

Feudalism Political

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Europe had democracy as a byproduct of the rise of capitalism, India got those products other way around as capitalism had followed behind democracy, now both tittering. Tittering why? What can be done? England and France are the pioneers of European parliamentary democracy, their approaches were not the same, but instructive for India.

England, in the Middle Ages, was the largest and most important source of fine wool popular in markets across the continent particularly Italy and the Low Countries. It is the growth of trading towns where would begin the strong commercial impulse that was eventually to rule British society. The prime players in the countryside were upper landed-classes and the yeomen who look like the kulaks of nineteenth-century Russia, i.e. a class lying between the smaller gentry at the top and the less prosperous peasants at the bottom.

The continuing demand for wool trade added impetus to develop commercial and even capitalist attitude in the countryside that would erode the feudal framework. One of the most striking signs of the changed outlook was a boom in the land market that began in the sixteenth century heralding structural change in the conduct of agriculture—the most significant being the *Enclosures* of open arable fields by feudal lords and the yeomen who gained most in the wave of agricultural capitalism. The main victims were the ordinary peasants.

The commercially inclined elements among feudal lords and the yeomen were among the main forces opposing the King and royal attempts to preserve the old order. Growth of commerce in the towns had created the countryside market for agricultural products, thereby setting in motion of commercial and capitalist agriculture. The aristocratic order survived, 'but money counted more than birth was now its basis.' The British Parliament itself became the instrument of landed capitalists. Eventually, by the nineteenth century capitalism would establish the iconic parliamentary democracy in England.

France took another route, albeit reached equivalent political destination. In the place of destruction of peasant property as it was in England, French peasants would consolidate their property both before and after the Revolution. Commerce and manufacturing in France lagged behind that in England for two centuries, fifteenth and sixteenth. Yet both countries achieved similarity in the final political outcome during the next two centuries. Without the French Revolution this convergence might not have taken place.

France in the Middle Ages was a feudal society with a powerful monarchy. The nobility lived on the farmers. Introduced in 1627, the seigniorial system was a semi-feudal form of noble privilege in France and its colonies. Land was arranged in long strips, each strip belonged to a lord, the *seigneur*. The lord divided the land further among his tenants who cleared the land, built houses and other buildings, and farmed the land. The toilers paid a chunk of crop, and were required to work for their lord, often building roads. The impetus toward commercial agriculture was weak in France, market areas did not extend beyond the vicinity of a few cities and certain export depots on frontier. Wine was to French agriculture what wool was to British agriculture. A long depression in wine trade was behind the generally backward state of the French economy and of the outbreak of the Revolution.

The aristocracy kept the peasant on the land and used feudal levies to extract more produce. Cultural and legal obstacles stood in the way of aristocracy to engage in

commerce, any nobleman who engaged in a demeaning occupation lost his noble status. The monarchy wanted prosperous nobility as a decorative adjunct to the crown and help in keeping the people in their proper place. It did not want the nobility to establish an independent economic base that could enable it to challenge royal power.

Under the conditions of royal absolutism the landed upper classes adapted to the gradual intrusion of capitalism by putting great pressure on the peasants. Up into the middle of the eighteenth century modernization of the society took place through the crown. As part of this process, there grew up a fusion between nobility and bourgeoisie. The crown's power was severely limited, the collapse of order and the monarchy opened the door for the bourgeoisie to rise toward power and the peasants to dismount the seigniorial system. The French Revolution did not succeed in establishing complete liberty. Nevertheless, the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens remains a landmark in the development of parliamentary democracy in Europe.

Peasants were driven out of their farms by the enclosure movement in England. The French peasants did not have to suffer that humiliation. They had launched a series of revolts that culminated in dismantling the feudal autocracy in the light of the Revolution. In the matter of economic achievement England and France came to be at equal level.

FESTIVAL OF FEUDALISM

Should one care about the all pervasive feudalism of India's variety may read this : On 11 January 2011, *Times of India* reported, 'Congress general secretary ...whose father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all prime ministers, told Banaras Hindu University (BHU) students on Monday that political dynasties are important in India.' A legislator is a rational being. Morality comes in two pieces : family morality, and social morality. Family morality is ingrained in people's bones since time immemorial when the first family hurdled into a cave. Social morality is brand new, barely three or four centuries old. Family morality enjoins filial obligation and compassion, a sentiment that easily spills over to other relatives. The rate of return of political investment is greater than that in other business. A conscientious person as he is, the legislator therefore naturally gravitates toward building a political dynasty on his own yard.

Once a person is elected as a people's representative lawmaker or even a justice-deliveryman, doors open up for unlimited possibilities across multiple spheres of activities like milk business, housing contract, social service, share market, and so on, for his relatives to enjoy; and millions of hidden dollars is not impossible within no time as evidence suggests. And his son or daughter would replace him in time. This is the social 'relativity theory' in India.

The democratic polity would have islands of political dynasties of various sizes, shapes and colours floating in an ocean of voters. The other two branched of the existence—society and economy—have their own dynasties. The country thus ends up with three components—social, economic, and political—each under respective dynastic rules. The three ruling classes install their predetermined agenda all over the polity, that is, government, legislature, and judiciary. No problem now to capture strips of farmland. No hesitation to dig up villages in distant forest or mountain areas for illegal mining or felling precious trees. This is Political Feudalism.

In a country with a weak economy, having political power could be a lucrative instrument for one's self-propagation. Politics draws ample leaders to forge parties, innumerable candidates to contest in election, countless cadres to join the ranks of foot-soldiers. Thus a mammoth political industry takes shape. A party conducts its own particular agenda, often regardless of the nation's consideration. Tyranny of the parties descends on the people; the individual is reduced to a mindless cog in wheels of political machinery.

Leaders of political parties come from the upper middleclass, gentry, aristocracy, lords, barons, and their close associates. By dint of their own effort, education, merit or intelligence they have achieved impressive fortune. And the society has been slit into two parts: the achievers on the one side and the left-behind underclass on the other. India now faces a historical dilemma.

Although the cultural glories of Athens in ancient Greece were real, the more the autocrats boasted of their own grandeur the less respect did they show to the women and the slaves; the social divide between the two widened. In China, likewise, the Confucian glorification of literary scholarship degraded those who could not afford it owing to poverty, that is, the peasantry. A parallel division happened in India. Buddhism which was a revolt against priest-craft and ritualism and against the dishonour of any human being, unconsciously led to the humiliation of vast numbers of toilers of the soil. It would be wrong to make Buddhism responsible for this, for it had no such effect elsewhere. There was something in the caste system of India which took it in that direction. One's unilateral progress and neglect of the 'other' in society breeds the other's frustration and accelerates the one's arrogance. Sectarian gratification causes social imbalance; it sets in motion a vicious circle. India today faces such peril.

DEMOCRACY AND INDIA

Democracy entails a government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. It is a government of the people, by the people, for the people. The prevailing theoretical ground of democracy had been derived from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1785) composed at the closing hours of the Enlightenment (1689-1789) in Europe. Its logic is as follows : Individual has a fundamental faculty of *reason*, by virtue of which by itself he becomes a *rational* being, and hence he has *freedom, autonomy, and free will*. Society comprises of a plurality of individuals, each with his aims, interests, and conceptions. All persons, having been endowed with the faculty of reason, are equally entitled and capable to accomplish their objectives. This is the essence of Kantian theory of democracy.

The theory of Kant is laid out in terms of *one* person with one *mind*. Kant simply did not face the problem of the relationship among the many independent minds that populate the world. He wrote either in the first person, or else in an impersonal style which abstracts from the distinction among different particular selves. He skirts the problem of *many minds* (Wolff, 1967).

The practical democracy in the mid-nineteenth century nonetheless had been inspired by the philosophy of Kant. The concerned countries of Europe at that point of time were of course homogeneous with respective ethnicity, language, and religion after the Peace Treaty of Westphalia. The economy encouraged by industrial revolution was immensely productive. In this social and economic conjunction individuals were indeed fairly equal, and Kantian democracy found a fertile soil to flourish. But the social landscape of India is markedly diverse, hence incapable to obey the dictums of nineteenth-century European democracy. Here the 'untouchable' dalits, the ignored tribals, underprivileged minorities who constitute more than one-half of the country's citizens are discriminated and deprived of scope for advancement.

The French Revolution was arguably a bourgeois revolution against feudal authority and sensitive to the cause of peasantry. The bourgeoisie had been revolutionary; it had long been able to assimilate intellectuals to its revolution and to keep them as a whole at its sides after the seizure and consolidation of power. French intellectuals accepted this situation and were hardly inclined toward the working class. And when they did rally to the working class,

they could not radically cast off the bourgeois ideology in which they were drilled. The forms of bourgeois domination continued for long in the workers' movements (Althusser, 1965:25).

Likewise, the political intellectuals of India imbued as they were in the format of Independence movements have little to offer to one-half of the citizens, that is, the underclass consisting of dalits, tribals, and underprivileged minorities. The feudal *Raj* not only survived, it spread all over the place throughout society, economy, and polity with enthusiasm. The 'relativity theory' presented above has come into action, in response the underclass has waken up with vengeance just as its counterpart of ancient Greece had done.

The politicians have committed to memory the slogan of French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. It is the 'liberty' part that they utilize or misuse the most at party's service. The 'equality' part is left rotting in cold storage.

'Without the creative minority a [society] must inevitably decay. But it may also decay if the bond between a creative minority and the majority is broken and there is a loss of social unity in society as a whole, and ultimately that minority itself loses its creativity and becomes barren and sterile; or else it gives place to another creative or *vital force* which society throws up' (Nehru 1946: 94, italics added). The loss of social unity as a whole is blatantly visible in India. The creative minority has lost its creativeness and become barren and sterile. Maybe the time for the society to throw up a new 'vital force' has come. Could that powerful force emerge from the country's underclass - with its fresh mind, open heart, and the experience of history across the millennia?

By the laws of history, 'the group which plays the leading role in the advancement of [society] in one period is unlikely to play a similar role in the next period. [Because] it will be too deeply imbued with traditions, interests and ideology of the earlier period to be able to adapt itself to the demands and conditions of the next period' (Carr 1961: 154). Fine. But how does the newly competent group manifest itself?

'The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill [brings you] society with the industrial capitalist' (Marx 1846-47: 166). 'Slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny; serfdom cannot be abolished without *improved agriculture*' (Marx and Engels 1845-46: 56, italics added). This suggests the correct path to remove Indian deficiency.

India must have improved agriculture, dynamic industry, creative intelligentsia, and above all social unity. Production needs land, labour, and capital. The country has land and river awaiting scientific utilization. Labour is at the center in the matter of production. Given the Himalayan blunders committed so far, the society—industry and the government in particular—should assume the responsibility : it must bear the cost of *full* and *free* facility for sustenance, healthcare, education, and training of all children of every needy family without exception. A *vital force* might arise from among them for the advancement of society. In the process society, government, industry, agriculture all would be self-awarded with commendable prize. □□□

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