

TWO CONTRADICTIONS OF INDIA TODAY

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Does materialist dialectics exclude external causes? Not at all. It holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes.

—Mao Zedong, *On Contradiction* (1937).

Any given culture (as an ideological form) is a reflection of the politics and economics of a given society, and the former in turn has tremendous influence and effect upon the latter; economics is the base and politics the concentrated expression of economics.

—Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (1940).

Human beings do two basic activities, namely, propagation of the species and production of subsistence, at two sites respectively: family and factory. Families come to constitute a culture; factories an economy. A polity springs up to run them all. Polity is relatively flexible; economy much slower; culture the slowest. This speed differential causes friction in society, or makes a society regressive.

The practice of democracy has in a way become a celebration of the poor — to remain poor. The overall participation rate, i.e. the percentage of eligible voters who actually exercise their franchise by voting in election, has stabilized. The rate is higher in the case of so-called dalit and 'other backward classes' than the gentry. The former looks upon it as a celebration of power. But what is the end for the exercise of power?

Politics has a short span of time-horizon, no more than five years which is usually the term for all elections. During election a candidate is anxious primarily about winning this time. He mobilizes voters by practically all means, offering all conceivable promises to all extant factions in his constituency. He dares not touch any controversial issue lest it should alienate even a single voter.

What do the voters mostly ask for? Repair of a road here, a tube-well there, a bit of electricity in the lines hanging over there at least for a few hours. Expectation from politicians is an endangered species.

The net result is that long-term concerns of fundamental nature are left unattended. Politics has become a game to protect the status quo, for those who are in office to retain it, those who aspire to be elected to get a chance.

Indeed, democracy, like the market, may be an excellent manner of making relatively minor choices within an overall settled structure, but it cannot without circularity or absurdity be granted the capacity to choose between total social structures or value-systems. The inapplicability of the democratic model to major issues is not a technical, but a logical point. It is not that major issues are less well handled by this method; rather it simply makes no sense to think

of them so handled. Our culture gives us identity: so who exactly is to choose a culture, when there is yet no self, no identity, no vision or set of values, which would carry out the choice?

The entire course of Indian history shows tribal elements being fused into a general society. India's development was in its own way more 'civilized' than in other countries. The older cults and forms were not destroyed by force but assimilated. Superstition reduced the need for violence. This procedure enabled Indian society to be formed out of many diverse and discordant elements with the minimum use of violence. But the emphasis upon superstition meant an incredible proliferation of senseless ritual. The basis of a broad, general law on the principle of equality was lost; crime and sin stood hopelessly confused while juristic principles were drowned in an amazing mass of religious fable which offers ridiculous justification for any stupid observance.

1. *Contradiction A* : There was no universally valid ethic, but only a strict status compartmentalization of private and social ethic, disregarding the few absolute and general ritualistic prohibitions like the killing of cows. This was of great moment. The doctrine of *karma* deduced from the principle of compensation for previous deeds of the world, not only explained the caste organization but the rank ordering of divine, human and animal beings of all degrees. Hence it provided for the coexistence of different ethical codes of different groups which not only differed but were often in sharp conflict. This presented no problem. In principle there could be a vocational dharma for prostitutes, robbers, and thieves as well as for brahmans and kings. In fact, sincere attempts at drawing these extreme conclusions appeared.

Men were not, by contrast with the teaching of Confucianism or Christianity or Islam, in principle equal, but for ever unequal. They were as unlike as man and animal. It excluded for ever the rise of social criticism, of rationalistic speculation, and abstractions of natural law type, and hindered the development of any sort of idea of human rights. This social order had coalesced during the Maurya era (200 - 300 BC), consolidated by the Gupta period (AD 300-500) and continues intact till today by and large.

A ritual law in which every change of occupation, every change in work technique, may result in ritual degradation is certainly not capable of giving birth to economic and technical revolutions from within itself, or even of facilitating the first germination of capitalism in its midst. The ritual code explicitly prohibited the direct producers, namely, cultivators and artisans, from accumulating capital, and thereby blocked the 'really revolutionary', first path of transition from feudalism to capitalism. Furthermore, the Maurya domain had eliminated traders and merchants by force while later the Gupta Empire having self-contained villages allowed little space for them. So the second path of transition to capitalism too was practically gone. Subsequently, foreign rulers of India had acquiesced to it.

A major contradiction of India today is, therefore, the one between the economy and the prevailing culture. In this context recall that pre-1949 China in its struggle for the New Democracy had emphasized upon a new culture, together with a new economy and a new polity.

2. *Contradiction B* : The pathway to globalization was paved by the discoveries made by Columbus (1492) and Vasco da Gama (1498). The first steps towards globalization were taken in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries when the Spanish Empire reached to all corners of the world. Liberalization during the 19th century is often recognized as the 'first era of globalization', a period of rapid growth in international trade and investment; it began to break down on the eve of the First World War. Globalization in the period since World War II has been driven by advanced technology which has dramatically reduced costs of trade in goods and finance. International barriers are falling; the accompanying problems could not be solved by individual nation-states acting alone. Throughout ages India had been weak in technology owing to its culture of disdain toward manual labour and ritual determination of one's profession. As international maritime trade became quite profitable in the eighth century this country could not avail of the opportunity. Arabs brought their trade to the east, India and Indonesia in particular. Inefficient in shipping India failed to stand up to competition. Technological deficiency had concomitant administrative fallout: governorship of ports was often offered to Arab sailors therewith giving away a pivot of maritime trade. The current phase of globalization is driven by high technology of which India is particularly innocent. Thus its economy has been exposed to the onslaught by powerful foreign multinational corporations. On the other hand it depends upon the global market for technology and finance. Here is a case of unity of opposites: Indian economy and world capitalism are related to each other in both positive and negative ways. In short, imperialism (defined as an agency which siphons away profits from the country) constitutes the other contradiction with the economy of India.
3. *Principal Contradiction* : India's contradiction with imperialism is antagonistic in the sense that imperialism is now poised to overrun its economy within a short while. Therefore it is to be considered the principal contradiction. Materialist dialectics does not exclude external causes. External causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change. The former becomes operative through the latter. Here the weakness of India's economy is the internal cause of the contradiction. Therefore its deficiency has to be addressed immediately. Culture is a reflection of the economics of a given society; and in turn it has tremendous influence and effect upon the economy. By this logic, under the circumstances India calls for a cultural transformation amounting to the genre of a revolution. ❧❧❧