

Intellectuals and the Buddhijibee

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...the educator himself needs educating... Karl Marx

All intellectuals are not buddhijibi, nor are all buddhijibeas intellectual. Intellect (the power of thought and reasoning) varies from person to person. *Buddhi* (the power to feel and to decide) does likewise, but in its own way. Intellect and *buddhi* are not always related. A buddhijibee might become an intellectual if he uses thought and reasoning in favour of a valid cause of the society.

'All men are', pundits say, 'philosophers.' And all are potentially intellectuals, as they have an intellect that they are using. But not all are intellectuals by social function.

Intellectuals in the functional sense fall in two groups. To begin with, there are the traditional *professional* intellectuals such as literary, artistic, or scientific. Besides, there are organic intellectuals, the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.

WHAT ARE THEY?

Under the banner 'Buddhijibee', a group of intellectuals protested in Kolkata against the use of farmland for industry. In England an eminent historian, Eric Hobsbaum, has opined in writing : 'The industrial policy, taking land away from the peasants [in West Bengal] ... was clearly a mistake.'

One can, however, contradict the views of Hobsbaum and of the Kolkata intellectuals. It can be shown that under certain conditions converting cultivated land for industrial projects might well be prudent, provided the peasants are compensated to the full extent for their reasonable *felt* loss. Take cognizance that from his plot of land a poor peasant derives, not one or two, but as many as four kinds of use-value, viz. (a) the assured employment opportunity for his family members : (b) income from crop by way of accrued profit and rent, over and above the virtual wages; (c) a sense of family security; and (d) social esteem accorded to a landowner, however miniscule, as opposed to the customary derision thrown at a landless farm labourer.¹ The land acquisition method of the West Bengal government was faulty, no doubt; but the government's programme for industry was not at all a "mistake", but a praiseworthy endeavor.

Could the intellectuals, e.g. the Kolkata buddhijibeas, make a contribution to this momentous question of industrialization in West Bengal? But, who are the intellectuals, anyway? What are they?

The search for a unitary criterion to characterize equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals is an effort in vain. It is a worse error to identify the social distinction of intellectuals in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities.

To be sure, the real uniqueness of the nature of intellectual activities is in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the

intellectual groups who personify them) have their place in the general complex of social relations. The worker or proletarian, for example, is not specially characterized in terms of his manual work, but by performing his work in specific conditions and in specific social landscape. In any physical work, even the most degraded, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual commitment.

There are varying degrees of specific intellectual activities. There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual input can be excluded. Man the maker (or tool bearer) cannot be separated from Man the thinker : Marx and Descartes both are correct. Each man, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity: he is a philosopher, an artist; he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and thereby contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thinking.²

THE SPECIFIC INTELLECTUAL

The enormous development of activity and organization of industry and education has induced expansion of intellectual functions and categories. The intellectuality of each individual has deepened and broadened. There has also been an attempt to multiply and narrow the various specializations. Specialization is the trend nowadays.

As scientific thinkers people activate a limited amount of their mental power. They use what is needed for their profession, their trade, or the particular situation in which they are involved at the moment. A large part of their intellect remains unattended and idle.³ Trained in a specific field of education and practice, an individual remains specialized in a limited skill appropriate for a certain job all his life. Such specialization constricts his conceptual horizon.

The great struggles of the 18th century, the time of Enlightenment in Europe, were fought over law, right, and the constitution—which can and must apply *universally*. For a long period the 'left' intellectuals spoke in the capacity of master of truth and justice. To be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/conscience of all. The intellectual, through his moral, theoretical, and political choice, aspired to be the bearer of this universality in its conscious, elaborated form. He was thus taken as the clear, individual figure of universality whose collective form is embodied in the proletariat.

As science and technology advanced, in the 20th century a new mode of the 'connection between theory and practice' was established. Now individuals have become used to working not in the modality of 'universal', but within specific sectors, at their precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them. They met here with problems that are *specific*, 'non-universal,' and often different from those of the proletariat or the masses.

If the 'universal' intellectual of the previous era derived from the man of law, the man of justice, the 'specific' intellectual of the 20th century derived from quite another figure, not the jurist or the notable, but the savant and expert. Alongside the development of techno-scientific structures in contemporary society the specific intellectual gained importance. Unlike his other counterpart, the specific intellectual does not bear the moral values for all, nor does he oppose

the unjust sovereign or his ministers. Rather he has at his disposal local power that can benefit or destroy life.⁴

The Renaissance conceived of man as 'the point of unity for all that has been thought and done by man'⁵, as the receptacle of his universal knowledge (in short, *u-knowledge*). An individual acquires but a portion of the u-knowledge (call it *i-knowledge*). The ratio between i-knowledge and u-knowledge is not uniform across all individuals. It is possible that each person knows only a part of the truth. Diversity of opinion among people is natural and advantageous to mankind. Popular opinions, on subjects, not palpable to sense, are often true, but seldom or never the whole truth. They are a part of the truth. 'It is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.'⁶ That is to say, intellectuals ought to be tolerant and attentive to each other and listen to people's voice.

THAT IS TO SAY

Sita is the daughter of King Janaka in epic *Ramayana* : she had emerged from the womb of Earth by divine blessing for the king's virtuousness. He was a connoisseur of plowing farmland. Confronted with the test of passing through the ceremonial fire to prove her chastity for husband Ram, Sita prayed to mother Earth: "Return me to your lap of land." Krishna, the incarnate of Visnu in epic *Mahabharata*, was born in a peasant family; his brother Balaram carried an image of plow. The sacred Veda was composed by sages in hermitages at forest. India's psyche looks at forest, land, and farmers with an aura of respectful awe.

The children of peasantry in India are no longer interested in a miniscule plot to cultivate. They go to school, college, university; they aspire to be doctor, philosopher, accountant, poet, musician, scientist, pilot; they read Shakespeare, Voltaire, Orhan Pamuk. With friends like some Kolkata-buddhijibes who are bent on pushing them back to the dark age, the offsprings of farmers do not need enemy.

The forest-dwelling 'manus' (human beings), in India officially recorded as tribals, have now come out from the confinement of the proverbial *cave* that Plato narrated in his philosophy. They have seen the light of day; they claim their rightful place in the comity of world civilization. If the self-styled buddhiji-bees wish to lull the tribals with the bait of mere *aranyer adhikar* (rights to forest property), their project will remain a day-dream. The 'barbarian' tribals of ancient German forests brought down the Roman Empire not to procure pieces of wood.

References :

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