

Mao beyond Maoism

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MAOISTS HERE, AND elsewhere, never quote a single line these days, from Maoist literature, whatever splinter group of Maoism they may belong to. It may be due to state-run violence they are subjected to or may be a tactical position they have taken to let the people know that they belong to them as opposed to the violence and atrocity unleashed by the financial-industrial oligarchies that run many an upcoming developing projects with the state behind them. A vast tract of the country, rich in jungles, with enviable possession of some of the richest deposits of iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, manganese, uranium, coal etc. along with rich bio-diversity are being subjected to continuous exploitation, eradication of the tribal masses and polluting the central heartland of the country so that the rich bio-diversity and the accumulated inheritance and knowledge of the tribes are destroyed once for all for the indigenous and foreign corporates' greed for money and power. And it is believed by the civil society and many an intellectual that the Maoists are carrying the battles of the tribals and dalits into a full scale war against the state and financial oligarchy- run violence, to stop the violence once for all and to build up a course of 'development' not pressurized from up but grown from below by the people and for the people. It is in this context that the interview given by Alain Roux to the *L'humanite* about the survival of Mao Zedong beyond Maoism bears a special significance.

Alain Roux, the historian, is now, Professor Emeritus at the INALCO (National Institute of Oriental Languages And Civilisation). He has written a no. of research-oriented books on China, and Mao Zedong such as 'The Monkey and the Tiger : Mao, a Chinese Destiny', 'China in the 20th Century', 'The Chinese Puzzle updated as People's China' etc. As he himself has claimed, initially he was not a historian of Mao or for that matter, Maoism. He was a researcher of the Chinese labour Movement. During his study he was pulled into the vortex and the puzzle that Mao was. To Alain Roux Mao Zedong was a historical figure as also an enigma and during Roux's search for materials about the Chinese labour he had to study that enigma which gave birth to the modern China with all its crises, annihilation, subjugation of its own people but keeping in mind forever that an egalitarian society is to be built with 3000 years of tradition and knowledge mingled with modern day techniques.

Questioned about how he saw Mao as a Nationalist or a Socialist and how such a historical figure was constructed Prof Roux says that "Mao was a patriot, and his first commitment was nationalist. This is due particularly to the humiliation that China experienced in the 19th century." Was he a socialist? "...In Chinese, the very word is not clear. It is rather closer to the term 'sociology'. For Mao, socialism is related to government control. It consists of a party-cum-state responsible for modernizing the country from the above".

According to Roux's findings the dichotomy in Mao could be observed in his thought process regarding Government control vis-à-vis his ideas about establishment of a society based on an egalitarian world system 'devoid of social classes, races or nations, whose foundation lay on the principles of the 'Great Harmony' of the Chinese tradition.

“Mao gave the impression that he wanted a less unjust, more egalitarian China” and Roux thinks that it was more of a populist slogan than a theoretical framework of future development. Roux, as a researcher and a historian of the Chinese labour movement also finds that Mao had, unlike his brethren in the European Communist Movement, much less confidence in the working class. He led many strikes in the Hunan province in the year 1922 of the workers. “He told a representative of the Communist International passing through his province that he thought that the working class was not very combative, corporate (having a craft mentality) and structured by secret societies.” He then started looking for other social forces (not classes or sub classes—the present writer) capable of starting the revolution and in 1925 he found such force in the peasantry. “During the winter of 1926-27, he discovered and raised to the skies the strength of the peasant movement in the Hunan province” says Prof Roux.

Asked about whether Mao became a ‘Maoist’ at that point of time, Prof. Alain Roux replied succinctly that at first Mao was not a Marxist theoretician, rather he was a theoretician of Guerilla Warfare and found and exploited a relationship with war and politics. In this he coalesced the Art of War by Sun Zi, written five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ and Clausewitz and perfected its form to suit his particular battles. And then Mao was lucky too because at that time he was sidelined by the leadership of the CCP. Otherwise he had also to bear the burnt of the defeat of the Soviet Republic of Jianxi in 1934 when the party hierarchy had to face the reality. Mao, as a great man of destiny grabbed the opportunity and in 1935 propounded his idea of and action for the *Long March*. Initially, what was a way of escape the deadly encirclement became, under his leadership, an anti-Japanese offensive and also proved to the Chinese people and party leadership that he was the ablest and tallest of all of them. It was at this time in history, that is, from 1935 onwards Mao felt the need to be a theoretician and that too on the Marxist line.

“He then established himself as the man who could adapt Marxism to Chinese reality” as did Lenin in the Russian context. One may argue about his contribution to the Marxian Theory ‘however fragile’ that might have been. But one cannot doubt the significance of the thought that country-specific adaptation of Marxism according to the historical reality of the time was an innovative one. “...the Chinese communists do not use the expression Maoism” but they raised the ‘Thought’ as Mao himself called it, to the level of Leninism. “In 1945, following a tough campaign to bring the whole CCP into line with his views”, Mao Zedong, “made his Thought the theoretical basis on which the growing power of the Communists rests.”

Mao developed his ideas of uninterrupted revolution and conceptualized his own world. He believed that the “the world is made up of an infinity of contradictions which can never result in stability”. He started a somewhat metaphysical culture of Class struggle and where there was no apparent contradiction he started building up such contradictions by doubting and questioning each and every forces that were allies to and working for his Thoughts. This was, in part, a result of the, as he saw it, continuous bureaucratization of the party in the Soviet Union. And from 1955 itself (remember the 20th CPSU Congress was held in 1956- present writer) he started questioning and fighting the Soviet Party’s line. Mao was “obsessed by the danger of the restoration of capitalism.” But the paradox is that what people see today in Russia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in China itself that a ‘good part of the bourgeoisie that is forming has its base in the party apparatus. Mao countered this bureaucratization with the enthusiasm and the mobilization of the popular forces.’ In his letter of 8th July, 1966 to

his wife Jiang Qing, just before unleashing the Cultural Revolution “he explained that he intended a big shake-up inside the party and throughout the nation.” He did not fear that his power was threatened in any way but he, in actuality ‘was’ in a great fear that his successors would fall into the same errors as the Soviet revisionists. “He was going to show his strength, to play the ‘tiger’ but also would be cunning, playing the ‘monkey’ : his errors in the Great Leap Forward furnished him with arms against the very people who aroused his ire for having tried to limit damage. Roughly every ten years, the masses had to let against the party cadres to put him to the test and to prevent the ossification of revolutionary elan.”

Alain Roux believes that to gauge the depth of the changes that are taking place in today’s China after Mao and Den Xiaoping mere probity in the iconoclastic image and personality cult of Mao would not be enough. One has to look into the reality of one party dictatorship which when required, though speaks of a new type of democracy when thwarted in any way does not think twice before threatening even their own intellectuals and own forces. And that brings the police state into being, a kind of bureaucratic socialism is built which is run actually by the indigenous and foreign oligarchs. And here enters the apparition of Mao which has transcended Maoism but looms large the fear Mao Zedong often thought of and tried to purge the party apparatus and the appertichiks.

What is needed is to find out new paths and break new grounds to unleash the allies of the revolutionary forces for building up socialism. What it boils down to is that old type of Marxism is no more applicable and keeping intact its basic tenets newer discoveries are to be made to suit the needs of the particular country to fight the aggression of the forces of globalization and financial-industrial oligarchies and denouncing one force or the other as social pariahs need to be looked into with deeper understanding and insight into the social polity and without mere slogan-mongering. □□□