

LETTERS

Vinayak Purohit

Dr Vinayak Purohit (1927-2009), the veteran Indian Socialist intellectual, died last December. In 1956 Vinayak joined the new, militant Socialist Party that Dr Ram Manohar Lohia launched to revitalize the movement. In 1962 Vinayak played a key role in bringing a historic motion of no confidence in the Nehru government to the vote in Parliament. After Lohia died in 1967, his Socialist Party disintegrated, leaving Vinayak adrift. He became an independent political journalist, well known for his biting attacks on just about every politician and party.

But Vinayak Purohit was not a man who lived by politics alone. He steeped himself in the rich culture of India. He became a music, drama, art, architecture, and film critic. In mid-life he earned a PhD in art history. He also wrote plays, made a film, and designed an immense architectural monument, the *Gitai Mandir* in Wardha. He wrote fluently in English, Gujarati, Hindi, and Marathi.

Having "moved through Marxism and Trotskyism," as he put it, he evolved his own very nationalistic brand of what he called "revolutionary democratic-socialism."

In 2005 Vinayak published, in pamphlet format, the first chapter of what he envisioned to be an open-ended autobiography, which he aptly titled "A Life of Surfeit and Overflow." He published two more chapters in 2006 and 2008. He died while preparing the fourth.

He presented a series of papers at the annual sessions of the Indian History Congress from 1979 to 1982. These were provocative broadsides aimed at just about every school of thought—from the old British Imperial historians to the so-called Marxists (the Stalinists).

He started by attacking Marx and his thesis of the "Asiatic Mode of Production." Marx had recognized (in this writer's opinion, correctly) that pre-colonial Indian society seemed to have little in common with the chaotic feudalism of Europe. In order to explain the relative stability of "Asiatic society," he posited that these societies must have been based on self-sufficient villages where private property in land (and hence class differentiation and struggle) hadn't developed. Citing a huge body of historical evidence to the contrary, Vinayak argued that this hypothesis isn't tenable.

Vinayak developed this seminal insight in the next three papers he presented to the Indian History Congress. In brief, he argued that India had evolved from a hunting-fishing-food-gathering society to a pastoral society in the period 7000BC to 4500BC; that the pastoral (or Vedic) society developed into a feudal society by 700BC; and that this feudal society went through four distinct stages prior to the arrival of the European colonialists.

"We had a feudal period which extended over 2,500 years. Indian feudalism was the most prosperous, the richest in export surpluses, and the most powerful that the world had ever known. It was precisely because it was so overwhelmingly strong that capitalism could not win against such an adversary. Capitalism triumphed in Europe from the 11th century onwards precisely because European feudalism was petty, divided, weak and poverty-stricken. The International Feudal Chain broke at its weakest link in Europe!" (*Mankind*, May 1999).

On the basis of this line of thinking, Vinayak rejected Marxism as hopelessly Eurocentric. No doubt his theory is intriguing and deserves further study.

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Extra-Judicial Killings

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) considers the raid and alleged recovery of "banned literature" and correspondence from Babita Pandey's rented accommodation in New Delhi by the Andhra Pradesh State Intelligence Bureau (APSIB) to be an attempt at

justifying the cold blooded killing of her husband Hem Chandra Pandey and Cherukuri Rajkumar @ Azad. By showing him to be a member of the banned organization, the APSIB and its political bosses want to suggest that Hem Chandra Pandey's alleged membership of a banned organization somehow justifies his execution.

PUDR wishes to draw attention to the fact that investigations by the civil liberties groups as well as by the media have documented credible evidence which shows that the two deceased were picked up and annihilated. The so-called forensic report put out by APSIB has not been able to refute the fact that Azad and Hem C Pandey were shot from close range and that entry and exit wounds on the deceased as well as the trajectory of the bullet entering from top and exiting lower down is impossible if the two deceased were on top of the hill and the AP police force fired from below. Instead of ordering a judicial inquiry the authorities are letting APSIB divert attention from a heinous crime to show that Hem Chandra Pandey was a member of the CPI(Maoist). As though membership of a banned organization justified extra-judicial execution of Hem Chandra Pandey and Azad.

It is a documented fact Hem Chandra Pandey earned his livelihood as a journalist. Whether he was or he was not a member of a banned organization is inconsequential. Because the Indian Constitution nowhere allows execution of a person who is, or is suspected to be, member of a banned organization. Unlawful Activities Prevention Act nowhere says that punishment for being member of a banned organization is summary killing.

Moreover, it is an absurdity that by summarily proscribing an organization, the authorities criminalize what is in reality, and under Indian Constitution, legitimate activities and expression. The incongruity of banning CPI(Maoist) and persecuting those said to be its members, becomes evident also from the fact that Hindutva terrorists remain scot free. RSS is allowed to preach divisive and venomous politics, propagate filth as so eloquently brought out by the former Sanghsanchalak Suder-shan, and carry out acts of murderous violence against civilians. What is urgently needed is a high powered judicial inquiry into the 'encounter' which took place on July 2, 2010.

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(Secretaries, PUDR)