

**Recognition or Redistribution?  
Dynamics of the National Question:  
A Preliminary Exploration**

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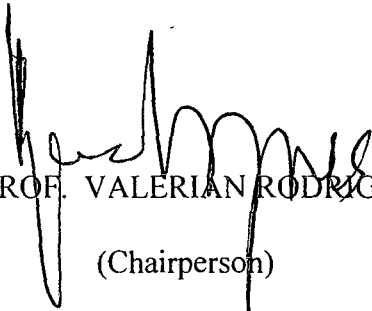
### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Recognition or Redistribution? Dynamics of the National Question in India: A Preliminary Exploration**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** has not been previously submitted, in part or full, for any other degree of this or any other university.

  
(CAESAR BASU)

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## **Preface**

Modernity generally, and Marxism in particular, is often understood to be myopic about difference. It is perceived to be not sensitive enough about issues of culture. Keeping this perspective in mind, we attempt a preliminary exploration of the Marxist discourse on the nation and its concrete handling in communist practice in India.

Professor Valerian Rodrigues has been a source of intellectual stimulation. Discussions with him provoked the interest in the issues I have tried to deal with in this work. To Professor Gopal Guru, I owe special thanks for his encouragement and for the many enjoyable and thought-provoking discussions we have had in the last few years. The courses offered by Professor Gurpreet Mahajan gave a new orientation to my intellectual interests that get partially reflected in this work. The Centre for Political Studies has been a home away from home.

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## Introduction

The “politics of recognition” is emerging as the hegemonic grammar of politics in recent years. Drawing inspiration from Foucault, Derrida and Said, to name just a few, who have explored the interrelationship of knowledge, culture and power, this politics has alerted us to the claims of spurious universality; if cultural issues are not foregrounded, more often than not, there is a tendency of the particular masquerading as the universal. The conceptions of citizenship that operates on the basis of the unencumbered self and notions of formal equality is deeply homogenizing and undermines the self that is socially and culturally constituted. Public neutrality, that is one of the cornerstones of liberal modernity, leads to the culture of the dominant social categories to become hegemonic.

But this politics is often leading to the displacement of redistributive concerns in a rapidly globalizing world, where economic exploitation, marginalization, deprivation and inequality are growing by leaps and bounds, both socially and regionally. Moreover, exclusive focus on identity issues, leads to the ‘reification of identities’. As a reaction to vulgar economism, the ‘identity model’ of recognition, often slips into vulgar culturalism. The nub of the problem is often seen as free floating discourses, instead of institutionalized significations and norms. The problem of class gets reduced to a problem of cultural devaluation of proletarian identity. Paradoxically, the dialogical character of identity ends up valorising monologism.

To overcome the shortcomings of the ‘identity model’ of recognition, Nancy Fraser, drawing inspiration from Weberian notions of status and class, has worked ‘a status model’ of recognition that she claims, can meaningfully combine the cultural politics of difference and social politics of equality, to advance the cause of meta-political democracy, where participatory party would be actualised. The project is laudable as the different paradigms of justice rarely communicate. Communitarians, multi-culturalists, generally focus of the recognition of the cultural belongings of the people and cultural

difference. Egalitarian theorists focus on distributive aspects and deliberative democrats theorise on the basis of a conception of the autonomy of the political. The point of invoking Fraser, however, is not to stick to her, faithfully, but use her elegant conceptual framework, that attempts to bring together the multiple axis of injustice, namely misrecognition, maldistribution and misrepresentation, that more often than not intersect in the real world, as a vantage point to assess and enrich emancipatory politics.

We take up one of the most potent identities in the modern age, nationality, a bivalent social collectivity according to Fraser, or trivalent, as she later argues, incorporating the political dimension. The philosophical treatment of national identity and nationalism is closely related to the general critique of status hierarchies. The debates have revolved round the issues of creation of a common national identity and the national self-determination project. The philosophical debate about the value of national identity, the legitimate forms of nation-building — whether and how the state can create a unified body politic, without demeaning or discriminating against people from different ethnic and religious communities, within the community — and the project of collective self-determination, tied to which are the questions of ethics of secession, have engaged attention. Nationalists, these days, rarely argue that the nation is natural, or organic or primordial; their claims are framed in the language of identity. But nations are not just about culture but embody political economies that are intimately connected with the uneven development of capitalism. Keeping this perspective in mind, we take up the issue of nationalism and the ‘national question’, as the Marxists call it, and explore, whether and how, in spite of their pronounced political economy orientation, attempts were made to address the issues of recognition and redistribution and resolve it through the actualization of political democracy. This serves as an entry-point to the Marxist understanding of the culture-economy interface and the attitude towards cultural identity and difference.

The work, though, is not an exercise in Marxist theory. We don’t problematise the concept of justice, but employ it, as articulated by Fraser, to evaluate, and if possible to give directions to enrich emancipatory politics. The concept of justice, itself can be a

deeply problematic concept in the Marxist scheme of things. A reading of Marx is possible that he is fundamentally a critic of normative political theory and the ideas of justice, rights, morality, for him, are basically epiphenomenal, articulation of the correlation of social forces in a given society. It is ineffectual to fine tune a theory of justice, and it is far more important to unravel the inner contradictions of the economic structure of society, in his case, the workings of the capitalist economy as it has historically evolved in western Europe, to identify the historical tendencies latent in it. Allen Wood has suggested that Marx advocates the revolutionary transformation of capitalism not on the basis of a theory of justice but on the grounds of self-actualisation, security, physical health and freedom.<sup>1</sup> G. Brenkert, disagreeing with Wood, argues that ‘the moral perspective’ from which Marx condemned capitalism is not based on justice but on freedom.<sup>2</sup> Alternative readings have been suggested by Husami who argues that Marx did have a distributive notion of justice.<sup>3</sup>

What we attempt to do, is give a broad overview of the Marxist discourse on the national question, as it gives us a concrete case of handling the culture-economy interface. The Marxist engagement with the nation and nationalism produced a rich and varied discourse, with the emphasis varying from economy, culture to politics, or a combination of the three, in different theorists. The history-of-ideas approach has its problems as Foucault has alerted us.<sup>4</sup> Its themes are genesis, continuity and totalisation, it credits the discourse that it analyses with coherence. Instead he directs us to the study of discontinuities and ruptures. Above all, for him, “contradictions are neither appearances to be overcome, nor secret principles to be uncovered...”<sup>5</sup> We do not use Marxism as a grid through which to read off a simple ideological phenomena, but to explore the relation between the two and the nature of the engagement. We map the tectonic shifts, as Marxism moved out of its West European location of an industrial economy and had to grapple with both the “agrarian question” and the “national question”. Interestingly, one of the supreme ironies of the twentieth century was that nationalism’s principal opponent,

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Wood, 1981. *Karl Marx*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>2</sup> G.G. Brenert. 1983. *Marx’s Ethics of Freedom*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>3</sup> Z.I. Husami. 1978. “Marx on Distributive Justice”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol.8, no.1.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault. 1972. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

namely Marxism, has been empowered by its alliances with nationalism and responsible for creating the conditions for the development of nations in the Second and Third Worlds.

After an initial sketch of the international Marxist discussion on nation and nationalism, we get down to the concrete Marxist practise in India of handling issues of cultural belonging and cultural diversity and their conceptualisation of the Indian nation. The objective of the study is to explore how the issue of recognition and redistribution and their interrelationship has been handled in communist practice in India, over the years. We make a general survey of the communist positions on the national question in India, a country of continental dimensions with mind boggling cultural diversities, that raised the hope of addressing and striking a balance between recognition and redistribution concerns, simultaneously. They argued the substantive issue of the national question was the peasant question. At the same time, their conceptualisation of India, as a multinational state marked a departure from the hegemony of the nationalist discourse and created space for the accommodation of recognition claims. Not treating unity and diversity as two antipodal concepts, they tried to work out a notion of differentiated nationalism, arguing that the affirmation of difference creates the basis for national integrity. We focus our attention on two moments, their position regarding Pakistan movement and the issue of linguistic identity and explore the nature of the thick engagement with the issues of cultural belonging and cultural difference by referring to the party documents and statements of the important party leaders.

In their conceptualisation, India was not a single nation, but constituted of seventeen different nationalities, who they argued ought to have the right to self determination, including the right to secession and hence the right to have seventeen constituent assemblies. It was only on the basis of acceptance of the distinct national identity of each of these groups that a voluntary union, as opposed to the coercive unity of the colonial period was possible, and desirable. This marked a departure from the imaginings of the nationalist elite, who took the culturally homogenous West European nation – state as the role model. Raising the vision of a ‘coming together’ rather than a



'holding – together' federation, it was opposed to the two conflicting concepts of India: one, a united Indian state like England, France, Australia etc. championed by the Congress, the Liberals, the Hindu Mahasabha; and the other, the concept of Hindus and Muslims being two nations advocated by the Muslim League. The party took the position that the communal problem could be handled through a national solution. The Pakistan movement was seen in the light of the right to self-determination of Muslim nationalities and granting of the right was argued to be the best guarantee of overcoming their sense of anxiety about Hindu dominance in post-independence India. We explore the intense inner party debate over the issue with changing party lines and map out the shifts in the party's positions on the national question over the years. Though the discourse of right to self – determination, including the right to secession, fell into disuse over the years, the conceptualisation of India as a multinational state, where the major language groups, are defined as distinct national groups, remained and we find a consistent championing of the self governance rights of these national groups and a firm commitment to the equality of their language rights.

## **Chapter: 1**

### **Recognition or Redistribution? Marxism and the National question**

#### **I**

In recent years, culture has emerged as a major terrain of contestation. The rise of identity politics, based on nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality has reshaped the public sphere and the terms of political discourse. The movement has drawn inspiration from the seminal works of Foucault, Derrida and Said, to name just a few, that has explored the relationship between culture, knowledge and power. The current developments seem to rectify the homogenizing discourse of universal citizenship that conceptualizes justice as equal rights for citizens, irrespective of their gender, religion and ethnicity. The relative downplaying of the cultural belongings of the people, that fundamentally shapes their self-identity, and privileging a conception of justice and citizenship, operating on the basis of a notion of the unencumbered self, more often than not, lead to the particular masquerading as the universal. The public sphere dominated by norms which appear to be universal and culturally neutral, in reality, reflect cultural values of the dominant social categories, the entrenched power elites of a given society. The politics operating as a critic of these deeply homogenizing discourse of spurious universality, has been variously called the 'politics of recognition', 'the politics of difference', 'the politics of presence'. Building up a case for differentiated citizenship and group rights, this politics, distances itself from the 'modernist project', which, for them operating on the basis of atomism and abstract universalism, is marked by a vision of the world that is deeply homogenous and disempowering, for women, non-whites, coloured people, indigenous tribes etc.

But often in a rapidly globalizing world, where economic disparities are growing by leaps and bounds, across societies, across regions, there seems to be a

relative neglect of capital's devastating production of difference. This leads to the displacement of redistributive concerns, apart from the reification of identities. This is most unfortunate, as more often than not, different forms of injustice and different identities, intersect and overlap. Without taking into consideration the multiple axis of injustice, emancipatory politics turns out to be ineffectual as we often find politics based on 'identity' and 'interest', instead of reinforcing, operate at cross - purposes, to undermine the other.

An attempt to connect the two political problematics - cultural politics of difference and social politics of equality – comes up strongly in the work of Nancy Fraser. Rather than accepting a simplistic division between a 'real' politics of class and a 'suspect' politics of identity, she has explored the tensions between economic and cultural claims in movements for gender and racial equality and developed an original and insightful synthesis of claims for economic and cultural justice, by advocating a combined socialist politics of redistribution and deconstructive politics of recognition. Critiquing the dominant 'identity model' of recognition, she draws inspiration from Weberian notions of status and class to work out a 'status model' of recognition, that she claims can overcome the phenomenon of reification of identities and meaningfully address redistributive concerns. She argues, though it addresses the problems of vulgar economism, the 'identity model' often slips into vulgar culturalism. The nub of the problem is presented as free floating discourses, instead of institutionalized significations and norms. The problem of class oppression is seen as cultural devaluation of proletarian identity. Paradoxically, the identity model that is premised on the dialogical character of identity, ends up valorizing monologism. As opposed to this model, she advances an alternative 'non-identitarian' politics of recognition, arguing that the issue is not one of valorizing group identity but rather of overcoming institutionalized relations of status subordination to ensure party of participation in public life. Moreover, the status model, unlike the identity model, understands social justice as encompassing two analytically distinct dimensions: a dimension of recognition and a dimension of distribution. From this perspective, status subordination cannot be understood in isolation from economic arrangements, nor

recognition abstracted from distribution. For her, the Weberian notion of class as an economic category, that sees an actor's class position in terms of his or her relation to the market, not in terms of his or her relation to the means of production, rather than the Marxian notion of class as a social category, is better suited to deal with distribution as a normative dimension of justice, though she does not reject the Marxist idea of the 'capitalist mode of production' as a social totality, as it can serve as an overarching frame to situate Weberian understandings of both status and class.<sup>1</sup>

Based on this understanding that pursuit of justice necessitates not only the doing away with class hierarchies but also status hierarchies, she takes up the issue of the distribution of 'non-economic goods' and explores the culture-economy interface. The Habermasian distinction between the 'life-world' and the 'system', that operates on the basis of communicative and instrumental rationality respectively, hovers in the background of ~~our~~<sup>her</sup> conceptual framework, though she diverges from his "substantive dualism", that treats economy and culture as separate institutional domains, and works out a position of 'perspectival dualism'. For Habermas, 'lifeworld' refers both to the world as given in experience, and as influenced by the subconscious. It is about the relatively informal aspects of life, that are contrasted to administrative and market systems.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, "systems", are relatively formal, and have a logic and a momentum of their own that go beyond the subjective experience of actors. They also respond to other systems and the rest of their environment in terms of their own formal, limited codes, rather than through hermeneutic negotiation. Systems, in spite of being culturally embedded in and dependent on the lifeworld, have "emergent powers", that is power dependent on but not reducible to lifeworld. What

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Fraser 1995: *From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postcolonial Age"* NLR, 212: 68-93

2000: *Rethinking Recognition: Overcoming Displacement and Reification in Cultural Politics* NLR, 3 (May/ June): 107-20

2003, *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation* In Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* translated by Joel Golt, James Ingram and Christiane Wilke. London: Verso

<sup>2</sup> Outhwaite W (1996) *The Habermas Reader*, Cambridge, Polity

differentiates them from the lifeworld is that they routinise, formalise and govern actions through specific signals and rules, such as prices, money, accounting system, bureaucratic rules and procedures, which standardize and fix relationships and responses for sometimes long period, until they are redefined. Thus even though these signals and rules often have to be interpreted by actors, the way the systems operate is in varying degrees independent of their intentions and understandings, or “delinguistified,” and disconnected from norms and values, as Habermas<sup>3</sup>, puts it.

Fraser, and others<sup>4</sup> drawing inspiration from her, make innovative appropriations of Habermas and distances their position from him and the common interpretations of them. First, system and lifeworld are dimensions of the modern social world rather than natural kinds. They do not correspond to particular physical spaces. The lifeworld is not limited to the private sphere of the home or the public sphere of political debate and opinion formation, but is present in organizations too. Concrete economic organizations like firms exist in both system and lifeworld. Second, system and lifeworld do not correspond respectively to economy and culture, since some important economic activities, in particular domestic labour, are part of the lifeworld rather than systems and some systems, particularly the legal systems are not primarily economic. Third the lifeworld is not all ‘soft’. It includes hard and durable structures as well as more negotiable forms of subjective experience and communication. Thus gender relations may form durable structures and have what is<sup>n</sup> everyday language might be termed a ‘systematic’ character, but they do not have the characteristics of systems as defined above, even though they may be associated with systems in organizations, and indeed gain reinforcement from system relations. Though the distinction between the two is fuzzy, it does not mean that there is no difference between its poles. Based on this theoretical foundation, this position rejects attempts to align the two kinds of politics, regarding redistribution and recognition with system and lifeworld respectively, and shows that the apparent equivalence is illusory. It is argued, what is needed is the fuzzy but illuminating distinction between system and

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<sup>3</sup> Habermas J (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity

<sup>4</sup> Sayer Andrew (2001) *For a Critical Cultural Political Economy*, Antipode

life world, which partially cut across the culture - economy and recognition redistribution distinctions .

Reminding oneself of the analytical perspectives of “system” and “lifeworld”, she advances an analytical distinction between political economy and culture, though the two are interimbricated, so as to reinforce one another dialectically, for heuristic purpose, and argues that injustice in the two spheres calls for accommodating different claims, namely of redistribution and recognition. The first in socio-economic injustice, like exploitation, economic marginalization and deprivation, which is rooted in the political - economic structure of society. Exploitation, she defines as having the fruits of one’s labour appropriated for the benefit of others. Economic marginalization is the phenomena of being confined to undesirable, poorly paid work or being denied access to income generating labour altogether and deprivation is the fact of being denied an adequate material standard of living. Egalitarian theorists for example, Marx’s theory of exploitation, John Rawls’s account of justice as fairness in the distribution of ‘primary goods’, Amartya Sen’s view that justice requires ensuring that people have ‘equal capabilities to function’ and Roland Dworkin’s argument for ‘equality of resources’<sup>5</sup> are attempts to conceptualize the nature of socio-economic injustice. Although all these writers are primarily theorists of distributive economic justice they have some resources for dealing with issues of cultural justice as well. Rawls for example, treats ‘the social bases of self – respect’ as a primary good to be fairly distributed while Sen treats a ‘sense of self’ as relevant to ‘the capability to function’. Still the primary thrust of their thought leads in the direction of distributive economic justice<sup>6</sup>, as Young has pointed out, though it needs to be kept in mind, Sen<sup>7</sup> is sensitive to variations in cultural meanings and the implications of human needs and the cultural meaning of goods and social networks within which needs are to be met.

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume I;  
John Rawls, (1971) *Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass  
A. K. Sen (1985) *Commodities and Capabilities*, North Holland;  
Ronald Dworkin *What is Equality ? Part II; Equality of Resource*. Vol. No. 10 (4) Fall, 1981

<sup>6</sup> I. M. Young (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton

<sup>7</sup> A.,K. Sen, (1992) *Re- examining Inequality*, Cambridge, Mass

The second kind of injustice, which is cultural or symbolic like cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect, is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Cultural domination is about being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and / or hostile to one's own. Non-recognition happens when one is rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative and interpretative practices of one's culture and disrespect deals with the phenomenon of being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and / or in everyday life interactions. The necessity to address these cultural and symbolic injustices as a 'vital human need' has come up strongly in the writing of Charles Taylor<sup>8</sup> and Axel Honneth<sup>9</sup>, both of whom draw on Hegelian notion of recognition to build their argument. Taylor critiques the liberal emphasis on sameness and public neutrality and argues what cultural groups want is recognition of their distinctiveness in the public sphere. The denial of public affirmation of cultures that articulate a language of moral evaluation leads to moral harm. Hence he is for the public acknowledgement of the idea of equal worth of cultures<sup>10</sup>. Public endorsement of distinct identities on the basis of group differentiated rights inform the work of many other critical theorists, including Iris Marion Young.<sup>11</sup> Broadly, culturalist arguments follow two trajectories corresponding to the two contrasting meanings of the concept of culture, that has been used since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One such contrast, occurs between those who see culture as a generic quality of human life, that is, as a basic capacity of human beings to organize their world into meaningful schemes and those who stress the differential quality of culture, that is, the identification of social groups with distinctive identities grounded in social behavior and meaningful systems.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, (1992) *Multiculturalism and 'the Politics of Recognition'*, Princeton

<sup>9</sup> Honneth *'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition'*, *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, no. 2 (May 1992)

<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor (1994) *The Politics of Recognition* in A. Gutman (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ

<sup>11</sup> I.M Young, (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton

The two concerns namely of redistribution and recognition seems to pull in two different directions as interest based politics and identity politics tend to operate on the basis of some form of economism and culturalism respectively corresponding to the hierarchies of class and status. The distinction is analytically helpful, as Fraser argues, in spite of the fact that in practice the two are intertwined as they call for two correspondingly distinct kinds of remedies. The remedy for economic injustice is politico-economic restructuring of some sort. This might involve redistributing income, reorganizing the division of labour, subjecting investment to democratic decision making or transforming the other basic economic structures. The remedy for cultural injustice, in contrast, is some sort of cultural or symbolic change. This would involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of marginalized groups. It could also involve recognizing and positively valorizing cultural diversity. More radically still, it could involve the wholesale transformation of societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everybody's sense of self.

Once again the distinction is analytical, for example, some proponents of egalitarian socio-economic distribution like Dworkin, ground their claims on 'equal moral worth of persons', thus treating economic redistribution as an expression of recognition.<sup>12</sup> Conversely recognition remedies sometime presuppose an underlying conception of redistribution. For example, some proponents of multicultural recognition like Kymlicka ground their claims on the imperative of a just distribution of the 'primary good' of an 'intact cultural structure', therefore treating cultural recognition as a species of redistribution.<sup>13</sup> But it seems to be useful to maintain a working, first order distinction between some economic injustice and their remedies, on the one hand, and cultural injustice and their remedies, on the other and not to reduce one to the other, because they appear to have mutually contradictory aims. Recognition claims tend to promote group differentiation whereas redistribution claims tend to promote group de-differentiation leading to what Fraser calls 'redistribution-recognition dilemma'.

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<sup>12</sup> R Dworkin "Liberalism" in his *A Matter of Principle*.

<sup>13</sup> Will Kymlicka *Liberalism, Community and Culture*



Fraser argues that “primary political concerns” like citizenship and political participation can be accommodated in her conceptualization of social justice that combines both perspectives under a general principle of ‘participatory parity’, if they are, following Habermas, viewed bi-focally. From one perspective, political institutions in state regulated capitalist societies belong with the economy as part of the “system” that produces distributive socio-economic injustices. From another perspective, however such institutions belong with the “the lifeworld” as part of the cultural structure that produces injustices of recognition. The array of citizenship entitlements and participation rights conveys powerful implicit and explicit messages about the relative moral worth of various persons. “Primary political concerns” could thus be treated as matters either of economic justice or cultural justice depending on the context and perspective in play.

Of the different kinds of social collectivities, she argues, at one extreme are those that fit the redistribution<sup>ve</sup> model of justice, for example, the Marxian notion of class defined in economic determinist terms. On the other extreme are modes of collectivity like despised sexuality that fit the recognition model. But in between come the hybrid modes like gender and race that are differentiated as collectivities by virtue of both the political-economic structure and the cultural-valuational structure of society. She is aware that class may also fit into this category as it has cultural, historical and discursive dimensions. These bivalent collectivities, as she calls them, need both redistribution and recognition. Only harping on the recognition dimension, she argues, leads to ‘the problem of displacement’ and ‘the problem of reification’.<sup>14</sup> In their case socio-economic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition are both primary and co-original. As she has illustrated, on the one hand, gender has a political-economic face, in the sense that it structures the division of labour. On the other hand, fight for gender equality calls for overcoming androcentrism and sexism, its cultural-valuational face. Now the tension arises because the logic of redistribution is to put gender out of business whereas the logic of recognition is to valorize gender specificity. The same holds true for race as it is both a structural principle of political economy and at the same time sustained by the ideology of Eurocentrism.

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Rethinking Recognition*. NLR 3, MAY/JUNE 2000

To overcome the recognition-redistribution dilemma, Fraser de-alienates two forms of recognition politics and two forms of redistributive politics that are compatible to each other. In each domain there is a surface politics of affirmation and a deeper politics of transformation. The liberal welfare state is the affirmative politics of redistribution; its cultural counterpart is “mainstream multiculturalism” and its celebration of previously stigmatized identities. Socialism or some form of social democracy is the transformative politics of economic distribution; its cultural counterpart, she argues, is deconstruction which transforms cultural binary oppositions by destabilizing them. An example of such de-construction is ‘queer politics’, which rather than embracing and re-valuing a substantive gay identity on the model of multiculturalism, undermines the very stability of the homo/<sup>hetero</sup>binary opposition by bringing to light the “queer elements” that reside within dominant practices. Just as socialism undermines economic injustices by transforming control over production and the division of labour, deconstruction undermines cultural injustices by transforming unstable hierarchies of identity/difference.

She is for transformative solutions because she argues affirmative policies are inadequate to address the issues at hand. First, on the economic front, surface re-allocations of consumption shares leave the deeper structure of class inequalities and the capitalist system of production intact. Second, the creation of two tracts of governmental provision, social insurance schemes such as social securities for employed workers and stingy, “welfare” benefits to the unemployed poor-works ultimately to enhance group differentiation, dividing the employed and unemployed fractions of the working class and stigmatizing the recipients of welfare. Third, by marking out a class of poor people as morally deficient, the liberal welfare state ends up contradicting its own commitment to universalism. Similarly cultural politics of mainstream multiculturalism fuels backlash and works to increase resentment generated by affirmative action programmes. Furthermore, “the cultural politics” of affirming women’s difference appears as an affront to the liberal welfare state’s official commitment to “the equal moral worth of persons”.

Moreover, she argues the intersection of class, gender, race and sexuality intensifies the need for transformative solutions.

In opposition to Fraser's "deontological" approach to social justice, Honneth defends a "teleological", perfectionist approach oriented to central ingredients of the good life in the modern world: intact identity, personal autonomy, self realization. Resuscitating a central theme of Hegel's Jena period, 'the struggle for recognition', he argues that the concept of recognition has the resources to take care of redistributive concerns. He believes that we have reached the current impasse because of Taylor's approach of reducing social recognition to merely cultural recognition. Taylor's reading of early modern history as a phase of struggle for a narrow concept of legal recognition, he finds deeply problematic. He questions, were not the European nationalisms of the nineteenth century or anti-colonial resistance movements, identity politics? He believes that the notion of recognition has a differentiated and multidimensional character. He talks of the three levels of recognition, love, legal order, and solidarity, corresponding to the three spheres of family, civil society and the state, operating on the basis of love and care, equal respect and social esteem respectably that in turn generates self-confidence, self respect and self esteem that are necessary for the blossoming of the human personality. He argues, since economic structures are mechanisms that are always normatively embedded the problems of mal-distribution can be understood in terms of the forms of self-respect (equality before law) and social esteem that operates at the level of civil society and the state respectively. The rules of distribution cannot simply be derived from the relations of production but are rather to be seen as the institutional expression of a socio-cultural dispositive. The rules organizing the distribution of material goods derive from the degree of social esteem enjoyed by social groups in accordance with institutionalized hierarchies of value in a normative order. For him, therefore disadvantaged groups suffer from deficient recognition. So the issue for him is not the importance of economic injustice but how best to conceptualize it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Axel Honneth: *Recognition or Redistribution? Changing Perspectives on the Moral Order of Society*. *Theory, Culture and Society* 2001, Volume 18 (2-3):43-55  
Nancy Fraser, and Axel Honneth., *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*

Young<sup>16</sup> argues that cultural recognition instead of displacing retributive concerns has become a rallying point in contemporary struggles, as it is conceived as a means to economic and political justice. She argues that the feminist dilemma of equality/difference is not an issue of alternative politics operating on the basis of principles of redistribution versus recognition but two different redistributive strategies. Moreover, she is distinctly uncomfortable with the polarizing strategy of Fraser and argues for pluralizing categories to capture the multiple forms of injustice corresponding to the five faces of oppression she talks of, namely, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

Fraser disagrees with Honneth and argues that in spite of socio-cultural embeddedness of economic structures the economic processes do not themselves follow normative paths. They are governed by economic mechanisms of various sorts, especially markets, whose working has to be understood in system-theoretic terms. Moreover, she feels Honneth is overstressing the concept of recognition to the breaking point. She feels that both the dimensions, the historical fact of capitalist economic/cultural differentiation and also the underlying reality of their thorough interpretation needs to be kept in mind, but one cannot be collapsed to the other in spite of the fact that cultural claims have distributive implications and economic claims have recognition sub-texts. Pluralizing categories also she finds distinctively unhelpful as they are broadly reducible to recognition and redistribution claims.

But over the years as an effect of the debate she has modified her positions. Her recent work is marked by an analytical diversification of the recognition framework and she has softened her stance towards non-deconstructive forms of cultural politics. In the Tanner lectures, she has argued, different recognition strategies, namely universalist recognition, deconstructive recognition and affirmative recognition of difference, are needed at different times and different contexts, and it cannot be made theoretically and a priori. But in her scheme of things the political dimension is undertheorized. Though she concedes that the 'political' may require independent theorization, the door is expressly

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<sup>16</sup> I M Young (1997) *Unruly Categories: A Critique of Nancy Fraser's Dual Systems Theory*- NLR 222

closed to the law, which in her scheme of things is to be regarded not as a “sphere” in its own right but ‘as pertaining to both dimensions of justice, distribution and recognition’. She tends to treat law purely instrumentally and discounts its role as a mode of social ordering and a dimension of social justice in its own right. But the state and politics needs to be handled with much greater care as it is an independent player in its own right and not just bi-focally. With the state becoming the lost object of critic there is always the chance of it being found as an uncritical instrument confronting civil society. As Markell<sup>17</sup> has argued the language of distribution and recognition invokes an agent who distributes and recognizes, which is the state. As she argues the “grammar of recognition” might itself be depoliticizing, a handmaiden of classifying procedures of states, “rendering their populations cognizable and manageable”. Moreover as Brown<sup>18</sup> has argued, “the state does not simply handle clients or employ staff but produces state subjects as bureaucratized, dependent, disciplined and gendered”. Stevens,<sup>19</sup> on the other hand, highlights the political nature of class as wealth is passed down through families through political institutions like inheritance laws and property rights. As a result, the performative role of the state and its role in productive classification cannot be overlooked. Moreover, Feldman<sup>20</sup> highlighting the ‘exclusionary dimension of state power in criminalizing, disenfranchising and marginalizing persons in the political community’ has argued for developing a ‘trivalent’ framework that brings into view the interrelated yet analytically distinguishable dynamics of maldistribution, misrecognition and political exclusion. Post-colonial studies have made us aware of the performative role of the colonial state, through the census, the map and the museum, in shaping the conceptual apparatus and the self-identity of the colonial subjects.

In her recent work, in the context of the present phase of globalization, Fraser<sup>21</sup> has worked out an account of ‘post-Westphalian democratic justice’, where the political

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<sup>17</sup> Patchen Markell, “The Recognition of Politics: A Comment on Enoke and Tully”, *Constellations* 7(2000), p.504

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Brown, *States of Inquiry*

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Stevens: *Reproducing the State*

<sup>20</sup> Leonard Feldman: “Redistribution, Recognition and the State”, *Political Theory*, Vol30, No. 3, June 2002

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Fraser: *Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World*  
NLR 36, Nov Dec 2005 pp 69-88

dimension has been independently theorized. She argues, theories of justice must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation, encompassing the three levels of misrepresentation, misframing and metapolitical misrepresentation, along side the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition. The ability to make claims for distribution and recognition depends on relations of representation, which she claims have been neglected by liberals or communitarian theorists of justice. On the other hand, the ability to exercise one's political voice depends on the relations of class and status. The capacity to influence public debate and authoritative decision-making depends not only on formal decision rules but also on power relations rooted in the economic structure and the institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value, a fact she claims is insufficiently stressed in most theories of deliberat<sup>ive</sup> democracy. Maldistribution and misrecognition subvert the principle of equal political voice. On the other hand, misrepresentation makes one vulnerable to injustices of class and status. Hence she gives the slogan, 'No redistribution, or recognition without representation'.

She argues, at the current conjuncture, apart from the first level of ordinary political misrepresentation at the national stage, where the issue is intra-frame representation, dealing with the questions of membership and procedure through alternative electoral systems, with globalization and decline of the territorial state, the frame within which justice claims are to be settled has become problematic. Misframing, which borrowing from, Hannah Arendt, she calls 'political death', is becoming the defining injustice of the age, as globalization is leading to political exclusion. Moreover the governance structure of the global economy is beyond democratic control. The Keynesian-Westphalian frame is, she argues, turning out to be a major vehicle of injustice as it partitions political space, in the process insulating offshore powers from critique and control. The more powerful, predator states and transnational private powers including foreign investors and creditors, international currency speculators and transnational corporations are shielded from the reach of justice. So the second level for her is the politics of frame-setting.

The politics of framing she argues can take two distinct forms, one affirmative, and the other transformative. The affirmative politics of framing, while accepting the Westphalian grammar of frame-setting and the principle of state-territoriality contests the boundaries of the existing frame and the application of the principle. The transformative approach that Fraser espouses, claims that globalization is drawing a widening wedge between state-territoriality and social effectivity, as the structural cause of many injustices are extra or non-territorial in character, for example financial markets, 'offshore factories', investment regimes and governance structures of the global economy, information networks of global media and cyber-technology which constitute the circuits of communicative power and bio-politics of climate, disease, drugs, weapons and biotechnology. In this changed context, she argues, the deep grammar of frame-setting has to change by supplementing the state territorial principle by 'the all-affected' principle, that holds that co-imbrications in a common structural or institutional framework, not geographical proximity, turns a collection of people into fellow subjects of justice. The democratization of the process by which the frameworks of justice are drawn and revised and creation of new democratic arenas is an urgent political task. For her, the emerging transnational civil society, though indispensable, cannot succeed unless formal institutions that can translate transnational public opinion into binding, enforceable decisions are in place. She believes that civil-society track of transnational democratic politics needs to be complemented by formal-institutional track.

The third level of political injustice, consists in the failure to institutionalize parity of participation at the meta-political level. It addresses the issue of meta-political misrepresentations that arises when states and transnational elites monopolize the activity of frame-setting, denying voice to the affected and blocking the creation of democratic arenas of contestation and redressal. The effect is the political exclusion of the overwhelming majority in the meta-discourses that determine the authoritative division of political space. To overcome the democratic deficit of the current process of globalization and the lack of accountable institutions, meta-political democracy is necessary, she argues. Piecing together the arguments, she advocates the relevance in the current

conjuncture of a dialogical theory of Post-Westphalian democratic justice, which is dialogical at every level, based on democratic deliberation, meta-political as well as ordinary-political. The view of justice as participatory parity, she argues, fits in well with this theory of Post-Westphalian democratic justice. Both an outcome notion and a process notion, it supplies the sort of reflexivity that is needed in a globalizing world.

Fraser's project is laudable because the different paradigms of justice rarely communicate. The point of invoking her is not to stick faithfully to her but to use her elegant conceptual framework as a vantage point to evaluate and enrich emancipatory politics. Though her attempt at grand theorization was done largely keeping the American context in mind, still critical inputs can be had from her for third world political praxis. Gender and race are the two major social categories she deals with but she is open to the possibilities of handling issues of ethnicity and nationality using her framework though the deconstructive solution has limited applicability, as she is herself aware of. The transformative solutions she advances regarding cultural and political identity is a goal worth aspiring, but is subject to a long historical process, of being and becoming that is marked by a dialectical relationship of *Aufhebung* (conservative/negation/transcendence).

We take up one of the most potent identities in the modern age, nationality, a bivalent social collectivity according to Fraser, or trivalent, as she later argues, incorporating the political dimension. The philosophical treatment of national identity and nationalism is closely related to the general critique of status hierarchies. The debates have revolved round the issues of creation of a common national identity and the national self-determination project. The philosophical debate about the value of national identity, the legitimate forms of nation-building — whether and how the state can create a unified body politic, without demeaning or discriminating against people from different ethnic and religious communities, within the community — and the project of collective self-determination, tied to which are the questions of ethics of secession, have engaged attention. Nationalists, these days, rarely argue that the nation is natural, or organic or primordial, their claims are framed in the language of identity. But nations are not just about culture but embody political economies that are intimately connected with the



uneven development of capitalism. Keeping this perspective in mind, we take up the issue of nationalism and the 'national question', as the Marxists call it, and explore, whether and how, in spite of their pronounced political economy orientation, attempts were made to address the issues of recognition and redistribution and resolve it through the actualization of political democracy. This gives us an entry-point to the Marxist understanding of the culture-economy interface and the attitude towards cultural identity and difference.

It is usually perceived that both Marxism and liberalism, both universalist ideologies are ill-at-ease with nationalism, the supreme philosophy of cultural belonging in the modern age. Marxian socialism is seen as a natural outgrowth of the principles and politics of the Enlightenment, a radical extension of the democratic principles of the bourgeois revolutionaries into the realm of economics and the life-world, where the promises of freedom, equality and humanism would at last be concretized and universalized. But at a certain level, Marx is understood to be myopic about difference. We explore this proposition, about Marxism's lack of appreciation of cultural rootedness and difference, through their understanding of nation and the national question.

More often than not, the nation is seen in cultural terms. While the most influential accounts of nationalism, from Karl Deutsch's to Benedict Anderson's, presented it as an over-determined amalgam of many processes like secularism, new popularizations of religion such as Protestantism in Europe, vernacular literacy and literature, popular legitimacy, civil society, industrialism as well as capitalism, there was a pronounced bias towards treating nationalism as a cultural phenomenon. There was little attempt to account for political economy in nation-state formation, except Ernest Gellner, whose modernist thesis was anchored in a theoretical connection between industrial society and nationalism based on the sociological theory of modernization. What is overlooked, more often than not is that nations and nationalism embody political economies as well as cultural politics. The political and geopolitical processes which created nations, nationalism and the international order was inextricable from the contemporaneous development of capitalism and civil society, one particularizing, the

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other universalizing, the one mobilizing vertically, the other horizontally, the one creating nations, the other classes<sup>22</sup>. Overstressing the cultural dimensions leads to oversight of the political economy aspects. As Sumit Sarkar notes<sup>23</sup>, the earliest texts of Indian nationalism was a critique of colonial political economy and not some emotionally charged polemic about the national soul or culture: 'Deliberately keeping his presentation logical rather than emotional, Naoroji made little or no appeal to any sense of cultural distinctiveness or lost glory. From [his] focus on Indian poverty emerged patterns of thinking and eventually action, seeking remedies in varied, recognizably "developmental" directions.

For the most influential theorist of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, 'nationality...nation-ness, as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind'.<sup>24</sup> Based on this understanding a simplistic opposition between nation and class, between nationalism and communism is often attributed to Marxism. In reality of course, while there were always tensions, slippages and gaps on the Marxist understanding of nationalism, this political tradition aimed to some extent, to comprehend the interaction between these two principles, however well or badly this or that thinker accomplished the task. Whether it was Marx and Engel's injunction to each working class to settle scores with its own bourgeoisie in the Communist Manifesto, Marx's clarity about the importance of India's independence for her capitalist development, Engel's notion of peoples with or without history, Luxemburg's celebrated debate with Lenin on the question of Polish independence, Lenin's support for the principle of self-determination and theorization of imperialism that resulted in the emergence of new diplomacy<sup>25</sup>, Stalin's elegant definition of nation, conceptualization of "socialism in one country" and work on linguistics, Gramsci's idea about the 'national-popular', or the Austro-Marxists insights about the interaction of nationalism and social democracy in the context of the multinational empire, Marxist theory sought to theorize the interaction of nationalism and

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<sup>22</sup> Radhika Desai: *Introduction: the Political Economy and Cultural Politics of Nationalisms in Historical Perspective*, Third World Quarterly, Vol.29, No. 3, 2008, pp 397-428

<sup>23</sup> Sumit Sarkar: *Nationalism and Poverty: Discourses of Development and Culture in 20<sup>th</sup> Century India*, Third World Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2008, pp 429-445.

<sup>24</sup> Benedict Anderson. 1991. *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso.

<sup>25</sup> A. Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: The Political Origin of the New Diplomacy*, New York: Meridian Brooks, 1963)

communism, of nation and class, in concrete circumstances of capitalism and imperialism.

Broadly, Marxists have understood the nation as a cultural community that emerges at a distinct historical epoch, one that is intimately connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie. Moreover the phenomenon has been studied in the light of uneven development of capitalism and the geopolitics of capitalist modernity. Though for Marx, a product of his times – an age captivated by the universalist logics, whether of capitalism, markets or civil society or reason – a student of Hegel, who regarded nations as ‘particularity without quiddity’<sup>26</sup>, the focus was more on the development of capitalism, civil society and classes, he was aware of the geopolitical stakes in the spread of capitalism and the roles nations could play in resisting imperialism. A strong votary of the social embeddedness of man, he was aware that popular sovereignty would lead to the articulation of the cultural personality. He was a firm critic of cosmopolitanism, though a champion of proletarian internationalism. As Marxism moved out of its West European location of an industrial economy and well-integrated nation-states its handling of the question of nationalism underwent profound shifts, as it had to confront both the ‘agrarian question’ and the ‘national question’, with renewed vigour and sense of urgency. One of the supreme ironies of the twentieth-century was that nationalism’s principal opponent, namely Marxism, has been empowered by its alliances with nationalism and responsible for creating the conditions for the development of nations in the Second and Third Worlds.

Moreover the complexity of the interaction of communism and nationalism in the Soviet Union has been the theme on which some very insightful work on nationalism has been published in the years since the break up of the Soviet Union<sup>27</sup>. The Russian Revolution saw the replacement of Tsarist imperialism over the vast empire’s non-

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<sup>26</sup> GWF Hegel, *The End of History*, in *A Zone of Engagement*, London, Verso, 1992, pp 290.

<sup>27</sup> R Suny: *Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993

\_\_\_\_\_*The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998

Martin Terry: *The Affirmative Action Empire* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001

Russian populations by Leninist nationalities policy, which realistically acknowledged the political force of nationalism and aimed to ‘reverse Russian privilege and undermine Great Power chauvinism’<sup>28</sup>. Contrary to the conventional view that Soviet communism dogmatically suppressed nationalities, it would preserve nations, where they existed and support the emergence of nascent ones by encouraging local cultures, languages and elites within the context of Soviet development, even though Russian privilege was soon restored. It was this, rather than the result of the awakening of long-slumbering, suppressed primordial nationalities, which ensured that the end of Soviet Union seven decades later would take the form of its break-up into constituent nations. As Suny has argued, they were the product of the ‘party’s unwilling promotion of national consolidation within the bonds of Soviet imperial arrangement and Leninist nationality policy’.

“The processes associated with ‘modernization’— industrialization, urbanization, increased literacy and social mobility, the emergence of civil society— had both centrifugal and centripetal effects on the Soviet peoples. Transforming societies within a set of politically constituted ‘nations’, the Soviet project created new ‘national’ working classes, intelligentsias, and political elites within republics, while simultaneously encouraging migration into and out of the republics, promoting the use of Russian and rewarding those who best adapted to the new, ‘modern’ Soviet ways of life.”<sup>29</sup>

The Soviet nationalities policies that conceptualized USSR, as a multinational state with each constituent republic having the right to secede, marked a departure from the standard ethnic policies pursued in nation-states across the world, be it a policy of assimilation, cultural or structural, or equalitarian pluralism, with its attendant varieties like corporate pluralism or consociationalism, and multiculturalism, not to talk of the different forms of unequalitarian pluralism, and policies of internal colonialism, expulsion and annihilation. Though there was often a gap between the precept and the practice, the

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<sup>28</sup> R. Suny: *Incomplete Revolution: National Movements and the Collapse of the Soviet Empire* NLR, 189, 1991, pp 112

<sup>29</sup> R. Suny: *Revenge of the Past* pp 158

nationalities policy was never conceptualized as 'the self-determination of toilers' but as 'the self-determination of nationalities'.

## II

Marxism and nationalism have often been regarded as mutually incompatible. The universalism of nationalism lies in particularism, precisely because its object, the nation is seen as the form and expression of an irreducible cultural, linguistic or other particularity. Marxism, on the other hand is a universal philosophy in the sense of a 'general' theory of history. Its universalism lay, not its claim for itself as a theory, but in how it conceived its object. Marx believed that with the advent of capitalism, history was becoming one, was becoming world history. Though he did not overlook that there were important differences between societies which were bourgeois, he recognized that the creation of a single bourgeois world was a historical tendency though not yet actualized. At the same time, in the Marxian paradigm the move from the general to recognizing and grasping the specific has been seen as a move from 'bourgeois society' or world capitalism to specific national economies, polities and cultures. As Marxism moved out of its West European location of an industrial economy, and well-formed culturally homogenous nation-states, it had to grapple with both the national question and the agrarian question and the interconnections between the two, and ended up taking a position that the 'specificity' of the Eastern countries lay not simply in their 'nation-ness' but also in their nationalism. This conceptualization of the centrality of its struggle for national liberation as the chief 'particularity' of the East, lead to endorsement and an engagement with specific nationalisms, a recognition and identification of national particularity, for example, Chinese nationalism.<sup>30</sup> We attempt in the following discussion to map out the broad contours and the shifts in the discourse. The theoretical and methodological aspects of the classic Marxist debate on the national question had its starting point in the relatively imprecise positions developed by Marx and Engels themselves in their writings and was carried on vigorously in the Second International

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<sup>30</sup> Sanjoy Seth (1995): *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics*.

before the First World War, culminating in Lenin's formulation of a realistic theory of the rights of nations to self determination.

Marx offered neither a systematic theory of the national question, a precise definition of the concept of a 'nation', nor a general political strategy for the proletariat in this domain. His articles on the subject were for most part concrete political statements relating to specific cases. As far as the 'theoretical texts' proper are concerned, we have the rather cryptic passages in *The Manifesto* concerning communities and the nation. A bold and rather uncompromising proclamation of the internationalist nature of the proletarian movement, they suffer from a certain economism and free trade optimism. This can be seen particularly in the suggestion that the victorious proletariat will merely carry on the task of abolishing national antagonisms that was began by 'the development of the bourgeoisie, free trade, the world market' etc. This idea however, is contradicted in other texts from the same period (*German Ideology*) in which Marx stressed that "while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, big industry created a class which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead". In this context, it may be mentioned in passing, that the manuscript *The German Ideology* made fun of Marx's left-wing critics for not having noticed that humans are not just language users, but speak in particular, specific languages. Engels attacked the supposed cosmopolitanism of the French in 1847 and declared that they meant the world would be cosmopolitan if everybody spoke French and thought like the French. In his later writings particularly those on the Irish question Marx showed that not only does the bourgeoisie tend to foster national antagonisms but it actually tends to increase them since (a) the struggle to control markets creates conflicts between the capitalist powers (b) exploitation of one nation by another produces national hostility (c) chauvinism is one of the ideological tools that enable the bourgeoisie to maintain its domination over the proletariat. These understandings have proved to be profoundly influential in subsequent Marxist theorization of the national question.

Marx, underlining the historical process through which nationalism has taken shape, mapped out how with the rise of capitalism, 'independent or but loosely connected

provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, become lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of law, one national class interest, one frontier and one custom-tariff.<sup>31</sup> This same impulse of capitalism that had eroded local particularisms and created the 'national state' leads to the internationalization of the economy by the capitalist mode of production and creation of conditions for the abolition of the national state itself and hence, the class that has been brought into existence by capitalism, 'the proletariat has no country', by which they meant that the proletariat of all nations have similar interests. But in spite of the strong pitch for proletarian internationalism, they argued the nation was the immediate political framework for the seizure of power by the proletariat. "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie" and hence "must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself as the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."<sup>32</sup>

But still we hardly get any concrete political strategy in relation to the national question, which comes, only in his later writings on Poland and Ireland, as well as the struggle waged in the First International against the liberal democratic nationalism of Mazzini and the national 'nihilism' of Proudhonists. The changed political climate after 1848, when the demand for national independence of nations, big and small, became strident, led them to a newer appreciation of the phenomenon. They gave recognition to the demands of the bigger nations, where capitalist development was well-advanced and the prospects of a proletarian uprising was promising, not the smaller ones. They supported the cause of Polish independence and for the first time put forward the slogan of 'self-determination of nations', in the Proclamation on Polish Question, drafted by Marx and endorsed by the London Conference of the First International in 1865. Keeping some distance from the tradition of the democratic workers movement, he supported it as part of the anti-Czarist struggle, which was seen as the bastion of reaction in Europe and

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. 1975. Moscow, pp. 45-50.

<sup>32</sup> "The Communist Manifesto" in Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*, David Fernbach (ed), Harmondsworth: Penguin and New Left Review, 1973, p.78.

noted the need “to annihilate the growing influence of Russia in Europe by assuring to Poland the right to self-determination which belongs to every nation and by giving to this country once more a social and democratic foundation”. This marked a shift, though the overarching framework of the necessity of overcoming the bourgeois property relations remained constant, from the position he took in his “Speech on Poland” in 1847, where he argued: “...for the people to be able truly to unite, they must have common interests. And in order that their interests may become common, the existent property relations must be done away with, for these property relations involve the exploitation of some nations by others, the abolition of existing property relations is the concern only of the working class. It alone has also the means for doing this. And so the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie is at the same time the signal of liberation of all oppressed nations”. But the principle of self-determination was not meant to be applicable to all national groups irrespective of the concrete historical situation. In 1866 a year after its endorsement in the Proclamation, Engels’ at Marx’s behest, publicly disclaimed the principles’ universality by restricting the status of nation to a very few select people, resting his argument on a sharp differentiation between nations and nationalities.<sup>33</sup>

The writings on Ireland on the other hand have a far wider application and state implicitly some general principles on the question of oppressed nations. In an early phase Marx was in favour of Ireland having autonomy within a union with Britain and believed that the solution to the oppression of the Irish by the big English landlords would come through a working class (Chartist) victory in England. In the sixties, however, he saw the liberation as a condition for the liberation of the English proletariat. His writings on Ireland in this period elaborated three things, as Michael Lowy has pointed out that were important for the future development of the Marxist theory of self-determination of nationalities in its dialectical relationship with proletarian internationalism.

i) Only the national liberation of the oppressed nation enables national divisions and antagonisms to be overcome and permits the working class of both nations to unite against their common enemy – the capitalists.

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<sup>33</sup> Walker Connor (1984): *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Strategy*, New Jersey, p.11



ii) The oppression of another nation helps to re-enforce the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie over workers in the oppressing nation: “Any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains”.

iii) The emancipation of the oppressed nation weakens the economic, political, military and ideological bases of the dominating classes in the oppressor nation and thereby gives fillip to the revolutionary movement in that nation. Thus, was developed a political strategy on the national question, based on the core principle of the right of self-determination of nations. The principle was never viewed as an absolute category, but subordinated to the broader question of radical social transformation, the abolition of private ownership of the means of production.

Apart from the writings on Ireland, in his articles in India also, we find an attempt, though embryonic, of an attempt to connect the national and colonial questions, though many have argued Asia appeared as passive in Marx's writings, lacking any capacity for self-activity. Marx and Engels of course thought of the colonial destruction of the old order, conceptualized as the Asiatic mode of production - a combination of the hydraulic state above, the autarchic village below and the virtual absence of classes – as a ‘revolutionary element’ in Indian society and hence British colonialism was ‘an unconscious tool of history’ but during the uprising of 1857-59, they sympathized with the insurrection. Though they foresaw its failure owing to lack in Indian society of what Engels called ‘the scientific element’ – the centralized political leadership and a unified military command – Marx declared the uprising was ‘not a military mutiny but a national revolt’. By the time he came to formulating the genesis of the industrial capitalist in Capital he only spoke of the plunder of India and connected it with the central role of colonization in the process of primitive accumulation. In 1881, in a letter to Davidson, we find him anticipating “[I]n India, serious complications, if not a general outbreak, [are] in store for the British government”.

Engel's position on Poland and Ireland were broadly similar to those of Marx. However, in his writings we find the employment of a “metaphysical” category of “non-historical nations” which bears strong resonance of Hegel. This categorization which

bears the imprint of the principles advanced by the historical school of law (Savigny etc.) found eloquent expression in Hegel who argued that nations that have not succeeded in creating a state or whose state has long since been destroyed are “non-historic” and condemned to disappear. Engel’s also echoing similar sentiments, dubbed Southern Slavs, Bretons, Scots and Basques as “non-historic nations”. Though his democratic commitments and capacity for dialectical analysis comes through in his argument that the Turkish Empire was destined to disintegrate as result of the liberation of the Balkan nations and he was free from Slavophobia or German chauvinism, still it shows an extreme example of the mistakes that can be made on the national question even if one bases oneself on a revolutionary socialist democratic position.<sup>34</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg tended to subsume the national question within the class question as for her the unifying political struggle of the proletariat should not be supplanted by “a series of sterile national struggles”. In her major work *The National Question and Autonomy, 1908*, she argued the right to self-determination is an abstract and metaphysical right. On the question of Polish independence she felt, support to the right to secession would mean supporting bourgeois nationalism which sees nation as a uniform and homogenous entity instead of one cleft by class struggle based on conflicting interests and rights. Moreover under the influence of Engel’s notion of non-historic nations, she argued, small nations are economically unviable and condemned by the laws of history, though she made an exception in the case of the Balkan nations of the Turkish Empire. Her views underwent a significant change in the Junius pamphlet (1915) where taking an essentially political view, she adopted the principle of self determination (however not within the existing capitalist states especially colonialist states). Broadly she took a determinist economic approach. Moreover for her, nation is essentially a cultural phenomenon and its political dimensions got downplayed. In her, we find an under appreciation of the complex and contradictory dialectic of the dual nature of the nationalist movements. With regard to Russia, in general, she underestimated the

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<sup>34</sup> Roman Rosdolsky, Engels and the ‘Non historic’ Peoples: *The National Question in the Revolution of 1848*, Glasgow, Critique Books, 1986. He demonstrates with great care how Engels made highly useful and perceptive distinctions in a very difficult situation, even though he got it wrong as far as the Czechs and Lithuanians are concerned.

revolutionary role of the non-proletarian allies of the working class: the peasantry and the oppressed nations. She saw the Russian revolution as purely a working class one and not like Lenin as one led by the proletariat. She failed to appreciate, that the national liberation of oppressed nations was the demand of the masses as a whole including the proletariat and an indispensable condition of unity of the proletariat of the oppressor and oppressed nations. Her lack of understanding of the dialectical relationship between the national question and the class question also comes through in her 1905 introduction to the *Polish Question and the Socialist Movement* where she concedes the undeniable right of every nation to independence, but questions its desirability.

Though her understanding has its problems she was acutely aware of the dark underside of nationalism. Apart from the fact that national identity masks class division and helps the bourgeoisie in maintaining its hegemony over the masses, she felt the quest for national self determination must turn into a quest to crush the self determination of other nations. She partly attributes “anti-nationalism of nationalism” to the requirements of capitalist expansion, combined with stupidities of “European cretinism”. Moreover, she felt given the fact of the geographical intermixture of people, which capital exacerbates but does not originate, the national self-determination of any single people inside a given territory must trigger the persecution of the rest. Luxemburg also alluded to the German idealist principle that no particular entity can determine itself without determining everything outside itself, to reveal why movements to national self-determination issue regularly in efforts of national aggression and domination. The empirical entanglements of people and the logical particularity of national identities, in combination with her own moral commitment to human solidarity prompted her to stand against the self determination of politically differentiated and militarily fortified nationalities. In spite of her under appreciation of the specificities of nationalism and over appreciation of the unity of the European working class, she’s hard headed in her conception of the intimate relationship between dominant classes, nationalism and the state and the self- obscuring methods of power it brings into play. At the same time we get interesting insights if her attack on the “offensive nationalisms” of the European nation states is read side-by-side with her extraordinary last six chapters of *The*

*Accumulation of Capital*. Here she emphasizes on the importance of non-capitalist cultures for logic of capital that, in her words, opens them up by brute force, ransacks them, and mutilates them – but also the importance of those cultures in and of themselves, as whole ways of life with their own integrity and virtue. Luxemburg's theory that capitalist expansion is based on non-capitalist economies, as well as her claim that communal land ownership in Algeria and backwoods self-sufficiency in the United States are “natural economies”, may be unpersuasive. Regardless of that, Luxemburg's account of the vitality of distinct cultures and peoples prior to capitalist penetration not only exemplifies her hatred of every kind of oppression but also provides a strong counterweight to her impatience elsewhere with ethno-national particularity. Moreover, she was acutely aware of the contradiction between the traditionalist self image and the modernist trajectory of nationalism that became the focus of subsequent research work on nationalism.

Trotsky had a largely eclectic approach, a halfway position, between Luxemburg and Lenin. He visualized the collapse of the nation state as an independent economic unit altogether and its existence only as a “cultural, ideological and psychological phenomenon”. Both in Pannecock and Strasser economism runs amok where class interest is privileged over national interest and nation separatism opposed in the name of proletarian internationalism. Treating nationalism as a bourgeois national phenomenon, Pannecock argued that Bauer, who was working out his position on nationalism as an ideology with an independent force around this time, was rather a Kantian and not a materialist.

The Austro-Marxists especially Otto Bauer with his remarkable sensitivity to the phenomenon of nationalism made a major departure in the theorization of the national question in Marxist tradition. The Austro-Marxists especially Renner and Bauer were broadly in favour of cultural autonomy within the framework of a multinational state. Taking the issue of cultural identity much more seriously they argue for public juridical corporations with a whole series of cultural, administrative and legal powers to accommodate rights of national minorities and at the same time maintain the unity of the

Austro-Hungarian state. Though a common concern of preservation of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian state was a major concern of both these thinkers there was a major difference in their approach. As opposed to Renner's juridicism, Bauer is more of a culturalist. His *The National Question and Social Democracy* (1907) is a major landmark in Marxist discussion on the national question. In spite of his reformist politics, it's a significant attempt at taking the cultural belonging of people seriously. What was peculiar to his analysis was the psycho-cultural nature of his theory of the *National Question* which was constructed on the basis of the concept of "national characteristics" defined in psychological terms: "Diversity of purpose, the fact that the same stimulus can provoke different movements and that the same external situations can lead to different decisions". Bearing strong imprint of neo-Kantian ideas it marked a major departure in Marxist theorization. The second key concept in his theoretical edifice was, of course, national culture and interestingly almost excluded classes and the class struggle from its sphere. His program aimed to give the working class access to "cultural advantages" and to the "national cultural community" from which they were excluded by capitalism. He therefore, seemed to consider "cultural values" to be absolutely neutral and devoid of class content. The complex relationship of the proletariat to the bourgeois cultural heritage, a dialectical relationship of *Aufhebung* (conservation/ negation/ transcendence) was reduced by Bauer to a simple act of appropriation or rather passive acceptance. Obviously Bauer was correct to stress the decisive importance of culture in defining the national question but his theory resulted in a fetishisation of national culture. On the other hand interestingly, he was aware of the problem of "naïve cosmopolitanism" and wanted to nationalize socialism and argued, interestingly that socialism will lead to a growth in cultural differentiation between nations. Despite his limitations his work has an undeniable theoretical value, particularly with regard to the historicist nature of his method. In defining the nation as a product of a common historical destiny as the "never finished outcome of a constant process", he advanced a conception of the nation as a historical process that profoundly influenced subsequent theorization.

In Bauer, we find also a thick engagement with <sup>the</sup> peasant <sup>question</sup> culture, which marked a departure of sorts, from the dominant Marxist paradigm, though around this time

Marxists were generally engaging with the agrarian question seriously. He linked national identity not simply to a shared language or territory, but rather to a 'common history [which] determines and produces [all other components]'. The nation is essentialised as an ever-present and thus non-transcendent social form and he regards the decline of nationhood associated with pre-capitalist social forms, nomadism, rural community, peasant economy, as a loss to be recuperated under capitalism and fully realised under socialism. For long periods of history, plebian culture remained regional or local, and only ruling classes were truly nationalists. Under capitalism and socialism, the hitherto excluded masses are drawn into and become part of the nation, by virtue of access to an education and a language that have become national in scope. National 'belonging' therefore, both precedes and survives capitalism and in an important sense reaches its apogee in terms of emancipatory potential under socialism. Moreover, in a break with all other Marxist theories about agrarian transformation, he maintained that under socialism not only would private ownership of land continue but that the State would ensure the reproduction of peasant economy. Based on a notion of economically undifferentiated peasantry,<sup>35</sup> he made symbolic fusion between peasant, nature and nation and saw the integration of the hitherto marginalised peasantry into the 'national cultural community' as a politically empowering process. This theorization has inspired subsequent articulation of subaltern nationalism.

Kautsky's position prior to 1914 was similar to Lenin's but was distinguished by its unilateral and almost exclusive concentration on language as the basis of the nation and by a lack of clarity and boldness in the formulation of the right of nation to secession. He adhered loosely to the Herderian linguistic concept of nation.<sup>36</sup> The privileging of the linguistic identity has remained pretty important ever since.

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<sup>35</sup> Otto Bayer (1978): *Socialism and the Principle of Nationality* in Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode (ed) *Austro-Marxism*, Oxford Clarendon Press

<sup>36</sup> Opposed to the theory that saw language as an instrument of information storage and communication, Herder adopted a more expressive or constitutive approach to language. Words for him are "companions of the dawn of life". Language is integral to the conscious activity and development of human beings. It is essentially, therefore, a form of action. It does not just record or designate external objects, but conversely has a constitutive and active role. Humans both make and are made within languages. Humans perceive nature through the medium of speech and reflection. Natural languages, in the form of primitive cries, are distinct from developed human speech. Language, as developed human speech is the essential medium of freedom and consciousness, reflecting the totality of human energies. The human capacity for self-

Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" in spite of its ultimatum character provided a more or less precise and working definition that has been increasingly used in communist practice, "A nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture" is how he defined it. As has been argued by Partha Chatterjee<sup>37</sup> this definition creates confusion regarding "nations" and "nationality" and have increasingly been used interchangeably, with nationality being largely defined in terms of rudimentary economic life. Stalin's definition clearly bears the imprint of Bauer's theorization. But unlike Bauer's formulation, common territory and economic life were made essential ingredients of nationhood in Stalin's definition. Moreover, the nation was "not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism". He was also critical of detaching the national question from the class question though he did not endorse Rosa Luxemburg's position, either. He concentrated his analysis on the multinational states of Eastern Europe which were then experiencing a growth of capitalist relations. Further, not being grounded on a complete analysis of imperialism his analysis could not sufficiently explain the national question of the colonies and the semi-colonies. Colonies do not qualify as nations under Stalin's definition, as they do not really possess an integrated economy given their dependent economic status. Stalin subsequently made another huge departure in Marxist theory with his theory of 'Socialism in one country', where the concept of a new evolutionary type of nation, a socialist nation was advanced, though the future goal still remained a united

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awareness is also formed in language. For him, all our conscious states are formed in language. Language is thus first and foremost an indispensable requirement for the operation of the human mind. Human beings develop through thoughtful self-creation, in which language is an integral part. For him, language apart from describing also expresses the feelings, emotions, thoughts and will of the person, considered as a totality. For him, it is built out of sense impressions. Since sense impressions of one's locality formed the basis of language, it follows that local conditions, geography, climate and traditions of the community will stimulate different responses. As languages develop, so do societies and culture. Language forms the essential historical community of a society and its traditions – tradition not being viewed as a static phenomenon but rather as processes in continual flux. Culture is the spiritual bearer of this process. All humans using language in this context, he held, will therefore, form, through dialogue and conversation, distinctive cultures, mythologies, mode of expressions. In other words each Volk (people or nation) forms a distinct language community. Each people has a distinctive national spirit, which is not biological or racial, but rather historical and cultural. For Herder, it is part of the greater richness of the world that we find such different language communities and cultures, each being unique.

<sup>37</sup> Partha Chatterjee – Bengal: Rise and Growth of a Nationality. Note 3. *Social Scientist*: Vol – 4, No 2, Sep 1975.

mankind. He defined the culture of a socialist nation as having a proletarian content and a national form.

The national question is one of the fields in which Lenin greatly developed Marxist theory by spelling out on the basis of Marx's writing, and going far beyond them, a coherent strategy based on the fundamental slogan of national self determination. In its coherence and realism the Leninist doctrine was far in advance of the positions, of the other Marxists of the period, even those closest to Lenin on this question; Kautsky and Stalin.

Nationalism for him was a definite stage in man's historical progress. As he theorized: "The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and taking society into account, the Marxists fully recognize the historical legitimacy of the national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements in order that this recognition may not lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring proletarian consciousness."<sup>38</sup> Identifying the progressive aspects of nationalism, at the same time drawing the limits, he argued: "The awakening of the masses from feudal lethargy and their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people, or the nation, are progressive. Hence, it is the Marxists' bounden duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratization of all aspects of the national question. This task is largely a negative one. But this is the limit the proletariat must go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the 'positive' activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism."<sup>39</sup> He identified two historical tendencies that capitalism develops in the process of its historical evolution; "the first is the awakening of the national life and national movements, the struggle against the national oppression and the creation of the national state. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the breakdown of international barriers, the creation of the

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<sup>38</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. – 20, Moscow, 1972. pp 34 – 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp 34 – 35.



international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science etc.”<sup>40</sup> For Lenin, the task of the proletariat is to carry the second tendency forward and hence he argues: “The proletariat cannot support any consecration of nationalism; on the contrary, it supports anything that helps to obliterate national distinction and remove national barriers, it supports everything that makes the ties between nationalities closer and closer or tends to merge nations.”<sup>41</sup>

But Lenin argued, working out his position in opposition to both the ‘radical left’ and the Austro-Marxists, the coming together necessitated the recognition of right to self-determination of nationalities, including the right to secession. Lenin understood better than his comrades of the revolutionary left the dialectical relationship between internationalism and the right of national self determination. For him, firstly, the right to secede makes possible free and voluntary union, association, cooperation and in the long run fusion between nations and secondly, it helps in uniting the workers of the oppressed and the oppressor nations. What is remarkable about this handling of the national question is that unlike most other Marxist writers who saw only the economic, cultural or ‘psychological’ dimension of the problem he stated clearly that the question of ~~political~~ self determination “belong wholly and exclusively to the sphere of political democracy”. For him, to counter-pose working class internationalism to ‘bourgeois’ or ‘petty bourgeois’ nationalism was only to *proclaim* the unity of the working class. To actively *build* it required the elimination of all possible sources of distrust between the workers of different countries which meant recognizing the right of oppressed nations to self-determination.<sup>42</sup>

In his celebrated debate with Rosa Luxemburg, he criticized her for her failure to see the concrete historical features of the national question in Russia that necessitated the advocacy of this right. He argued that she has “lost sight of the most important thing – the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p – 25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p – 35.

<sup>42</sup> Sanjoy Seth (1995), op. cit.

difference between countries where bourgeois democratic reforms have long been completed and those where they have not”.<sup>43</sup> Explaining his position he wrote:

The peculiar conditions in Russia with regard to the national question are just the reverse of those we see in Austria. Russia is a state with a single national centre – great Russia. The great Russians occupy a vast, unbroken stretch of territory and number about 70,000,000. The specific feature of this national state are: first that ‘subject peoples’ (which on the whole comprise the majority of the entire population – 57 percent) inhabit the border regions; secondly, the oppression of these subject people is much stronger here than in the neighbouring states (and not even in the European states alone); thirdly, in a number of cases the oppressed nationalities inhabiting the border regions have compatriots across the border, who enjoy greater national independence ...; fourthly, the development of capitalism and the general level of culture are often higher in the non-Russian border region than in the centre. Lastly, it is in the neighbouring Asian states that we see the beginning of a phase of bourgeois revolutions and national movements which are spreading to some of the kindred nationalities within the borders of Russia.<sup>44</sup>

The development of a theory which does apply to colonies and semi-colonies came about with Lenin’s theory of imperialism. In this new understanding, Asia’s connection with Europe ceased to be treated as accidental and episodic rather it came to be regarded as structural and *necessary*. Moreover, aware of the political awakening in Asia he incorporated ‘the East’ into Marxism as an active historical agent.<sup>45</sup> As a result of his theorization of imperialism the theory of self-determination of nations acquired a specific context and meaning and even greater importance. In this changed context, he argued, “the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism ... It is this division that our definition of the ‘right to nations to self-determination’ must follow...”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. – 20, p – 405.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp 407 - 408

<sup>45</sup> Sanjoy Seth (1995), *op. cit*

<sup>46</sup> V. I. Lenin ‘The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination.’ (1915), Lenin, CW, Vol. 21, p - 409.

It was no longer simply a matter of uneven development, of East, setting out to do what the West once did. Though 'the awakening of the bourgeois-democratic national movements' was noted, Lenin assimilated it with another proposition stemming from the theory of imperialism. In this case, national struggles in the East were seen as products of and response to the specifically imperialist nature of late nineteenth and twentieth century capitalism, which had divided the world into oppressor and oppressed nations. Here the struggle for nationhood in oppressed countries was seen as a response generated by and against imperialism. To raise the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination, then was not only to seek to build working class unity across and against the divisive effects of national oppression under capitalism. Nor was it merely a question of welcoming the arrival of capitalism in hitherto pre-capitalist parts of the world and supporting their 'bourgeois-democratic' national struggles. It was both of these, but it was also a crucial aspect of the struggle against imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, itself.<sup>47</sup> As a result he argued, "National wars against the imperialist powers are not only possible and probable; they are *inevitable, progressive and revolutionary...*"<sup>48</sup>

Stalin has explained the historic implication of Lenin's theory of imperialism. "Leninism has laid bare the incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between Europeans and Asians, between the 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies." The national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal state problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of the liberation of the oppressed peoples in the dependent countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism.<sup>49</sup> Lenin thus played the role of a mediator, who first opened wide the door for implantation of Marxism in Asia by firmly tying up the national and colonial question.

Making a broad overview of the national question, Lenin identified three distinct phases. The first phase, 1789–1871, he claimed, was represented by the ascendance of the

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<sup>47</sup> Sanjoy Seth (1995), *op. cit*

<sup>48</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'Junius Pamphlet' (1916) Lenin, CW, Vol. 22, p.312.

<sup>49</sup> Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* pg. 63 (from *Foundation of Leninism*)

bourgeoisie, of bourgeois democratic movements in general and bourgeois national movements in particular, and the breakdown of feudal absolutist institutions. The second phase, 1871–1914, was the epoch of the dominance of the bourgeoisie and its transformation from a progressive to a reactionary class with the emergence of finance capital and, lastly, the epoch of imperialism, that began in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War, which he expected would be a period of convulsions ending in the overthrow of capitalism, in country after country. In the imperialist phase of capitalism Lenin,<sup>50</sup> divided the countries and states into three main types in order to examine the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat and their parties regarding the national question. They, in the words of Lenin, are:

“First, the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and the United States”;

“Secondly, Eastern Europe: Austria, the Balkans and particularly, Russia”;

“Thirdly, the semi-colonial countries, such as China, Persia and Turkey, and all the colonies, which have combined population of 1,000 million”.

Pointing out the tasks of the respective contingents of the revolutionary proletariat, he stated: “The tasks of the proletariat of the ruling nations are the same as those of the proletariat of England in the nineteenth century in relation to Ireland”, i.e., to come out openly in support of the secession of Ireland and its independence.

“With regard to the second type of countries which includes Tsarist Russia, where a developed bourgeois democratic national movement and intensified national struggle were present, the proletariat has to champion the right of nations to self-determination against the particular oppressor nation and the most difficult and most important task in this is to unite the class struggle of the workers of the oppressor nations with the workers of the oppressed nations.”

Regarding the third category of countries, the Marxists, he argued “must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation – and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing else than recognition of the

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<sup>50</sup> Lenin, *On the National and Colonial Questions, Three Articles* pg.6

right of self determination, they must render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising – or revolutionary war, in the event of one against the imperialist powers that oppress them.”

Lenin’s conceptualization of imperialism and anti-colonial nationalism, which made a decisive break with the rigidly deterministic and evolutionist Marxism of the Second International, has been profoundly influential and guided the political praxis of communist parties across the Third World. He did not delve much into the cultural and/or linguistic and historical dimensions of nationhood. The conceptual grid he provided gave the broad framework to view the national question, though a lot of space was left to incorporate the particularities of a given society on the basis of a concrete analysis of a concrete situation. But often in communist practice, the singular focus on the geo-politics of imperialism and its contradictions vis-à-vis the nation, has led to the downplaying of the sectional identities that needs to be articulated, to actualize the concrete universal.

## Chapter: 2

### Changing Positions of the Mainstream Communists on the National Question: Pakistan Movement and After

Marxist materialist conception of history assigns primacy to class struggle in determining the course of social development. In spite of their stress on class, most of the classical Marxist thinkers, as we have discussed earlier, recognised that the transition to socialism requires, among others, a better understanding of the role of other social structure like nationalities, caste, races, and religious groups, especially in the Third World, where societies are making an uneasy transition to modernity and capitalism. As a result, Marxists had to handle, the issues of culture and cultural difference, the dynamics of the culture-economy interface and in their politics articulate, to some extent, recognition and redistributive concerns.

Grappling with the social complexities in India, the communists, with all their limitations and prevarications, tried to work out a differentiated notion of nationalism that marked it out from the dominant Congress ideology of Indian nationalism that appeared to 'exude the flavour of a monochromatic, integrated and homogenous blend.'<sup>1</sup> The communist interrogation of the idea of India, as a nation, marked a departure from the hegemony of nationalist thought that operated on the basis of a basic assumption that a pre-existent nation was needed as an essential prerequisite for the anti-colonial freedom movement. As Gandhi, refusing to accept the view that India became a nation due to British rule, argued, "We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation, that they were able to establish one kingdom, subsequently they divided us"<sup>2</sup>. His argument rested on the assumption that firstly, ancient Indian civilization had an accommodating

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<sup>1</sup> T.V. Satyamurthy : *Indian Nationalism : State of the Debate*, EPW Volume XXXII, April 5 – 11, 1997

<sup>2</sup> M.K. Gandhi: *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Ahmedabad, Revised New Edition, 1939, p. 40

capacity and secondly, in ancient India the acharyas in founding certain places of pilgrimage had laid the basis for the evolution of an all – India consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

The communist approach marked a sharp break from this strong and widespread tendency with almost all variances of nationalist thinking to ‘immemorialize’<sup>4</sup> the nation. The immemorialization of India - nation as the one pole that unified the two distinct streams which made up the nationalist thought - gave a specific imprint to Indian nationalism. The two streams were the liberal, enlightenment based trend, centering around the idea of progress (i.e. secular, democratic and homocentric) and cultural deliberations based on religion which sought to invest nationalism in a distinctly defined identify content. Common to both streams was the unexamined relation of the ‘national’ with the ‘civilizational’. Even Nehru, who drew heavily on the enlightenment tradition, both in its liberal and Marxist versions, was essentially non-rational. The sense of oneness of national heritage existing throughout the ages as an overarching presence on the individual linguistic features of the various people, who have lived in India, came to him not by rational mode of appropriation of social reality, but by an overpowering emotional experience, a kind of mystic peep into India’s uniqueness as a nation . The communist position, on the other hand, showed sensitivity to the fact that a nation has to be fashioned out of concrete elements contained in the given social formation with its linguistic, cultural and religious peculiarities. This marks a sharp contrast with the Congress position which regarded the nation as automatically indistinguishable from country wide territory.<sup>5</sup>

The Indian National Congress began its career in 1885 in humble and loyal opposition to the colonial government. But over the years, different sections of its leadership developed political consciousness ranging over the entire spectrum from mild liberalism to different brands of radicalism. The nationalist elite were profoundly influenced by metropolitan ideas. They separated the private and personal sphere from

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony J. Parel: *Gandhi's Idea of Nation in Hind Swaraj* in Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (ed) *Political Ideas of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi, 1998, p. 84

<sup>4</sup> Javed Alam, “Nation : *Discourse and Intervention by Communists in India*” in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed), *State and Nation in the context of social change*, Vol – I, New Delhi, 1977, p. 337

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

the public sphere, where the ideas of West European nationalism that culminated in the emergence of the modern, culturally homogenous nation-states, served as the model. Though Gandhian Congress worked out an inclusive, integrated concept of anti-colonial nationalism, and had to accommodate differences to some extent, its vision at a fundamental level remained one of administrative unity rather than political unity. The main objective of the Congress party, as opposed to Gandhi's multi-layered vision of an independent, undivided India, loosely held together by a minimally powerful central state, with political autonomy widely dispersed to regions and localities down to the villages, was to inherit the colonial state at independence and to control its power. INC's organizational wing gave Indian nationalism a 'centralist, state-oriented and unitary meaning'<sup>6</sup>. Nehru's ideological stance that India was 'an undifferentiated and totally integrated political entity, based on an extrapolated, linear and simplistic reading of Indian history'<sup>7</sup> continued to be the official line.

CPI's intervention in the nationalist debate highlighted the tensions between the integrative approach of INC and the more differentiated orientation towards the nationalist project, which was continually heightened by the demands of Muslims (Muslim League), untouchables (under Ambedkar's Leadership), minority communities, the Non-Brahmin / Justice movement in Madras and other "nationalities". CPI was the only nationalist party, though it was not a mainstream political force in any sense, which developed a differentiated view of Indian nationalism. It at least experimented with a variety of ideas about the composition of the Indian nation. Thus at various stages, it gave a communal or regional, based on culture and language, emphasis to the concept of "nation", "sovereignty" and "autonomy"<sup>8</sup>

At the same time they did not see the national question, in narrow cultural terms, but tied it up with the broader issue of socio-economic transformation. They employed the category of class, defined in strictly economic terms and tied it up to the national question. Largely following the lead of the Comintern, and Lenin's Colonial Thesis, they

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<sup>6</sup> T. V. Satyamurthy : Indian Nationalism : State of the Debate

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



settled for a two-stage transition theory. The stage of the Indian revolution was a bourgeois democratic one, they argued. Moreover, following Lenin, the progressive democratic content of the anti-colonial movement was recognized. This had profound implications for the characterization of the bourgeoisie in India, as they or a faction of them were supposed to have a progressive content, unlike in imperialist countries. Though the assessment of the bourgeoisie and the strategy and tactics to be employed to advance the cause of the Indian revolution kept on changing, with the changing positions of the Comintern, still anti-imperialism and the struggle against feudalism, which was understood to provide to the former with a social base, remained the chief plank of attack. From this vantage point, they argued that the substantive issue of the national question was the peasant question. The agrarian revolution was the primary task to increase the democratic content of the national movement. Moreover the changing assessment of the bourgeoisie and their role in the democratic and anti-imperialist movement and the nature of the “post - colonial state” was a bone of contention and led to a series of splits in the party. The national question was intimately connected with the characterization of the bourgeoisie and its handling in concrete communist practice has much to do with the assessment of its class character. The Communists, now divided into the CPI, CPI (M) and the various CPI (ML) factions, as a whole subscribed to the notion that India is a multinational state and does not constitute a nation in the same sense as in Europe. However there are sharp disagreements on various issues and tactics relating to the national question.

Broadly the national question was studied within a framework that regarded India as a multinational state. Moreover, it was viewed as an integral part of the larger socio-economic transformation that was marked by uneven and distorted nature of capitalist development. National crystallization of people with different expressions of ethnic identity was understood to be, conditioned by capitalist transformation, which in the Indian case was structurally dependent on pre-capitalist forces. Taking note of the Indian situation arising out of its colonial past, it was argued, that the remnants of the old colonial and feudal order that stood in the path of democratization of social relations, had to be done away with. The uneven development of different nationalities residing in India was

to some extent the result of the colonial experience. The desire of the big bourgeoisie to consolidate its domination over the Indian market, to accentuate the process of capital accumulation and its conflict of interests with the bourgeoisie of different nationalities was the context in which the national question was analysed. Moreover, it took note of the belated awakening of some of the tribal nationalities as a result of imposed capitalism. For large sections of the mainstream left the resolution of the national question was one about democratic development and cultural awakening to advance the cause of national unity. For them, unity and diversity are not two antipodal concepts. This perspective made them acutely sensitive to the efforts of some 'reactionary' and imperialist agencies trying to disrupt the unity of the people.

Keeping the unique communist approach in mind, in the following discussion we take up two moments, they attempted to negotiate diversity and difference in the Indian context. First, we take up their handling of the communal identity and the demand for Pakistan and second, the issue of linguistic identity. The discussion reveals the points of confusion and ambiguity in their understanding as well as the shifts in the position of the Party. Starting with the 'Adhikari Thesis', its relentless criticism during the Ranadive period, intense inner-party struggle of divergent positions after the fall of Ranadive, the 1951 Party Programme, that was a compromise document hammered out under Soviet influence, the 'National Unity' position worked out in the Third Party Congress in Madurai in 1953, that gave the basic orientation during the subsequent period, and its virtual endorsement, though with significant modifications after the split, by CPI(M) in the Madurai Congress in 1972, the understanding of the national question has undergone tectonic shifts. A modest attempt to map it out is made in the subsequent discussion.

The story of the communist interventions into the discourse about the nation in India began meaningfully only in the early 1940s. The CPI documents of the period before 1940 sometimes referred to the right of self-determination to national minorities, for an example, The Draft of the Platform of Action of Indian Communists, 1930. It was during the 40s, after the demand for sovereign Pakistan

became insistent, that the communists began to ask questions about whether or not India was a nation or what kind of a national entity it was or what the best way would be of introducing the 'national idea' into the political debates that were taking place in the country. In this context it is interesting to remember, that Stalin had, as early as in 1925 in his speech to communist trainees, who were to take part in Asia's struggle for national liberation observed, "Now, India is talked about as one entity. But there can be hardly any doubt that in the case of revolutionary upheaval in India, many hitherto unknown nationalities each with its own language and its own distinctive culture, will emerge on the scene."<sup>9</sup>

The theoretical formulation that was advanced in 1942 aspired to resolve both the communal problem as well as the phenomenon of regional assertion. The party tried to work out a scheme of forging voluntary unity of the people belonging to different nationalities to strengthen political unity, as opposed to the coercive unity imposed by the colonial masters. The party began to see the so called communal problem, especially the Hindu - Muslim problem, as really a problem of growing nationalities and attempted to give a 'national solution'. At the same time, its formulation was also made keeping the needs of other nationalities in mind. To regard religion as a basis of nationality, though not the sole basis, to concede the "just essence of the Pakistan demand" marked a significant departure from Stalin's definition of nation.

This position was clearly worked out in the article "National Unity Now" by Gangadhar Adhikari, popularly known as the 'Adhikari Thesis,' which appeared in the party organ, People's war on August 9, 1942. It sought to analyse the reasons for 'an accentuation of the communal tension in the years that followed 1937' as well as the provincial strife that took place in different parts of the country. To him, "Apart from a general sharpening of Hindu-Muslim relations, there has been also been a cropping up of provincial jealousies and frictions, such as the Bengal-Bihar controversy, the question of a separate Andhra province and the question of "Samyukta" Karnataka and so on". To

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Stalin: *The Political Tasks of the University of the People's of the East* in J.V.Stalin, Vol. 7, Moscow, 1954,p. 141

work out a solution to these problems, he analysed the national composition of India and tried to establish the 'multinational' character of it and advocated the right to self-determination of all nationalities, including the right to secession, in the interest of the greater unity and freedom of the country. He argued, "the freedom and unity of India can be won and preserved only by recognizing the freedom and equality of the various nationalities of which India is composed." Thus, apart from conceding the 'just essence of the Pakistan demand', emphasis is given to the need for a joint fight for freedom through 'Congress-League Unity'.

Adhikari's position was endorsed by the Enlarged Plenum of the Central Committee (C.C.) of the Party held in 19 September, 1942. The resolution adopted by the Enlarged Plenum of CC and confirmed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the CPI held in May 1943, envisaged India as the home of many nationalities whose political aspirations had to be met in a scheme of independence. The resolution stood for the right of a sovereign or autonomous state of each of these "distinct nationalities" within the Indian federation along with the right to secede, if it so desired. The resolution affirmed:

"Every section of the India people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological makeup and common economic life would be recognized as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as a autonomous state within the free Indian Union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire..... free India of tomorrow would be a federation or Union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims) Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthani, Gujratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Beharis, Oriyas, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrians, Malayalis etc."

Before this resolution was passed there was no clear evidence to suggest that the CPI viewed the national question in India in terms of 'right to secede' even though, the much more ambiguous 'right to self-determination' has always been a part of its discourse on multi-national India. Together with the enumeration of various nationalities, this not only constituted a departure in terms of CPI's own

understanding but it also represented an effort to introduce a new set of categories and a methodology, even if only implicit, of arriving at them. The CPI's position was quite novel and had some differences with Muslim League's position, in the sense that it argued, that Muslims constitute not one but a number of nationalities. Alternatively, there could be a large number of nationalities in India which shared the "Muslim Faith" as one of the defining characteristics. The CPI endeavour was an attempt at bridging Hindu-Muslim differences to strengthen, the national liberation movement. It distanced itself from "the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion" and argued that "the recognition of the right to separation in this form need not necessarily lead to actual separation." It claimed that "by dispelling" the mutual suspicion, it brings about the unity of action today and lays the basis for a greater unity in the free India of tomorrow."

Adhikari, the moving spirit behind the Party's position argued: "The grant of the right to self-determination to all the nationalities of our land will in fact lead to a greater and more glorious unity of India than we have ever had till now. .... The denial of right to self determination means denial of equality and freedom to every nationality in a free India..... It is the denial of self-determination which will disunite and disrupt India." According to him, as the national movement gathered momentum, the struggle for autonomy waged by different national minorities was bound to grow as well. Because certain Indian nationalities e.g. The Baluchis, Pakistanis, Sindhis, West Punjabis and East Bengalese were predominantly Muslims, he contended the national aspirations of these people found their expression in the movement for the establishment of Pakistan. To him, the Communists, who recognize the right of nations to self-determination, including the right to secede, cannot therefore deny that the Muslims too would have this right. He also asserted that the principal language groups in India represented different nationalities and stressed that it would only be just to concede the right of self-determination to those groups also. He argued: "The grant of this right, including the right of separation, dispels

distrust and acts as the strongest unifying bond here and now. The object is to unite, not to partition off.”<sup>10</sup>

Analysing the conception of India’s unity, Adhikari observed that it “was never a static one.” To him “It is a living and growing reality which is developing within its womb a host of individual nationalities which lived together on the Indian soil through centuries and are now waking to new consciousness. Unequal economic development leads to friction and conflict between communities and different national units.” He further observed that “the growing sweep of the All India Peoples movement tends to unite these communities and national units into one united national front for freedom.” But he continued “imperialism deliberately promotes and fosters separatist tendencies to disrupt and paralyse the unity of national force which is advancing towards freedom.” He urged the leadership of the INC to take note of the developing multi-national pattern of India’s unity, instead of playing into the hands of imperialist reactionaries and asked them to recognize the just claim of the peoples of these individual nationalities to autonomous state existence within the framework of a free Indian union along with the right to secede, if it so desired.”<sup>11</sup> Adhikari also observed that the granting of such a right could never lead to the vivisection of the motherland. For him to have apprehensions on this ground is to display a fundamental lack of faith in one’s own people.

The editorial of the same issue of People’s war, that contained Adhikari’s article, stated, that the fear of a minority which distrusted the majority could not be allayed, unless it was “given the right to secession, the right to form an independent state.”<sup>12</sup> Ranadive also in an article argued that the unification of India could not be built except on the basis of complete freedom of nationalities to secede. He warned “the refusal to consider the right is to leave the initiative to imperialism, is to head for the Balkanization

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<sup>10</sup> Gangadhar Adhikari (ed) *Pakistan and National Unity - The Communist Solution* [Report by Adhikari before the Enlarged Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India held in September, 1942] Second Edition, Bombay, 1944, Reprinted in T.G. Jacob (ed) *National Question in India: CPI Documents, 1942 – 47*, New Delhi, 1988 and in Jyoti Basu et. al. (ed) *Documents of the Communist Movement in India (hereafter DCMI)*, Vol – IV (1939 – 43), Calcutta, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Gangadhar Adhikari: *National Unity Now*. p. 3

<sup>12</sup> CPI, *People’s War*, August 9, 1942 p.2

of India".<sup>13</sup> Countering the allegation, as to whether religion can be the sole basis of nationality, Ranadive argued "The Communists do not define nationality by reference to Religion Alone and hereby they differ from Mr. Jinnah. They have got scientific criteria for defining a nationality - contiguous territory, historical tradition, language, common economic life etc." He continued, "this does not mean, however that these criteria do not apply to Muslims in certain areas. In fact... Muslims in certain territorial units forms a distinct nationality. To concede this is not to adopt religion as the sole criteria."<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, there was significant difference, which had profound implications, in the Resolutions of the Party and in the Reports, statements and other writings of leaders like Adhikari and Joshi, as Javeed Alam has pointed out. "Whereas the Resolution of the CC of CPI only refers to 'nationalities having the Muslim faith,' Adhikari's Report refers to Muslim not only as 'nationalities' (without any qualifications) but also as 'oppressed nationalities'. It does not lay down any criteria as to what constitutes an 'oppressed nationality', a procedure essential to the Leninist method. Nor does Adhikari distinguish between the oppression, on the one hand of 'Western Punjabis' (predominantly Muslims) or 'Muslims of East Bengal' and on the other of (say) 'Sikhs' or Oriyas respectively". Moreover as Alam has pointed out, "Joshi, like Adhikari regarded religion as a defining factor in the making of nationality, even though the official documents of the CPI regarded it only as a conditional factor of nationality." To him, the discussions on Bengal constituted a case in point, because Joshi accorded a separate status to 'East Bengal' as a nation by virtue of the fact that majority of them were Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

During the period of 1942 - 45, the basic position of the party continued without much change. The Party however began to realise its mistake during the post war years and subjected its national policy to close scrutiny. The intervention of Rajni Palme Dutt in March 1946 and also after a series of inner - party debates and discussions following it, that the real shift in CPI's position became perceptible. Dutt, while being

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<sup>13</sup> B.T. Ranadive, *We Can and Must Unite*, People's War, August 30, 1942 pp1,6

<sup>14</sup> B.T. Ranadive, *National Unity and the League*, People's War, September 20, 1942, p3

<sup>15</sup> Javeed Alam, op. cit.

appreciative of “the constructive character of the contribution (exaggerations apart) which the Indian Communists have made to the problem of Indian unity in relation to the multi-national character of the Indian people,”<sup>16</sup> warned the “demand to base nationality on religion encouraged communal antagonism, and is doubtful from a practical point of view, since Hindus and Muslims are in reality intermingled all over India.”<sup>17</sup> Arguing his position out, he criticized the formulation of “Moslem Nationalities”. He wrote:

First, the Pakistan programme makes no mention of the varied nationalities recognized by the Communist programme as having a claim to self – determination. The Pakistan programme is a programme for a Moslem State. The Communist Party calls for seventeen Constituent Assemblies, based on seventeen alleged nationalities. The Pakistan programme calls for two Constituent Assemblies, one for Hindu majority areas, and the other for Moslem majority areas.

Second, the Pakistan movement is not a federation of recognized national movements of nationalities. It is a movement of the Moslem League for the constitution of a Moslem State, with the determining factor as religion, not nationality.

Third, it is doubtful if it is correct to speak of “Moslem nationalities” any more than it would be to speak of Spain, Italy, France and Austria as “Catholic nationalities.” The measure of religion is not identical with the measure of nationality ( the example of Bengal, with a strong common Bengali feeling against partition, yet almost equally divided between Hindus and Moslems, is a case in point); and the identification is dangerous and plays into the hands of Pan- Islamism.

Fourth, the Moslem League is not a national movement of certain nationalities occupying certain parts of India. It is a communal organization organizing Moslems as Moslems in all parts of India, just as the Hindu Mahasabha organizes Hindus as Hindus. Such communal organization is a sign of political backwardness and carries obvious dangers of disruption.

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<sup>16</sup> Rajni Palme Dutt: *India and Pakistan*, Labour Monthly, (XXVIII) (3), March, 1946 pp. 87 – 90 in Debnarayan Modak: *Dynamics of the National Question in India*, 2006

<sup>17</sup> Rajani Palme Dutt, “Freedom for India” T.G. Jacob, op. cit, p 179



But this does not diminish the importance of winning the wide sections following the Moslem League to a broad united national front for Indian independence. It is here that the work of the Communist Party, in striving tirelessly for Congress – League unity, in approaching with sympathetic understanding the aspirations of the masses following the Moslem League and in discerning the genuine national elements behind the Pakistan demand and showing the possible basis for an agreed solution between the Congress and the League has performed a real service in the cause of Indian national unity.<sup>18</sup>

Dutt's criticisms get reflected in the CPI Memorandum to the British Cabinet Mission, submitted in April, 1946. It dropped its support for Pakistan and substituted for it the demand for 'self determination' of 'linguistically and culturally homogenous national units.' It categorically stated 'the Communist Party stands for a free, voluntary, democratic Indian Union of sovereign units.'<sup>19</sup> The Central Committee resolution of the Party adopted in August, 1946, was also very categorical in its opposition to the demand for Pakistan and on the basis of class analysis, characterized the demand as the "policy of Muslim bourgeois, feudal interests who are seeking for a compromise with imperialism for a share of administration in a divided India." It took the decision to "expose the undemocratic demand of the Muslim League for a separate Muslim state...., by denying self-determination of the people of the nationalities of the areas". Accusing the leadership of both the Congress and the League for turning to "imperialism for separate compromise with each other" instead of turning to "the people for a democratic struggle against imperialism", it argued, this cleared "the way for the success of imperialist designs," to "smash the growing mass upsurge, to split the freedom movement and to perpetuate imperialist feudal rule in a new form."<sup>20</sup>

The subtle shift in the discourse within the party also comes through in Sajjad Zahir's criticism of the League's formulation, that 'sovereignty resides not in the entire people speaking the same language and bound together by a thousand and one cultural

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<sup>18</sup> Rajani Palme Dutta, *India and Pakistan*, Labour Monthly in Modak op. cit

<sup>19</sup> CPI. Memorandum of the Communist Party of India to the British cabinet Mission,, People's Age April 21, 1946

<sup>20</sup> CPI. Central Committee Resolution (Adopted in August, 1946), People's Age , August 18, 1946, p.2

and historical ties, but only a section of the people – the Muslim majority.” Even Adhikari now argued that the demand for Pakistan was undemocratic because it included non-Muslim majority areas without democratic vote of the people of those areas and because it denied the right to self determination to the nationalities contained therein, e.g. Assam, Pathanland, Sind etc.

Though there was significant continuity with past policy, there was an attempt to distance the party’s position from the League’s. The ‘Draft Resolution for the Constituent Assembly’, tabled by Somenath Lahiri, the lone Communist member of the Assembly, also emphasised the need to resolve Congress–League differences on the question of Indian unity and Pakistan, “by the vote of the people through the democratic application of the principle of national self-determination....”. He argued, “if a reactionary section of the League leaders had been able to distort the freedom urge of the various nationalities into religious separation..... responsibility rests with the Congress for not unequivocally recognising the right of any national unit to self-determination.”<sup>21</sup>

P.C. Joshi, the then General Secretary of the party, explained the party’s position: “Our party supports the Congress’ demand for self determination against Britain but expects the Congress to pledge to implement self-determination in the future framework of independent India as well.....our party also supports the Muslim demand for self-determination but insists upon just boundaries and puts forward plans for a really voluntary and free Indian Union instead of a partitioned and divided India.”<sup>22</sup>. According to him, “neither the concept of India as one nation nor that of Muslims as one nation can help towards the real understanding of our past history or our present problem of achieving Indian unity – but rather both concepts only build further barriers between the Congress and the League and hinder the achievement of unity for the final battle.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Somenath Lahiri, “Lahiri’s Speech to the Constituent Assembly”, *People’s Age*, December 29, 1946, in Modak, op.cit.

<sup>22</sup> P.C. Joshi, *For the Final Bid for Power: Freedom Programme of the Indian Communists – the Communist Plan Explained*, Bombay, p.4

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.11

All subsequent steps taken by the Party reflected this changed position. The Central Committee resolution of June 1947, "Mountbatten Award and After" was the last desperate attempt to turn the tide. "Partition will not solve our problems. It will multiply them leading to conflicts on boundaries, border hostilities, oppression of minorities on each state, perpetuate all conflicts, strengthen reaction all around and thus create avenues for imperialist penetration."<sup>24</sup>

In the second Congress of the CPI held in Calcutta in 1948, signaling the change of guard, Ranadive came out with a scathing criticism against the official leadership. Presenting the 'Report on Reformist Deviation', while recognizing the great contribution that the leadership had made by posing the question of self-determination as the core problem in situations of multi-nationality, he accused the leadership of its 'non class conception' towards the Hindu-Muslim problem. He said "While we took basically a correct revolutionary position, we more and more drifted into opportunist trailing behind the bourgeoisie till we sank deep into the mire of disruptive reformism."<sup>25</sup> Criticising the 'Adhikari thesis', he maintained that it did not expose the bourgeois leadership as the obstacle and the disruptor of the struggle for self-determination. To him, "the whole conception of how the Hindu-Muslim problem arose at different times is a non-class conception in which classes are not taken into account and the deliberate policy of imperialism of divide and rule is screened from the reader's eye". He further noted. "It fails to attack the [Muslim] league leaders and their cry for Pakistan as a weapon of compromise with imperialism, separation being the special form of compromise with imperialist Government". As a result, he argued, CPI "not only refused to fight the disruptionist role of the Muslim League and the Pakistan demand, but more and more ourselves made concessions to separatism in the name of popularizing and enriching self-determination."<sup>26</sup>

Inner-party controversies did not subside and severe inner party squabbles on different policy issues including the national question, witnessed allegations ranging

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<sup>24</sup> Jyoti Basu op. cit., p 364

<sup>25</sup> B.T. Ranadive, *Report on Reformist Deviation* in DCMI, Vol - V pp 671 - 723

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 175

from 'Right-Reformism' to 'Left-Deviation' being leveled by one section against the other. On national policy in particular, the question arose once again as to whether the attitude taken by the leadership of the party since the Second Congress represented the principle of 'self determination of nationalities' or 'self-determination of toilers'. The new leadership that represented the Andhra group, alleged that 'the Political Bureau since the Second Party Congress pursued a reactionary policy of subservience to big-bourgeoisie chauvinism by opposing all nation movements.'<sup>27</sup> Thus while the Joshi-Adhikari leadership was accused of following 'a grossly servile policy of tailism' to the separatist bourgeoisie, the policy of Ranadive leadership was criticized as subservient to 'big-bourgeoisie chauvinism.'

The program of CPI (1951) which was the product of three years of intense inner party struggle was basically a compromise document hammered out under Soviet influence. Section 14, 26 and 27 were especially noteworthy for their handling of the national question. Section 14 argued for the free development of various nationalities of India. It also asserted that large tribal areas with their own economy and culture should have the right to self determination. In section 26, the right of all nationalities to self-determination was stated. Moreover, it was argued that the Union could be formed only on the basis of voluntary consent. Section 27 dwelt with substantive issues. It stated that states have to be re-constituted according to the principle of common language. It was also of the opinion that princely states also need to be reconstituted on the same principle and national homeland for various nationalities ought to be created. In tribal areas or areas where the population is specific in composition and is distinguished by specific social condition or constitutes a national minority, complete regional autonomy and regional government was the answer.

In the subsequent phase especially after the Third Congress in Madurai in 1953, 'national unity' became the central focus and we find a reframing of the question of national self-determination. The CPI's stand on the reorganization of states

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<sup>27</sup> CPI, *Report on Left Deviation Inside the CPI*, M.B. Rao (ed) *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol – VII, New Delhi, 1976 (DHCPI)

was substantiated by Ajay Ghosh, the General Secretary. Ghosh emphasized the following four conditions as the basis of party work on the national question in India, and these remained the basis of work until the 1964 split.

1. The first state in the struggle for solving the 'national question' in India has to be a movement for the linguistic states but only as a part of the general democratic movement.

2. It was not to be conceived, as was the case in Tsarist Russia, as a struggle of one nationality against another, but a 'struggle for a democratic recasting of boundaries and against the relics of imperialism and feudalism'.

3. While it recognized that even in the post – independence period every major linguistic-cultural group constitutes a nationality, it explicitly stated: "*wrong is the idea that in India there are oppressor nations and oppressed nations and that the later have to fight against the former*".

4. It therefore followed that the tendency of separatism in all forms has to be fought.

Ajoy Ghosh went on to say very clearly that the various Indian nationalities must stay together in one state both for the defense of freedom and for rapid economic, political and social rebuilding of the country. "The Communist Party stands for the unity of India and wants the people of different nationalities fighting for freedom and democracy to come closer together." This new thinking clearly comes through in EMS Namboodiripad's articulations around this time, about the "unbreakable unity of India." He wrote: "We on our part, pointed out that the political unity of India can be preserved only if the linguistic cultural groups inhabiting a particular state is considered a distinct nationality within the indivisible Indian state. It was in this sense that the communists in 1940s called India a multinational state. Multinational India defined by the communists is in other words supplementary rather than contradictory to the unity of the India as a nation."

Under this new emphasis, the question of self-determination as embodying the right of secession became to all intents and purposes a dead letter even though it

continued to exist formally in the party programme of the CPI. If there were no oppressor nations, then from the logic of Leninist formulations on which this understanding was based, the right to secession could not be written in as an automatic constitutional provision. This way of defining self-determination was finally dropped by the CPI(M) after the split in the 1964. Although in the party programme of the CPI(M) in 1964, not much was said on the question of nationalities, a detailed position was taken in the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1972. The note on the “national question” is important because it represents the first attempt by the CPI(M) to provide a theoretical substantiation of its position on this issue. Taking an argued position on the issue of oppressor / oppressed nationalities, the note added that there was and will remain important differences with the USSR. The foremost difference was that, there is no dominant nationality in India as was the case in pre – revolutionary Russia, meaning thereby that there is no nationality so predominant that it does or can exploit other nationalities. Therefore in the Indian federation, there is no need for the right of self – determination, seen as a right to secede. It asserted:

“There is no compelling reason why it should be obligatory to insert this slogan in our Programme, and that too, when we cannot postulate the division of Indian nationalities into what are called oppressor and oppressed, and when the big bourgeois-chauvinist and jingoist groups in different nationalities on the other hand are endangering working class unity by fostering separatist and disruptive forces, thus pushing into the forefront of the proletarian party, the foremost task of fighting against these trends”.

The question from now onwards for the dominant factions of the left was a problem of securing the national integrity and political unity of India. The internal democratization of social relations between the various linguistic and cultural communities, referred by them as distinct nationalities, was the minimum requirement. This also requires the emancipation of peasant masses and the availability of universal education in the mother tongue. The creative potential of the people of India can only be realized under these conditions, it was argued. At the minimum, two things

needed immediate attention, according to the communists; the recognition of all the languages as national languages as well as complete equality of the languages and a very high degree of political autonomy for the states created on a national basis in a federation. Now for the communists, the question of nationalities boiled down to an approach that has three dimensions, (1) Guarantee of equality of all languages under the Constitution (2) Equal partnership of the Centre and the States and (3) Uneven Economic Development.

The various CPI (ML) factions though, have held on to the right of self-determination of nationalities as an important aspect of the New Democratic Revolution in India and expressed support for the national struggles of the Nagas and Mizos but in their practice also, there has been a certain element of counter-posing class struggle with national struggle by adopting a policy that communists must lead class struggle, while the bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeoisie would lead national struggle. They have criticized the “national unity” positions of the CPI and CPI (M) on the ground that it reflects a “class-collaborationist policy”

## Chapter: 3

### Linguistic Diversity and the Communists

#### I

Language is the linchpin of identity. This is because language is connected to the shared understanding of a community, understandings that commonly go by the name of culture. Language gives us an identity as member of a community, which is distinguished by certain shared understandings. Denise Reaume<sup>1</sup> suggests that language can be valued intrinsically as a cultural inheritance and as a referral of identity simply because an individual member's use of language is at once, participation in the accomplishment of a group, as well as a marker of belonging. Therefore, if a state does not recognize or respect a language, the identity of the members of the linguistic group is devalued. This leads to loss of belonging, alienation, discontent and even revolt. Moreover, language is tied up with material opportunities. If one language is privileged as the language of material, social, cultural and political transactions, it gives unfair advantage to some and disempowers others. As a result the issue of language, has both the dimensions of identity and opportunity. Language has historically formed the basis of nationhood, as in the case of Italy and France. In the same vein, in India the question of language has been wrapped up in the larger political issue, that of a homogenous, unitary and strong nation versus fragmentation, disruption, anomie and ever secession. As Schmidt<sup>2</sup> suggests language policy conflicts are fuelled by a politics of identity in which competing rhetorical strategies are deployed on behalf of two competing public values : national unity on the one hand and equality of all linguistic groups on the other. Conflicts over language policy thus emerges when a country is characterized by linguistic diversity, when ethnolinguistic groups compete over language and where political actions motivated

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<sup>1</sup> Denise G. Reaume: *Official Language Rights: Intrinsic Value and the Protection of Difference* in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman eds, *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, Oxford:OUP, 2000, pp. 245-72, in p. 251

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Schmidt, Sr. *Language Policy and Identity Polity Politics in United States*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000, pp. 68-9



by concerns over group identity, national unity and / or ethnolinguistic inequality push the state to implement their agenda.

In India, also the politics of language broadly following the above trajectory have been stalked by two historically constituted tensions. The first component of this tension was politicization of language groups in pursuit of forming their own state. The second component was to balance out the claims for either one or many official languages. The communists, who have historically taken the question of linguistic identity and the recognition of linguistic difference seriously have in the Indian context, tried to work out an alternative position by not treating unity and diversity as two antipodal concepts, unlike the other trends. Contesting the arguments against linguistic re-organisation on grounds of national unity, financial viability and administrative inconvenience, they championed the cause of recognition of linguistic identity and accommodation of linguistic difference. At the same time, this was seen as a project for advancing the cause of national integration.

The British rulers carved up India into provinces keeping in mind the convenience of the colonial administration. They established and changed the administrative boundaries without taking into account the different nationalities and languages of the population. Several national areas were often combined within the boundaries of one administrative unit, while on the other hand many national areas were divided by the borders of provinces and principalities. With the advance of the anti-imperialist movement, a drive for the creation of linguistic provinces gained momentum. Anti-partition movement in Bengal in 1905 marked the beginning of the movement for the creation of linguistic provinces which took the shape of a mass upsurge against British rule. Between 1918 and 1922, the movement greatly extended its range and embraced most of the Indian nationalities. The Indian National Congress (INC), over the years, committed itself to the creation of linguistic states in post-colonial India. By 1920, Gandhi was to declare his support for linguistic states though three years earlier he had dismissed the idea as not important for Congress, faced as it was with more urgent issues. Whereas in Young India on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1917 Gandhi had argued that

encouragement of regional languages would imperil the fate of Hindi as the national language, at Nagpur session in 1920, he was to accept the idea of language as a basis for states, within the Union, in post – independence India<sup>3</sup>. But as the moment of transfer of power approached, the Congress party developed cold feet over the demand. The Justice Dhar committee, appointed to look into the issue proclaimed, “the formation of provinces exclusively or even on mainly linguistic considerations is not in the interest of the Indian nation and should not be taken in hand”<sup>4</sup>. According to EMS Namboodiripad, the position the INC was taking up at this point of time “ultimately led to the virtual renunciation of the principle”. Calling it a betrayal he said, “never was a promise clear and unambiguous nor was its violation more blatant and shameless than the one regarding the formation of linguistic states”<sup>5</sup>.

To have a proper understanding of the position of the Communist Party of India (CPI) on the issue of linguistic reorganisation of states one has to go back to the years immediately preceding independence. In 1945 and 1946, the CPI during the elections to the provincial legislative assemblies supported the demand for the constitution of such provinces as *Vishalandra* (greater Andhra), *Aikya-Kerala* (united Kerala), *Sankyuktha Maharashtra* (United Maharashtra). As the next step, it proposed the creation of provinces, uniting all areas, with a predominantly Telugu, Malayalam or a Maratha population, including those areas that formed parts of princely states. The CPI election platform for Punjab categorically proclaimed: “The people of the various nationalities in India with their respective languages, culture and historical traditions, whose homelands are today divided by the artificial boundaries created by the imperialists must be free to form their sovereign constituent assemblies.”<sup>6</sup> It further stated “The people of every national territorial unit such as Pathanland, Balochistan, Sindh, 'Western Punjab' (Muslim), 'Central Punjab' (Sikh homelands), Hindustan, Bihar, Rajasthan, Assam, Orissa, Andhra, Tamilnad, Kerala, Karnatak, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bengal (with

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<sup>3</sup> Neera Chandoke: *Negotiating Linguistic Diversity. A Comparative Study of India and United States in Democracy and Diversity*

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Prakash Karat, *Language and Nationality politics in India*, Madras 1973, Page 34

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in EMS Namboodiripad and AK Gopalan ed *Communist Party and State Re-Organisation*, Delhi 1955, Page 1

<sup>6</sup> T.G.Jacob ed. *National Question in India*, CPI Documents, New Delhi, 1988, Page 126-157

previous agreement for plebiscite for the Hindu and Muslim areas) should be able to form their own sovereign states in a free India with full freedom for self-development in brotherly unity with each other”<sup>7</sup>.

Similar views are reflected in the memorandum of the CPI which was presented to the British Cabinet Mission in 1946. The struggle for linguistic provinces was regarded as an integral part of the movement for independence, for the elimination of feudal survival and for the creation of conditions conducive for the cultural development of all nationalities. It suggested, “the provisional government should be charged with the task of setting up a Boundaries Commission to redraw the boundaries on the basis of natural ancient homelands of every people so that the re-demarcated provinces become as far as possible linguistically and culturally homogenous national units.”<sup>8</sup>

The lone communist member in the constituent assembly, Somenath Lahiri in 1946 moved a draft resolution that urged “the setting up of a boundary Commission which proceeds immediately to re-demarcate the existing provinces and states so that each such re-demarcated unit together with the contiguous states or part of states forms the unified homeland of a linguistically and culturally homogeneous people and India is regrouped in national units such as Kerala, Karnatak, Andhra Desha, Tamilnad, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Hindustan, Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Sindh, Balochistan, Pathanland and Kashmir”<sup>9</sup>. He lost his seat in the constituent assembly due to the partition and so the Communist Party could not carry forward its position on linguistic states within the assembly, any further.

But the party kept on championing the cause consistently. In the pamphlet, *Mountbatten award and after*, the CPI, while proclaiming their stand on the nature of the state structure to be established in free India, advocated, “national self-determination on the basis of linguistically demarcated provinces to lay the basis for the future unity of India”. It also advocated, “regional or local autonomy with full democratic rights for the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> T. G. Jacob op. cit, pp 235-240

<sup>9</sup> CPI, “*Draft Resolution for the Constituent Assembly*”, T.G. Jacob op. cit, pp 229 - 34

hill, frontier and other compact tribal areas”.<sup>10</sup> Around this time when a tug of war was going was between the INC and the Muslim League over Bengal, the noted communist leader, Bhowani Sen advocated a scheme of *Nutan Bangla* (New Bengal), in which both the Hindus and Muslims would mould their destiny together to build a new Bengal. Though the proposal did not gain political momentum, it underlines the communist approach of privileging the linguistic identity, above all other identities.

In the post-independent period, the Congress government at the centre grew lukewarm over this demand on the grounds that it would lead to fragmentation causing administrative inconvenience, apart from the project being financially unviable. The CPI was extremely critical of this stance and championed the cause of formation of linguistic states. The programme of the CPI adopted in 1951, categorically proclaimed, “The present boundaries of the states in the Indian union shall be recast and the states shall be re-constituted according to the principle of a common language. Princely states, where existing, shall be dissolved into the appropriate adjoining national state and the foreign possessions shall be restored to the country and shall be reconstituted through the same principle.”<sup>11</sup> It further proclaimed, “tribal areas or the areas where the population is specific in composition and is distinguished by specific social conditions or constitutes a national minority will have complete regional autonomy and regional government and full assistance for their development.”<sup>12</sup>

The party's election manifesto published in August 1951 echoed similar sentiments. It pledged the formation of “national states by the abolition of princely states and reconstruction of the present provinces grant them with wide powers including the right of self-determination and create an united India by the voluntary consent of the nationalities and the tribal people”. It also pledged to grant “regional autonomy to tribal people and national minorities wherever possible”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jyoti Basu ed. *Documents of the Communist movement in India*, Vol 6, Calcutta, 1997, Page 354 (hereafter DCMI)

<sup>11</sup> Programme of CPI, 1951, Bombay, 1951, Mohit Sen (ed) *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India* (hereafter DHCPI), Volume VIII (1951 – 56), New Delhi, 1977 pp 3 - 18

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p 74

The emergence of CPI as the second largest political party in the first general election and its relative success in Andhra, Kerala and Maharashtra was to some extent due to its role in the fight for linguistic states. Making an assessment of the election, the party held that “the most impressive victories were won by the democratic forces” in such places, “... [W]here provincial units of the Party brought out their own manifestos based on the central manifesto, where agitation was positive and concrete and such concrete factors as the national factor, the factor of unification of the nationality into linguistic provinces, were effectively utilized.”<sup>14</sup> The party also took a self critical note of its weakness in the movement for “Samyukta Maharashtra”.<sup>15</sup> It identified its main task to “[i]ntensify the movement for linguistic provinces in Andhra and Kerala and draw all elements, including Congressmen, into the movement. Develop similar movement in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Demand ending of Commissioner’s rule in Tripura and other Part C states and conferring of the right of legislative assembly on the electoral college.”<sup>16</sup>

The communists also intervened enthusiastically in Parliament demanding linguistic reorganization of states. On 7<sup>th</sup> July 1952, a communist MP moved a resolution in Lok Sabha demanding “immediate steps to distribute states on linguistic basis and that the boundaries of the existing states be readjusted accordingly”<sup>17</sup>. Contesting the argument that this would lead to disruption, economic instability and administrative inconvenience, he opined that it would be the other way round. Reacting sharply the Prime Minister Nehru argued it was “not only completely unacceptable but completely objectionable” and “the country’s economy would be upset” when it was at the point of settling down”<sup>18</sup> A. K. Gopalan vehemently differed, pointing out the denial of the importance of linguism on the ground that it might break the unity of India, was in sharp contrast with earlier position of the INC. Contending that the then existing division of India into so many multi – lingual states which was the making of British imperialism,

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<sup>14</sup> CPI: *On the Results of 1952 general election, Party letter number 9, April, 1952* in Mohit Sen edited DHCPI, Vol. VIII, p-96

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pp. 106-108

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pp – 114 - 115

<sup>17</sup> A. K. Gopalan and Hiren Mukherjee, *Communists in Parliament*, New Delhi, 1957, p – 14

<sup>18</sup> Gopalan and Mukherjee, Op. Cit, P – 14

did not help the cause of India's unity, he argued that linguistic reorganization of states would strengthen rather than disrupt the unity of India<sup>19</sup>. After much heated debates the resolution was defeated by 261 to 77 votes. Earlier in parliament on May 28, 1952 the party moved an adjournment motion in the house, over the fast undertaken by Swami Sitaram for the formation of the Andhra State. Again on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1952 they supported a move to adjourn the house, over Sri Ramalu's fast unto death.

As public pressure continued building up, the government conceded the demand for the formation of the Andhra State. The extended plenum of the Central committee of the CPI held in Calcutta from 30<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1952 to 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1953 warmly welcomed it as one of the significant victories of the democratic movement during the post-independence period. In parliament, communist MPs welcomed it as the first step in the redistribution of states on linguistic basis. But they criticized the government for the lack of any clear cut principal on the basis of which the Andhra State bill was drafted. They wanted the bill to be based exclusively on the linguistic principle. In Rajyasabha P. Sundaraiya argued. "It would have been gracious on the part of the Congress Government, after its thirty years advocacy of linguistic provinces..... to have come forward and said, 'we are going to re-organize India mainly on the basis of language' because language, cannot be ignored as it is the most important factor which cements the relations between people and is the source of communication between people."<sup>20</sup>

As the demand for linguistic reorganisation became more and more insistent, the Government appointed a State Reorganization Commission in 1953. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress held in Madurai from December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953 to January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954 hailed it as a "popular victory" and vowed to strengthen further "the struggle for the constitution of linguistic states by the abolition of states headed by Rajpromukh, the disintegration of multinational states and the redrawing of State boundaries."<sup>21</sup> It also urged for special attention "to the just demands and rights of the national minorities, the tribal peoples and

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Pranab Dalal *The Communist Opposition in the first and second Indian Parliament*. Unpublished P.hd thesis Burdwan University, 1979, pp – 234, 235

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. pp 234-235 in Modak, 2006

<sup>21</sup> CPI political resolution (adopted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> party Congress held in Madurai, 1953 – 54), Mohit Sen edited DHCPI, Vol - VIII, P - 315

of predominantly tribal areas within each linguistic states”. Identifying the Party’s tasks, it was said “later groups must be drawn into the movement and close links must be forged with them which can be done only by championing their demands boldly.”<sup>22</sup>The Party, however, cautioned. “All tendencies of bourgeois nationalism, tendencies of whipping up national hatred and animosity, tendencies of concentrating on the so – called disputed areas in order to build up a case for their incorporation in one’s own ‘homeland’ will intensify with the appointment of the boundary commission and the ruling classes will utilize them to disrupt the struggles of the masses. Hence all such tendencies are to be specially combated and the banner of proletarian internationalism upheld.”<sup>23</sup>

Ajoy Ghosh, the then general secretary of the Party in an article entitled “On the Works of the Third Party Congress of the Communist Party of India” analysed the movement as ‘basically a democratic movement’ aimed at participation of the common people in government and ‘full - flowering of culture’ of different linguistic nationalities and directed against ‘the feudalist strongholds which so long have retarded their formation’. But in a self – critical note, that displays the party’s thick engagement with the issue, he observed “in conducting this movement we have sometimes committed mistakes of not firmly combating bourgeois - nationalist deviations and even allowing them to penetrate our ranks”. He categorically stated:

“We should note that the demand for Linguistic States is a demand which unities all classes inside a nationality including the feudal classes. We do not reject such a unity, but we consider the unity of toiling masses of different nationalities as the most precious thing which must not be violated at any cost.”

In his Party Congress speech also, while emphasizing the democratic character of the movement, he, urged the party members to be stand clear of chauvinism. He emphasized that “the working class at many places in India is of a mixed character, composed of elements of various nationalities. We must on no account allow disruption

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid pg – 315

<sup>23</sup> Ibid pg – 315

of the unity of the working class”.<sup>24</sup> He also rejected “wrong theories of Gujrati, Marwari dominations,” pointing out the inapplicability of the “oppressor – oppressed” relationship between and among different Indian nationalities. He categorically stated. “...The linguistic States movement has got to be looked upon as a part of the general democratic movement. It is not a struggle of one nationality in Indian against another nationality. It is a struggle of all the nationalities in India for a democratic recasting of boundaries and against the relics of imperialism and feudalism. The movement will be progressive only to the extent that it is directed against these enemies.”<sup>25</sup>

The party worked out a detailed proposal for the reorganization of the states, and demanded an interim report of the commission, in line with the scheme, within September 1954. The scheme was on the following lines:

1. Kerala: The existing Travancore Cochin state, minus the Tamil – speaking areas, and Malayalam - speaking areas of Madras State.
2. Tamilnadu: The existing Madras state minus the Kannada and Malayalam - speaking areas plus the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore - Cochin with necessary boundary adjustments with Andhra.
3. Andhra: The existing Andhra state with the Telegu – speaking areas of Hyderabad State - the Telengana area including Hyderabad city - and Telegu – speaking areas of Mysore with necessary boundary adjustments with Tamilnadu, the existing Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.
4. Karnataka: The existing Mysore state minus its Telegu - speaking areas, with the Kannada - speaking areas of Madras, Hyderabad, Bombay and Andhra states and Coorg.
5. Maharashtra: The Marathi - speaking areas of Bombay, Hyderabad and Madhya Pradesh states, including Bombay city.
6. Gujrat: The Gujrathi - speaking areas of Bombay state with Saurashtra and Cutch, with the necessary boundary adjustments with Rajasthan and Madhya Bharat.

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<sup>24</sup> Ajoy Ghosh tasks before the CPI (Abridged text of the speech while moving the political resolution before the 3<sup>rd</sup> party congress). P - 27

<sup>25</sup> Ajoy Ghosh: *The Movement for Linguistic States and Struggle Against Burgeois Nationalism*, New Age (Monthly, III (5) May, 1954, pp. 16 – 18. Also see Ajoy Ghosh, *Marxism and Indian Reality*, Selected Speeches and writings, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 389 – 477.



7. The Punjab: The Punjabi - speaking areas of the Punjab and PEPSU states.
8. Orissa: The existing Orissa state with necessary boundary adjustments with Bihar, Bengal, Andhra and Madhya Pradesh.
9. West Bengal: The existing West Bengal state with the necessary boundary adjustments with Bihar and Orissa.
10. Assam: The existing Assam state.
11. Rajasthan: Including Ajmer and with the necessary boundary adjustments with existing U.P., Delhi Madhya Bharat, Gujrat and PEPSU
12. Madhya Bharat: Along with Bhopal and with necessary boundary adjustment with Rajasthan, U.P. and Madhya Pradesh.
13. Madhya Pradesh: Hindi - speaking areas of the existing Madhya Pradesh state along with the Vindhya Pradesh and with the necessary boundary adjustments with the Madhya Bharat, U.P., Orissa and Andhra States.
14. Delhi: To be formed by including Hindi speaking areas of Punjab and PEPSU and such districts of Western U.P. as had close economic links with Delhi.
15. Himachal Pradesh: with the necessary boundary adjustments with the Punjab, PEPSU and U.P.
16. Uttar Pradesh: The existing U.P. state with necessary boundary adjustments with the existing Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan, Vindhya Pradesh and Delhi.
17. Bihar: The existing Bihar state with the necessary boundary adjustments with Bengal and Orissa.
18. Tripura & (19) Manipur: Both these states would be given an elected legislature and government of their own [Sic]
19. And lastly the Kashmir and Jammu State whose special status had been recognized in the Indian Constitution.<sup>26</sup>

On the basis of the list the party argued, the re – organization of the states would “reduce the number of states from 28 to 20, which itself rebuts the arguments of those

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<sup>26</sup> CPI on re- organization of states Central Committee resolution adopted at its Meeting which concluded in Delhi on April 18, 1954), New Age 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1952. Mohit Sen (ed) DHCPI , Vol - VIII, PP – 357 – 361.

who raised the bogey of balkanization”<sup>27</sup> It contested that this would “encourage provincialism or led to ‘fissiparous tendencies” and argued that it would led to greater unity of India.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover the Central committee resolution mention two important points to be followed while redrawing boundaries

“(i) Village is to be taken as the unit, Demarcation line is to be drawn on the basis of majority of villagers speaking a particular language in that village and on the basis of contiguity of that village to that particular linguistic state.

(ii) It should be understood that, however carefully the demarcation line is drawn, both in these boundary areas, as well as in the interior of every one of these states, there will be linguistic minorities. These must be guaranteed that their education will be in their mother - tongue both in elementary and secondary stages. The question of whether college education is also to be given in their mother – tongue, and if so to what extent and under what practical conditions, is to be left to the states concerned.”<sup>29</sup> The party felt that “ only then that these boundary areas instead of being seats of discord and disunity, will become seats of mutual bonds between linguistic states.”<sup>30</sup>

In case of tribal areas the party held that “wherein a particular distinctive tribe lives should be attached to one linguistic state or the other as per their cultural and linguistic affinity with that of the neighbouring state, as well as on the basis of which state their economic development is more closely linked and likely to be more naturally developed. Where a tribe is interspersed by the migration of neighboring linguistic population, “the different compact areas wherein the tribe lives will have to be put in those states with which its economic life is linked or likely to be more naturally developed.”<sup>31</sup> It further advocated local and regional autonomy for the tribal population.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p – 2 and 11

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p - 11

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p - 11

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p - 11

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p - 11

Taking a comprehensive view of the linguistic reorganization of state, Ajoy Ghosh articulated the party's position. We quote his definitive statement at length.

The Communist Party is interested in the movement for linguistic provinces and gives it support firstly, because it is basically a democratic movement. One of the elements of democracy is that the common people must be able to participate in the government. This the multi-lingual States prevent. In multi-lingual States, English, which only a small minority of the people - generally those of the upper classes - understand, inevitably holds a dominant position. It becomes the language most commonly used in legislatures and other state institutions, thus preventing the common people from effectively participating in their functioning even if they get elected.

Secondly, one of the edges of attack of the movement is directed against the States headed by Rajpramukhs, those feudalist strongholds. It is obvious that for the realization of this demand, States like Hyderabad, Travancore – Cochin, Mysore, Patiala, etc. will have to be broken up into their constituent linguistic parts. This will be a big blow to feudalism.

Thirdly, the formation of linguistic States alone will create conditions for the flowering of national culture which democracy demands, by giving the language of each people its rightful status as State language in the area where it is spoken. The retarded state of the cultures of our different nationalities is the result of imperialist oppression, of feudal survivals and also of the present artificial nature of the administrative units.

Finally, and above all, the communist Party extends its fullest support to this demand because the present arrangement of the States gives rise to all sorts of national animosities, hampers the coming of other more important political and economic issues to the foreground and makes more difficult the organization of people on a class and democratic basis.<sup>32</sup>

Similar sentiments echoed in the Party's Memorandum to the State Reorganization Commission in May 1954. It reminded the commission of the earlier resolutions of the Indian National Congress and also particularly of the All – Parties Committee "appointed by the Indian National Congress in 1927, presided over by Pandit

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<sup>32</sup> Ajoy Ghosh op. cit, pp 389-97

Motilal Nehru and of which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the general secretary.” Quoting the All Party Committee it stated “What principles should govern this redistribution? Partly geographical and partly economic and financial but the main consideration must necessarily be the wishes of the people and the linguistic unity of the area concerned.” The party was of the opinion “that nothing has happened in India since the Nehru committee submitted its report which can negate these weighty arguments of the committee which made them recommend that the language and wishes of the people are the primary considerations for the reorganization of states.”<sup>33</sup>

The memorandum also demanded the abolition of distinction between A, B and C States; of any distinction in the degree of democratic rights enjoyed by the people of India; of the institution of Rajpramukh and their special privileges. It argued, the question of financial viability cannot be used as an apology. “Uneven economic development which results in certain areas being backward” cannot be used as “a ground for refusing the people of these areas their linguistic states.” “Such an argument would only mean that it is only the people of economically more prosperous areas that have the right to participate in the political economic and administrative life of the country.” The party proposed “It is the duty of the centre to help the more backward states, so that they are enable to rapidly do away with this backwardness and to help the even development of the whole country.”<sup>34</sup>

When the report of the State Reorganization Committee (SRC) was published the CPI offered qualitative support though it was critical of home minister G.V. Pant’s stress on “unity and security”, as the overriding principle. The Central committee stated “despite its rejection of the linguistic principle, the SRC could not but recommend the formation of Kerala, Karnataka and Madras mainly on the basis of language”. It was critical that it denied “the demand for linguistic states to the peoples speaking Marathi, Gujrati, and Punjabi.” It further observed:

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<sup>33</sup> Communist Party’s Memorandum on State Reorganisation, *New Age*, May 2, 1954 in Mohit Sen (ed) *DHCPI*, Vol. VIII pp. 362-72

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* p – 09

“Although it adduced cogent arguments for the demand of Vishalandhra, the SRC refused to recommend its immediate formation. In the matter of boundary adjustments, the SRC discarded all democratic principles and based itself on sheer opportunism. In making its recommendations, the SRC patently permitted itself to be guided by all sorts of extraneous and opportunist considerations and, above all, by its most unwholesome concern for the interests of big business”.<sup>35</sup>

It also criticized the proposal of the Commission to create Zonal Councils “as a first step towards the denial of linguistic states.”<sup>36</sup> The party shot down the merger proposals saying they as “nothing but an attempt to completely reverse the course of history.” Hence it resolved, “The Central Committee strongly oppose these merger proposals and demands their immediate withdrawal. It demands the modification of the SRC recommendations in strict conformity with linguistic principles”.<sup>37</sup> Regarding boundary issues it categorically stated “They should be settled on the basis of language and geographical contiguity taking village as the unity”.<sup>38</sup> Based on this understanding the merger proposal of Bengal and Bihar was condemned.<sup>39</sup>

The party also strongly protested against the proposed separation of Bombay from Maharashtra and considered it “to be a great injustice under the pressure of vested interests..... The proposal to keep Bombay under Central administration deprives Bombay’s citizens of their democratic right to have their own legislature, tears it away from Maharashtra and disrupts the economic life of Maharashtra.”<sup>40</sup> On Punjab issue the party opined “the opposition of the Congress to the linguistic principles of the one hand, and the activities of the communalists on the other have deprived the Hindustani speaking

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<sup>35</sup> CPI Central Committee resolution (adopted in its meeting, held on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan – 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1956, New Age 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1956 p – 01 in Modak op. cit

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p – 01

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p – 01

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p – 01

<sup>39</sup> CPI. Resolution of the 4<sup>th</sup> party Congress of the CPI on struggle for linguistic states. New Age May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1956. in Mohit Sen (ed) DHCPI Vol – VIII, pp – 572 – 574

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

people of Haryana areas of the Punjab as well as the Punjabi speaking people of their just right of separate linguistic states”.<sup>41</sup>

Broadly the party welcomed the implementation of the report which it saw as a step towards the solution of the national question in India. But the party stated “The Communist Part will continue to support the struggle of the people of Maharashtra and Gujrat for Samyukta Maharashtra and Maha Gujrat. As regards certain areas in other States about which disputes persist, the party stands for their being settled by methods of negotiation between the governments of the States concerned.”<sup>42</sup>

Inspired by the verdict of the electorate in the second general election in 1957 the party with great vigour took up the issue of Maharashtra and Gujrat both within and outside parliament. The Extraordinary Congress of the Communist Party of India, held in Amritsar on 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1958 resolved, “The refusal of the government to grant the demand for Samyukta Maharashtra and Maha Gujarat, in spite of the clearly expressed verdict of the people in the election to legislatures and local bodies, shows that the powers – that - be will not change their decision unless compelled by popular pressure. The obstinate attitude of the government is adding to popular discontent. Our Party, while campaigning for this just and democratic demand, should stress the importance of unity and co-operation between the Samyukta Maharashtra Samity and Maha Gujrat Parishad. Basing itself on the unity of the two movements, our Party should, in co-operation with others, take initiative in forging mass sanctions to secure the demand for Samyukta Maharashtra and Maha Gujrat. As hitherto, Party units in Gujarat and Maharashtra have to play a big part in this campaign.”<sup>43</sup>

When on 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1960, the govt. came forward with the bill for reorganization of the Bombay state, the party whole heartedly welcomed it. Ajoy Ghosh in his speech before the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the party at Vijaywada on 7<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1961

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<sup>41</sup> CPI Polit Bureau Statement June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1956, New Age, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1956, p – 02 in Modak op. cit

<sup>42</sup> CPI, Election manifesto of the Communist Party of India, 1957, General Election in Jyoti Basu (ed) Documents of the Communist Movement in India (DCMI) Vol - VIII, p – 28

<sup>43</sup> CPI, Resolutions of the CPI adopted at the extraordinary party congress, Amritsar, April, 1958, New Delhi , 1958, in Jyoti Basu (ed) DCMI Vol – VIII, p - 181

greeted the government decision claiming it “a major victory for the Indian democratic movement” and emphasised the vital role of the party towards the achievement. With this he claimed, “The problem of the linguistic states have been virtually solved”, ‘one important exception’, being Punjab. Clarifying the party’s position, he said: “.... Our Party has taken the position that Haryana should be separated from Punjab and that a Punjabi - speaking state should be formed comprising all Punjabi - speaking areas of Punjab, including Kangra district. Such a Punjabi - speaking state will be based on the common national consciousness of the entire Punjabi people and can therefore, be achieved speedily as the result of a united mass movement”<sup>44</sup>

In the National Integration conference Ajay Ghosh stated that the party was irreconcilably opposed to the intrusion of religion in politics, and it wanted the Punjab to be reorganized on the linguistic principle.”<sup>45</sup> Ghosh further highlighted the problems of linguistic minorities that were “naturally more and more coming to the forefront” after the reorganization. In almost all the states “there are linguistic minorities and many of them suffer from certain disabilities” and “their rights and interests have not yet been fully acknowledged much less safeguarded”. This could fuel linguistic passions, he pointed out, drawing attention to the Assam disturbances of 1960.<sup>46</sup>

As for the tribal people who according to the party “need careful and sympathetic consideration”, Ghosh told the conference that they “cannot be expected to be content merely with economic benefits that the plans bestow on them... they are proud of their distinctiveness, their own culture and they would like to develop them in their own way....” They had he claimed “already begun to demand opportunities for self expression”. He urged their “sentiments and strivings have to be respected if we desire to integrate this neglected but proud people into the texture of our national life”. Hence, he suggested “It may be necessary where fairly large number of tribal people living in a compact area, to allow them regional autonomy so that within their own sphere, they can fashion their life as they like without interference from outside. Not very long ago, it was

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<sup>44</sup> Ajoy Ghosh: *New Situation and Our Tasks* in Jyoti Basu (ed) DCMI, Vol. VIII, p 741

<sup>45</sup> Ajay Ghosh: *Marxism and Indian reality*....., p – 370

<sup>46</sup> Ibid p – 371

thought that the Nagas could be satisfied by modifications of the Sixth schedule of the constitution. But ultimately it became necessary to form a separate Naga State and this was undoubtedly a wise step.<sup>47</sup>

The five broad principle on the basis of which the party fought for the demand of linguistic states can be identified as firstly, a common language should be the basis of reorganisation; secondly, the princely states were to be dissolved and their areas were to be redistributed according to the linguistic principles; thirdly, villages should be taken as units for redistribution and the contiguity of the particular linguistic state should be considered; fourthly, regional chauvinism should not be whipped up and harmonious relationship between the people of neighbouring states should be maintained and fifthly, as the demand for linguistic states was not the demand for independent statehood, the political unity of India should be preserved and strengthened.<sup>48</sup>

We have quoted extensively from the party documents and statements of the important leaders to substantiate the party's thick engagement with the issue of linguistic identity. Right from the 1940's down to the 60's the party consistently championed the self-governance rights of major language groups whom they defined as distinct nationalities and relentlessly pursued the implementation of the linguistic reorganization of the states. The issue was more or less settled by the mid-60's especially after the formation of Punjab and Haryana in 1968. The carving up of new states after that, have largely been on other grounds, not language. The main stream Left which now saw the emergence of CPI(M) as the major force has not been enthusiastic of the further sub-division of the linguistically organised states. They have not supported demands which violate the linguistic/nationality principle. Rather for them regional autonomy within the existing state structures for the distinct cultural groups, like the tribals, has been the answer. They felt the further sub-division of the states would weaken their position, vis-à-vis, the central government and results in the erosion of the federal structure.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp. 369-70

<sup>48</sup> Avtar Singh Malhotra, *Role of Communists in the Struggle for Linguistic States*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 14-16.



It has been extremely critical of efforts to create small states on grounds of administrative convenience as they perceive it as a sinister move to fashion a more unitary state with an authoritarian centre and weak smaller states with no linguistic-nationality identity. This approach eloquently expressed by BJP, it castigates as bureaucratic and profoundly undemocratic, as it seeks to undo the major democratic gains of the formation of linguistic states. The consequence of such a step, they argue, would also retard the development of the major Indian languages, which are the national languages enshrined in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Instead of separation which it argues would be detrimental to overall development of class based movements, the party's perspective has been one of balanced and speedy development, removal of disparities and autonomy for the states followed up by democratic decentralisation of power lower down to directly elected district/panchayat/local bodies. It has argued that formation of separate states with a substantial non-tribal population under the existing order, as has happened in the case of Jharkhand, means only replicating the existing state structure with all its undemocratic, anti-people characteristics. It argues alteration of state boundaries and duplicating an administration does not solve any of the basic problems of the people.

## II

The recognition of linguistic identity is not just about the linguistic reorganisation of states but tied up with the issue of national language and right of the various nationalities to use their language in all public and state work. Ambedkar has confessed that at the time of the discussion of the draft constitution, there was no article that proved more controversial than the one that dealt with the issue of Hindi as the national language. The unitary vision comes out also in the pronouncement of Gandhi. Gandhi initially had supported the move to make Hindi the national language. 'A universal language for India should be Hindi', he wrote in the Hind Swaraj in 1909. But by 1917 he was strongly arguing the case for adopting Hindustani as the national language, because Hindustani was neither Hindi nor Urdu, neither highly Sanskritized, nor highly Arabized. Anxious to pre-empt a communal divide, he was dismissive of the problems likely to be

encountered by non-Hindi speaking groups in the South or Bengal. 'A spirit that is so exclusive and narrow as to want every form of speech to be perpetuated and developed', he was to write, 'is anti-national and anti-universal. All underdeveloped and unwritten dialects should be sacrificed and merged in the great Hindustani stream. It would be a sacrifice..... not a suicide'.<sup>49</sup> The communist position was worked out in opposition to both the proponents of one-language formula and the anti-Hindi brigade.

The Communist position on the language problem began to take shape since the early 40's as an integral part of its overall perception of the national question though the specific issues relating to it was not paid much attention to before independence. In the late 40's when the Constituent Assembly was debating the issue of the national / official languages the CPI backed Hindustani as the language of the Hindustani people. There was an attempt to explain historically the growth of the Hindustani nation in Marxist terms.<sup>50</sup> But the souring of the Hindu – Muslim relation leading to the partition made the CPI stand untenable.

Although there were both pro-Hindi and anti-Hindi factions within the party during the early years of independence by the end of 1949 the dominant sentiment was one of vehement opposition to the promotion of Hindi as the national language, either official or un-official<sup>51</sup>. This mood comes through in the Manifesto of the Central Committee on the new Constitution (1949):

"The constitution denies equality of all languages and imposes English and Hindi as the state languages. This monstrous attack is a weapon of perpetuating backwardness and denying culture and education to the people of those regions; it is a weapon of creating a solid basis for Marwari - Gujrati domination because such domination stands endangered if people develop their own languages and culture."

A pamphlet of the communist led All India Student's Federation (1949) also said:

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<sup>49</sup> Cited in Robert King, *Nehru and the Language Politics in India*, OUP, 1997, p.82.

<sup>50</sup> Prakash Karat: *Language and Nationality Politics in India*, Madras, 1973 p – 62

<sup>51</sup> Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall. Windmiller, *Communism in India*, Berkley, 1956. p - 501

“The policy of imposing Hindi is not only part of the policy of protecting the economic and political dominance of Birla and Co., it is equally a policy of suppressing all other languages and culture.”<sup>52</sup>

There was vigorous inner party debate on the language issue. Rambilas Sharma, who was one of the most vocal exponents of the anti - Hindi stand, categorically declared that it was not possible to have a single language for the whole of the country. May be in the distant future India, may have fewer languages and ultimately one common language but then the common language will be very much different from Hindi or any other modern Indian language. His main point was that a language should not be imposed on any nation against its will. He argued a ‘Rashtrabhasha’ or ‘state language’ would help the Indian big bourgeoisie to consolidate Indian market as a whole in their own interest and oust the bourgeoisie of other nations.<sup>53</sup>

Sharma was engaging in a debate with Mohan Manjhi (Published in weekly Janashakti December -- 10<sup>th</sup>, 1948) who had while opposing the imposition of any language to deprive other nations of the right to use their own languages held the view that Hindi could become an all India language in a natural way. Sharma vehemently opposed his comrade and opined that the “phrase all India language is a vague one and it leaves a loophole for chauvinist trend to creep in.” To him “the natural way is only a mask for covering opportunistic concessions to great national chauvinism.”<sup>54</sup>

In another article Sharma was critical of the Constituent Assembly’s decision regarding the continuation of English for fifteen years after the commencement of the Constitution, seeing it as a natural consequence of the policy of servile collaboration with imperialism. To him the language and cultures of the various nationalities are suppressed by the continuity of English as a compulsory state language. Hindi he felt was kept as a back up if people are not in a mood to accept English. He was very categorical that the

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<sup>52</sup> All India Student’s Federation, AISF Resolution Bombay 1949 As quoted in Prakash Karat, *Op cit*, p - 65

<sup>53</sup> Rambilas Sharma: *On the language question in India*, Communist, 2(5) September - October pp – 43 – 50 in Modak (2006) *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* pp – 49 – 51

real aim of the articles of the constitution of a State language is nothing but the ultimate suppression of all languages in favour of Hindi as state language. It was violative of the principle of the equal status of all languages of India.<sup>55</sup>

Soviet Indologists like Dyakov, T.Yeshov, Madam N Sosina were also critical of the promotion of Hindi as an official language, though Sosina conceded the possibility that a common language, may be Hindi or some other language, will be promoted by the practice of life itself<sup>56</sup>. The anti – Hindi sentiment is reflected in the 1951 programme of the CPI .It stated that “in the name of a united country, the language of a part of the country, namely Hindi, was declared an obligatory state language for all nationalities and states, to the detriment of their own national languages.<sup>57</sup> Regarding the tasks in respect of language policy, the Programme stated: right of the people to receive instruction in their mother tongue in educational institutions; the use of the national language of the particular state in all its public and state institutions; provision for the use of the language of minority, or a region, where necessary in addition to the national language. Use of Hindi as an all India State Language will not be obligatory. In Hindustani – speaking areas, safeguard and protection to Urdu and Debnagari scripts and the right of the people to use either of the two scripts.<sup>58</sup>

But the differences in the party were not resolved. In 1950 the publication of ‘Concerning Marxism and Linguistics’ influenced the debates. Stalin had argued that the various national languages in a state instead of fusing to form a national language would result in the displacement of the weaker language and a single language could remain as the national one. For him some languages could emerge as victorious in the process of cultural accommodation enriched by the partial absorption of those tongues, which would be displaced. This formulation along with the changing attitude of the Soviet Union towards Nehru’s regime influenced the toning down of the anti Hindi position. The most significant reason however was the shift in the Party’s stance on the national question

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<sup>55</sup> Rambilas Sharma: *Decision of Constituent Assembly on a State Language for India*, Communist 3(1), in Modak op. cit. January, 1950 pp. 64 – 68

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Gene. D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmilla, op. cit. pp 500-502

<sup>57</sup> CPI Programme of the Communist Party of India, Bombay p – 09

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 15

in the Third. Congress in Madurai, in 1953 – 54, where the new theorisation on ‘Indian Unity’ was adopted. Reviewing the language question, the Congress amended the Party Programme and decided that while no compulsory state language should be introduced Hindi was to be encouraged as a means of intercourse between Governments and people of different states. The party also abandoned the earlier formulation of “Marwari–Gujrati” domination in respect of linguistic issues. Ajoy Ghosh stated:

“Our party Programme provides for education in one’s own mother tongue and opposes all attempts at imposing a common language by compulsion. This is necessary for the cultural advance of the entire people and the strengthening of democracy...

At the same time, we have to realize that the Communist Party stands for the unity of India, which is necessary both for the defence of freedom and for the rapid economic, political and social rebuilding of India. Also we want the people of different nationalities fighting for freedom, and democracy to come closer to each other ..... This demands the building of close relation between the nationalities that live in India, and therefore, raises the question of a language in which people of different nationalities can speak with each other.”<sup>59</sup>

Conceding the importance of Hindi as a link language the party however reiterated its earlier position of upholding the rights of all other national languages and stated that “in–non–Hindi speaking areas the national languages must not be suppressed but made the medium for education and for all works for the Government.”<sup>60</sup> Strongly critical of the idea of replacing English by Hindi Ajay Ghosh wrote “The forcible introduction of Hindi as the national language for the whole of India, the language of the government and of higher education in all states, would perpetuate the present state of absence of democracy and cultural backwardness in the greater part of the country. Also it would intensify national animosities. Hence, the attempt is harmful and should be abandoned.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ajoy Ghosh: On the Work of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress, New Age, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1954, p – 13 quoted in Modak op. cit

<sup>60</sup> Ibid – p – 13

<sup>61</sup> Ajoy Ghosh : Marxism and Indian Reality pp – 378 - 388

So the party distanced itself from both the opposite tendencies, pro-Hindi and anti-Hindi. Refuting the argument of both and defending the new line the party ideologue, S.N. Majumder wrote “[I]n a multi-lingual country like India, there must be a medium of intercourse and of exchange of ideas between the peoples belonging to the different linguistic groups. In reality, there is not and should not be any conflict between the federal language and regional languages. Their spheres of action are different and each can fulfill its function without encroaching on the sphere of the other. Given a proper and correct understanding of their respective roles, they can enrich one another.”<sup>62</sup>

The new line found expression in Maharashtra where the government of Bombay attempted to impose Hindi as a medium of instruction in colleges and Universities instead of the regional languages in early 1954. The Maharashtra provincial committee vehemently opposed the move urging the people “to raise their organised voice to demand that English be steadily replaced in colleges and Universities by the regional languages of the area and Hindi should not be imposed as a language of higher education, to the exclusion of regional languages” S.S. Mirajkar, secretary of the Provincial committee in a press statement categorically stated:

“The introduction of the regional language as the medium of instruction at all levels will in no way reduce the importance of Hindi....

....Hindi will be willingly accepted as compulsory second language in India in all education institution throughout India, only if the regional languages come into to their own.”<sup>63</sup>

The Central Committee of the CPI in its meeting October, 1957 reviewed the report of the Official Language Commission, Ajay Ghosh explaining the decision of the Central Committee drew attention to the terms of reference of the commission and critically said “the whole problem was approached in a narrow restricted way.” To him, “The question of official language of the union was viewed in isolation from and not in

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<sup>62</sup> Satyendra Narayan Majumdar : *Stalin's work on Linguistics* (2) *New Age* (Monthly) III (4) April, 1954 p -76 quoted in Modak op. cit

<sup>63</sup> CPI. Regional language as medium of instruction : Maharashtra Communist's demand, *New Age* weekly April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954 quoted in Modak op. cit

the context of the general cultural and linguistic problems facing the country. The primary and almost the only purpose for which the commission was appointed were to make recommendations facilitating 'the progressive - use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union.' Only a sort of warning was issued that in making their recommendations certain other factors also should be taken into account."<sup>64</sup> The whole report was "a confused and bewildering document – full of equivocation, contradictory statements and makeshift proposals, which arouse inevitably out of the desire to press the claim of Hindi not merely in opposition to English, but also to all other languages while simultaneously trying to balance the claims of other languages and also English against Hindi". He alleged that "some members of the Commission had only one objective in view – how to ensure not only that Hindi becomes with outmost rapidity the official language of the union but also replaces English in as many spheres as possible. He also criticized the dissenting notes submitted by two members of the commission Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee from West Bengal and Dr. P. Subbanarayan from Madras and observed that " while making some correct points" they " suffer from a strong bias against Hindi"<sup>65</sup> Summing up his views he said:

"On the one hand, the majority, ignoring the sentiments of the vast numbers of non – Hindi - speaking people and in defiance of democratic principles, express views which intensify fears and suspicion in many parts of the country and make recommendation, some of which are utterly unjust and untenable. They constitute a concession to those protagonists of Hindi who would like to reduce all other languages to an inferior status. One the other, the minority, while making some correct criticism of some points, is obsessed by fear of 'Hindi - imperialism' refuses to recognize that a foreign language like English, understood only by a microscopic minority of Indians, cannot continue indefinitely to be the official language of the Indian Union and the language of inter - state communication"<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ajay Ghosh , *Report of the official language commission*, New Age (monthly) October, 1957 . Also in Jyoti Basu (ed) DCMI Vol – VIII Calcutta 1997 P – 95

<sup>65</sup> Ibid pp – 95 – 100

<sup>66</sup> Ibid pp – 99 – 100

He identified the task of the party in the cultural sphere as follows: "Liquidation of illiteracy; Expansion of higher education among the people on the basis of the language spoken by them; Rapid development of Indian languages and the creation of adequate literature in them; conducting of administrative, legislative and judicial work in every state in the language spoken and understood by them; The formation of linguistic states to facilitate all these; The imparting of a minimum amount of knowledge of one Indian language to people in all parts of the country so that the language can become, as rapidly as possible, the official language of the union as well as the means of communication between people of different regions. Being the language which is spoken and understood by a larger number of people than any other language of India, Hindi can be such a language."<sup>67</sup>

In another article published in 1958 the broad principles of the party's approach was identified. He identified "two complementary tendencies" in the field of language. One was the growing popularity of Hindi as the language symbolizing the unity of India and the other, was the increasing attention and devotion to the regional language that has developed during the course of the freedom struggle. He lamented "this healthy co – relation and balance between Hindi as common language and the fullest development of all regional languages could not be maintained" during post independent days. He apportioned the major share of the guilt to the "chauvinist protagonists of Hindi." The Central government has not acted as the custodian of the interests of all Indian languages and this has resulted in a violent reaction in the opposite direction", he said. For him:

"The language question should not and must not be made a matter for political wranglings but should be seen as a problem within the general need of our national reconstruction and of the raising of the cultural and intellectual level of our whole people. It has to be viewed from the angle of strengthening the unity of India and of basing the unity on the equality and fraternity of all our language groups. It has to be considered from the standpoint of further broad - basing our democratic institutions, for bringing the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid pp – 104 - 105



administration closer to the masses, of bringing about the actual participation of the masses in government.”<sup>68</sup>

While admitting that the language commission rightly stressed “ on the development of regional languages not only by the state government , but by the Union Government as well” Ghosh argued that such development could “ only take place if the administration in the states as well as education at all levels is carried on in the regional language” “It would be quite wrong to attempt to make Hindi take the place of English as far as the states are concerned - which unfortunately is what the language commission had attempted, though in veiled and subtle way”, he said. He also highlighted the need “ to safeguard the interests of linguistic minorities within each region”, including the rights of Urdu speaking people.

On the other hand he opined total abjuring of English can only be detrimental to the intellectual and scientific advancement of India.” English should be taught as a language of comprehension and communication rather than as literature. In state services he advocated regional languages as medium of examination and Hindi should not be made compulsory. But in union services, he wrote,

“At present and during the transitional period for the Union Service Examination the candidate should be allowed to answer in English, Hindi or in his regional language. When Hindi is made the Union Language, apart from being able to answer papers in the language of his choice, each candidate whose mother tongue is not Hindi will have to answer a compulsory paper in Hindi, and the candidate whose mother tongue is Hindi a compulsory paper in a modern Indian language. Those already in Central government service and whose mother tongue is not Hindi will have to pass the Hindi paper referred to above.

To avoid all possible reasons for bickering during the period when Indian unity has yet to be fully consolidated a quota system should be fixed for recruitment to all Indian services on the basis of the population in each state. This is by no means an ideal solution and every effort has to be made to push ahead with consolidating Indian unity so

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<sup>68</sup> Ajoy Ghosh - Marxism and Indian Reality pp – 389 – 397

that this quota system may be abolished , but for the present without this quota system animosities will only increase.<sup>69</sup>

As regards the judgements of the high court, he said that “they must be delivered in the regional language as soon as possible, with translations in English and Hindi to be undertaken by the Central government” So long as the judgements continued to be delivered in English he demanded that “authoritative translation must be prepared in the regional language at the central expense.” To him judgements of the Supreme Court may be delivered in English or Hindi with translation in either case. In addition all Supreme Court judgments should be translated into the regional languages, he added.<sup>70</sup>

The Communist approach to the language issue also comes through clearly in the policy decisions of the first Communist led Government in Kerala. It appointed a language Committee that recommended the changeover to Malayalam as the official language of the state. It recommended a phased programme of implementation, at all levels of administration, over a period of seven years. In regard to the courts it recommended deposition of witnesses in regional language and verdict in English to continue for the time being though provision for translation on demand, ought to be there, the committee argued. Conceding that English might continue as a language of legislation till a common legal terminology for the whole of the country was ready, it was in favour of a Malayalam version along with English. Though, in favour of equal status of the regional language as a medium of instruction in higher education, it was in favour of making Hindi compulsory.<sup>71</sup>

A bitter controversy erupted when the Joint Parliamentary Committee on official language submitted its report. The strong protests by the Southern States forced Nehru to adopt a policy of gradualism. The subsequent Presidential Order, apart from constituting the Standing Commission on Official Language, took an accommodative stance. The CPI more or less accepted the Presidential order, though it made some points

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid pp – 10 – 15

<sup>70</sup> Ibid – pp – 15 -1 6

<sup>71</sup> CPI – Language Committee recommends change over to Malayalam as official language, New ge. October - 12, 1958 pp – 6 - 7 quoted in Modak op. cit p.173

of criticism. The Tamilnadu State secretariat of the party resented the order and demanded amendment of it. “to provide for the regional languages as alternative media for examination for recruitment for all Indian services. It however distanced itself from DMK’s movement against Hindi language itself. They stood for “modification of the President’s order in accordance with Prime Ministers assurances”.<sup>72</sup>

Over the language rivalry in Assam which was not directly related to the Presidential Order, the CPI demanded acceptance of Assamese as the Official Language of Assam, while allowing the autonomous hill states, freedom of choice on language and unconditional recognition of Bengali for the district administration of Cachar together with other rights to the minorities guaranteed by the constitution. Though critical of the demands of the Sangram Parishad, “to make Assam a multilingual state through a non co-operation movement secretary of the Assam state council, Phoni Bora was forthright about the cultural and language rights of the Bengalis. “Our Party has been demanding and will continue to do so until the demand is conceded that Bengali should be the official language in Cachar up to and including the district level. It recognizes the right of the people of Cachar to move on this demand. The party has been championing the right of the Bengali people of Assam as a whole to have all important laws, decrees, orders etc. in Bengali. The party inside and outside the state legislature has been fighting for these rights and any movement launched for the realization of these demands is considered just by our party.”<sup>73</sup>

The intervention around the time of the meeting of the National Integration Council makes the party’s position amply clear. On the eve of the conference, E.S. Namboodripad accused the government that the “demand of the national movement for the replacement of English by Hindi and regional languages was opposed by the British rulers and their Indian friends precisely on the same ground on which it is now being opposed by the leaders of the ruling party”. He categorically held that a “national and

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<sup>72</sup> CPI - Tamilnadu Secretariat on language issue, *New Age*, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1960 p – 16 quoted in Modak op. cit p. 175

<sup>73</sup> CPI, *Assam Communist Leaders on Language Movement*, *New Age*, June, 4, 1961 quoted in Modak op. cit p 176

popular approach to the problem would lead us irresistibly to the conclusion that the mother tongue or regional language stands in a class by itself. He added “dislodging English from the honourable position of being such a language of inter-state communication is of tremendous importance not only because it is derogatory to national respect to use a foreign language for mutual contacts, but also because from a purely practical point of view, it is easier for any Indian to learn Hindi than English” At the same time he emphasized the importance of English as an international language out of the necessity “ to keep abreast of international developments in all fields, particularly science and technology.”<sup>74</sup>

Ajoy Ghosh in his speech at the conference, apart from stating the party’s position which we have discussed earlier added much importance to the need of defending the rights of linguistic minorities and advocated the creation of a permanent Minorities Commission armed with all requisite authority.<sup>75</sup> While commenting on the language tensions he commented: “In order to bring the administration closer to the people in all states we consider it imperative that the change-over from English to the regional languages for purposes of State administrations is effected speedily – a task to which scant attention is being paid, at least in some states.”<sup>76</sup>

The Party’s position was at variance with both the major trends over the language issue. The first trend was represented by the eminent Congressman, C. Rajagopacharaya, Anglo - Indian leader, Frank Antony and DMK leader Annandurai, whose major slogan was ‘ Hindi Never , English Ever.’” The position of those in the second category, represented mainly by Guru Golwalkar of RSS, Deel Dayal Upadhyay, General Secretary Jana Sangh, Morarji Desai and the other Hindi Leaders, was to throw out English and install Hindi straight away. Distancing the party’s position, from the other two trends, EMS wrote, “ As for linguistic and cultural unity

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<sup>74</sup> E.M.S. Namboodripad - *National Integration Demands Radical Change in Government’s attitudes to Language issue*, New Age – September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1961 p – 5 quoted in Modak op. cit 177

<sup>75</sup> Ajay Ghosh - *National Integration Conference: A Historic Landmark*, New Age - October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1961 p – 14 quoted in Modak op. cit 178

<sup>76</sup> Ajoy Ghosh: *For the Unity of our Motherland*, New Age, January 28, 1962 in Ajoy Ghosh, *Marxism and Indian Reality...*pp 364-77

in diversity the very idea is negated by some insisting on unanimity ; others insist on separation instead of diversity.<sup>77</sup> The Party's position was one of forging national unity through democratic development and cultural awakening. They favoured simultaneous adhering to the twin principles, equal development of the regional languages and their equality and the necessity of recognising Hindi as the official link language for essential all – India purpose by common consent. This marked a departure from Lenin's position, who declared that it was unnecessary for a democratic state to adopt an official state language. Life itself will show which of the country's languages was the best medium of communication between various nationalities inhabiting that state."<sup>78</sup> But the party felt in the Indian context simultaneously adhering to the twin principles was necessary and overemphasis on one at the expense of the other would be weaken national unity.

After the split, the CPI(M) emerged as the major left force in the country. The Party Programme adopted in 1964 did not contain a section on the national question. As there were deep divisions within the party the discussion was deferred. A note on self-determination was finally adopted in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress in Madurai, 1972. The CPI(M)'s position marked a departure from the CPI's position of accepting Hindi as a link language. The Party Programme on the State Structure talked about the 'equality of national languages' in the proceedings of the Parliament and in central administration. It goes on:

“Equality of all national languages in Parliament and Central administration shall be recognised. Members of Parliament will have the right to speak in any national language and simultaneous translation will have to be provided in all other national languages. All Acts, Government orders and resolutions shall be made available in all national languages. The use of Hindi as the official language shall not be made obligatory. In the course of growing economic, social and intellectual intercourse, the people of different States of India will develop in practice the language of

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<sup>77</sup> E.M.S. Namboodripad: Biggest Problem Facing Nation-Growth of Fissiparous Trends, New Age, August 12, 1962 p 5 in Modak op. cit p 179

<sup>78</sup> V.I.Lenin: Thesis on the National Question in Collected Works, Vol. 19, Moscow 197, pp 243-251

intercommunications most suitable to their needs. The use of English, in the fields of administration, legislation, judiciary and the medium of instruction in education shall be discarded, replacing it with the national languages. Right of people to receive instruction in their mother-tongue in educational institutions, the use of the national language of the particular linguistic state as the language of administration in all its public and State institutions, as well as its use as the medium of education in the State up to the highest standard; provision for the use of the language of a minority or minorities or of a region where necessary in addition to the language of the State shall be implemented. The Urdu language and its script shall be protected.”

Two major points come out of this. It was argued that the English language which was supreme in the legislative, administrative and educational fields during the British rule will cease to have its predominant position, though as a language for studies in sciences etc., not as the medium of instruction or the language of administration; it will have its pride of place. Secondly, CPI(M) made a major departure to argue that Hindi will not replace English. The argument for using English and Hindi as two link languages, it contests on the ground that it cuts at the very root of the equality of all national languages. It was of the opinion that the language which replaces English is the national language or local language of a particular linguistic state. Citizens will have the right to address the Central Government in their mother tongue, together with the right to receive replies in the same language. Members of Parliament will have the right to speak in their mother tongue as well as to get speeches delivered in other national languages, simultaneously translated into their mother tongue. It argues that this is how the equality of languages i.e. the languages spoken by the majority of the people in linguistically formed states will replace English.

As the above discussion shows, there was an attempt at an alternative conceptualisation of the Indian nation, where it was argued that recognition of linguistic identity and affirmation of linguistic diversity was the step forward to build unity. But over the years, the attempt to connect the issues of cultural recognition with redistributive measures to actualise political democracy, has often been subsumed in a discourse of

developmentalism leading to the downplaying of the sectional identities and privileging of an idea of the “abstract universal”.

## **In Lieu of a Conclusion**

The above study was a preliminary attempt to explore, whether and how, issues of recognition and aspects of distribution has been handled in communist practice in India. We kept the focus more on the aspect of recognition of cultural diversity than on the dimensions of redistribution of economic assets in communist practice, as it is much talked of, though here also the appropriateness and effectivity of the concepts and categories they employ, calls for detailed focus. In the real world the multiple axis of injustice intersects and overlaps and without addressing the aspects of recognition, redistribution and political voice, simultaneously, emancipatory politics become ineffectual. Our discussion above shows in concrete communist practice there was an attempt to address the different dimensions and the cultural question was not dissolved in an economic-deterministic notion of class as often it is perceived to be, though the centrality of the agrarian question, as the substantive issue of the national question, was always highlighted.

The Pakistan movement and the accommodation of linguistic identity are the two moments we have picked up to see how the issue of cultural diversities were taken up and handled. An attempt was made to work out a notion of differentiated nationalism, where it was argued acceptance and affirmation of diversity is the building block of national unity. Steering clear of the positions that valorise homogeneity and fragmentation, they tried to work out an agenda for democratisation of social relations, keeping the overarching presence of imperialist geopolitics in mind. Its intervention in the debate over the Pakistan demand, though, could not influence the course of events. The party's commitment to language rights and the self-governance right that flow from it, helped in broadening and deepening the federal structure and the democratic process in India. We find the privileging of the linguistic identity over all other identities and a relentless commitment to self-governance rights to linguistic groups and a forceful articulation of equality of all the languages. There were significant differences in the positions of CPI and CPI(M), as the former got itself reconciled to the position of qualified support to



Hindi as a link language, which the latter has consistently opposed, arguing for the equality of all the national language enumerated in the Eighth Schedule. Over the years, the communist parties, especially the CPI(M), that emerged as the major left force after the split, have been singularly unenthusiastic about the further subdivision of the linguistically-formed states. Apart from the violation of the linguistic/nationality principle, this would, they argue, lead to the emergence of weak states and the erosion of the federal system. Their answer has been one of thoroughgoing democratic decentralisation of power down to the villages to resolve the national question.

Over the years the stress largely on national unity has led to the dumbing down of the concerns with community and culture and downplaying of the sectional identities, as they are seen to be fissiparous tendencies, out to subvert the unity and integrity of India. The aspect of linguistic identity has drawn most of the attention to the relative neglect of the other forms of identity. It, most probably, carries forward the Marxist tradition as it evolved in Germany, where German nationalism was largely linguistic nationalism. Moreover in Communist theorization, if one element of Stalin's definition is absent, the grounds for being treated as a nationality is contested. This seems to be a rigid and mechanical position and is ill-equipped to capture, for example, the tribal experience. The overbearing presence of imperialism has influenced them to downplay the national question and subsume it within the discourse of nationalism understood in formal territorial terms, as it is imagined to be a reliable bulwark against imperialism and an agent of rapid socio-economic transformation. Espousal of a form of developmental nationalism and the unidimensional privileging of the contradictions of the nation vis-à-vis imperialism seems to be a mechanical application of materialist dialectics. "This has left large questions, associated with nationalism, such as its specificity and its relation with identities, communities, castes and culture, which were simultaneously formulating themselves and the national movement inadequately addressed. A deficiency in making conjunctural analysis of a situation has often expressed itself in the inability to theoretically engage with the "situated self" that shapes the self understanding of the masses. These have often led the communists to embrace a formal territorial nationalism that rests on shaky foundations and is susceptible to collapse to a concept of

homogeneous Indian nationalism or be synonymous with a regime of rights and liberties making national identity superfluous.”<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, in practice, the communist movement has succeeded in those areas where they have been able to build bridges with locally assertive identities. But at the theoretical level it has shied away from grappling with the complex issues of identities.

It may be instructive to go back to Gramsci, who attempted political and theoretical reconciliations of class and nation in his theorisation of the ‘national-popular’ and explorations of the relationship of nationalism and socialism. Since ruling class domination was nationally organised in the form of hegemonies, he argued, national working class struggles against them on the terrain of the ‘national-popular’ were the first step in any global emancipation from capitalist domination. “To be sure the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is national and it is from this point of departure that one must begin”.<sup>2</sup> Empty or abstract universalisms, which ignored the economic, political, moral-cultural reality of the nation,<sup>3</sup> resembled the “cosmopolitanism... of the Catholic Middle Ages, centred on Italy”. This was responsible for the absence of any Italian “political and national history” which he so brilliantly analysed and lamented.<sup>4</sup>

In his view, the national-popular domain was produced by the popular energies mobilized by bourgeois revolution and the later task of socialists was to radicalise these national-popular energies towards socialism. In Italy, this task was difficult precisely because of an only partially successful bourgeois revolution which failed to lay the basis of a truly national culture.<sup>5</sup> National cultures provided the popular medium through which socialist parties and their intellectuals establish the communicative, cultural and political bonds with the ‘people-nation’. Without this bond, socialism was impossible. The task of the party was seen by him as one of organising and expressing the “national-popular” in a historic bloc in which the proletariat exercises hegemony. The historic bloc

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<sup>1</sup> Valerian Rodrigues: *The Communist Parties in India*.

<sup>2</sup> Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebook*, p.240.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 236-241

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 274

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp 131-133

is seen to express the national and popular aspiration in a broad sense. The proletariat lives, works and struggles on the national terrain and is shaped by these “national-popular” aspirations. “Culture” in Gramsci is the sphere in which ideologies are diffused and organized, in which hegemony is constructed and can be broken and reconstructed. And one way in which proletarian hegemony is constructed is precisely through a global contestation of the bourgeois domain and a co-optation of national-popular traditions, compatible with the democratic socialist project. To become the ‘national class’ entailed assuming the mantle of intellectual, political and moral leadership.

In the Third World context, closely engaging with peasant culture, as a result, becomes a historic necessity. But there is often a tendency of slipping into varieties and forms of agrarian populism, where an essentialised peasant culture/ economy and indigenous nationalist agency is valorised and national difference, not class antagonism, posited as the major site of struggle. The essentialised peasant culture is seen as the site of resistance. The socio-economic process of becoming is replaced by an eternal situation of systematically non-transcendent being, that ends up privileging stasis over transformation. The “agrarian myth”, which operates on the basis of an undifferentiated peasantry, has both its aristocratic and plebian variants. But it is necessary to be careful, as it has often been the mobilizing discourse of the political right, as we have seen in the nineteen twenties and thirties, in Italy and Germany.

The intellectual discourse these days tends to get polarized between the visions of the “flat world” of neoliberalism, and varieties and forms of agrarian populism, espousing subaltern nationalism, where subalternity is defined as the over-determination of class by forms of cultural subordination. But, it is equally important to differentiate the peasantry, sociologically, economically and politically. This is not to discount the necessity of intense engagement with peasant culture, because if the masses have to be invited into history, the invitation card has to be written in a language they understand.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Narain, *The Breakup of Britain*, p.340.

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