), neighbourhoods of cities (Portobello, Edinburgh), through council districts (Penwich) to cities and city boroughs (Brixton).

Central to the transition town movement is the idea that a life without oil could in fact be far more enjoyable and fulfilling than the present: "By shifting our mindset we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low carbon age to be thriving, resilient and abundant - somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth."

An essential aspect of Transition is that the outer work of transition needs to be matched by inner transition. In order to reduce our dependence on energy we need to rebuild our relations with ourselves, with each other and with the natural world. That requires focusing on the heart and soul of Transition. (6).

Towards a Fossil Fuel Free Urban India

India has an urban population of 30 crore, which is equal to the U.S. population and greater than that of any country except China. This urban Indian population lives in a total of 400 urban agglomerates. Of this urban population, more than half (18 crore) lives in 35 cities that have a population greater than 10 lakh. The two mega cities, Mumbai and Delhi have more than one crore residents. Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad have more than 50 lakh people.

It will be easier to tackle the problems of the 12 crore people who live in 365 urban agglomerates of less than 10 lakh each, and many of the success stories will first come from them. On the other hand, many groups and individuals in bigger cities are more aware and have resources to start alternatives. They can help groups and residents in smaller towns.

It is only in the metro and mega cities that restructuring to suit cheap fossil fuel has occurred in a significant way. Road widening, tarred roads, suburbia etc. has occurred in these cities. Even there, it is not complete. Pockets of slums - with as much as a third of the population living in them - which have small lanes continue to exist. So changes required to initiate a fossil fuel free society are far easier in India and in other developing countries than in the developed countries. On the other hand, public awareness on these issues is low, which makes it difficult to influence governments or even local bodies in terms of Transition-friendly policies.

Whatever changes that are occurring now, are happening only as remedies for acute problems that people are already facing, and which are part of the same crisis. These include: rain water harvesting, fuel (for cooking) and fuel efficient stoves, urban agriculture for perishable foods like vegetable and fruits which are becoming expensive due to transport costs, transport that does not depend on fossil fuels – bicycles, cycle rickshaws, horse, donkey, camel and bullock carts. Solid waste management is probably the only area where city-wide policy intervention has come about.

Roof top rain water harvesting is a widely discussed topic these

days. Many state governments have passed laws making it compulsory and have published booklets to help people how to do it. Organisations like Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi train people in it and have also carried out prestigious projects. However, in terms of implementation it is still slow. It is the most promising area of activity for creation of green jobs and green entrepreneurship. Rain water harvesting is not limited to roof tops alone. It involves tree planting in cities, restoring tank and ponds and in general what is called 'water shed management,' which can apply to all areas, whether urban or not.

Fuel efficient stoves have been around since the 50s, starting with Magan Chulha, which has a built-in chimney and is designed for two or three pots. There are others, which produce charcoal as a by-product or are based purely on charcoal as a fuel, and finally there are solar box cookers. The problem is that they are a bit expensive, need maintenance, and require some knowledge to operate. The real answer is to increase equality in society and have plentiful fuel wood by planting trees that would meet this need. Charcoal produced from wood should become the main high density fuel for artisan/industrial use.

The urban garden movement - which mainly produces vegetables - too is catching up among relatively educated and affluent city people, because they want their food to be natural and chemical free. Most cities have e-groups, training programmes and books promoting it, apart from outlets that sell local and organic produce. Bangalore and Hyderabad have fairly well established shops which also serve as spots for people interested in urban gardening to meet and exchange ideas. Poor people, on the other hand, grow whatever is possible. In smaller towns, where there is a bit more space and people are more linked to the rural hinterland, this happens much more.

In Vellore in Tamil Nadu, a zero waste management programme has been successfully carried out. Several municipalities all over the country are trying it out. This coupled with an anti-plastic movement is slowly changing the face of urban India. (7, 8).

Bicycles and cycle rickshaws (particularly in North India) are making a genuine comeback and a large number of towns are seeing a revival, backed by better equipment and support organisations. Bangalore has recently opened cycle lanes in its suburb of Jayanagar as a pilot project, while Nanded in Maharashtra has lanes for cycles on several streets. On the other hand, urban planners are still governed by fossil fuel age thinking and the influence of fossil fuel lobbies. As a result, urban infrastructure and transport policy is based on the convenience of private vehicle users. (9).

Kinwat: A Holistic Approach

Kinwat is a small taluk level town in Nanded district in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Here a small group is trying many of the approaches described above simultaneously. Kinwat was consciously chosen, based on the understanding that the crisis would hit small towns first, and therefore, where changes too would be accepted readily. So far, these assumptions have proved correct.

Kinwat is located on the banks of river Penganga and is surrounded by small hills and forests. It has a population of around 25,000, which consists mainly of Muslims, Dalits, fisher folk and gypsy communities. The town is predominantly middle to lower-middle class, the majority of them engaged in farming, fishing, pottery and collecting forest produce. It has a small upper-middle class that either have large land holdings or are engaged in commercial activities. It also has a small middle class consisting of government employees and teachers of the local degree college. The town's municipal water supply depends on a nearby dam as well as ground water sources located a few kilometres away.

While the group has achieved success in everything it tried, the quantum is still too small to make a significant dent in local life and politics. However, its rain water harvesting activities are commercially viable and have an unlimited demand because the town has a serious water problem. All types of improved, fuel-saving stoves promoted by the group too have proved successful, and so has the seeds program for vegetable gardens. The group has undertaken several

other activities, including a library and a bookshop. The group now is prepared to launch a big awareness programme on Climate Change and Peak Oil. This will also strengthen the team and bring more young people to the group. (10)

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ON POPULATION

Introduction

This is meant to be an article for activist education and therefore, on the one hand it starts with explaining basic concepts; on the other it avoids academic references. The population problem is complex and has been debated since Marx's time. In the past, Leftists maintained that it is not a real problem, but a creation of Capitalism. However, in the last few decades, resource constraints of the planet earth have been recognised and the present population of seven billion appears as a challenge. This article does not give definite ready solutions. It tries to present the problems and looks at possible solutions in a particular region.

Population Growth, Growth Rate and Doubling of Population

Population growth means increase in population, which is computed by subtracting total deaths from total births per year. For a specific area or country, one has to add total immigration minus total out migration.

Population grows at a 'compound rate' (like the compound interest rate that we learn in school). The doubling of population is a function of its growth rate. A simplified (but fairly accurate) formula is $70/\text{growth rate} = \text{No. of years in which the population will double}$. Thus if we have one percent growth rate, in 70 years it will double. If we have two percent then in 35 years it will double and in 70 years

it will be four times! If the growth rate is 10 percent, it will double in seven years - like our fixed deposits used to double in seven years when the interest rates were 10 percent.

Zero Population Growth (ZPG) or Sustainable Population

Zero population rate (ZPG) means the rate of growth is zero or we have a stable population. We can even have negative population growth, which results in the decline of the population. This happens sometimes both in nature and in human history.

In nature, sustainable population is based on high child mortality and normal/low longevity. High child mortality occurs because almost all animals have predators, which kill the weak and the slow. Also, in nature they don't have 'health care' like humans have today, where the aim is to save every child and achieve as low child mortality as possible. High child mortality ensures lower growth rate and more effective genetic selection and therefore a 'healthier' population. Low longevity occurs because the predators kill the weak and the old because they cannot escape. Animals that do not have predators (the top of the species) die due to inability to hunt or digest. For example, tigers die when they become too weak to hunt whereas elephants die due to losing their teeth.

In early human history, human beings were not very different from other animals as the population growth charts show below. But human history is different because humans can modify the environment to suit themselves to a greater degree than any other species. This ability kept on increasing and it increased by a leap due to industrialisation in the last 200 years. That is the root of the population problem.

The Problem

Population growth is essentially due to humans' ability to modify the environment to suit their needs. While the invention of fire and similar inventions were important, a significant change occurred around 12,000 years ago due to introduction and growth of agriculture. Agriculture provided food security by increasing the shelf

life of food (mainly grains), made slavery possible and in turn increased population. The figures are well known. Thus:

Period	World	India
Beginning of agriculture (10000 B.C.)	1 Million	
Introduction of Iron (500 B.C.)	100 Million	
Beginning of Christian Era	200 Million	
1800 A.D.	1000 Million or 1 Billion	260 Million
1900 A.D.	1.6 Billion	300 Million
1950	2.5 Billion	350 Million
2000	6 Billion	1 Billion
Today	7 Billion +	1.2 Billion

(All figures and dates are approximate)

Agriculture also destroyed forests, grasslands and wetlands, endangering the flora and fauna and in the final analysis, it can endanger human species too. We said above that agriculture created food security. It is debatable because it also increased population and created slavery thus creating food insecurity for the slaves. This has happened more dramatically in the 20th century.

The Twentieth Century

As we see from the data above, the 20th century was unique. It had the highest population growth rate in history. It was the only century in which the global population doubled and trebled! Several factors contributed to it. The ‘Green Revolution’ (use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, seeds, irrigation and machinery in agriculture), which was possible due to availability of cheap petroleum products, came only after World War I (in India it came in the 1970s). It contributed significantly to increased production of commodified food, particularly in the US, Canada and Australia and contributed to increase of population all over the world. On the other hand, it also increased poverty, hunger and food insecurity for millions of people, especially in the third world.

Secondly, increased longevity and decreased child mortality occurred due to dramatic changes in the health care industry. This is the opposite of what happens in nature. In the era of cheap oil,

longevity increases due to 'zoo conditions' of old people - no predators, assured food supply and a high eco foot print of old people due to geriatric health care. In nature, 'zoo conditions' do not prevail and therefore longevity is low.

Thirdly, the decrease in the number and intensity of deaths due to famines. So, we get a picture of a 7 billion population with millions of hungry people all around the world, particularly in the third world. The current UN data shows around a thousand million or one billion people go hungry.

Several other things happened too. A huge meat and poultry industry came up. These animals did not eat grass or insects as in the past, but were fed agricultural produce (mainly corn in the US). So a greater area came under agriculture, further reducing grassland, wetland and forest. Several commercial crops like tobacco, tea, coffee and sugarcane also took up large agriculture areas. To feed this agriculture, other industries and mining also increased. A huge resource drain occurred.

The Twenty First Century

There is a limit to growth of agriculture. It is limited by land and by input resources. The limit was artificially raised by cheap oil in the 20th century. This has ended in the 21st century. Oil production peaked (2005-2008), and it has leveled off, never to rise again. This not only ushered an unending crisis for Capitalism, it has also affected food production by increasing the input prices of agriculture. Today a billion people are starving the world over. About half of these starving people, that is, 500 million are likely to die in this decade. And a full half of them, that is, some 250 million, will be Indians. It is difficult to imagine what other things will happen along with this catastrophic event. It is an end of era event - like the Black Death in Medieval Europe, only on a much bigger scale.

What are the possible ways in which we can cope with such a situation?

There are two issues:

1. How the current and growing population can feed itself and
2. How we can move towards a sustainable population

As we have seen above, in a short term scenario there is going to be a lot of pain and starvation deaths. In the past due to cheap oil one could transport large quantities of food quickly. While it did not stop poverty or starvation, it prevented deaths. This is no longer will be possible. These deaths will occur among the most vulnerable in the population, the poor and tribals. The sad thing is that it is these very people who have the skills needed to sustain us in a post oil world. Various experts have given different figures about the reduction of population in the short term. One extreme figure is that the world population will be only two billion by 2050.

In the long term there are some possibilities. With the end of oil, economies will have to grow local because transport costs will be too high. If we do not destroy ourselves, social changes are bound to occur.

A viable future lies in some kind of non capitalist social formation which is based on:

1. Equity
2. Scaling down of energy use
3. Local self sufficiency
4. Eco restoration by using Permaculture/Agro Ecology

This may ensure enough food for the existing population. Each eco region will have to become self sufficient. Now, different eco regions can support different levels of populations. Deserts and cold countries support smaller populations whereas tropical countries and riverine plains support bigger populations. So, over a period, the population will have to decline according to the carrying capacity of the region. In the final analysis each society will have to attain zero population growth and may even have to opt for shrinking of the population.

Two Models

We have two existing models which have tackled the present problems somewhat successfully: the Cuban model (described in detail in *Yugant*), after the collapse of Soviet Union and the Transition Town Movement in Europe and USA. The latter has an anarchist kind of social formation.

The erstwhile Socialist/Communist countries (former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam etc.) may learn from Cuba and have their own version of 'Special Period' and come out of the crisis in 5 years. The advanced capitalist countries may have some kind of social democracy with strong 'Eco Socialism' inputs and coupled with Transition Town models may also solve the problem within a relatively short period.

The so called 'Third World' countries have limited experience of democracy. While they do have anarchist kind of experiments in pockets, as with the organic farming communes that are springing up everywhere, they are also facing lot of difficulties because the society at large still has an authoritarian background. So, these countries may have to go through some kind of revolution resulting in a command economy and then follow the Cuba kind of 'Special Period'. This is an optimistic scenario, but in reality there will be lot of conflict, pain and misery, particularly before and during the revolution. There is also a possibility that some countries may not have revolution and may have a prolonged period of chaos destroying people and resources.

Zero Population Growth

The new social formations coupled with organic farming or agro ecology can certainly feed the present population better. This is due to several factors. Due to relatively equitable distribution, people will have a little more food. A lot of wastage food in the present capitalist economy - due to wasteful consumption by the rich, due to storage and transport etc, will also be eliminated.

However, as we have seen, organic farming fed only about two

billion people in 1921. Can it feed 7 billion people today? It is a very difficult proposition. So there will be attempts to limit population growth and take it to zero population growth (ZPG).

The existing models of ZPG are based on urbanisation, nuclear family and increased prosperity. This model cannot be applied to the whole world because there are not enough resources for the whole world to achieve the prosperity that the western countries and some richer people in developing countries have achieved.

However, one reason for the above model to work was the security that this model provided. It is possible to provide security at a lower level of consumption if the society is based on equity. So, it is possible that in the new social formations ZPG may be achieved.

But is a Achieving ZPG Enough?

We have seen that the sustainable population before agriculture was only one million. What is the desirable level of population that is actually sustainable over a long term? Obviously one million, the natural sustainable population before agriculture, is the lowest limit and mankind may never go down to that level. Various figures have been suggested, most of them are around two billion or less. This figure is arrived at due to the fact that in 1921 when the population was two billion, all agriculture was organic. For India, this figure is 350 million (1950) when practically all agriculture was organic. However, since then the soil has been degraded and without oil even this population may have difficulties to survive. Will mankind shrink to such a level? And of course the more pressing question is how the present population will face the situation when fossil fuel agriculture comes to an end. As we said above there is a possibility of large scale famine that kills millions of people.

The Future

Will mankind be able to achieve this reduction of population to two billion? The question poses several issues. Mankind has developed an ethics that values life per se and it is unthinkable to allow child mortality to increase and have higher number of births. Similarly it

is difficult to think of lowering longevity. At best, we can think of an option - making euthanasia legal. But it will be exercised by very few. Only future generations will be able to think about it more clearly in changed circumstances. Even if we achieve negative population growth rates, it will take a long time to achieve this kind of reduction. And what is the way to achieve this? If we decrease birth rate, we will be saddled with an increasingly ageing population, like Japan and France today. So, logically, nature's way appears to be best. In organic farming we say that we should follow Nature's way. Why should it not be applicable to human society? It remains a challenge to future generations as to how to achieve this in a humane way.

Think Locally, Act Locally

In the past the slogan, 'Think Globally, Act Locally' was very popular. Even in this article we began looking at the problem globally. But as we have said, in the future, local self sufficiency will be the order of the day. So, we should also be able to think locally and act locally. Below we look at the Deccan in India as an eco region, look at its problems and try to look at the solutions that are being attempted.

Historically, India has been endowed with rich natural resources and the country was self sufficient most of the time except in times of great political turmoil. Deccan too has been self sufficient. The last great famines occurred during the closing decades of the 19th century.

Every eco region has specific food practices. In Deccan it has been millets, pulses and ground nut. Agriculture is mainly rain fed with local irrigation from tanks. Some rice was grown in low lying areas with tank irrigation. Cotton was the main cash crop. Rearing of sheep and goats has been an important part of the local economy and meat has been part of the diet. Some amount of fish and poultry has also been part of the food. Some communities also eat pork.

A lot of this changed due to Green Revolution in other parts of the country and in Deccan it introduced food insecurity and hunger and, in some cases, farmers' suicides. How did this come about?

Increases of food production of wheat and rice are concentrated in Green Revolution areas. This was brought to the Deccan by the government's public distribution system. Popular governments introduced rice at two rupees per kilo for the poor. This made the local millets expensive and people got used to eating rice and wheat. Slowly, rice and wheat were introduced as food crops. As these require lot of water, tube well irrigation was introduced and tanks were neglected. Other cash crops like sugar cane, soybean and genetically modified cotton were also introduced.

This led to a big disaster within 30 years. Water tables fell and there is a big water scarcity in many regions. Commercial agriculture proved unviable for small and medium farmers and their burden grew to such an extent that several thousands of farmers had to commit suicide. Polished rice and white flour consumption affected the health of local people and possibly caused increased suffering due to diabetes. Hunger and water scarcity stalks the land.

The Socialist solution to this situation is a combination of the old traditions and new. The old tradition consists of struggling for security of land ownership or land to the tiller or land reforms. The new is decentralisation, local food security and knowledge based restoration of ecology and agriculture that has been degraded due to the processes mentioned above. Local food security implies growing local foods as per local ecology. In the Deccan, it would mean reducing rice and wheat and going back to millets, pulses and ground nut. Again the cash crop of sugar cane and soybean which are popular today will have to be abandoned or reduced drastically and organic cotton will have to be restored. Agro-ecology would be the key science of the 21st century and rebuilding local communities would be the key social task.

A large number of social movements coordinated by the NAPM (National Alliance of People's Movements), NGOs like Deccan Development Society and several other organizations and Permaculture farms in the region are following this path. While the scale is small and the ruling classes are very powerful, nevertheless they have demonstrated a viable alternative. With larger political

changes, these policies and experiences will prove useful. It is certainly possible to visualise food self sufficiency for the Deccan region.

A Call to Arms

In the face of such imminent crises, there are several people's movements going on - the Maoists in Central India, the ethnic and regional movements in Kashmir and the North East and scores of movements against large capitalist projects that take away common property resources such as land and water and the existing livelihoods of poor people and endanger the environment.

However, there is a lack of coordination and understanding about the nature of the crises of Capitalism. The movements mainly oppose the exploitation and oppression and demand either immediate relief or improvement of the system. Many even think that they are fighting a losing battle. They do not realise that the time has come to fight to win, to change the system. There does not seem to be the necessary urgency among the people's movements. Partly, it is inertia; partly it is the phenomenon of the boy crying 'wolf'. That is, in the past, so many times it has been said that Capitalism was facing a crisis, but it survived and only got stronger every time. So, this time around, people naturally fail to respond to such alerts.

Then there is a divergence in various movements – in the issues handled – class, ethnicity or opposition to mega projects. So, even though millions of people are actively opposing the present State and Capitalism, there is no dialogue or coordination between different groups and movements. It is the need of the hour to have a dialogue, come together for concerted action and avoid the forthcoming disaster as much as possible. This time around, the chances are better because the edifice of the enemy is weakened, is crumbling and imploding. Is anyone listening?

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PEAK OIL, DYING CITIES AND CITIES OF TOMORROW

Peak Oil

The concepts of Peak Oil has been discussed in the article *Yugant*. In this article, we shall examine the future of cities in this context.

Dying Cities

Cities play a central role in the functioning of the system. They are seats of power, business, trade, industry, education and culture. Historically, cities thrived because they siphoned large quantities of energy surpluses from their hinterlands. The primary energy source in today's cities is fossil fuels. However, with the fossil fuel era coming to a close, and no viable alternative energy source visible on the horizon, cities as they exist today will become unsustainable and extremely vulnerable to collapse. Every big city is showing signs of this collapse.

Colonialism allowed Europe to benefit from an enormous amount of surplus energy siphoned off from Asian and African colonies, both in terms of manpower and natural resources. A part of this surplus energy was used to transform medieval cities into fossil fuel age cities. Roads were widened for automobile use. Cities expanded laterally, eating up farmland; and vertically to dizzying heights as cement concrete provided the strength to do that. Massive bridges allowed wide rivers to be crossed easily, and aeroplanes reduced travel time between cities on different continents to less than a day.

There are two types of cities in the modern Industrial age. The first is located largely in Europe, North America and Australasia, where the transition from Medieval Age cities that are based on animate energy and biomass to Industrial Age cities based on fossil fuels is largely complete. Typical examples of such cities are: Berlin, San Francisco, Stockholm, Melbourne and Tokyo. The second type of cities is in the developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America, where the transition is still in progress. In India, Mumbai and Delhi are the mega cities (population exceeding one crore) and there are 30 odd cities with population of more than a million. In these cities, the transition is not complete and the medieval and modern coexist.

Cities in today's world, particularly in the developed world and in metro and mega cities of developing nations [delete] are becoming unsustainable. In the last hundred years, they restructured themselves to suit fossil fuel transport and economy - wider streets, suburbs and fossil fuel-based energy. With the oil crisis they are falling apart and dying. Their future depends on whether they can reinvent themselves radically—reduce their energy consumption drastically to come closer to that of their hinterlands, and distribute energy equitably across all their residents.

Cities Must Re-Invent Themselves

Given the impending energy crisis, cities will not have the necessary energy surplus to sustain themselves. They will not disappear overnight, but will perforce shrink. If such shrinkage is not to be chaotic, it is better to plan it from now. Some of the key factors will be:

1. Cities should plan their shrinkage so that they do not to exceed a population of 500,000.
2. Cities should distribute energy evenly across all its residents to avoid the risk of conflict between various sections of its residents.
3. The difference in the per capita energy consumption of city and rural people should be narrowed significantly.

4. Cities must plan to configure themselves to suit the future energy source, i.e., solar energy.
5. Cities in developing countries will never have the resources (energy and financial) to complete the transition to becoming cities based on fossil fuels. It is best to abandon the attempt to make that transition right away and begin the transition towards becoming solar cities. For example, plans to widen streets, to have a metro, build a new airport, bring more water from distant rivers etc. should be abandoned.

Cities of Tomorrow

Several hundred cities and rural communities all over the world are involved in local changes to meet such a situation. They are called by the names of ecological villages, Transition Towns and post carbon cities. In India too many urban initiatives are taking place. This story, however, must begin with Cuba where many of the initiatives we are talking about took place about two decades ago.

Cuba

Cuba is where “Peak Oil” hit in 1989—though, in an artificial manner (because there was no global oil shortage then). The Soviet Union had begun to collapse and Cuba’s petroleum imports dried up. The U.S.’ embargo against Cuba did not permit imports from other sources.

Cuba’s response is an inspiration to the rest of the world. A spontaneous decentralised movement to set-up urban farms was born. By 1994, more than 8,000 city farms were created in Havana alone. Front lawns of municipal buildings were dug up to grow vegetables. Offices and schools cultivated their own food. Many of the gardeners were retired men. Women played a larger role in agriculture in cities than they did in rural areas. By 1998, an estimated 541,000 tons of food were produced in Havana. Food quality improved as people had access to a greater variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Some neighbourhoods produced as much as 30% of their food.

The growth of urban agriculture was largely due to the State's initiative. New planning laws placed the highest priority on food production. Licenses were granted to convert unused urban land into farms, and resources were made available to aspiring urban farmers. This helped in converting hundreds of vacant urban spaces into food producing plots. Another successful device was the opening of farmers markets that allowed direct sale of farm produce by farmers to consumers. Deregulation of prices combined with high demand for fresh farm produce in the cities allowed urban farmers to generate two to three times the income of rural farmers.

When oil supply stopped in 1990, transportation in Cuba ground to a near halt. No cars ran; public conveyance collapsed; and the streets were empty. People walked. In the early-1990s, Cuba imported 2,00,000 bicycles from China. Trucks were converted to buses by simply welding steps at the back and adding a skeletal frame of rods and a canopy. The concept was refined into the 'El Camello' (The Camel), Cuba's mass transit bus. Built on a long chassis vehicle, it could accommodate 250 persons. For shorter distances, cycles and auto rickshaws were used. In smaller towns, horse drawn or even mule drawn 'cabs' were used. Car-pooling and ride sharing became common. Designated government officials in yellow uniforms had the right to pull over even government vehicles and seat people in need of transport.(1)

Transition Towns

The concept of Transition Towns has been introduced in the article *Yugant*.

The main aim of the Transition Town project generally, and echoed by the towns locally, is to raise awareness of sustainable living and build local ecological resilience in the near future. Communities are encouraged to seek out methods for reducing energy usage as well as reducing their reliance on long supply chains that are totally dependent on fossil fuels for essential items. Food is a key area, and they often talk of "Food feet, not food miles!" Initiatives so far have included creating community gardens to grow

food; business waste exchange, which seeks to match the waste of one industry with another industry that uses that waste material; and even simply repairing old items rather than throwing them away.

A key concept within transition is the idea of a community-visioned, community-designed and community-implemented plan to proactively transition the community away from fossil fuels. The term “community” in this context includes all the key players - local people, local institutions, local agencies and the local council. With a website devoted to the plan and the publication of Totnes’ Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP), the definition of the concept of transition towns has recently seen a significant development (2).

Urban India

India has an urban population of 300 million. This urban Indian population lives in a total of 400 urban agglomerates. Of this urban population, more than half (180 million) lives in 35 cities that have a population greater than a million. The three metros/mega cities, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi have more than 10 million residents. Hyderabad and Bengaluru, have more than 5 million.

It will be easier to tackle the problems of 120 million people who live in 365 urban agglomerates of less than a million, and many of the success stories will first come from them. On the other hand, many groups and individuals in bigger cities are more aware and have resources to start alternatives. They can help groups and residents in smaller towns (3).

As we have said it is only in the metro and mega cities that restructuring to suit cheap fossil fuel has occurred in a significant way. Road widening, tarred roads, suburbia etc. has occurred in these cities. Here also it is not complete. Pockets of slums - as much as a third of the population living in them, which have small lanes continue to exist. So changes required to face a fossil fuel free societies are far easier in India and in other developing countries than in the developed countries. On the other hand public awareness on these issues is low and it is not able to influence the governments or even local bodies in terms of policies.

So the changes that are occurring are on the basis of acute problems that people are facing due to the present crisis. These are: rain water harvesting, fuel (for cooking) and fuel efficient stoves, urban agriculture for perishable foods like vegetable and fruits which are becoming expensive due to transport costs, transport based on non-fossil fuels—bicycles, cycle rickshaws, horse, donkey, camel and bullock carts. Solid waste management is probably the only area where city wide policy intervention has been possible. In Vellore in Tamilnadu a zero waste management programme has been successfully carried out. Several municipalities all over the country are trying it out. This coupled with anti-plastic movement is slowly changing the face of urban India. (4), (5).

Political Hurdles

As it is obvious from above, in India there is lack of awareness and political will on these ideas. Why is it so? These ideas require local solutions and are based on strengthening of local politics and of local bodies. In Indian polity, they have always been weak and the last 60 years have not strengthened them. In fact Indian polity has actually weakened them by breaking down communities and by populist electoral promises. Most Indian politics - from extreme right to extreme left is about capturing Central power and is not about grassroots democracy. These ideas require anarchist inputs - ideas of opposing power in any form, local direct democracy and local self-management. We find them in the writing and works of anarchists in the urban movement.

Historical and Ideological Roots

Many of the ideas discussed above have roots dating back to a hundred years in the Anarchist movement. In urban planning, as Peter Hall say in *Cities of Tomorrow*, we must begin with Patrick Geddes (6). Patrick Geddes was a pioneer in people-centric urban planning and regional planning. “Town planning is not mere place-planning, nor even work-planning. If it is to be successful it must be folk-planning.” It was Geddes who introduced concepts and strategies like ‘Diagnostic Survey’, ‘Conservative Surgery’ (as against

demolition), planning for health and planning for open spaces and trees. He influenced town planners all over the world. Lewis Mumford and The Regional Planning Association of America and its journal *The Survey* played an important part in spreading his ideas (7). Geddes was in India during 1915-1919 and he carried out some 60 town planning exercises. Fortunately, a book about him, *Patrick Geddes in India* has been reprinted in India and we have access to most of his ideas now (8).

I would like to end with a simple quote from Geddes: “Town planning... should start by the development in youth of a civic consciousness, working up through a knowledge of the immediate locality and city to a larger and most general grasp of their problems. ... There is, therefore, a great need of public co-operation; of an ever-increasing body of active citizens who will no longer leave all matters to official authority but work with the municipal representatives.”

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OLD AGE AND PEAK OIL

“Old age is a tiredness that does not disappear the next morning, as we ingenuously expected upon going to bed”.

- Baldomero Fernández Moreno, Argentinean poet

Old Age

People above sixty years are considered old or senior citizens. It is the percentage of old people in the total population that is important and not the total number, and especially in relation to those in the 0-15 age group in the population. If we consider only total numbers then China and India will have the largest number of old people because of their high population. On the other hand as a proportion of the total population it is the Scandinavian countries, France and Japan that have very high percentage old people in their population. As the population of the old approaches that of the 0-15 group, the working population shrinks in proportion and the burden of taking care of the old and the young becomes very heavy. In such cases, societies experience a shortfall in its working population.

Old age is a human phenomenon with all the complexity that entails one. In nature, that is, in plant and animal kingdom, there is no such comparable phenomenon. And contrary to popular understanding, among humans also it is relatively recent – starting roughly since mid 19th century when it became possible to control reproduction. The knowledge of controlling reproduction became popular in modern societies due to technology, which made the availability of these devices cheap and easy. Although the Catholic

Church frowns upon it, it rapidly spread in the developed capitalist countries.

The population of the elderly rises because of a fall in fertility and not because of decrease in mortality and increase in life expectancy at birth. (Ansley J. Coale, "The Effects of Changes in Mortality and Fertility on Age Composition, 1955). Reduction of mortality will definitely increase the total number of old people in the population. However, it is the fall in fertility that increases the *proportion* of old people in the population. A reduction in the number of new additions to the population increases the *ratio* of old people in the population, which as we said above is the real problem of old age for the society.

The twenty first century may see a dramatic rise in old age if present trends continue. It can be as high as one in three people. Today the so called developed countries are experiencing it. In India, it is still below 10 per cent, but even here the growth of the elderly population has been higher than that of the general population.

Old Age Care

Historically, old people were cared for within the family. With the increase in their number and increase in wage employment, more and more old people are getting care through old age homes. The funding for this comes from the welfare state, charities and the pension of the old people themselves.

However, these 'homes', of which there are not enough to take care of all the old people, suffer from many defects. To begin with, they are often inadequately furnished or maintained and lack adequate funds. Also, because old people are vulnerable, they are often exploited by the owners of these homes (or the individuals who run them) and the medical industrial complex.

Today, the burden of the care of the elderly on the government is so big that it often exceeds the pay check of the working people. In Kerala, for instance, the pension of government employees is more than the current wages of the employees. As a result, today's governments desperately want to get out of it.

Elsewhere, we come across fictional accounts where the state has made euthanasia above 70 liberal and is actively promoting it and offering incentives. In Japan, in one fiction, there is compulsory euthanasia above 70 years! Of course there are a lot of moral and legal issues involved in realising this, but secretly the state would love it.

The fact is, care of old people is rapidly becoming an unsolvable problem, and only more so in the coming resource crunch due to Peak Oil.

Peak Oil and Old Age

As we saw above, growth in the elderly population occurs due to fall in fertility. A fall in child mortality also helped because people no longer felt anxious about the possible death of their children. Reproduction of labour, in capitalist societies, began to take longer because it needed more years in education. This also led to smaller families. It is very difficult to reverse this trend and attempts to do so in these countries have largely failed.

On the other hand, this policy of reducing fertility has been aggressively pursued in Third World countries, both by local governments and by international agencies. This is giving rise to the rising percentage of old people in these countries too. In this context, it is interesting to note that today China is giving up the one child policy and allowing couples to have two children, ‘in a bid to raise fertility rates and ease the financial burden on China’s rapidly aging population’! (Wang Hairong, *Beijing Review*, May 8, 2014)

As we know, capitalism became viable due to availability of cheap fossil fuels like coal and oil. These resources are finite, and will not last forever. The term Peak Oil highlights one of the key aspects of the depletion of these resources, namely the depletion of petroleum. While coal may last for a few decades, today we are in the middle of Peak Oil which endangers the very existence of modern way of life.

This is applicable to old age too. Both health care and institutional care will be severely affected in coming years and the state would view old age as redundant and may actually follow a

programme of liberal euthanasia. Expensive medical interventions will soon become unavailable.

Any demands for better regulation or for more resources to be made available by the state today will fall on deaf ears or the promises made would not be kept. To repeat, in the present system there is no hope for old people.

Old Age Care in a Post Carbon Society

Post carbon or fossil-fuel free societies are visualised as local self governing societies. So old age care too would be community based care. What is the size of a 'local society'? It can vary in different ecological areas, but the Indian postal network gives us a practical idea. In India an average post office covers 21.21 sq. kms. and a population of 7176. So, 25 sq. kms (5 km by 5 km) and a population of 10,000 is a good figure for India.

In such a community the population of old people will be around 1000 or less. The care of the elderly will be a part of everyday community institutions such as school, health centre, public library, community agriculture and so on.

The old age centre will be located near the health centre and the kindergarten will be a part of the centre. The latter would take up only a few hours in the day and old people would be happy to see small children.

In such a society, all the old people or senior citizens will be members of the old age centre, though all may not be residents of it. It will be completely managed by the old people themselves, since many people below 65 are in fairly good health. So, it will be an organisation of old people, by old people and for old people!

To begin with, it can be just a cultural centre or club – place where old people can meet, play cards, listen to music, watch television and read newspapers or books. Later on, it can provide food and palliative care for all and special care for the disabled. The resources including funding for the centre will come from the community itself, where people will contribute according to their capacities.

It is possible that many members have a variety of skills which can be used for the community. There can be artists, authors, bankers, carpenters, cobblers, cooks, doctors, engineers, farmers, gardeners, knitters, lawyers, plumbers, poets, potters, tailors, teachers, spinners, scientists and weavers. These people may find it easier to serve their own small community of senior citizens. The community can become fairly self sufficient in many ways, particularly if they own an acre of land with some water.

This does not mean that they will be isolated from rest of the community. Apart from family realtion they may also continue to work in their specifics kills and capacities with the community. However this may change with respect to the time committed and therefore the amount and kind of remuneration received.

Another way of looking at it is to have a focus: to serve nature. We have benefited so much from nature and in return we have only degraded it. It may be a good idea to correct this mistake and take a piece of natural resource and nurture it. Nature is so kind that it will give us in return fruits, vegetables and herbs! Even if we are not able to eat the fruits, the next generation will eat it. After all we have been eating fruits from trees that have been planted by a previous generation.

Transition

Such a Utopian local community will not come into existence automatically. It will require a different value system. Today people either demand goods and services from the government or buy them in the market. They do not think that they can collectively do things on their own, except during a Ganesh Puja or Durga Puja. Human beings are products of circumstances and different human beings will be products of different circumstances. But as Marx said, it is only human beings themselves who can change these circumstances. So it is up to us senior citizens, particularly those who are below 65, to take the initiative and set up such an old age home.

August 30, 2014

(A version of this article was posted on the website www.peakoilindia.org)

EUTHANASIA, SUICIDE AND SANYASA

I thought that by writing an obituary of Comrade Sitaram Shastry, I had come to term with his death. But it was not so. Some correspondence with friends and comrades made me realise that there are some issues that have never been adequately discussed among us 'leftists' and 'progressives' in public or in private. This is an attempt to start such a process. I am still very upset about his suicide and so the tone of this article is also possibly affected by it. Secondly, this is also trying to address my own situation - of a person seventy years old, who lives alone, has some health problems and does not want to live when he is not in control of his self.

I ended my obituary note thus: 'The sad thing is that he had to be alone in his last moments. It is a sad commentary on our progressive movement that it has not supported the movement for legalising euthanasia, that we are not prepared to deal with situations like this, and were not available to help him for a honourable and dignified end.'

Euthanasia

Let us start with understanding suicide and euthanasia. Euthanasia is not suicide. The word euthanasia means good death. It refers to the practice of intentionally ending a life in order to relieve pain and suffering. It is popularly known as 'mercy killing'. Technically, it is assisted suicide and it is supposed to be a humane and dignified way of dying when life is no longer bearable. Often, it is used in cases of terminal illness which are very painful, where any medical

intervention will not improve the condition of the patient, or is expensive to keep the person alive and extremely stressful to care givers and the family.

Euthanasia is not legal in most countries. It is legal in a few countries in Europe and in some parts of the U.S. and Australia. In India, it is not legal and people in such a condition must either continue to suffer or commit suicide. Recently, passive euthanasia has become legal in India. The term “passive euthanasia” used by the Supreme Court in its verdict on Aruna Shanbaug’s case is defined as the withdrawal of medical treatment with the deliberate intention to hasten a terminally ill-patient’s death.

Making passive euthanasia legal may appear as some progress. But it happens every day with the poor when doctors tell the family to take the patient home because they cannot do anything more. In the case of rich patients, either the family is not prepared to accept that no more medical care would help or the medical profession does not communicate clearly either due to fear or greed or both.

Suicide

Even if euthanasia were legal in India, the majority of people who commit suicide will not be eligible for it. Suicide is committed for a variety of emotional, social, psychological and economic reasons. In the last decade, several lakhs of poor Indian peasants and urban poor committed suicide for economic reasons. Several studies have shown that suicide was the best option for majority of them.

In a significant number of cases, however, suicide can be prevented by timely counselling. Suicide ‘helplines’ try to provide this, but many do not avail of it. By its very nature, suicide is a lonely act because while suicide is no longer a crime, aiding and abetting is. So, if someone knows about an attempt, he or she is expected to prevent it and seek help from others to prevent it.

A very large number of old people wish death because life is unbearable. It may be due to ill health or financial reasons or both. The main reason for it is that in the present society, individualism and nuclear family is the accepted value system and inter-generational

care is vanishing fast. Some of the old people also commit suicide because they want to die when they are still able to move about on their own. Even if euthanasia were legal, they may not qualify for it and will not get help. Most probably, Sitaram Shastry would not have qualified for euthanasia. Euthanasia laws will have to be far more liberal so that people who are fed up with life have a chance to die legally and with dignity. A short story I wrote, *The Black Hole*, describes such a fantasy. But it is not possible to have a liberal euthanasia law in the present society anywhere in the world because of the possibility of its misuse.

Palliative Care

Sitaram Shastry did not want to be treated for his cancer. There is some doubt whether it was in fact cancer or not. This is not unusual in cancer cases. There is a debate on this issue and many refuse cancer treatment on this count.

However it is in the field of cancer treatment itself that the concept of palliative care has evolved as a full discipline. Here the person is not treated for cancer, but is given help to reduce his suffering and die peacefully in a caring atmosphere. This concept is applicable in many other diseases also. Basically it is informed care and counseling, coupled with relief from pain and suffering. So an option for Sitaram Shastry could have been palliative care at a place of his own choice.

Unfortunately palliative care is not very well developed in India except in Kerala, where every district has a palliative care centre. Of the 908 palliative care centres in India 841 are in Kerala! Today, training courses in palliative care are available even for paramedicals and counsellors and it is an area that needs to be encouraged.

Also when it is available, it is not fully utilised. For example the CIPLA Pain and Palliative Care Centre at Pune, which is completely free, has occupancy of only 60 percent. The reason seems to be the perception that when you go to such a centre, it means there is no hope for cure. It is of course true, but many patients are reluctant to accept it and doctors may not be able to counsel them adequately. If

the patients are rich, there is the additional factor that continuing 'normal' health care is lucrative to the cancer 'industry'.

Family Pressure

In my obituary to Sitaram Shatry, I had said: 'On the other hand, the family also feels weak and vulnerable in such a situation and it is difficult for any family where such choices are not openly discussed to be able to accept such choices of no treatment.'

The problem is informed choice. It is further complicated by the false lure of the 'magic of modern medical science' as well as the new value system that life must be saved at all costs. The cost not only includes the financial burden on the family but, often, the quality of life of the patient. The medical profession itself often forgets its own golden rule, 'No medical intervention should be carried out that does not improve the condition of the patient.' There is a legitimate perception that a significant part of the medical profession is guided primarily by the profit motive and not by the welfare of the patient. But there is also a factor of fear of being sued by the rich patient's family for not saving the life of the patient.

Doctor's Dilemma

We have at several places above criticised the health profession. But individual doctors do face a dilemma. They are part of society and the medical system and their own opinions have often needed to be modified or compromised for the reasons mentioned above. Still, there are good hospitals and good doctors who genuinely help the patients in every way, including pain and palliative care and passive euthanasia.

Sanyasa and Preparing for Death

The value system 'that life must be saved all costs' is obviously at fault here. Several factors of consumer society are responsible for it. The perception that money can buy anything, particularly the 'best' health care, that it can 'snatch life back from the jaws of death', the greed of the medical profession (although many good doctors

do not subscribe to it) and peer pressure. It has become socially accepted, and the poor especially, go through enormous psychological and financial stress to 'save life'.

This was not always so. In most societies, there is a tradition and ritual of meeting death with dignity and peace. In the Christian tradition of Hospice, medical care is provided to reduce suffering but not to prolong death. The Hindu tradition believes that after death the soul has to attain 'Moksha' (freedom) and for that it has to cut itself from 'Maya' (bondage to earthly ties of material wealth and human relationships). To this end, some Hindus build a cottage next to a holy river and spend their last days peacefully. Some take 'sanyasa' (renunciation), leave family and die among unknown people. Jains have a tradition of 'sallekhana' - systematic fasting to death with religious rituals. Some tribes in Fiji believe that after death they will live eternally at the age at which they died. So they prefer to die in their prime! In the polar region, some communities send their old on a boat with provisions.

It is possible to build secular traditions too. In Hyderabad, for instance, there is an old-age home run by the Communist Party! There are several secular old age homes in the country. How I wish Sitaram had a choice like this! But that was not to be.

So Then?

What one would do if one faces a similar situation in one's own life? I think all choices are open and the person has to choose according to the situation. If palliative care is not available or the person wants to die with a fair command of his/her faculties, does not want to be bed ridden etc. then suicide becomes a valid choice, especially when there is no law for euthanasia, let alone a liberal euthanasia law. The problem with suicide is that it involves violence – not just towards oneself but towards one's family and friends. Even strangers can be affected by it, as in the case of a suicide under a running train. An engine driver told me that these cases affect them for a year at least!

One can opt for some kind of 'sanyasa,' preferably with the knowledge of the family, so that they are not unnecessarily stressed.

One need not be religious to do it. Then one can walk away and die among unknown people in any manner one chooses on a date and time of one's own choice. Preferably it should not be in a violent manner so as not to hurt even unknown people. Such a choice, however, requires a lot of courage and a value system of accepting death when life is no longer worth living.

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Also a version of this article appeared in *Law Animated World*,
Hyderabad, March 15, 2013.)

ON LIBERATION

Man desires liberation. So goes a traditional Indian saying. But what does liberation mean? In Indian texts there is the term ‘moksha’ for liberation. Liberation from what? From ‘maya’, which means bondage. The soul desires to be liberated from the bondage of this world to unite with the Ultimate Being. The bondage comes in the form of love for earthly things, for property, for wife, children and relatives and for gratification of senses.

One is supposed to cut this bondage of maya. A popular practice has been to go on a pilgrimage. But, what happens in a pilgrimage? One passes through different ecological regions and climate. The dress and food are different. One has to learn to eat different foods and so some of the bondage of sense gratification goes. One learns to sleep in different places, live on low budgets and lead a frugal life. One meets different people—different castes, regions. One learns to relate with them. Thus slowly the bondage breaks. One returns wiser, has a distance from the erstwhile loved ones, has become a simpler and frugal person. This concept of pilgrimage is common to many cultures. For example among Muslims, people go to Haj and return as Haji. A Haji is a wise person.

So what has happened to a person when he goes on pilgrimage and returns? Essentially, he has learned to care less for ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and learned to relate with a host of ‘other’. This has ‘freed’ him from many prejudices of past as he has seen that the ‘other’ is equally valid. He is on the path of liberation. Thus one can give a secular meaning to liberation. Liberation means an ability to relate with the

‘other’ on a basis of equality.

Well, a person is called ‘liberated’ if he sheds some of his prejudices. You are liberated if you can relate with women as persons and not as sex objects. If you are comfortable with people of different sexual orientation you will be called liberated. And so on. Liberation implies recognition of other’s rights and a brotherhood. Hence the slogans of the French Revolution were “liberty, equality, fraternity”.

In India’s freedom movement, relating with the other was seen as an important as part of the nation building exercise. In the early days, people joined the movement but stuck to their prejudices. Later, eating from a common kitchen, inter-caste marriage became important. Ambedkar also saw inter-caste marriage as important for breaking the barrier of caste in his book, *Annihilation of Caste*. In the Communist movement, eating beef by Hindus was considered as a step to break the prejudices of communalism.

Critics will say that it did not go far enough; it was window dressing as one can still see the influence of caste in society and politics. How does one go far enough?

To change oneself, to be rid of one’s prejudices, one has to begin with the very first question of philosophy. Know Thyself! Who are we? What are we? We live in society and relate with various members of the society. In the process, we become a microcosm of the society. Each individual is different. The trouble is that we don’t have an inventory of various aspects of our being. Hence ‘know thyself’.

As a microcosm, there is in each one of us male and female, adult and young, rich and poor, exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed, upper caste and lower caste, healthy and sick and so on. It is how we work these out in our life determines the extent of liberation. So, for each one, there has to be both a collective and individual path of liberation.

How do we know ourselves? How do we make an inventory? Essentially it is a process of self reflection. There are several ways it

can occur. In terms of consciousness, it can occur through travel, reading, listening. However, real self reflection takes place through practice - through acting on one's beliefs, through taking part in struggles of the other.

Men helping women's groups or upper caste persons working with lower caste groups often are liberated with many prejudices. Likewise, many youth from a bourgeois background are very active in the working class movement. In Communist movements, the principle Mao said, 'live with the people, eat with the people and sleep with the people', is what creates a situation of self reflection.

It will be argued that the above describes the liberation of the privileged. How does it work with the oppressed?

Frantz Fanon, in the context of Black Africa's struggle against slavery and apartheid, argued that counter violence helps in liberation. When a black man looks up and finds that the white man is no bigger than himself, when he hits a white man and draws blood and sees a white man scared, then he feels as a man himself—he receives a baptism of blood.

“For in the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity, killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free;” “Violence is man re-creating himself.”

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

During the Chinese Revolution, there used to be 'cry bitterness' meetings. In such meetings, the poor used to recall the suffering, the beating and exploitation they endured in the period before the revolution. People would cry, curse their bitter past and vow never to allow that past to come back. These meetings had a liberating effect. This author himself has seen such scenes in India during similar meetings among freed bonded labourers and child labourers.

Liberation is a historical process involving both the larger society and the individual. At the level of society, it involves redistribution of wealth, allowing equal opportunity to all. At an individual level, it implies self reflection, an ability to relate with

different people equally. Mankind is moving from the ‘realm of necessity to the realm of freedom’.

(A version of this article appeared in *Frontier*, dated June 8 - 14, 2014)

ON PASSION

I have been fascinated by the word and concept of ‘the Passion’ for more than 50 years. I first came across it in the early sixties, in *Beyond Desire* (1956), a biographical novel of the German musician Mendelssohn by Pierre La Mure. The central theme of the novel is the discovery of the scores of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* (1727) in a butcher’s shop in Berlin in 1829, and the subsequent struggle of Mendelssohn to perform it. One of the most important pieces composed by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), it was first performed by Bach himself on Good Friday on April 11, 1727 in Leipzig. Subsequently, the scores were lost till Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) rediscovered it. He performed it on March 11, 1829 in Berlin, when he was just 20 year old!

The concept of Passion is a very important concept in Christian theology and means suffering of Jesus on the Cross. (I am listening to the piece while writing this, thanks to the Internet, which also throws up some fantastic images of Jesus as well as of Bach writing this piece of music). Mendelssohn was a Christian, but also an ethnic Jew. The music required more than hundred performers, a place to do rehearsals and time and money. How it came to be performed is itself an epic in the story of Western Music. Finally a Jewish banker supplied the money and a barn outside Berlin to perform rehearsals, and the novel ends with the first performance. I enjoyed reading it and was deeply moved by it.

Now I am an atheist, irreligious, and an anarchist to boot. Those who have met such people would not be surprised by my interest in

such ideas and subjects. Contrary to the popular belief, most of us are not against serious religious persons. In history, a great amount of important milestones in arts, science and culture have been achieved by deeply religious people - Leonardo Da Vinci, Newton and Tolstoy, just to name a few people in the Christian traditions. There are equally important people in Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and many other religious traditions and cultures. Our difference with them is that the concepts of religion and God are not good enough for us. This has been debated peacefully over centuries. Our quarrel is with communalism - use of religion for secular purposes, as the scholar Asghar Ali Engineer defines communalism. It is the use of religion to gain power and wealth and use of hate and genocide of the other communities that we are against. In this many good people, both religious of all hues and others are with us.

Then, in the seventies, I read *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1954) by Howard Fast. It is about a miscarriage of justice in the U.S.A. in the 1920s. Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested, sentenced to death and hanged in 1927 for a crime they did not commit. It was a pay check robbery and there was a false witness to it. Although, everyone knew it was a false case, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were punished because they were poor immigrant Italian workers and had socialist and anarchist leanings. They were punished for their thoughts and ideas and not for their actions. Fast never uses any Christian theological terms in his beautiful novel, but it is clear that he portrays Vanzetti as Jesus. In fact Vanzetti was a very sincere and humble socialist, a loving and caring husband and father as is clear from his letters from the jail.

The trial received wide scale international publicity and support for the victims. In the protests that followed the execution, many people were killed by the police in many countries in the world. On August 23, 1977, the 50th anniversary of their execution, Michael Dukakis, the Governor of Massachusetts issued a proclamation stating that Sacco and Vanzetti had been unfairly tried and convicted and that 'any disgrace should be forever removed from their names.'

Fast was not alone in telling their story. There was a Broadway

play, a film and also great music on the subject, notably sung by Woody Guthrie (1912–1967) and later, Joan Baez (1941-). Among the more famous songs are Baez’ recital of the poem on the Statue of Liberty sung in a manner that brings out the pathos and irony of the immigrant. The other equally moving song is in the form of a letter written by Vanzetti to his son.

The painter Ben Shahn (1898-1969) produced in 1931-32, 23 paintings on the subject, the most famous being the monumental painting called, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*.

I have read a thousand-page book on the subject describing the legal battle. It is one of the classic human rights cases in history, and till today books and articles keep on appearing on the subject.

Actually, the concept of Passion keeps on reappearing. When we come across the fast of Irom Sharmila, which has been going on for 14 years now, or the incarceration of Dr. Binayak Sen, we are reminded of it. These are gentle people advocating peace and human rights. There have been and still are, a large number of people, poor people, middle class people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, poets, authors, painters and musicians who have been incarcerated and punished for their ideas. Again and again people are being jailed and punished for their thoughts and not for their actions. This is what human rights are all about - you cannot be punished for your thoughts, period!

If you are a Christian you will find that Christ is being resurrected every day - wherever there is some injustice and someone is protesting. If you are secular, you will find that wherever there is injustice, there is protest. Good people are born again and again in every age.

So, this is what the words Passion and Easter mean to me. It is about Jesus, who suffered and died for others. Who was punished and crucified for his thoughts and not for his actions. Who accepted his punishment with grace and forgave those who punished him because in his opinion they did not know what they were doing. It is also about courage – the quiet courage of conviction!

(Easter, 2014)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

T. Vijayendra (1943-) was born in Mysore, grew in Indore and went to IIT Kharagpur to get a B. Tech. in Electronics (1966). After a year's stint at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, he got drawn into the whirlwind times of the late 60s. Since then, he has always been some kind of political-social activist. Vijayendra has immense mobility – linguistic, regional, social classes and across disciplines. He covers politics, culture, socio-linguistics, health, education, environment and technology with equal ease. His brief for himself is the education of Left wing cadres and so he almost exclusively publishes in the Left wing journal *Frontier*, published from Kolkata. For the last six years, he has been active in the field of 'Peak Oil' and is a founder member of Peak Oil India. He divides his time between an organic farm at the foothills of Western Ghats, watching birds, writing fiction and Hyderabad.

Like those in his earlier book, *The Losers Shall Inherit the World*, these articles too were first published in *Frontier* and deal with current socio-economic-cultural issues of a diverse range of topics. These include, Sanskrit, Hinduism, Bhimsen Joshi, Education Manifesto, Euthanasia, Small States, Population, Cities, Peak Oil and the Politics of Non-Violence. There are also two small articles dealing with the Passion (Christ's suffering at the Cross) and the concept of Liberation.

'If a political activist can be defined as a person who is not only trying to promote the interests of his own particular group or class but trying, generally speaking, to create a better world, then she must first have a good understanding of the state of the present-day world. And then Vijayendra's article (Yugant in this book) is a must-read for her, because it is an excellent short introduction to the subject.'

Saral Sarkar, author of *Eco-Socialism*

You can read this book online or download a copy at www.peakoilindia.org