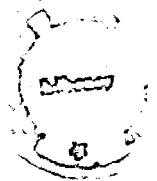


**THE INVENTION OF AN ADVERSARY:
COMMUNISM IN COLONIAL AND
POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **The Invention of An Adversary: Communism in Colonial and Post-Colonial Discourse**, submitted by **Shalini Sharma** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is her original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or any other University to the best of my knowledge.

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Dr. Bishnu Mohapatra
Supervisor

Dedicated to
mum, dad,
Bali & Manuji

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Introduction

This thesis began as an investigation into how the Communist Party of India fared in its efforts to mobilise the Indian working class. My intention was to examine the extent to which factors such as identity politics, religious fundamentalism and factional ties shaped or hindered this movement.

However, even a cursory examination of the literature on the subject soon made it apparent that the study of communism in India was already dominated by a widely consensual and negative understanding of the history and nature of the movement. In this inimical perception, shared by administrators and scholars, the notion of the alien nature of this ideological project has been the most consistent feature. It has become an accepted wisdom that communism 'failed' because it is a foreign doctrine. Those professing to be communists are in this view, at best, mistaken, at worst, 'traitors'.

The project of communism has been compared, always unfavourably, with the Gandhian tactics of Satyagraha and non-violence. At its crudest, these are apparently 'Indian' methods, acceptable and effective, whereas this discourse depicts the communist method: to infiltrate, capture, and generate discontentment in order to provoke chaos, and reap the benefits. The communist, a 'Bogeyman' and 'Red Menace', is an 'opportunist', a 'robotic follower of Moscow' and a 'liar'. The

communist and his/her exported project of class struggle and revolutionary politics is deemed as essentially unviable within India.

In the face of this overwhelming and almost suspiciously uniform consensus on the subject of communism in India, the focus of my project was transformed. The intention of this dissertation is to explore how this aura of illegitimacy that surrounds Indian communism has emerged. It has been argued that marginalization of certain groups in society bring into focus norms and values which dominate its ideological milieu.¹ This process apropos communism will be the subject of the thesis.

When the Communist Party of India was first officially formed in Dec.26, 1925², it attracted an enormous amount of anxious and negative attention from colonial officials whose discourse became the first archive of opinionated characterizations. The volume of official documentation is a vivid expression of the trepidation and concern with which the communist individuals were regarded. This thesis undertakes an analysis of this colonial discourse on Indian communism. It then attempts to explore the influence of this discourse on the later understandings, first of the Indian state and then of scholars of communism.

Most analyses of colonial discourse are profoundly indebted to Edward Said's classic, *Orientalism*³. Said described the history of orientalist scholarship as intrinsically connected to the Western 'will to power'. His aim was to expose this Western pursuit of truth, loaded with racist and cultural supremacist assumptions as a

¹ M. Aymard and H. Mukhia [ed.], *French Studies in History*. Vol. II, 1990, p. 301.

² However this date is much disputed by the several conflicting groups claiming to represent the official Communist Party during this period.

³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.

double entendre. For orientalist discourse was both an outcome of and vindication for imperialist conquest and the distortion and pillage of Eastern culture. The orientalist posited the West as the progressive, rational inheritors of Enlightenment and modernity against the mystical and superstitious 'Other' of the East. This study has influenced a wealth of studies which have emphasized the role of the orientalist perspective in the construction of a legitimate basis for colonial governance. But the emphasis has steadfastly forced the importance of 'otherness'.

One subject, however, that cannot adequately be addressed through the paradigm of otherness is communist politics in India. Communism fits uneasily into theories which attribute explanatory power to the construction of East-West oppositions in a colonial polity. Colonial observers systematized the communists as un-Indian and alien to the 'essence' of Indian otherness while simultaneously representing them as feared and despised by the British. Thus, it could be argued that communism seems to symbolize a part of the British self that cannot be acknowledged, which perhaps points to the limits of the self-other paradigm.

It could be maintained that in the present context, the paradox is even more urgent to note within the commentaries of nationalist leaders and histories. For, the eliciting of the image of the un-Indian communist essentially presumes an acceptance of the colonial and hence orientalist definition of Indianness. That is, the notion of the spiritual, religious and 'passive' Indian were accepted and even venerated by the adoption of Gandhian strategies whereas the communists, because they advocated

alternative modes of protest, were seen as antipodal, and hence remained labelled as outsiders.

My effort has been to tease out the implications of this paradox. To this I have concentrated on the state representations of communism by which a process of political marginalisation occurred which began as a process during the period of colonial rule and continued well after Indian independence. It is this politics of representation, of how our knowledge of the movement is constructed, that I have attempted to interrogate. It is hoped that this will enable a comprehension of not only how the omnipresent colonial legacy has shaped our understanding of the past, but also the intrinsically ideological nature of much that we have hitherto considered fairly unproblematic within the confines of our discipline.

In order to investigate this theme I have chosen two significant events that stand out in histories of this century, the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929-33) and the Telengana uprising (1946-51). Although not easily comparable they present us with a distinct and meticulously debated response of the state to communist-led or inspired politics. My endeavour in this project has been neither to describe what happened during the two events in question, nor to narrate the 'true' role of the government. Rather, the importance of these cases lies in the fact that much of our inherited understanding of communism in India has been shaped by invocations of the history of these episodes.

The Meerut Conspiracy Case, in which thirty-three alleged communists were charged with conspiring to overthrow the sovereignty of the King-Emperor, was the

most extravagant case of its kind. An unprecedented amount of 1,800,000 rupees was spent while 2500 prosecution exhibits and 320 prosecution witnesses were utilized to prove a somewhat self evident charge. The Telengana region , from July 1946 to October 1951, saw the biggest guerilla war so far of modern Indian history. Led by communists, the revolt was against feudal authority and bonded labour. However, September 1948 saw the intervention of the Indian army or 'police action' and concurrently an increased vociferation of anti-communist rhetoric.

Government commentaries of these events are a rich source of representations on communism. These consist of CID reports, inter-departmental correspondence and official publications, which have been regarded as the most trusted sources on which histories of the communist movement have been based.

My intention has been to try and challenge the sanctity of these official records by concentrating specifically on the language, imagery and metaphors that have been used when describing the communists. It has been in this sphere of language that continuities and similarities between the colonial and post-colonial discourse have been sought. The study has been illuminating simply because such pointed similarities in terms of loaded terminology, phrases and depictions were not expected at the outset of the inquiry. I have tried to analyse the language of these texts in order to gauge what was deemed significant to the state officials at the actual moment of policy making and what notions of class, justice, peace and political dissent underlaid these representations. The official discourse surrounding communism smacks of such a virulence and paranoia which can only be attributed to the time in which they were

written when post-1917 Russia represented an extremely close and concrete threat to the established world order. However, the manner by which these views have been seemingly uncritically taken for granted in a very different political context after Independence is noteworthy. What is even more mystifying is the way in which many influential histories of Indian communism have taken these attitudes at face value.

The dissertation is arranged in three chapters. Chapter I concentrates on the colonial discourse surrounding the Meerut Conspiracy Case. Chapter II describes the independent state discourse on the subject in the backdrop of the Telengana uprising, while Chapter III focusses attention on influential histories of Communism in India from which we have learnt about the subject.

I have faced several problems during the course of this exploration, some of which will be reflected in the thesis. The first has been purely practical since many files on Telengana are either not accessible or simply lost. More fundamentally, it has been difficult linking the two very different events. After all, the Meerut Conspiracy Case was a thoroughly premeditated measure designed to curb the increasing danger of communism. Conversely the response of the Nehru government to the unrest in Telengana was not solely an antidote to communism but also an act of unification of the new nation during a period of much communal discord. This also indicates the passage of time that had passed between the two incidents which can only be treated with brevity in this account.

Chapter 1

Conspiracy and Contradiction

It has been argued that colonialism cannot be understood only as a set of institutions such as a repressive military or trading networks that are beneficial to the metropolis. Colonialism is also a set of discourses which, along with institutions, undergo transformation over the long history of the colonial period.¹ An examination of these discourses is imperative in order to comprehend the complexities of colonial governance as they indicate the hegemonic strategies pursued by the British that tried to legitimate their rule.

This is compatible with the Marxian axiom that “the ideas of the ruling classes are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”² For as Gramsci has elaborated, the dominant classes control the means of symbolic production as well as the physical and thus ideological sectors of society such as the cultural sphere, the education system and the media disseminate values of what is true, beautiful, moral and legitimate. In this manner, a mystifying symbolic climate is created from which, certainly if one compares colonial and post-colonial discourse of governance, detachment or difference has ultimately seemed either an impossible or fruitless exercise.

¹ S. Kaviraj. 'On The Construction Of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse and Hegemony' in S. Marks and Engels [ed.], *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Asia and Africa*. 1994, pp.19-54.

² K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*. Progress Publishers, Moscow. 1972.

According to Kaviraj, in the colonial setting, hegemony refers to, “conventional modes of arranging compliance to constitute authority and this authority’s search for a langue which makes such compliance assured and habitual.”³ This ‘langue’ composed the British self definition based on a popular-mythic variant of the tradition of rational modernity by which they claimed invincibility and righteousness while dealing with their colonized subjects.

In this self-definition the British were clear, precise, instrumentalist, technical, scientific, effective, true and beneficial to all who came in contact with them. Yet, internal ‘Western’ dissent within this tradition of rationalist modernity, crucially the theory of Marxism which was full of self-doubt and criticism, was excluded from this discourse. This was not an oversight, but a deliberate silence because Marxism and the problems it addressed relating to class exploitation, economic disparity and the vested interests of the dominant class could not be easily accommodated within the discourse of colonial rule. Maybe this silence would be easier to understand by referring to Foucault’s notion of discourse and rupture. Here, discourse is productive, it enables and encodes, creating conditions of possibility that render knowable our knowledge and thought. However, a rupture that effects discontinuity, creates a new episteme and thus new ways of thinking the ‘true’. This process inevitably bestows doubt upon the all-encompassing validity of the former discourse. It may be argued that the advent of communist politics in India proffers such a break as the orientalist constructions of the East could not reconcile an inclusion of the organized left without opening up a Pandora’s box of inconsistencies.

³ Kaviraj, op cit.,

This is illuminated through a look at Partha Chatterjee's explanation of the failure of the colonial mission to "normalize" Indian society in order to create a modern state. The failure is put down to the assumption that the basic premise of British power was the rule of colonial difference. And, he continues, "Of all signs, race was perhaps the most obvious mark of colonial difference."⁴ The preservation of alienness of the ruling group meant that the universalizing rationality and liberalism that was espoused could never be enacted in practice as it would result in the loss of this 'Jewel in the Crown'.

He cites the Ilbert Bill which was introduced to grant equal promotion for Indians to the position of magistrate. This Bill was adamantly trounced by British civilians in India and is, according to Chatterjee, an example of the difficulties faced if the rule of colonial difference was not pursued.

However, as we shall see, in 1929 the difference of race was no barrier when it came to arresting and trying the Communists without a jury at Meerut. Philip Spratt, Benjamin Bradley and John Hutchinson were disallowed the so-called privileged right of white Englishmen of being tried by jury. This suggests that an examination of policy towards these particular "deviants" can throw additional light on the prejudices and principles governing colonial policy and the limitations of the suggestion that a single colonial discourse was at work.

Kaviraj has tried to explain some of these difficulties and internal inconsistencies in the colonial discourse with the notion that the discourse of the Raj

⁴ P.Chatterjee. *The Nation and Its Fragments*, New Delhi, 1995, p.20.

was being addressed to a number of different 'publics' from whom it sought legitimacy. The imperial policies in India had to appear correct to the British public back home, the traditional elite of Indian society as well as the newly emerging Indian intelligentsia. There arose a severe paradox that had to be contended with by the regime. This resulted from the fact that it was far more powerful than the state in the 'mother country', entirely unrestricted by the procedures of democracy that the elite had to wrestle with in the metropolis. Rather, it was an, "external, in a sense suspended state which was not the product or terrain of social conflict [as bourgeoisie states are] in the society over which it rules."⁵

Kaviraj has seen these as two alternative modes of legitimization which were deemed possible and simultaneously pursued. In that legitimization meant that political forms and strategies had to find structures of self-evidence on their side, firstly, it was felt that this could be accomplished by fitting the patterns of the new political regime into the existing justificatory discourse or at least appearing to do so. Bernard Cohn's study of the way officials of the Raj took up symbols resembling Mughal leaders is suggestive of such a strategy, as are arguments the British used pertaining to their respect for the inherently different and essential 'Indianness' of their subjects.

The second strategy which was followed consisted of a severe remodeling of the discourses of Indian society through a serious and missionary spread of western education. This would subsequently result in a climate wherein the activities, policies and maneuvers of the colonial state would appear justified to the new structure of self-evidence acquired by the rationalist intelligentsia. Here, the constitution of the

⁵ Kaviraj, op cit.,pp 19-54.

Weltanschauung of rationalist modernity which was part of a universal, moral ethics and values was inscribed and glorified by the new intelligentsia and, as we shall see in Chapter 2 was taken up as the ideal vision by the leaders of India at independence.

But the point that Kaviraj has failed to stress adequately is the internal incongruity of these two strategies. This inconsistency comes out sharply in representations of communism and class struggle illuminated in British discourse. For on the one hand the charges of the un-Indianness of communism were repeatedly cast, from which the picture of Indianness and India as perceived by the British can be derived. The communists were also lambasted as the antithesis of everything that was considered 'decent' or 'normal' by the 'ordinary', 'civilized' citizen and the way this was depicted sheds enormous light on the constitution of this universal correctness and morality. The enduring characterizations employed by the British which are still persistent in the present context create a sense by which the Communist is cast outside both India and universal humanity. Thus, the stress on the atheistic and egalitarian basis of communism distanced the followers of this theory from stereotypical models of Indian being, while the communists were also excluded from British notions of civilized norms because their aspirations to rationalism superseded the modernity advocated and glorified by the British. Before evidences of these contradictions are presented it would be instructive to examine the specific context of the late 1920s and the immediate intentions of the British prior to the commencement of the Meerut proceedings.

The 1920s have been seen as a watershed in the history of modern India for a number of different reasons. This was the decade that saw the first nation-wide non-cooperation campaign that culminated in Chauri Chaura, drawing involvement of masses of people and stirring the already shaky foundation of British rule. This was also the period in which, it has been argued, the first explicitly political communal clashes occurred, giving rise to heightened insecurities amongst communities as well as interesting characterizations of 'communal' labeled at the particular enemy of the moment.

Of particular interest to the project at hand, these years also witnessed an increasing interest in the state over labour related questions, one manifestation of which was a clear policy to eradicate the menace that called itself communism from the territorial confines of India. Dipesh Chakrabarty has presented a number of reasons for this relatively new approach. He writes : "It was only after the end of the First World War that the conditions of Indian workers became an object of knowledge for the government of India."⁶ He contends that two factors contributed to this outcome.

The first of these provisos was the establishment of the International Labour Office which the Indian government had actively participated in. The second was the internal political scene within India after the war. As he writes, "The conclusion of the war and the subsequent period of nationalist agitation had seen trade unions mushroom all over the country on a scale previously unknown. This was accompanied by a country wide outburst of labour unrest. With the Russian Revolution still fresh in its

⁶ D.Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 162.

memory, the Government of India's reaction to these developments was coloured by its fear of Bolshevism."⁷

Of significance was also the emergence of Workers and Peasant Parties (W.P.P.) during the period. This was achieved largely through the extensive organizational work of the communists who, through the legal front of the W.P.P.s could influence the nationalist leadership and also bring the cause of the working class and peasantry under the aegis of the struggle for independence. An important success of the Bombay W.P.P. was registered during the visit of the Simon Commission⁸ in February 1928. The huge demonstrations and the effective hartal that greeted the Commission was largely believed to be the work of the communists. The W.P.P. was also instrumental in establishing a number of new unions in Calcutta in 1927 and 1928 while the same period saw party members active during the strikes of the railway workers of Lilloooh and Kharagpur.

Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has summarized the situation in Bombay, highlighting the increasing intensification of militancy shown by the workers from the period 1919 to 1929 when "Bombay became the most dramatic centre of working class political action."⁹ He describes how the general strike of 1928, which began in April and ended favourably, was followed by seventy strikes between October 1928 and April 1929, after which a second general strike commenced, lasting nearly as long as the previous strike. It is worth remembering that it was during the 1928 general strike that a group of Communists emerged as the most vocal and powerful spokesmen on

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸ The Indian Statutory Commission [all white], set up to discuss India's constitutional future.

⁹ R.Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India*, New Delhi, 1995, p.5.

the strike committee. These men formed the Girni Kamgar Union which, "despite severe repression", led the labour movement in Bombay asserting political as well as economic demands.

Reasons for workers' distress and methods of their militancy varied across the country. For example the labour-intensive textile industry tried to introduce rationalization and standardization schemes which meant intensification of labour and a fall in real wages, based on mill-owners' perceptions of "a fair days's wage for a fair day's work."¹⁰ In Calcutta, on the other hand, the jute industry, which derived its monopoly over the world jute industry because of the cheapness of its product also tried to inflict similar wage-reducing measures. These were contested by what Chakarabarty has dubbed violent and pre-capitalist workers.

The government response to these problems was two-fold. On one level it assumed what Chakrabarty has termed a 'developmentalist' approach, which was spurred by "a desire to reform the conditions of labour and thus change the nature of the workforce." He proceeds by citing "an impressive range of labour legislation" by which this restructuring of the labouring classes was to take place. "The Amended Factories Act (1922), The Workman's Compensation Act (1923), The Trade Unions Act (1926), the Trades Dispute Act (1928), the Maternity Benefits Bill (1929)."¹¹

We can add the Public Safety Bill (1929), which was designed to keep foreign Communist including British Communist Party members out of the country as well as the Peshawar Conspiracy Case, the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case and of course, the

¹⁰ S Bhattacharya, 'Capital and Labour in Bombay City, 1928-29', *Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Political Economy*, XVI, 42 and 43 {17-24 Oct., 1981}, pp. PE36-PE44.

¹¹ Chakarabarty, *op cit.*, p.71.

Meerut Conspiracy Case. Hence, one is inclined to agree with Chakrabarty when he claims that these laws were to enable the worker "to receive a new 'legal' personality, more welfare, and even some official help in organizing into trade unions, (*naturally of a non communist kind*)"¹². This repression of Communist activity, whether it was a result of industry pressure on the state or an ideological maneuver, was the second aspect of governmental policy regarding labour.

The Meerut Conspiracy Case was publicly asserted in 1929 to be the prosecution of thirty three alleged Communists who were accused of conspiring to overthrow the sovereignty of the King Emperor over British India. The case for the prosecution was based on a systematic presentation of the enormous vault of information that had been collated on each labour organizer or Communist during the 1920s. Detailed reports of the daily activities of individuals such as Phillip Spratt and Muzaffar Ahmad, examination of interpreted letters, interpretations of speeches as well as the grappling with Marxist theory through a reading of books such as *The Communist Manifesto* and *State and Revolution* vividly exemplify how seriously the British regarded the need to curb Communism. One is not concerned here with the accuracy of the reports or the reliability of the evidence. Rather, of significance is the particular manner in which the British framed this information, the themes they chose to emphasize, the meanings they derived from such investigations and the political use to which their constructed definitions were put during the course of the trial.

¹² *ibid.* [emphasis added.]

Pressing Concerns of The British

The specific intentions of the British during the run up to Meerut seem to be as Kaviraj has described, "a general policy of keeping Communists and Congress at two ends of an eternally renewed misunderstanding,"¹³ as well as a curtailing of the sporadic mass action which had been witnessed at specific moments of the decade.

The former concern was expressed as early as 1923, during the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation Movement when it was reported that "For special reasons; chiefly the desire to carry with us at a critical stage moderate Indian opinion, the Non-Cooperators were allowed a degree of immunity," whereas, "a purely Communist propaganda can work only through a very low class agent, though a fear of the so-called leaders may assist, it will not command the support of large numbers of *the* respectable classes, and can therefore be more easily suppressed than an agitation on nationalist lines."¹⁴ The foundations of the differentiated policy were thus firmly in place and could be reinvoked whenever a dangerous intermingling between the two parties was apparent. For example, the interest shown by the prominent nationalist leader C.R. Das in labour unrest and empowerment sent wary reports amid the administrative body as did the support for the left amongst 'decent, respectable' citizens such as Motilal Nehru during the debates around the Public Safety Bill.¹⁵ As Haig, the Secretary of State for India elaborated in a letter to the Chief Prosecutor of the Meerut Case, Langford James, "from the political point of view it would be an

¹³ S Kaviraj, 'The Split in the Communist Movement of India', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, J.N.U., New Delhi, 1979, p.104.

¹⁴ Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India 1919-1924*, ed. Subodh Roy, 1971, p.199. [emphasis added].

¹⁵ The Public Safety Bill was ordinated on 12 April, 1929 to keep foreign and especially British, communists outside British India.

advantage to be able to convince the public in general as early as possible that Communism is not the kind of movement that should receive the sympathy of Nationalists. The opposition to the Public Safety Bill has created an artificial and false atmosphere, and we want to set that right as soon as possible."¹⁶

The second imperative of British colonial policy during these years was to quell the increasing propensity of the Indian public towards mass action. As an investigating officer states while describing a letter of M.N. Roy, "The menace of the programme outlined in the following extracts lies not much in the determination to wage war against the king and to overthrow the government established in India, as in the intention to stir up the masses by teaching them that they are oppressed, to create class hatred and eventually to lead the masses to attack on those who are possessed of land or property."¹⁷ These words drive home the fear of mass political participation with vivid clarity. They also suggest that, as much as this fear may be privately acknowledged, the fact that a conspiracy case was taken up points to a perception of the pedagogical threat that communism posed which, unchecked, could dismantle the precarious legitimacy of British rule.

It is on the communists and especially the example of the Russian Revolution that blame is laid for such inspiration to indulge against the state. For example, in his work *Communism in India*, Cecil Kaye bemoans the fact that as a result of communist intrigues and propaganda, "the Press is becoming increasingly alive to the immense power of mass action as a political weapon... as also the impression that, as

¹⁶ Haig in a letter to Langford James, 29 April, 1929, Home Poll. File 10/IV/1929, PC Joshi Archives.

¹⁷ Letter by Crerar to Secretary of State Haig, Home Political File, 18/VII/28, National Archives of India.

this particular weapon broke the dominion of the Tsars in Russia, so it may again be used to win India her freedom from the overlordship of Great Britain."¹⁸ From this we can gauge that it is a particular kind of politics that the British were trying to thwart, a politics of the "mob, indulging in the kind of mass violence which does not require to be composed of convinced Communists, but only of persons whose mind have been inflamed beyond all control; and Communism is an exceedingly potent and subtle poison for exciting the mob mind in much a way."¹⁹

The communists were categorized as the cause for such manifestations of violence and class struggle. According to the British administrative machine, these individuals who spoke of mass mobilization and workers' rights had no business preaching the doctrines of Marxism on British colonial territory. Thus after the arrest of the thirty three alleged conspirators at Meerut, Haig clearly state that

A judicial pronouncement is required as early as possible which enables us to deal with further manifestations of Communism and to prevent the Communist movement recovering from the blow which the arrest of the leaders has dealt it. We hope to be able on the result of this case to make further Communist activities both difficult and dangerous for those who wish to indulge in them.²⁰

Thus it can be argued that these particular notions of mass democracy and class struggle, notions that conflicted with the paternalist and welfarist modernity that the British were imposing upon their Indian subjects, were to be curtailed. These notions were threatening not only because they presumed and inspired participation of the

¹⁸ David Petrie, *Communism in India 1924-1927*, ed., Mahadevprasad Saha, Calcutta, 1972, p. 287.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 288.

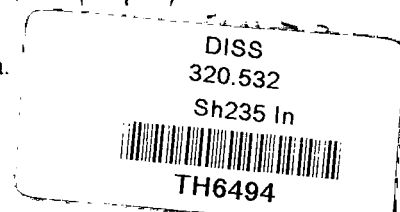
²⁰ Haig in a letter to Langford James, 29 April, 1929, *op cit.*

feared 'masses' against the interests of the Raj, but they also conflicted with the notions of India which propped up the reasons and justifications proclaimed by the British to reign over the territory.

The Communist as Un-Indian

Throughout the official archive on communists, the most poignant typification of these individuals is their inherently 'non-Indian nature'. For example, a police report referring to the 'man in the street,' stated that, "But India is different. Bolshevism is the negation of religion. Bolshevism connotes equality status. India is the home of caste and feudalism. The doctrines of communism can never take deep roots in this country."²¹ The communists were presented to as being peripheral to Indian society, incessantly attempting to infiltrate or entice 'real' Indians with their rhetoric of Marxism as if to ensnare the innocent Indians with some malevolent designs. This presents particular problems if the history of colonialism or 'orientalism' per se is being pursued in terms of the self-other dichotomy. For, if communists were alien to India, where and how did they become part of the British self? What one needs to comprehend here is that the communists were projected as being marginal to both the essential and orientalist Indian as well as the rational British self. The 'other' that the communists were a manifestation of, portrayed not only the differences that were perceived as essentially Indian, but also the similarities and unity between the Raj and its colonized subjects which were sought to be preserved.

²¹ Report in Home Political File, 18/VII, National Archives of India.



In his defence of British policy, *India on Trial*, Woolacott, a former editor of 'The Pioneer', presents us with a fairly comprehensive version of how India was perceived during the 1920s. Woolacott's *India on Trial* was not an official publication. But if we take into account the censorship and anti-sedition laws governing the territory during the period,²² as well as Woolacott's professed intention to correct the, "misrepresentation of British policy against the fallacious teachings of pseudo-historians,"²³ one senses that, the text certainly reflects what the British would have wanted the reading public to believe. Amidst the laudatory commentary on British rule and the derision with which the swarajists and the "Red Menace"²⁴ is attacked, two recurring attitudes abound within the text.

Firstly we are delivered the picture of India which is so familiar today, a society where religious sentiments hold full reign over people's lives creating disunity and communal disorder, an India where most people are "naturally law abiding" and "highly conservative"²⁵, and secondly, an India which required the paternal control of the British in order to remain a stable and unitary country. This paternalism was most explicit when Woolacott talked of the labour situation and unrest, that according to him, was generated by "Bolshevik agents and Gandhians alike"²⁶. For the British were purported to have provided better facilities, daily practical benefits and increasingly safer conditions for the workers, while agitators were accused of exploiting any ill-fortune that befell the worker for their own political

²² See NG Barrier, *Banned Controversial Literature and Political Control in India, 1907-47*.

²³ Woolacott, *India on Trial*, London, 1929, p.vii.

²⁴ The title of chapter XVI, *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.80.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.160.

ends.

This overbearing concern for the Indian masses was seen as necessary in the specific context of India because of the apparently 'intrinsically violent and ignorant nature' of its people. For example, when he writes of labour unrest, he warned that,

"Advocates of the improvement of labour conditions in India would do well to bear in mind that rhetorical appeals to the masses are likely to be misunderstood by the men to whom they are addressed. The riots and sabotages which have been the concomitants of recent strikes show how quickly labour disputes in India degenerate into violence."²⁷

It seems the British government did not have to worry itself over such concerns 'back home', for, as Cecil Kaye explained, "interference with Communist associations in England is unnecessary so long as members of such associations confine their activity to England where public opinion is sufficiently strong to prevent any serious menace to society."²⁸ Thus, India was a muddle of weak public opinion, mob mentalities and opportunistic politicians, while the only 'responsible' statesmen were constantly vilified as producers of "misery and poverty."²⁹ The familiar strains of the 'white man's burden' were played out here with grave despair and desire for approval.

In fact, evidence points to the suggestion that it was India which imposed undemocratic methods on a reluctant administration. Dipesh Chakrabarty thus

²⁷ *ibid.*, 219.

²⁸ Letter of Isemonger [Intelligence Bureau] to Haig, 20th September 1928, in *Communism in India 1925-1935*.

Ed. Subodh Roy, 1972.

²⁹ Woolacott, *op cit.*, p. vii.

describes the debates amongst Scottish millowners regarding the promotion of trade unions, in which the idea was dismissed on the grounds that, "such equality would be too un-Indian."³⁰ The panchayat (traditional Indian village council) system was considered a more suitable arrangement by which workers could resolve industrial problems. Thus, Benthall, of Bird and Company, justified the arguments against trade unions by positing that,

I do think we might try out in one or two mills the experiments of workers representatives...They may prove to be suitable for India where things are more primitive and where such committees would take the form of a panchayat. The natural leaders, mouthpiece or mukhis of the workers would come to the fore... (This) would do a great deal more than the trade unions.³¹

Whether this is interpreted as a justification or simply, as Chakrabarty assumes, a pragmatic approach to the particular relations of power and authority that the Indian workers were accustomed to, the sense of difference that is evoked is the most prominent underlying effect of the statement. Yet their protestations of British democratic egalitarianism were not borne out by the colonial judges, who drew clear distinctions, even between communist 'agitators' of the lower and upper classes. For Sessions Judge Yorke in the Meerut Judgement could unabashedly speak of Alve accused, as not regarded as the same as the other conspirators "mainly for the reason that he does not belong to the bourgeois or petty bourgeois classes from which the rest of the Indian accused come from Bombay..." continuing that "Though a factory hand himself, he is an intelligent and practical man."³² In fact, this

³⁰ Chakrabarty, op cit., p.162

³¹ Cited in Chakrabarty, op cit., p.162.

³² Meerut Conspiracy Case Judgment [MCC] Volume II, p. 413.

idea of a basically dumb mass proved useful when justifying the repression of communists. Another example of this class elitism was delivered by Langford James, Chief Prosecutor at Meerut, when he suggested with horror that the logic of Marxism culminated in a "classless society" in which "We are all to become actual workers in a factory or actual workers in a field".³³

The alienness of communism was projected as an aspect of the Soviet-centric nature of the Indian, or indeed any, Communist Party following the 1917 Revolution, as well as the so called anti-nationalist character of the C.P.I. The first depiction of externality here carried two senses for it could describe the Communists as being controlled by other, non-Indian superiors, such as the Soviet Union-centric Comintern, as well as a connotation of a foreign or 'strange' theoretical framework on which to base one's politics and vision. An example would be to use class as an analytical and strategic tool instead of caste which could be viewed as being more indigenous. In the superficial sense, and in common-sensical parlance, the CPI of the 1920s fell on both these counts. For the Comintern was generally perceived to be the hub of all communist activity during this period while the ideological armature within which the communists operated also stemmed from alien quarters. It could be argued therefore that the constant British references to the strange and anti-national character of the communists was not just a metaphor but reflected a reality that they merely exposed relentlessly. However of interest is the manner in which the discursive use of this metaphor of alienness went beyond descriptions of the 'strange' organizational qualities of the communist link to the Comintern. Also worth

³³ Langford James, , Vol.1, p. B3, PC Joshi Archive

appreciating is the effect of these emphasized repetitions on subsequent historiography as well as the exclusion of other 'realities' such as the equally 'alien' nature of liberalism, secularism and other notions upon which the entire edifice of the Indian state stands.

While the attachment of the communists to the Soviet Union is hardly being denied (although a cursory reading of secondary works on the subject suggest the relationship between the two to be far from one sided or dictatorial), the portrayal asserted by the British suggests a blinding devotion to all things Russian on the part of the Indian communists. For example, during the Meerut Judgement, Yorke elaborated on how the communists painted "the marvellous state of Russia", to be "since the revolution nothing less than paradise." He continued ,

present day conditions in Russia are described as heavenly compared with conditions in India and the underlying idea conveyed is that the results which have been realized by a Communist Revolution in Russia are likely to be and in fact necessarily will be realized in other countries which follow the same road.³⁴

Here one can comprehend the fear that the 1917 revolution in Russia generated throughout the capitalist world . It is again clearly discernible in a report that stated that "the Bolshevik Government is thoroughly earnest in its hope to provoke revolution in India as the best means of wrecking the British Empire"³⁵ However the former pronouncement also tacitly implies that the mere praise of an alternative system that advocated internationalism and the politicization of labour was

³⁴ MCC, p.283.

³⁵ Kaye, op cit., p.145

criminal.

Yorke went on to emphasize how, in a book entitled Red Money. "There is scarcely a resolution which does not go to prove that the sums sent by the trade unions in Russia during the General Strike and Miners Strike of 1926 were intended to further the hope for proletariat revolution."³⁶ Thus, the impression was cast that the communists were trained and financed by the Soviets, or 'the fountain head in Europe' which referred to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and were merely indigenous agents of an international plot to decimate the tyranny of Bolshevism on an international scale. As one CID agent noted :

...it is doubtful, however, whether the indigenous labour agitator is a Communist at heart. He is ordinarily a man of little education, who has acquired a smattering of Bolshevik theory and who is able to impress the ignorant workers with violent harangues interlarded with the catchwords and slogans employed by the Communist tub thumper all over the world.³⁷

This suggested that whatever pure communism may be, the Indian recipients of such a theory invariably played out a crude distortion of it which was again objectionable to the British law brokers. Here is a variation of the same theme: while this particular political actor was presented to be alien because he was a communist, he could never be sufficiently communist by virtue of his Indianness.

The colonialists warned that the task of communism was simply to provoke revolution for the well being of the Soviet Union. It was not to be misunderstood as

³⁶ MCC, p.287.

³⁷ Report on Communism in India 1927-28, Home Political File, 18/VII/28, National Archives of India.

being synonymous with the demands for independence. As Yorke stated, the communists merely saw, "unlimited revolutionary possibilities,"³⁸ in the nationalist cause of the colonial world. However, any support shown for the cry of independence should be ignored because it was a 'lie'. Yorke warned:

In other words you put yourself at the head of the nationalist movement saying that you want to see India governed by Indians and all the time you mean nothing of the sort, you want the dictatorship of the proletariat all over the world and the transitional stage of government under Stalin at Moscow.³⁹

Another instance of this apparently deceptive nature of the communist project lay in a report that suggested again, that it was not even 'proper' communism that was to be played out in India. For, "the Comintern soon decided not to attempt to foster the projected revolution in India on the milk of pure Communism...." as "...the first objective of Communism in India was to capture and control existing Nationalist organization such as the Indian National Congress... in which a revolutionary spirit might be introduced by means of propaganda."⁴⁰ The inference here points to the idea that communism was not only distorted by the Indianness of the communist agents but also by the fact that Moscow was playing a double game. This served as a useful warning to anyone within the nationalist organisation to take heed of the 'capturing' and 'controlling' tendencies of their communist brethren.

The above extract also alludes to the method of communist politics as seen by the British as communism was incessantly characterized as an invasion or the

³⁸ MCC, Vol. II, p.25.

³⁹ Langford James, op cit., p. C3

⁴⁰ Petrie, op cit. p. 283.

work of indigenous agents who combined to promote ill will towards the legal and constitutional masters of the Raj. Communist method was described as "skillful", "deceitful", "disguised" and the threat from communism was that such methods were "likely to rot the core of Government's strength by disaffecting its servants, military and civil, by destroying the influence of the more conservative elements of Indian society through the promotion of a government of dictatorship of the proletariat."⁴¹

It would appear to follow from this that in the British point of view, 'genuine' nationalism was vastly more acceptable than all-out communism. This attitude can be traced back as early as 1923 in a report comparing the success of Gandhi and his Non-cooperation Campaign with M.N. Roy's attempts at 'fostering' communism during the same period. Gandhi was said to have created in the Non-cooperation Campaign, "a mass movement which, while resembling nothing in spirit and conception to Communism was far more widespread and formidable than anything Roy could possibly have created." The success of Gandhi is attributed to a universal appeal which is based mainly on religion and is extremely "anti-British". Thus, "with a demi-God like Mr. Gandhi leading the Non-Cooperation Movement there was no one to harken to the purely secular preachings of a puny earthling like Roy."⁴² This is an example of the limitation within the self-other paradigm in explaining British policy. Here, Gandhi's alienness and his religiosity were deemed to be a legitimate expression of a 'genuine nationalism.' Thus the secular, rational communist failed in the British view because he was too much like them.

⁴¹ Kaye, op cit., pp.145-146.

⁴² Petrie, op cit., p. 66.

So, in the opening lines of his speech at Meerut, the Chief Prosecutor Langford James commenced his pre-ordained task to demarcate the communist accused from the nationalist politicians, with a memorable and persistent theme. "The revolution that these accused have visualized is an anti-national revolution." he declared. They, "entertain feelings of hatred towards a very large number of people," but, according to James a special hatred was reserved for each of the prominent nationalist leaders of the period. Here he emphasized politicians who were also known for their concern shown in the labour question such as C.R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai and Jawaharlal Nehru. Next we have the reason for the communist repulsion of these leaders of nationalist thought in India, for, "They are striving... for independence in India. This is an apparently hopelessly wrong ideology according to the accused. Mr. Gandhi's crime is enhanced by... the bad taste to have religious scruples and there is no God at all in the Mecca to which these gentlemen look"⁴³. Here, succinctly expressed was an explicit rendition of the by now well worn formula:

The Communists do not belong to this country. Their cause is not the nationalist cause. The Communist is the interloper who is out to destruct and manipulate the just cause of nationalism in order to create satellite state of the USSR.⁴⁴

The British Similarities with the 'Native'

It seems that Gandhi was deemed more legitimate because he was more religious and hence, more Indian. Here, Langford James was very dexterously

⁴³ Langford James, p. A1

⁴⁴ Langford James, p.41.

reconciling two extremely different, even contradictory arguments. In that he was expressing a unity amongst God fearing and nation loving beings, his tirade against communism revealed a universe of interests that must be protected from this particular 'menace.' Here was the second prong of the strategy where the state argued for a universal common sense and human values shared by ordinary people in India and England - which the communists defied. This suggests that in order to fight a movement like communism, it was not enough to talk of difference. Because of the universalism of communism itself, the British were forced to acknowledge universalism in some area when dealing with the 'natives.' Some common ground had to be found in the face of the communist challenge.

This aspect is most explicit in the concretization of communist history and politics that permeated the official archival material on the Meerut Conspiracy Case. This encompassed how the imperial administration discussed Marxism, the class struggle, the perceived intentions of the conspirators as well as the political methods used by the labour agitators. For, in order to "do our best whenever occasion offers..." that is, "...to inform the public that this is a Moscow case and nothing to do with nationalism,"⁴⁵ stark discrepancies between the communists and 'decent, civilized' folk had to be forcefully and repeatedly expounded. To this end, the inclusion and emphasis on the British communists, Phillip Spratt, Benjamin Bradley and John Hutchinson were especially useful. As Yorke himself stated,

I do not quite understand why Spratt accused should suppose that a jury would regard with a favourable eye

⁴⁵ Langford James' letter to Haig, 2-5-29, in Home Pol. File, No. 10/IV/1929

work aiming at revolution, by which he himself says that he means violent upheaval of a political and military character, Revolution in the good old fashioned sense.⁴⁶

The appeal to a 'universalist' morality was couched in terms of a common set of 'ideals of civilization' which can be seen as a conscious appeal to the Indian higher classes.⁴⁷ For example, Officer Horton, in an attempt to define the theory of class he derived from a reading of Lenin, stipulated that, "The only other (apart from the proletariat class for which Lenin designed his appeal was that of the 'intellectuals', revolutionary theorists, dazzled by the counterfeit brilliance of their own intellects and devoted to the perversion of the *accepted ideals of civilization*"⁴⁸ What 'accepted ideals of civilization' was Horton drawing on here? Were they Indian, British, or most credibly, a conglomeration of the two, which implied a shared interest between the 'decent' classes of both 'civilizations' against those 'malicious' intellectuals and the destitute proletariat.

Langford James rejected Marx's theory of the state by positing it against what he connoted as the opinion of 'the man in the street' on the subject:

I suppose any ordinary person who thinks about the state regards it as an institution which for better or for worse, well or less well, is there to guard the liberties and rights of all citizens in the state and see to the best of its ability that they all get fair pay and equal treatment.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Yorke, MCC, Vol I, p.302.

⁴⁷ See Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, 1988 pp.57-60

⁴⁸ Horton's 'opinion' Home Pol. File, 10/IV/1929. [emphasis added]

⁴⁹ Langford James, op cit., Vol. I, B2.

This was a far cry from the organ of the ruling class, "which Marx reckons it is the duty of the proletariat to smash." Yorke further elaborated that, "the theory of the withering away of the state relates only to the proletarian state, and not to the capitalist state which can only be brought to an end by violent revolution."⁵⁰ Similarly, "the dictatorship of the proletariat which is the transitional stage after revolution and before the classless society," actually meant for James, "rule by a small bureau of men which is impossible without a violent and bloody revolution."⁵¹ The oblique inference that can be drawn here is that this mode of governance bears no semblance to the reign of the British, or that of any 'civilized' race in India. Also the universalism espoused here profoundly contradicted any notions of modernism or rationalism as it was based on the emphasis of civilization and tradition.

The British depicted themselves as being, "the antithesis of all the Soviet System stands for and... one of the chief bulwarks against the world wide revolution which the Bolsheviks regard as the essential condition of their ultimate success."⁵² Thus, British rule in India was constantly described as being based on legality, morality and truth, their conception of politics is consensual and evolutionary and above all they possessed a respect for each religious community within the polity as opposed to the negators of religion, the communists. Hence, it was "the approval of that vast majority of India's people who have faith in India's future and whose first desire is to see their country prosperous, contented and secure," that was sought

⁵⁰ Yorke, MCC, op cit., p.18.

⁵¹ Langford James, op cit., Vol.1, p. B2.

⁵² Petrie, op.cit.p.2.

from the spokesman of the protectorate race, Lord Irwin, on the occasion of the ordination of the Public Safety Bill in 1929.⁵³

The British espousal of the reality of Russia served to underline the threat of communism to the 'civilized' classes and was thus the most demonstrable vindication for prosecuting the accused as it is here where the theories of Marxism had been enacted to their most "brutal and extreme conclusions." And, as James portrayed, "it is not a fact that Russia is a happy land peopled by Communists. It is a fact that it is ruled by Communist with the help of the OGPU and the and Red Army... " where, " ... the people of the country are terrorized into submission to the rule which is imposed upon them." It was therefore incumbent on the British to protect Indians from this form of subjugation for the essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat was "incompatible with freedom for the bourgeoisie."⁵⁴

There is no doubt that this 'civilized' audience was in the judge's mind when he ruled at Cawnpore that, according to communists, "British rule, government by *upper and middle class Indians alike*, were to be swept away, the confiscation of property was to be whole sale, a 'People's Party' was to be the initial step, that is, a legal front of the illegal Communist organization. Violence and the destruction of property were to be encouraged and conflicts to be precipitated." The terrible scenario was to culminate, "In the event of the overthrow by force of arms of the British government, the revolutionaries proposed to sweep away all political groups and labour organizations which didn't come into line. The power of the *upper and*

⁵³ Irwin's Speech 12th April, 1929 in Home Pol. File F18/VI/29

⁵⁴ Langford James, op cit., Vol. 1, p. C1.

middle class Indians was to be destroyed by taking from them all that they possessed."⁵⁵

The Communist Method

The communist violation of 'civilized' norms was also revealed in their methods. From the catalogue of various *modus operandi*

the most important of their activities, that which was taking up the most of their time and attention and probably attracted most public notice were the strikes which raged in Calcutta and Bombay. There is no necessity for me (Langford James) to prove that these strikes were instigated and carried on and prolonged by these accused because it is their proud boast that such was the case.⁵⁶

This is significant, for whereas at most opportunities, Langford James was constantly trying to prove the accused to be malevolent liars who could never be trusted, here he seemed perfectly willing to accept their narration of events. He then exemplified what strikes actually meant, "to the Bolshevik", for he felt "two fundamental purposes", moved the Bolsheviks to concentrate on this activity, neither of which, claimed James, actually bore any remote resemblance to the demands of the strikers:

One is to educate the masses to mass action and to provide so to speak a rehearsal for the general strike and the mass revolution. The other objective is to glorify the members of the Communist Party and make them appear as the recognized leaders of the proletariat - the sort of man who gets things done for you."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Petrie, op cit., p. 64.

⁵⁶ Langford James, op cit., Vol. 2, p.3

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10

When citing examples of the increasing influence of communists over unions James again spoke of them 'capturing' the employees of the Ichapore Munitions factory and "capturing" the employees of another arsenal at Kirkee. He then chose to elaborate on "what I mean by capturing". It was, "so that the workmen in these trade unions act at the dictation of these accused."⁵⁸ However, the most illuminating in this regard was Yorke during the judgment at Meerut when he took the individual case of Philip Spratt and his role as a 'labour agitator'. For, we are told that "In a letter to Page Arnot, Spratt says he's taken part in five strikes." Yorke then proceeded to dissect exactly what this 'taking part' could mean... "He might either have taken part as an organizer working for the Trade Union Congress or he might have taken part as an organizer working for the propagation of Communism, that is representative of the Left Wing or Communist Wing". He went on to ascertain that "He was certainly never at anytime taking part as an ordinary labour organizer for AITUC and in fact it is his own claim that he took part as an organizer of revolution and not of negotiation."⁵⁹ which was precisely the reason why Spratt found himself in the dock at Meerut.

The huge importance given to the strike activity of the communists is manifest when in the conclusion of the judgement of the Meerut Conspiracy Case, Yorke actually emphasized that apart from the establishment of Workers and Peasant Parties,

perhaps of deeper gravity was the hold that the members of the Bombay party acquired over the workers in the Textile Industry in Bombay as shown by the extent of the control which they exercised during the strike of 1928 and the success they were achieving in pushing

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Yorke, MCC, Vol. I, p. 221

forward a thoroughly revolutionary policy in the Girni Kamgar Union after the strike came to an end.⁶⁰

Explicit here is the fear in being overrun by workers action and political demands as well as the aura of illegitimacy that surrounds such a revolutionary campaign.

This impression was also cast by the consistent classification of the communists as the violent agitator in Indian politics as opposed to the popular Gandhian tactics of ahimsa. Not only do we repeatedly read the quotes by Lenin on the necessity of violence and descriptions of the 'mendacious' regime that reigns over Russia but we also hear how the main texts of Marxism such as the '18th Brumaire' and *The Civil War in France* lay most stress on the "glorification of violent revolution," while it was suggested that Spratt et al would have liked to have taught bomb making in communist study circles elsewhere.⁶¹ A distinction was made when describing those unions and labour movements within the 2nd International whose base was Amsterdam and the 3rd International which according to the British was an entirely Moscow-run affair. As Langford James stated,

...to be Amsterdamed means that you hold rational feelings with regard to the labour question and rationalization is one of the hated things in the Communist International. I want to put this is fairly as possible. I suppose it may be said that this Amsterdam International aims at the constitutional methods whereas the Third International holds most strongly that no such method is possible."⁶²

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 674.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 300.

⁶² Langford James, *op cit.*, Vol. I, p. A4. [emphasis added]

Here, the term 'rational' was equalled to the use of constitutional means to effect transformation. However even these were not universal constitutional norms, for in that the issue of the legitimacy of British occupation was not questioned, 'rational' meant an adherence to British criteria.

It can be inferred therefore that on the subject of labour and class struggle, a unity of interests between the English and Indians was plainly reinforced. Woolacott also provided an example of this tactic, when he stated, "The truth is that in India, as in other countries, there are good and bad employers, and general denunciations of the employing class as a whole must fail to carry conviction to unbiased observers."⁶³ Thus, Woolacott was articulating a politics of class collaboration, of goodwill between employers and employees and of welfare. Again, he was addressing that 'impartial, decent' citizen of the middle class who was constantly and confidently referred to by the British administrative machinery.

The communists it seems could never get it right. Even the fact that they used secret codes, invisible ink and false passports and pretexts in order to enter British Indian territory was incriminating and displayed as a sign of foul play and illegitimate means. Ignored was the crucial qualifier that these were the only means by which the communists could communicate or operate as political actors under the Raj as their existence was already decided as illegitimate and thus marginal to the space of political action. Thus, the implied connotations of deceit and malpractice in the statement, "No communist comes out here exactly in a free or overboard manner. They either change their names or they at any rate throw some doubts upon their

⁶³ Woolacott, op cit., p. 219.

occupations”⁶⁴, is rendered meaningless when viewed in this obvious light.

The communists were thus characterized as dangerous to the Indian polity on all counts. They were out to manipulate the cause of nationalism, usurp the possessions of the wealthy classes, excite the workers of their rights and finally indoctrinate the youth of the country with their insidious programme. As Langford James put it in his indubitable manner, the communists were determined in "the efforts... to poison the minds of - I put it that way, they I suppose would say to instruct the minds of the youth. That is a point which Moscow insisted upon strongly. You should get the child from its cradle and teach it class war."⁶⁵

The Communist Character

The universe of decency and morality that was evoked to tie the Indian educated and elite to their British protectorate was not just depicted in political terms. For in the representation of the character of the communist as an individual or, significantly, as part of a destructive malevolent living organism that was feeding into a healthy, functional society and rotting it to its core, one could also find traits that were and still are considered repulsive to the 'normal' citizen.

At first one is confronted with a variety of images of the communist as reporters did not seem to have decided whether the Indian communists were pure to their theoretical dogmas or merely opportunist politicians. For example, one suggestion for the failure of Roy and his comrades, "was the indifferent quality of

⁶⁴ Langford James, op cit., Vol. I, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, Vol. II, p.4.

himself and his agents. Practically all of them, and Roy is also included, have proved to be greedy opportunists, lacking in scruples and principles and even in common honesty."⁶⁶ Following in the same vein and alluding to the particular social background of the communists in India we have the attitude "that the leaders of the Communist Party and of Labour organizations in India come, almost invariably from the bourgeois class, and they have taken up the cause of Labour either from political motives or motives of greed."⁶⁷

However at least here the communists were in the possession of human traits and could possibly be recognized as normal if not slightly shady characters. The striking quality of Langford James' speech which presented a detailed portrayal of "a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character", was its most blatant lack of attributing any semblance of humanness to the individuals he was describing. For, to be this Bolshevik,

you require certain definite qualifications to which the ordinary man does not aspire. You do not love your country, you are anti-country, you are anti-God, and you are anti-family. In fact I think it is fair to say that a Bolshevik of unimpeachable character is anti-everything which the normal man considers decent.⁶⁸

These dramatic sentences which stress the 'anti-everything' and thus the negative and destructive undercurrents of communism, (the lack of love, the utter void of normality), this loaded rhetoric that carries such power lucidly communicated the impression the British desired to generate amongst the public at

⁶⁶ Petrie, op cit., p. 67.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Langford James., op cit., Vol. I, p. A2

large. He continued to rampage, "You have ruthlessly to hate those who differ from your views, and when the proper time arrives you have as ruthlessly to kill them. And last, but by no means least, I think it is quite essential that you should have no sense of humour."⁶⁹

The 'Gospel of the anti-God' which was Bolshevism was described as a particular mind set, "a rule of life" that created fanatical disciples such as Philip Spratt. This was the individual who, when he claimed in his defence that, "I didn't think what I was doing is illegal," Yorke retorted, "It is a curious explanation to put forward and is only understandable in the light of a fanatical belief in Communism which renders a man completely unable to judge things from an ordinary standpoint."⁷⁰ Thus, this fanaticism was actually accepted and expected as a norm if one was a communist.

Both types of communist, the opportunistic swindling politician or the satanical agent of Moscow fitted in remarkably with the apparent politics of expediency which was described as the basis of communist operations. This was amply illustrated when Yorke saw it fit to introduce Lenin's repudiation of bourgeois morality. For "Lenin's Communist morality is identical with the fight for the strengthening of a dictatorship of the proletariat which means what is advantageous, useful and expedient for a definite group of people: everything is immoral which seems injurious and inexpedient to this group."⁷¹ The logical consequences here point to a method of 'any means necessary', everything was

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Yorke, MCC, *op cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 326.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 17.

seemingly justifiable, for

lying and deceit are often very important weapons to the pupils of Lenin.... That is to say that in the class struggle any means, however immoral according to bourgeois ideas are right and proper from the point of view of a Communist. One colossal immoral act is to produce a state of affairs in which there will be no more need for any immoral acts, or in which as everybody will be on equal terms, immoral acts will no longer be justifiable.

Lying should thus come naturally to such individuals in Yorke's opinion which led him to conclude that, "One will not be justified, in the absence of independent proof, in believing in the truth of anything which is said by a Communist if there can possibly be any motive for him to abstain from stating the truth."⁷²

The image which was most poignant in displaying the vitriolic and paranoid attitude of the colonial state towards the organized party of the left was that of the parasitic organism that was detrimental to the health of 'decent civilized' society. This was a very common trope within official documentation on the subject but it was manifested most succinctly by Petrie who ended his work *Communism in India* with the warning that the Raj must beware, "for the germ is bound to multiply, even as that of an infectious disease, and to taint the entire body politic."⁷³ He stressed the necessity of swift measures by the authorities for

It would be as little justifiable for the Government to relax its vigilance in times of peace as it would be for our health authorities to discard precaution when the public health is at its best. Wherever Communism manifests itself it should be met and stamped out like the plague."⁷⁴

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Petrie, *op cit.*, p.292.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

His attack shows strains of exaggeration, but perhaps more noteworthy was his likening of Indian society to the functionalist ideal. For here he was referring to India as a 'whole', a singular working healthy organism that completely contradicted the orientalist idea of Indian society that we are so familiar with. However it seems plausible to argue that any argument was justified to combat this 'sickly' disease, as he resolves,

The spread of Communism in India is not a case of those problems which may be looked at from a particular "angle of vision" it must be looked at straight in the face, and it must be fought with the most unrelenting opposition.⁷⁵

Thus, it can be concluded that the paradox inherent in the self-other paradigm which has been used to explain colonial policy, is amply illustrated when it comes to colonial discourse on communism. For here, the main premise by which communists were excluded was the repeated refrain that they were external to India. However, since this was a difficult game to play, as the British could hardly be described as Indian themselves, a universalism was espoused. This universalism not only went against the 'rule of colonial difference', that Partha Chatterjee has articulated. But it also contradicted the Enlightenment rationale and modernist assumptions that the British seemingly inherited and purveyed. For this colonial, universalism was based on traditional and civilisational ties, a common religiosity and morality that could be used to proscribe communism.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

Chapter 2

The Enduring Antithesis : Communists and the Indian State

The events in the Telengana region of Hyderabad state between 1946 and 1951 have been described by Sumit Sarkar as the longest peasant guerrilla war in modern Indian history, affecting at its height about 3,000 villages spread over 16,000 square miles and with a population of 3 million.¹ Yet surprisingly, very little research has been carried out the subject. In part, this can be explained by the extreme want of archival material of the period, much of which is declared missing. Due to the late development of anthropological peasant studies moreover, the case of Telengana has only recently begun to be examined.² The other source of information lies in the vault of communist literature on the period.³ However, the majority of this work is overdetermined by the contemporaneous concerns of the authors, whose priorities lie in damning Naxalite political methods and thus Maoism and to reappropriate 'Historic Telengana' for their own party's political history, tactical mistakes and all.

¹ Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and Nationalist Leadership, 1945-1947.' *Economic and Political Weekly* Annual Number, April 1982, pp. 677-689.

² Amit Kumar Gupta, 'The Communists and the Telengana Uprising, May 1944-February 1947', *Occasional Papers on History and Society, No. VIII*, Inkonda Thirrimulli, 'Aspects of Agrarian Relation in Telengana, 1928-1948', Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, CHS. SSS, JNU. See forthcoming work by both authors.

³ P.Sundarayya, *Telengana People's Struggle and it's Lessons* (Calcutta; Communist Party of India [Marxist]), 1972; R.B.Gour, et al., *Glorious Telengana Armed Struggle* (Communist Party of India Publication) 1973.

In the present context, the Telengana uprising offers a challenging counterpoint to the discussion of the colonial state discourse towards communists, for the years 1946 to 1951 cover the crucial period of transition from a colonial territory to an independent nation, as well as, in the case of Hyderabad, a princely state to a part of the newly integrated Republic of India. Before homing in on the specific representations of the communists during the Telengana struggle, it may be conducive to register some of the prevailing concerns of representatives of the administrative machine apropos labour, and especially the communists preceding the outbreak at Telengana.

The circumstances which preceded independence such as the brief legalization of the C.P.I. during the Second World War, and the deliberations on the eventual transfer of power in the period of transition between the war and August 1947, indicate the tumultuous context in which all political actors were operating. This period is crucial as the exchanges between British officials and the spokesmen of the soon to be independent nation such as Sardar Patel, illuminated clearly the use of the category of the 'Red Menace' as a constructed and unconcealed political tool⁴. For not only does one come across notions of the violent, disorderly and threatening outsider yet again, but now a few official documents, albeit hesitantly, also reported on an acceptable communism.⁵ It could be inferred that this was dictated by the fact that the communists had received legalization since they began to support the British war effort after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. What is interesting is how

⁴ See *Transfer of Power Documents Vol. I-VII*, ed., Mansergh.

⁵ *ibid.*

the enemies of the state could be swiftly transformed and how the definitions of political agents, as well as tactics towards them could also undergo an unashamedly dramatic change.

The adoption of the 'People's War' line by the C.P.I. in 1942 has been used by many nationalist historians such as R.C. Majumdar, to bemoan the treachery and betrayal of the communists who, it is argued, collaborated with the British in their indubitably opportunistic style.⁶ The state is said to have unquestioningly accepted the C.P.I.'s aid and allowed communists into crucial posts. Sanjoy Bhattacharya has pointed out the fallacy of such a simplistic thesis concerning the administrative machine and the communist activists during the war.⁷ Conversely, Sumit Sarkar has pointed to the fears of labour within both the British and Congress practitioners of power, which manifested itself in crucial decisions of policy.⁸ These discussions provide the backdrop to the concerns governing the regime when we come to Telengana as well a reminder of the caution with which much nationalist history should be treated

Thus, the end of the war 'normalized' imperial homilies towards the communists for the British once again chose to take exception to the inherently malignant nature of the party or any other that was pursuing the politics of class struggle. The British were however, on the way out. For this was the period of

⁶ R.C.Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* Vol. 3 (Calcutta) 1977.

⁷ S.Bhattacharya, 'The Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-45: A Reappraisal.' *South Asia Research*, Vol.15, No.1, Spring 1995.

⁸ S.Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and Nationalist Leadership, 1945-1947', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, April 1982, pp. 677-689.

Congress ascendancy, first, as the elected holders of the Interim Government from September 1946 and then as leaders of the new Republic. While bearing in mind the threat of partition, communal violence and anarchy, the correspondence of this period also reveals indications of future policy regarding the left and illuminates the significance of the C.P.I. in the eyes of Congress protagonists. This correspondence illustrates that the Congress had begun, in this period, to construct itself as the only force which could protect the nation against the 'Red Menace'.

Policy Imperatives For Congress

The Indian National Congress was never a body noted for unanimity amongst its leaders. The deep divisions caused by conflicting interests and attitudes that guided its various spokesmen have invariably led political scientists to avoid delineating an ideology particular to the party. Yet on the theme of communism a surprising degree of consensus is discernible which cuts across the varied ideological and factional cleavages of the organization.

Even during the interim government period, Maulana Azad instructed the committees to collect evidence of (Communist) "treachery" during the 1942 disturbances and afterwards, marking the beginning of the Congress campaign to denounce the C.P.I. as 'anti-national' for taking part in the war effort during the Quit India Movement. As Joya Chatterji points out, "it is interesting that no such moves were made against the Hindu Mahasabha which had been supporting the

British war effort since 1939.”⁹

One could argue that this, as is perhaps all 'high politics' was more an indication of achieving short term objectives, for certainly a high priority for Congress at this period was winning a substantial majority in the elections of 1945-1946. This is revealed in the letter of Patel to the Lahore Congress leader Bhargava about the ensuing elections in Punjab:

Communists we have to oppose at all costs. Two of the Congress Sikhs and two Akalis will discuss the chances of respective candidates with me and Maulana Daud.... Bitterness will disappear. But we shall settle positively about seats which are being contested by the Communists. The weaker will give up and allow the stronger to fight the Communists.¹⁰

It can therefore be argued that following independence, even though the country was in great need for reconstruction and reorientation in the post-war and post colonial climate, and while certainly policy decisions of the new statesmen were a reflection of this predicament, another factor determining national strategy can also be perceived. This is the thread of anti-Communism which was inculcated during the period of late colonial governance. While explanations for this attitude perhaps lie in the fact that a considerable number of people voted for the C.P.I. in both the ^{Provincial} ~~Constituent~~ Assembly Elections (even with a far from universal suffrage)^{10a} as well as the elections of 195², the apparent adoption of propaganda similar to their erstwhile colonial masters presents a degree of ambiguity on Congress policy.

⁹ Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, 1995, p145.

¹⁰ Patel in a letter to Bhargava, 2nd November, 1945, in *Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. 2, ed., Durga Das, Doc. 154.

^{10a} See R. D. Dutt, *India To-Day*, 1970, p 586. 48

The Telengana region was, in 1946, part of the princely state of Hyderabad ruled by the Nizam. His regime was supported by many Muslims who benefited from their enjoyment of bureaucratic and administrative authority. But it was deeply unpopular amongst the Hindus, (who constituted 89% of the population), whose languages and cultural norms had been actively suppressed and whose political representatives lived in fear of constant harassment and internship. At a time when most of his princely allies had seen the writing on the wall and had agreed to accede to India, the Nizam was recalcitrant to the last. Indeed he went so far as to organize a militia known as the Razakars to protect the state from Congress and Hindu domination: a step that did little to ease the tense communal climate.

This was the background against which the local communists had come to dominate, by 1944, the Andhra Mahasabha: a pro-Telengana, liberal organisation which had reflected the concerns of petty bourgeois Telugu speaking bureaucrats worried about their status in an increasingly 'Islamic' state. Under the leadership of the communists, it was transformed in the 1940s into the forum of the liberation campaign and anti-*jagirdari* and anti-*veti* (bonded labour) struggle of the peasants.¹¹

The extent of communist involvement in the Telengana saga has been investigated elsewhere¹² and will not be addressed here. Instead, the task is to explore how the communists were perceived and characterized during this period. The focus will be to explore not only how the communists were regarded by those in

¹¹ See Sarkar, op cit., J. Alam, State and the Making of Communist Politics, 1947-57, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI No45, November 9, 1991.

¹² Gupta, Thirumali, op cit.

power, but also how the Republican state of India saw its own role.

On the Hyderabad question, the Indian government unequivocally took the position that the only way to deal with the intransigent Nizam was 'Police Action' to 'liberate' the people of Hyderabad from their despotic and feudal ruler and his autocratic plenipotentiaries. Although the priority was to oust the Nizam and incorporate Hyderabad into the Indian Republic, plans to carry out another process of elimination were also at work for the trope of the communist 'disease' had begun to disseminate.

This is manifest in the fact that before this 'Police Action' was implemented, a number of letters passed through the hands of the Home Minister Sardar Patel, dealing with the issue of communist danger and their infiltration into the Telegu countryside and factories. Ramaswamy Reddy, warned the Home Minister that, "Now they (Communists) have come into the open and we must expect more and more trouble in the labour field. Production is bound to go down heavily if the Communists are allowed any hand, and we must take a strong line with regard to the Communists."¹³ Thus 'Police Action' could enable discipline to be inflicted on both the 'anti-national' leaders at the higher rungs of Hyderabad society, and the political agitators on the ground, who were similarly causing anxiety to the new rulers of India. True to his image of being a 'disciplinarian', Patel's reply was characteristic, "As regards the Communists, I suggest that if, as you say, the position is so bad, you take drastic action against them."¹⁴

¹³ In a letter of Ramaswamy Reddy to Patel, 7th January 1948, in Durga Das, op cit., Vol. 7, Doc.122.

¹⁴ In a letter of Patel to Ramaswamy Reddy, 19th Jan. 1948, in Durga Das op cit., Doc 123.

Again K.M. Munshi, faithful devotee of Patel and agent of the new government of India within the state talked of a

double problem, the problem of liquidating the Razakars as well as the Communists in Hyderabad. The first is easy, but the second is allied with the problem of the whole South India and connected with the Communist policy in South East Asia. Though Hyderabad is the immediate problem, the whole Communist infiltration in South India would prove a danger to the National Government if not firmly and thoroughly handled.¹⁵

Here Munshi underscores the importance with which the new government viewed the problem of left insurgency. His statement also draws out an attitude shared with the colonial commentators. For the notion of the communist alien who was prone to infiltrate and destroy India was taken on by the Indian official with a disturbing ease.

Following the 'Police Action' a government report on the progress of the Indian operation, *Hyderabad Reborn*¹⁶ delivers a stark and sinister message that echoes an intolerance and attitude of social engineering that perhaps seems disheartening when uttered by representatives of an idealist and newly 'liberated' people. The words read,

It would be idle to pretend that the Communist problem in Hyderabad has been solved... and it was obviously impossible to undo the effects of decades in a day.... But a certain measure of success has been obtained. The 'Communists' may not have been annihilated, but their fangs have been drawn.... Their complete liquidation is a matter of time and

¹⁵ In a letter from K.M.Munshi to Patel , 3rd August 1948 cited in Barry Pavier. *Telengana Movement, 1944-51*, 1981, p.139.

¹⁶ *Hyderabad Reborn: First Six Months of Freedom, Sept. 18, 1948 to March 17, 1949* compiled by Binod U.Rao, Director of Information, Hyderabad. 1949

organization of police and military forces.¹⁷

Sensing a tone of jubilation within this publication would not be amiss, as it pointedly celebrated the manner by which both 'enemies' of the Indian state were being dealt with firmly.

Communists As Alien To India

The new government used a number of arguments in order to justify the repressive measures wreaked on the communists. The most persistent was the notion of the alien nature of communism. However in the state discourse on the subject delivered by its various representatives we are also presented with the ideology and self definition of the state itself.

Thus the state actively displayed itself to be the bearer of truth, of the veracity that constantly battled against the demeaning propaganda of the communists. Rajagopalachari, Governor General of India from 1948 to 1950 and Chief Minister of Madras from 1952, proclaimed that, "I know the Communists are humble in the beginning, how they are smooth and oily, get into every group... they know how to work on human psychology."¹⁸ Conversely it was the government that consisted of people (like Rajagopalachari) who were not afraid to voice their views or real motives. Another of his virulent attacks on the party painted a particularly sinister picture of communist political method: "They seem ever ready to seek devious ways for catching

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.22.

¹⁸ C.Rajagopalachari, *The Indian Communist*, 1958. p.14.

fish and not the straight forward way of discussion and persuasion on the main issue. This must lead to the conclusion that there is something wrong in their ideology otherwise, why are they shy of daylight?"¹⁹

Opposed to these calculating and duplicitous features of the Communists, the government portrayed itself as the brutally honest willing negotiator and reluctant prosecutor. Thus, while arraying lists of Communist atrocities in Hyderabad and West Bengal, the authors of a government publication vociferously stated that, "These are the bare facts about the hunger strikes, unlawful processions, police firing and casualties.... Communists have distorted the facts." Later one reads that the communists glorified their own acts of violence while exaggerating police response: "there was no dearth of propaganda of abuse and vilification."²⁰ This image of the government as the force of truth is repeatedly presented for example, the author of *Hyderabad Reborn* proclaimed, "It was the duty of the new Government to save the poor peasants of Telengana from their sinister, self-appointed 'saviours'... with these forces an organized hunt for the goondas was undertaken.... Misleading propaganda of the 'Communists' was countered."²¹

It is evident that the communists were viewed as a significant enemy of the state. However, it was imperative that the communists be similarly regarded by the public. Thus, propaganda was to be a prime catalyst in this process. An instance of such policy was the quite casual statement of Bhatt in a memorandum discussing the

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.36

²⁰ *Communist Violence In India*, issued by Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, Sept.1949, p.14.

²¹ *Hyderabad Reborn...*, p.21.

feasibility of using photographs displaying damage allegedly inflicted by communists. In his words, "The object of the Hyderabad Government is perhaps to justify stern action of the Hyderabad Government against criminally minded Communists and also to strengthen the conviction of the public at large against helping these anti-social elements in any way."²² Thus a construction of public opinion was self-consciously admitted to be the need of the hour with no qualms about representation of possible inaccuracy.

The objective and positivist truth that was espoused by the leaders of the new nation was equivalent to real and authentic Indianness, a trait consistently denied to the communists. Thus, government propaganda that emerged from the integrated state of Hyderabad emphatically heralded the popular support of the Congress government. It was deemed that the state administrators were the natural and authorized representatives of every citizen of the country. This was pitted against the notion of the outsider or alien communist who, whether or not he led the peasants revolts or preached the rights of the workers, did not belong.

Thus, the author of the book *Hyderabad Reborn* which opens with the three words "Truth Alone Triumphs", dramatically emphasizes the popular support of the military governor of the state as he "conferred upon" them, "the fundamental freedom, freedom of fear!" When "he met common people... what a welcome the people gave him!" This saviour who had brought about a situation where the state was "now pulsating with new life and its 170 lakhs of inhabitants are breathing the air of

²² V.R.Bhatt, D.S. in a memorandum "Publicity re Communist activities in Hyderabad State". Ministry of state File No. 3[4]-H/49.

freedom and confidence", drew "thousands to greet and fete him.... Thus, in no uncertain manner, the artless, unhalved common folk of Hyderabad registered their satisfaction at the new order in the state."²³ In stark contrast, a CID report stressed how the Communist strategy was a poisonous cocktail of brainwashing the "dumb masses and underdogs," and terrorizing them into submission. It was reported that "Their propaganda machinery ably organized and controlled instills the poison of violence into the minds of the masses. They appear to have a firm hold of the Kisans and mill labourers. Many villages appear to be under their influence." Any opposition to them was said to be contained by violence law. " They assaulted and murdered local Congressites and Kisans and labourers who refused to fall in line with them."²⁴ The continuities with the British attitudes in these passages are vivid. For example the allusion to the 'dumb masses' immediately betrays the condescension with which the rulers regarded their subjects, whilst the idea of peasant 'ignorance' was sustained by the ease with which it was described that they could be brainwashed. Another interesting aspect is how the methods that had been used during the Quit India campaign of 1942 were now viewed in a different light. What were the grounds for granting illegitimacy to peasant rebellion at this juncture? What was the justification for this attitude both internally and publicly?

The official documents on Hyderabad and the communist problem categorically put forward the idea that it was the government that possessed real concern and empathy with the plight of peasantry and labour, while the communists or

²³ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., p.20.

²⁴ Special Branch C.I.D.Report, 22nd Sept., 1948 in Ministry of State, File No.100H

even 'pseudo' communists were in the political arena for completely conflicting objectives. We read how,

while carrying out military and police operations against the goondas, simultaneously the Government set in motion a programme of widespread reforms aimed at improving the lot of the tiller of the soil.... In this way the peasant was made to realize that the Government was his own and that his interests would never be jeopardized.²⁵

Here we have an example of how the government saw itself as a protective buffer between the 'masses' and the destructive sycophantic followers of Moscow. Thus, welfare and concern was propagated in order to isolate 'the pretenders,' and create unity between the Indian state and its people.

Similarly, an emphasis on the labour situation in Hyderabad suggests strains of paternalism once evoked by the British. For example,

Realizing the importance of the working classes in the social order the caretaker Government has taken far reaching measures to safeguard their interests and ensure their welfare. For this purpose, not only has a full fledged and strong Labour Department been created, but legislation has already been drafted on the lines of the Industrial Relations Act of Bombay under which strikes should be virtually eliminated.²⁶

Echoes of the colonial discourse pervade this ironic statement. In one sentence we are told how the concern for labour was being born out with the introduction of legislation that would eliminate strike activity. Thus, the curtailment of the

²⁵ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., p.57.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.81

fundamental right to strike was equalled to the advancement of the interests of the working class.

This granting of legitimacy to a concern for the labouring classes without extending it to any political, or 'disruptive' activity that could be classified as class conflict was reflected in a speech by Nehru on the Preventive Detention Bill in March 1949. Here, after disclaiming the authority of "a number of small groups, some associated with the Communist Party and some not associated with the Communist Party", who indulged in, "violently subversive activities", he added, "I should like to appeal to the labour in this country.... This government as a whole is bent on not only improving the general condition of labour... but of giving its rightful place to labour in the governance of this country."²⁷ Hence we are delivered an indication of what Partha Chatterjee has designated, "passive revolution", where the agency in political transformation is arrogated to the autonomous state, that is supposedly acting for the general welfare of all.²⁸ Linked to this approach and especially to the case of Telengana, is the assessment of Nehru's opinions on peasants. Chatterjee suggests a seemingly compassionate and yet condescending attitude towards country folk emerging from the leader of the new nation. Peasants were considered to be poor and ignorant, unthinking and subject to unreasonable excitements. It was deemed necessary for them to be controlled and led by responsible leaders who would show them how they could fit entirely in accordance with the national movement.

²⁷ Speech by Nehru, Constituent Assembly [Legislative] Debates, Vol. II, Part II, 5th March, 1949, pp.1164-67.

²⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, New Delhi, 1986, pp.131-166.

Thus Congress was projected to be very different from the communists by the nation's leaders. For while the Congress was 'genuine' in its concern for the welfare of the masses, the communists were merely 'agents of sedition.' According to Rajagopalachari, communist policy was that, "every difficulty, complaint, discontent, must be taken up, interpreted in language of opposition to the status quo and the Government. It is expounded, exaggerated and repeated to give the Government a bad name."²⁹ This was supported by the CID report written four years earlier which, under the heading of "their (C.P.I.'s) ideal," inserted, "They have a bitter hatred for all village Government officials," continuing with a catalogue of murders purportedly to have been committed by the communists. This report also avers that,

They are not motivated by any patriotic sense of duty.
They are opportunistic and fish in troubled waters.
They select places which are in a disturbed state as
breeding ground for their ideology.³⁰

Here, not surprisingly, the Congress leadership saw itself as the colonial rulers had perceived Congress. That is, only Congress could be described as being motivated by genuine nationalistic ideals while the communists articulated a phoney appeal.

These government spokesmen were thus keen to foster the impression that the communists were in effect merely 'rebels' who were not driven by any desire to better living conditions of the Telengana peasants or anyone for that matter. Indeed, in that they were not seen as economically motivated, they were considered false preachers

²⁹ Special Branch C.I.D. Report, 22nd Sept., 1948 in Ministry of State, File No. 100H.

³⁰ *ibid.*

of the doctrine of Marxism as well. Thus, "the only ideology of these anti-social elements of Hyderabad who go by the name of 'Communists' is to exploit a confused situation for their own ends. The adoption of Marxian jargon and unorthodox, violent methods of agitation does not convert a body of gangsters into the liberators of workers and peasants."³¹

Thus, the justification for repression of the communists lay in the emphasis of their difference from Congress, a strategy also employed by the British. Similar refrains were used by both colonial and Congress leaders to delegitimize communist politics by excluding the C.P.I. from the nationalist ambit. This strategy is acutely displayed when Patel reintroduced and won support for the Preventive Detention Bill in February 1950. This draconian measure designed to intern political prisoners, surpassed in terms of severity, any of the laws passed by the British with which to curb the communists. For in justifying the internment of communists who formed the majority of those imprisoned for political reasons, he requested members, not to judge the measure before them from, "your past experience of detention." India, he proclaimed, was now a democratic country where any party that wanted to take advantage of democratic institutions to gain power was free to do so. The communists were different however. Not only had they betrayed the cause of the freedom fighters during the war and, "now create disruption, dislocation and tamper with communication to suborn loyalty and make it impossible for normal Government to function", but they were not a part of the country's national heritage. It was

³¹*Hyderabad Reborn*, op cot., p.21.

incumbent, Patel stated not to surrender to the, "merciless and ruthless faction of a comparatively small number of persons whose inspiration, method and culture are all of a foreign stamp and who are, as the history of so many country's shows, linked financially, strategically and tactically with foreign organizations."³²

These words that posit the communists as alien to the 'national heritage' of India have been heard before. The marginalization and repression of communist political activity was justified in a similar vein in the 1920s. However, Patel was also requesting his fraternity to forget the experience of political struggle they had once undertaken as it was no longer necessary in the free and democratic nation. There can be no question of the fact that India did assume a different character after independence, that the freedom won was real. But it also seems apparent that because this free state did not have to struggle as much as the British had in order to legitimate its rule, it possessed an increased licence to deal with internal dissent. This proved to be most unfortunate for the communists.

In the same debate, Sir Tirumula Rao, a member of the Constituent Assembly from "the heart of Andhra Desha", lamented that this region "has been the scene of Communist intrigue and bloody daylight murders of innocent women and children by lawless political adventurers" and fully endorsed the Bill. He stated while referring to the Communists that, "We have been seeing that many of the groups and parties in this country who were far away during the freedom movement have suddenly

³² Speech by Patel, Constituent Assembly [Legislative] Debates, Vol. III, Part I, 25th Feb, 1950, pp.874-927.

developed a great amount of patriotism for our country."³³ The message is clear, the leaders of the Congress, the new brown skinned officials who occupied positions of power were the only patriots, the only genuine providers of the country and all of its classes of people. In presenting an alternative or even a critique of this new government, the communists were not only subversive or criminal, but pitted against the newly found freedom that had been gained in 1947. As Professor Bhattacharya, a legislator from U.P. claimed while supporting the Bill, "our newly won freedom cannot be jeopardized by those who want to commit international sabotage."³⁴ Here the reference to the threat of 'invasion' or 'exported subversion' that was used to characterize the communists was another colonial argument put to expedient propaganda use by the nation's spokesmen. However, the different context of the post war climate also added an impetus and legitimacy for such views, as by 1950, the Cold War was an established reality.

Thus, it must not be assumed that a receptive nationalist leadership simply lapped up the ideas of the British towards the communists and continued in the same vein forever after. For, the interesting point is to note how the representation of the communists, as this 'other' which was marginal to the sphere of 'high politics' within this period, was manipulated, transformed and perceived by those who presented the 'bare facts' to the general public at large. For the discourse of the national leadership also presents evidence of their own innovations when depicting the communists.

³³ Speech by Thiramula Ram, Constituent Assembly [Legislative] Debates, Vol. III, Part I, 25th Feb. 1950, pp.874-927.

³⁴Speech by Prof. Bhattacharya, Constituent Assembly[Legislative] Debates, Vol. III, Part I,25th Feb. 1950.

Therefore, when one arrives at the question of communalism, especially with regard to the well nigh catastrophic communal situation in Hyderabad, it is perhaps not surprising, albeit disturbing, that official documents actually pronounced the communists to be a communal organization acting in league with the Razakars against the secular state of India.

The author of *Hyderabad Reborn* repeatedly emphasised the importance of the restoration of communal harmony which had been carried out under the leadership of the Military Governor, and the "complete impartiality of the new Government between the different communities." It was written that finally, six months after the 'Police Action,' "Hindus and Muslims, sons of the same motherland and co-partners in the same undertaking, laboured in the same fields, shared the same fortunes, worked together for the common goal."³⁵ The inferred suggestion here that Congress ideology put itself above sectional interests, parallels the British paternalist attitudes that conveyed the impression before 1947 that it was the British who kept the conflicting communities of India from creating disorder and chaos.

Conversely, the communists were described to be the antithesis of anything that was good and Indian and in this particular case, secular. For, in the 'White Paper on Hyderabad', the only mention of the Communist 'menace' stated that while Communists gained in strength partly as a result of the extremes in economic disparity within the state, and partly as a reaction to the Razakar movement, "of late however, the Razakars have sought an alliance with the Communists in their

³⁵ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., pp.874-927.

crusade against India and democracy". This "greatly contributed to the rapid growth of communism in Hyderabad and the state is indeed a hotbed of communism."³⁶

It could be argued that here the communists have not been described as communal directly but rather they have been surreptitiously aided by the Razakars in order to create disorder for the new nation. However, *The New Danger*, a report included in the deliberations of the state governor with the Agricultural Association of Hyderabad in June 1949, was more to the point. The author suggested that,

Paradoxical as it may seem, the latest developments reveal that the Communist offensive is decidedly taking a communal turn, in as much as the Communist forces are making a clear discrimination between community and community, in conducting their dangerous operations and rendering them thus yet more dangerous.³⁷

Therefore, whereas veteran historian Sumit Sarkar believes that the, "Communist led peasant revolt also succeeded in defusing what might have been quite an explosive communal situation in the state, where the first political movements in the 1930s had been under Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha inspiration."³⁸ here, in the government sources, it was alleged that the Communists were now not only anti-India, but also anti-Hindu, or worse pro-Muslim and Pakistan.

The communists was made to represent the extreme opposite of what a good,

³⁶ White Paper on Hyderabad, Government of India, Sept. 1948, National Archives of India, p.38.

³⁷ *The New Danger*, Report in Ministry of States, File No. 3[4]-H/49.

³⁸ Sumit Sarkar, op cit., p.685.

honest Indian should have been during the time of Independence. As the author of Hyderabad Reborn states,

At a time when it was most important to build, they burned. At a time when food was precious, they destroyed it. At a time when order and peace were of supreme importance, they deliberately created disorder and confusion.... And all this they called Communism.

This almost poetic rendition of the alien and destructive nature of communism starkly contrasts with the self proclaimed ideas of Congress leaders during this period which Paul Brass lists as "sovereignty, unity, order, strong state, secularism, democracy, and need for social and economic reform."³⁹ Each description of the communist accumulates the picture of the almost demonic conspiratorial outside-agent which in turn reminds us of the caustic pronouncements of the sessions judge, Yorke, in 1933.

Communists As Uncivilized

The documents on and around the period of the Telengana Revolt reveal that the Red Bogey was not just the inverse of Indian culture but it also clashed with the refined sensibilities of decent morality. Again, as in the British reportage, these political agents were said to have possessed traits that were the most repulsive to 'normal', 'good' citizens, which resulted in "making the lives of *honest* people

³⁹ Paul Brass, *Politics of India since Independence*, ? p.10.

impossible".⁴⁰ Who were the honest people the author of this report was referring to - the dominant classes who were threatened by the communist challenge, or the 'ignorant masses' who, it seems ought not to be stirred?

The communists were depicted as criminals, but what exactly constituted this criminality was referred to quite fleetingly. For example, the author of *Hyderabad Reborn* stated of the communists that, "they went about 'distributing' the land and dispensing (with justice). Rightful owners of the lands were driven away or done to death and their land were given to others, also were told that the good earth belong to them."⁴¹ In failing to mention the hardships of the peasants and attributing all agency of the revolt to the communists the authors quite categorically display their attitude towards the masses. For the masses were pictured as an objectified entity possessing no agency or volition to transform or better their lives. This posture smacks of the colonial paternalist pronouncements on the subject.

Again, in *The New Danger*, the criminality is defined as a "highly dangerous campaign of vilification of Government officials... open air meetings and 'propaganda', systematic agitation, and 'training peasants for a mass revolt and in them a spirit of violence and defiance of authority."⁴² Thus it can be inferred from this that the politicization of villagers was a crime as were the peasant demands to transform existing agricultural relations between *deshmukh* and *vetti* in the region. These activities which, it could be argued, constituted the only effective political

⁴⁰ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., p.55 [emphasis added]

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *The New Danger*, Report in Ministry of States. File No. 3[4]-H/49

enterprise that could be taken up by the peasants during the entire struggle are described as unlawful. The accusers were those purporting to represent the decent, upstanding individuals of society who lived by constitutional methods of agitation and who had been told not to equate their periods of protest under British rule with the 'horrific destruction' of society by a small band of 'goondas.' We can conjecture from this that the communist method was considered criminal not only because it was deemed to cause widespread disruption and upheaval, but also because it was regarded as objectionable to the civilized guardians of the status quo. For just as the British made common cause with the higher echelons of Indian society in the name of an adherence to the civilized as opposed to the barbarian, so the new leaders used the same strategy in ousting the communists from the nation's collective and civilized past.

These uncivilized traits could be explicated by referring to the doctrines of Marxism. For example, their violent and unconstitutional methods were viewed by Rajagopalachari as a result of the way, "Communists believe in social cooperation through dictatorship if possible without, but if necessary through violence."⁴³ Alternatively a seemingly well-reasoned and more sympathetic report prepared by the Hyderabad State Congress leader began thus: "I am no supporter of the Communists and I condemn them unequivocally for what they have done. No Congressman or any peaceful citizen for that matter can have anything but severest condemnation for such violence whoever may be the perpetrator." He went on to

⁴³ C. Rajagopalachari, op cit., p.7.

argue that, "...in fairness to the Communists... if they or people inspired by them are responsible for a part of the orgy of violence that is prevalent as alleged... there is a method in their madness."⁴⁴ For, they were seen to have limited their violence to political enemies and to have inflicted "grades" of punishment according to the various crimes of these enemies. Here again the communists were seen to be brandishing an alternative ideology that justified activity which contradicted conventional norms. It was perceived as a consequence of adhering to Bolshevism and having a complete "lack of religious scruples"⁴⁵ which motivated the political agitators to rebel against established authority.

The official documents presented yet another explanation for Communist behaviour however when the stress was laid on the inherent opportunism and avarice of the Sangam organizers. For any political rationale that was motivating the Communists was erased and the characteristics that impinged upon and hindered a constructive and peaceful society were emphasized. This overall impression was best described when the author of Hyderabad Reborn wrote,

"But the government is very confident, the more so because it knows that it has the moral support and strength of all right thinking citizens. It is becoming increasingly clear that the people even more than the government will refuse to tolerate those whose religion is sedition, whose creed is violence, whose weapon is sabotage and whose and is anarchy."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Shari Burgul Ramakrishna Rao, A note on Hyderabad State prepared by the Hyderabad State Congress, Jan. 1929, Ministry of State, File No.337-H/48, National Archives of India .

⁴⁵ Special Branch C.I.D.Report, 22nd Sept., 1948 in Ministry of State, File No.100H.

⁴⁶ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., p.57.

For it was the government that was supported by “right thinking citizens” while the wrong thinkers were driven by opportunism, personal vendetta and greed. What is striking here is the fact that Langford James could easily be quoted as stating these words. While it cannot be argued that Congress rule was a mere extension of the Raj, bearing no distinguishable features of its own, the attitude towards the communists cannot be rationalized as a ‘natural’ reaction to revolutionary politics. For the terminology used to depict the left by sympathetic spokesmen as well as the more overtly hostile voices of Patel and Munshi, are a word for word imitation of the colonial paranoia and venom. The concrete arrogance which underlay their attitude is also apparent as it is clear taken that the words carried the power to repress and eliminate if need be.

We have already come across the representation of the ‘opportunistic’ communists. In addition, the author of the report *The New Danger* went so far as to suggest that the communists actually used women as a bait with which to recruit lusty men for, “the sex instinct has also been very usually exploited by the party to augment its members.”⁴⁷ The connotation here indicates the barbaric and animal instincts of the communist which, it was felt, were used to manipulate and recruit the masses compared to the decent, restrained and cerebral citizen. This report also listed as one category under the heading “Party Composition”, “persons who have some score or other to settle either with the *deshmukhs* or *vatandars* or some government servants.” Thus personal traits that were seemingly specific to the communists were

⁴⁷*The New Danger*, op cit., Noteworthy here was the connection being made between the communists, who were condemned as Muslim sympathiser, and thus ‘communal’, and an excessive virility, a trait which had been applied to Muslims by colonial and communal commentators alike.

stressed.

Hyderabad Reborn is replete with such characterisations although here the author suggested that the "goonda element" that calls itself communists was divorced from what communism actually meant without ever describing his own perception of that particular political spectrum. This reminds us of the British depiction of the seemingly 'pure' communist which clashed with the distorted Indian variant of the theory. He feels that while the communists were ostensibly distributing land,

In this process of doing some good to others, of course they could not help doing some good to themselves. To save the ignorant people from being robbed by the landlords and the government, they appropriated their money by collecting funds out of their heed earned annas. It was of course an accident that many of them after amassing large fortunes abandoned the movement and tried to live under false names.⁴⁸

This sardonic insinuation was then followed by an example of one such "goonda" who had allegedly been found in Madras with seven lakh rupees.⁴⁹

The final explanation for why human beings would take up the creed of communism or pseudo-communism was of being in the possession of an inherently insane or violent nature. This had nothing to do with any political or opportunistic motivation but was simply a particularly nasty persona which should be severely dealt with. Each official commentator who has dealt with communism in Hyderabad has produced a catalogue of atrocities in its name. Two particular reports are of interests

⁴⁸ *Hyderabad Reborn*, op cit., p. 40.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

because of the manner by which they portray communist violence.

Firstly, the author of *Hyderabad Reborn* reported that,

The Communists indulged in orgies of arson, loot and murder. They destroyed houses, mowed down smiling crops, seized cattles and murdered in cold blood those who dared refused to subscribe to their creeds. In some cases even murder did not meet their idea of sadistic delight and they cut up the bodies of their victims and left them to suffer in pain and agony.⁵⁰

The obvious inference here is that it was only a psychopath who could “indulge” in such brutal acts, for the government was actually portrayed as reluctant to use force to put down these ‘barbarians’.

The second report is a section on Hyderabad in the Government publication *Communist Violence in India*. Here, “they [Communists] have not remained content with mere preaching and planning: they have tried their best to execute their programme of hate and violence.” It goes on to describe the “cold blooded murders” of “husbands and sons... being dragged out in the presence of wives and mothers and being tortured to death,” and how, “the houses were set on fire and the bandit methods were followed that were followed to keep the people under their control”. These perpetrators were the epitome of evil for, “wherever the Communists have failed to win over these people by persuasion, they have resorted to methods of terror and in ruthlessly pursuing their plan have carried death and

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.56.

destruction to hundreds of families all over India."⁵¹ This is a blatant piece of rhetoric which carried the element of shock in order to provoke an appropriate response but what is noteworthy is the ease with which communists could be slotted into the role of violent and ruthless agitator. For regardless of the contingent details that led the communists to take up arms during the Telengana uprising, the label that the British had cast for them was readily manipulated by spokesmen of the new nation.

Not only were the communists branded with the stigma of being violent in the country that was liberated following the Gandhian tactics of *Ahimsa* [regardless of the amount of blood that was shed in the name of Swaraj], but they were also depicted as being competitive in their destruction. Thus Bhatt warned that government propaganda regarding the violent activities of the communists could have a counter effect. For,

the visual evidence of so much destruction might give ideas to Communists in other parts of the country... might arouse a spirit of competition in like-minded Communists and incite them to try and better their Hyderabad comrades and cast calculating eyes on residencies of well to do or government properties in rural areas or small towns.⁵²

The motivating factor here had nothing to do with peasant or labour struggle but a certain sickness of the mind which was manifested in chaos, disorder and meaningless rebellion. Rajagopalachari best encapsulated this impression when he claimed, "I do not complain about the "patriotism" of the Communists. My only

⁵¹ *Communist Violence In India*, issued by Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, Sept. 1949.

⁵² V.R.Bhatt, D.S. in a memorandum "Publicity re Communist activities in Hyderabad State", Ministry of State File No. 3[4]-H/49.

complaint against them is that their brains do not function in the proper manner."⁵³

For these reasons the communists constituted "a serious menace to the life, owner and property of all law abiding villagers."⁵⁴ For these reasons serious actions against them and the villagers who had proclaimed independence and Sangam Raj was vindicated and indeed celebrated.

Thus when Romesh Thapar replied to his question "What is Telengana?" in 1948 with the statement that "an attempt is being made in official circles in Hyderabad as well as in India, to dismiss this great people's movement as a wicked creation of the Communists who are out to create political and economic chaos in order to embarrass the newly formed Nehru Government,"⁵⁵ one is inclined to agree. For not only were the real reasons behind the uprising conveniently made subordinate, but the revolt also presented an opportunity to justify the repressive 'Police Action' during which the state employed the same indictments and accusations the British had charged the left with in order to paint itself as the bearer of decency, truth and order.

This discourse surrounding communism is manifest with a thread of continuity that tied the newly independent state to the conquerors who had been forced to abandon it's shores. The paradox inherited by the colonial legacy was still acted out by Congress leaders. For in categorising the communists as devoid of an inherent Indianness in terms of spirituality, non-violence and passive political action, the

⁵³ C. Rajagopalachari, op cit., p.38.

⁵⁴ *The New Danger*, op cit.

⁵⁵ Romesh Thapar, *Storm Over Hyderabad*, April, 1948

leaders were in turn accepting these traits as Indian. However, because the universalizing tendencies of communism could only be dealt with using categories that were equally universal, the notions of civilization as an inherited and refined state of being were employed. Thus, the two different states shared a religiosity, paternalism and ethical code which cast the communists as the common enemy.

This chapter has attempted to draw out the continuities between colonial and post-colonial governance. Although others such as Ashish Nandy⁵⁶ and Partha Chaterjee⁵⁷ have addressed the same theme, a exploration of the state discourse surrounding communism in particular, manifests otherwise unacknowledged similarities. Thus, communism was not simply a universal enemy, but also an 'other' that united the protectors of the state, whether they were colonial or nationalist. Conversely, we have also seen how the independent Indian state itself contributed to the development of discourse which saw communism as its antithesis. Here, communism was given to represent communalism and atheism, virility and cruelty, fraudulence and disloyalty.

⁵⁶ Ashish Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*. 1985.

⁵⁷ Partha Chaterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*. 1995.

Chapter 3

Retelling Indian Communism

It is now incumbent that an examination of how we have learnt about communism in India through various representations generated in prevailing literature on the subject is taken up. This entails an exploration of common assumptions running through the studies which contribute to the reinforcement of common-sensical notions, as well as a query into why these possible similarities occur. For example, the sources used and the field of study endeavored can invariably lead to generalizations or even essentializations that, as I hope to demonstrate, are unfounded if we view the movement, “through a microscope” rather than “through a telescope,” as Nossiter has pleaded¹.

It is my contention that we have received a consensual understanding of communism in this country as a result of studies that are, in some way or the other, motivated by an implicit desire to wish it away or claim that it never was a legitimate force to be studied seriously. This obviously does not hold true of all works on the subject (especially works by communists themselves) but one should bear in mind the qualifier that the official archive on the subject is, as we have seen, tainted with the imprint of illegitimacy and sickness. Conversely, the official autobiographies of the communist movements each present conflicting accounts and, it could be argued, merely provide constant vindications of their presentist concerns such as particular

¹ Nossiter, *Marxist State Governments in India*, 1988, p.37.

electoral strategies or the claim to be the purveyors of the 'correct' communist line. Thus, whereas Roger Stuart rejoices that, "The historian of Indian communism in its formative phase is richly served by source material. This is so largely because of three of the Communists' great problems, an effective state intelligence system, the selective, legalistic mode of state repression and Party factionalism."² One can rather bemoan that these very sources tell us more about the problems faced by the communists than the, "activity of the life series of thousands of individuals who have lived the Communist movement," that Kaviraj urged us to reveal in 1975.³

The bulk of the chapter will concentrate on accounts of the communism movement from the 1920s to the early 1950s in order to remain concurrent with the first two chapters but, where works on later periods have alluded to the early history of the CPI, they have also been addressed. I have structured the chapter into three segments in which commentators on communism and class struggle are divided. The paradigms are therefore:

- I the explicitly cold war studies on the subject;
- II. nationalist histories which have included the communists within their purview;
- III. works that emphasise the particular Indian 'realities' or culture within which communists have had to operate, including studies that concentrate on the social and economic histories of workers and

² Stuart, "The Formation of the Communist Party of India, 1927-1937: The Dilemma of the Indian Left," Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1978, p.40.

³ Kaviraj, "The Archeology of the Communist Movement," in *Marxist Miscellany*, Volume 6, 1975, pp.111-126.

peasants, the preordained constituency of communist politicians, and the interaction between the two.

Although it could be argued that these are artificial divisions imposed on the historiography of the communists, I pursue this strategy in order to address the particular problems of each approach as well as to argue for a more nuanced history that takes up a perspective to inject the story with the various modes of interaction between 'human communists' and the equally 'human' and 'real' people who are labelled the 'masses' or the 'mob' and who, before the advent of the Subaltern histories and the emphasis on the social and economic life world of 'real' people had not been granted agency.

The Cold Warriors

The mammoth study, 'Communism in India', by Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller is widely regarded as the most authoritative and meticulous work on the communist movement from its publication in 1960, to date.⁴ Conversely, it is generally conceded that the work is also a viciously anti-communist polemic, symptomatic of the Cold War at its height but, because of the detailed labour that has obviously produced this reference like study, it cannot be viewed as merely a diatribe.

In that the authors are described in the Foreword as, "out to discover the truth where evidence is scanty and contemporary interpretation is carefully covered with purposeful obscurantism,"⁵ a vivid indication of the firmly positivistic approach is also

⁴ Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*. Bombay, 1960.

⁵ Richard L. Park, Foreword to Overstreet and Windmiller, *op.cit.* p.vi.

apparent throughout the work. For, it is believed that, if, "interpreted correctly " one can "get to the truth even from Party documents which attempt to surround particular courses of action with an aura of scientific correctness and mobilize support thereby,"⁶ The entire perspective with which the communists are viewed is encapsulated in the opening quote of the book by Howard Fast,

I would say that the Communist Party is not a thing to be feared, yet it cannot be destroyed by a force or any violence. Truth, understanding, and an ability to measure this thing calmly and react in a democratic way - this will destroy it. This will leave it out of our scene, and it doesn't belong in this scene anymore.⁷

Listen to these words. The Communist Party here is not a movement made up of 'normal' human beings, but rather an organism, a parasite that feeds on the decay of a dysfunctional society. It is pitted against rationality and truth which, if invoked can defeat this alien and unwelcome, unhealthy disease. This portrayal of communism is an exemplification not only of the contemporary political prejudices of the authors but also the implied positivist- functionalist perspective that determines their notions of society and reality. Also, the imagery of the party, feeding and growing on violence and the implicit externality of this 'thing' to a functioning and healthy society is imbued with notions we are already well acquainted with through the exploration of state discourse on the subject.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Howard Fast, in an interview by Martin Agronsky. *The Progressive*, March, 1958, cited on the opening page. Overstreet and Windmiller, *op.cit.*

However there is more to this particular enterprise on communism than purely Cold War rhetoric or anti-communist propaganda. For as in the official documentation, here again we are presented with characterizations of the communists as alien to Indian society and the universal order of decency, as well as possessing traits that are explicated with reference to the essentially 'Indian' nature of these particular beings. This illustrates the continuity that stretches back to the colonial discourse which carried the same message. This portrayal that emerges from the meticulous study of Soviet documents, British reports and mainly Communist Party leaflets, correspondence and newspapers should draw attention to these very sources used in order to ascertain how representative they are in an attempt to establish the story of communist activities within the Indian polity.

Reading between the lines, we can glean specific characterizations of the communists pitted against the purely Indian nature of Gandhi and his nationalist brethren. A most pronounced example is the comparison between M.N. Roy and the, "simple man in the loin cloth"⁸. For,

Although guided by the same star -independence for India- Gandhi and Roy set very different courses. Both men had travelled the Western world and both were deeply influenced by it. But only Roy actually became noticeably Westernised. Gandhi remained profoundly Indian. Until 1930, Roy conducted his struggle from abroad using revolutionary techniques learned from experiences in Europe. Gandhi, on the other hand fought in India using ancient ideas that he adopted to modern conditions. Roy sought Indian independence

⁸ *ibid.* p.58.

through violent revolution; Gandhi led the masses in disciplined nonviolence.⁹

This is a stark rendition of the 'violent, Westernised communist', who, in his ignorance of the prevailing conditions of India, such as the "fact" that "since the British regime permitted a large measure of civil liberty, the nationalist movement was free to engage in peaceable political action without fear of extreme reprisal,"¹⁰ could not devise, as Gandhi could, political tactics that were 'uniquely suited to Indian conditions.'

Externality is also, again, depicted as a consequence of the Indian communists' dependence on superior comrades in Moscow and London who were apparently constantly consulted by the "doctrinally confused"¹¹ Indians. This expression reminds us of similar attitudes firmly established in the colonial and post-colonial state discourse. For in that the Indian communists adhered to an 'exported politics,' it is held as axiomatic that a 'distortion' of the political theory would follow. However these "frustrated émigrés"¹² who turned to communism, and who were out to 'capture' the nationalist movement are deemed to have failed largely because of their inherently violent nature. Thus, "articles" by Roy, appraising Gandhi, " might have had considerable effect on Congress policy had it not been for their over emphasis on violence. But Congress was too full of *respectable middle class elements* and intellectuals to whom the idea of going to the barricades was completely repugnant."¹³

⁹ *ibid.* p.19.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.15.

¹¹ *ibid.* p.124.

¹² *ibid.* p.8.

¹³ *ibid.* p.57. [emphasis added]

Here, the hint of a class elitism is at work. For Congress is seen as middle class and therefore 'respectable', whereas, communism and working class struggles are deemed as dangerous and unseemly in the Indian context.

However, throughout the work, a tendency to attribute certain traits to these communists as a result of their being Indian can also be discerned. For example, the authors suggest a certain passivity amongst Indian people in that they stress, "factionalism based as charismatic leadership is more common in the CPI than in other Communist parties"¹⁴, which for them is a sign of specifically Indian political behaviour. Another instance of this occurs when the positive consequences of the Meerut Conspiracy Case are described. For, it "made martyrs out of the Communists, and martyrs are especially important in Indian political life."¹⁵ Or again, "Many Indians are highly susceptible to hero worship and often fail to differentiate between ideologies per se and the personalities of their leading advocates. Therefore, to tell a true believer that mankind's noblest representative (Stalin) was in fact a murderer and tyrant is to invite trauma and disillusionment with the Communist way of life."¹⁶ Many tropes are at work in this account. For not only are communists erroneous because of their inherently Indian traits such as hero worship and factionalism, but they are cast outside of normal civilization by the authors' emphasis on their particular 'lifestyle, their political indoctrination and their robot-like character. Thus, the communist is dehumanized, classified as a strange type of being who does not belong.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.4.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.137.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.325.

The Nationalist Narration

The nationalist historiographical representations of communism, are chronicles of the Subcontinent's past which are arguably over-determined by the success of Congress at independence in 1947. These teleological accounts have construed an impression that every political actor who was apart from the Congress movement was, as a consequence of the outcome of independence, erroneous and thus written off as an historical agent. Hence, the omissions of activities that were at variance with the Gandhian or Congress mode either 'mythologize' or wipe out the history of people who were not incorporated or refused to be part of the Congress fold. This process of narration then generates and reinforces with an increased vigour, the 'truth' of the nationalist story.

The most renowned scholar of this genre, Bipan Chandra, who has influenced generations of research students of modern Indian history and could hardly be described as unsympathetic to the cause of communism, writes these words to introduce his essay in *The Indian Left*:

We have also wanted to find out why the (Communist) party has so often been wrong in political assessments and predictions, why it has been constantly outpaced by events, and why instead of being able to see the emerging reality, even if hidden in the womb of time, as a Party based on the scientific or Marxist interpretation of reality is supposed to be able to do, it has invariably been late in recognize even the emerged reality which has stared it in the face.¹⁷

¹⁷ Bipan Chandra, *The Indian Left*, 1983, p.260.

Although various authors within this paradigm profess differences with each other and Professor Chandra, the approach outlined above is shared by all. The words 'wrong', 'mistaken' and 'irrelevant' as well as the emphasis on communism's 'ignorance' of Indian reality recur in page after page of these stories to describe the organized left. The impression of the outsider is also ascribed by constant references to directives of the Comintern, the unGandhian violence advocated by these seemingly robotic internationalists and the illegitimacy of a politics based on class struggle during the era of nationalist awakening.

Perhaps one should actually bestow more appreciation on Bipan Chandra for at least granting the communists a right to an independent existence no matter how 'mistaken' or 'dogmatic' its leaders were in failing to achieve an autonomous line which could have carried Jawaharlal Nehru with it. Conversely, in what could be quite facilely be taken as the last word on the subject, Bhagwan Josh and Shashi Joshi postulate that the professor is mistaken. In their words, "In actuality, the Communist preoccupation was with 'independent' politics. That is, the politics of domination and not of hegemony and with 'leading' all the revolutionary forces in the country, in place of intervening on a part of a broad left-front."¹⁸ This study, which is ostensibly an effort to reinstate the left within the history of the nation, actually reads as the oft-repeated story of the illegitimacy of any alternatives advocate of independence a political struggle to the winning Congress horse. Although the arguments are well worn, the authors take as their theoretical framework, the notion of hegemony by

¹⁸ Sashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India Volume 1, 1920-1934*, 1992, p.152.

Antonio Gramsci. However, in their hands, the use of this analytical tool assumes extremely spurious proportions.

The authors' intention is to explicate events preceding independence through the investigation of how Congress and the left used 'hegemonic' strategies, in the sense of building alliances and making compromises, in order to ensure that the national movement had the support of as many classes and groups as possible. It is thus presumed that the failure of the communists lies precisely in their refusal to pursue this strategy, in remaining 'isolated' and in attempting to 'capture' control over the nationalist movement rather than establish hegemony within it. This apparent activity of the communists is classified as detrimental not only to the cause of communism but also, and more gravely for Josh and Joshi, to the future Indian state which, it is posited, could have adopted a more fundamentally left agenda if only the communists had participated in building a flexible left bloc within Congress rather than constantly pose as an alternative political force.

This 'if only' approach is also used by Aditya Mukherjee when he seemingly bemoans the ultra left turn of the Communist Party (dictated of course by the Comintern) in 1929, which he feels was responsible for abandoning the workers and peasant parties. In his opinion, this party was the most radical and effective force through which the communists could have possibly attained power.¹⁹

Another 'Gramscian' point that the authors Josh and Joshi consistently aver is to describe the colonial state as 'semi-hegemonic' in that the British claimed legitimacy

¹⁹ Aditya Mukherjee, "The Workers' and Peasants' Parties, 1926-1930: An Aspects of Communism in India," in Bipan Chandra, op.cit. pp1-45.

on the basis of moral and intellectual superiority and not simply coercive force. One is here not questioning the authority of the authors are Gramscian but certainly it seems as though an over simplification of the revolutionary's ideas is being presented in the work. It does not follow that 'hegemony' as a strategic device can be attributed wherever consent was deemed apparent. For Gramsci, consent was far more complex. It represented the hegemony of the dominant class perpetuated through social relations, institutions and ideas, and was rooted in society as the common sense shared by all classes. To attach this denomination onto the colonial state crucially omits the process of ensuring traditional elite support which contradicted the totalizing notions of moral and intellectual superiority of the British. Additionally, as we have already noticed, if anyone believed in the self definition of the British it was the nationalist leadership (as well as the nationalist historians) themselves, who refused to entertain alternative languages of development, progress or political action than the patterns laid down by the Raj.

Within this historical context it also seems unconvincing to portray Congress and British as competing for hegemony as equals for here the element of repression and the coercive potential of the state is patently underestimated. In that "the Indian context required that no Communist Party be formed at all if the left bloc was to remain together", and, "In fact the continuous attempts to form a Communist Party became the major obstacle in the path of left hegemony in India," the authors can justify their contention that, "Gramsci's ideas on the questions of the Communist Party are irrelevant to our context."²⁰ Thus, the spectre of communism that, albeit obliquely,

²⁰ Sashi Joshi, op.cit. p.34.

Josh and Joshi recognise Gramsci to be a part of, is deemed inconsequential and outside the story of the nationalist achievement of independence. It can therefore be dispensed with from the annals of our recent history as an example of a mistaken ideology and political approach or an aberration that, it could be argued one would learn not to pursue.

Hegemonic politics for Josh and Joshi seem to mean the activity and theoretical endeavours in the world of high politics which is why the insistence on examining local insurgencies by the Subaltern Studies group is summarily dismissed in the work. This perspective is also illustrated by the methodology employed in the pursuit of their narrative. For the authors claim that it was the result of their search "in vain for (communist) documents where a detailed analysis of colonial society and the state could be made and on the basis of which formulations would relate to the given reality with Marxist concepts,"²¹ that forced them to focus on the Congress and Gandhian mass movements in order to understand the relation if the Communist Party to surrounding society. This presents itself as a baffling strategy to adopt as it takes on the nationalist autobiography, which we have reason to believe was not as distinct as one would imagine from colonial strictures regarding communism, with an unflinching and unashamed unreflexivity.

However, this method also falls short of viewing the various layers of archive on a political party in a given society. For, as has been argued by Kaviraj, the

²¹ *ibid.* p.10.

communists operated on three levels. The top most is the realm of the leaders, the English speakers who engaged in theoretical debates amongst themselves and within the Communist International; the second is a vernacular discourse located in the various regions and provinces and evidence of which can be found in newspapers, leaflets and local instruments of propaganda; whereas the third is the mainly unrecorded world of local political action which becomes itself in the form of meetings and demonstrations and which is where perhaps, any percolation of hegemonic strategy should be evaluated.

Unfortunately though, in that the emphasis has been on the irrelevance and faultiness of any political alternative to Congress, derived from British, Congress and the 'top level' communist documents, we are taken through the familiar gamut of characterizations of the dogmatic, un-Indian, economicist, violent, ignorant and robotic followers of Moscow with which communism is painted. This leads to a process that converts these particular actors and the people they represent to 'Fei'-a negative grammatical expression used by Confucian chroniclers, denoting non-persons. In other words, this alludes to a denial of their existence in the eyes of history. It has been argued in an article on various paradigms of social history in India that this process of 'occultation' which is, "one of the most widespread practices in the state's control over the past," by which, "entire sections of world history have no other existence than what the oppressors permit us to know of them," has occurred as a result of the nationalist paradigm. Bhattacharya brings to our attention the consideration that, "vast

sections of the people have remained 'Fei'," as, where they are present in 'imperialist' and 'nationalist' historiography, they are, "objects in the social thought and actions of the colonial bureaucracy and nationalist leadership". He continues by remonstrating how, in nationalist history, whether nationalist history as an ideological effort to define and establish national unity and thus a project of domination, or conversely whether it as a consequence of a seemingly united struggle for freedom which acted across classes and communities, the, "occultation" of manifestations of class struggle is presumed inevitable. For, "these phenomena were not part of the problematic the nationalist historian framed for himself."²²

* * *

This is not to argue that all work on communism is dominated by the need to undermine it as a political project. Thus, in a Ph.D. thesis inspired by Bipan Chandra, Roger Stuart attempted to address the failures of the communists within the political environs of the nation by delving into the social and economic milieu in which the communists had to function. This was not a radically novel approach to the study of communism, for Bhabani Sen Gupta also examined the split in the Communist Party of 1964 on the premise that the Indian context was the primary area that needed attention²³. It could be argued though, that as Stuart located the problems of the contemporary Communist Parties in the period of the inception of the CPI pointing to a 'bolshevization' or 'Stalinization' of the party following the Meerut Conspiracy Case,

²² S.Bhattacharya, "Paradigms Lost: Notes on Social History in India, " *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual number, April, 1982, pp.695-696.

²³ Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics*, 1979.

the explorations certainly suggested a breakthrough in the pantheon of 'Communist' studies.

However, the thesis, while covering the vast spectrum of class politics in Calcutta and Bombay, drawing out differences in the colonization of these two major industrial cities and emphasizing the repressive measures of the state, actually lends itself to a one point programme. This is to provide evidences that indict 'Stalinism' to being, "simultaneously the cause, symptom and cure of the range of problems, which have prevented the Indian communist movement from emerging as a viable alternative revolutionary force in India." ²⁴ Stuart elaborates that 'bolshevization' means the camouflaging mystique of infallibility around the leadership, the unaccountability of the leadership to lower levels of activists, and the undermining of the autonomy of Indian communists by the Comintern. He believes that the bolshevik leadership cult reinforces feudal modes of consciousness. Thus, he favourably cites K.Damodaran, who felt that the cult of the great leader "fits with the Indian tradition of political gurus enlightening the masses."²⁵ Thus, the justifications of his arguments are sought within the depths of Indian tradition as well as the specific nature of Soviet communism following the death of Lenin. Also worthy of note is the continuity between this thesis and the approach first presented by the British that a certain type' of communist that was Indian, betrayed the 'pure' theory as well as the Indian masses.

Writing seventeen years later, a scholar from the same institution, Sanjay Seth, published his work, 'Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics'²⁶, in which, informed by

²⁴ Stuart, op.cit.p.8.

²⁵ ibid.p.28.

²⁶ S. Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics*, 1995.

Stuart's approach, he endeavoured to seek the reasons behind the communist failure within the theoretical development of Marxism itself. He suggests that following Lenin's particular incorporation of the colonial question in his thesis, 'Imperialism', Marxists of the colonial world were required to view revolutionary politics from the vantage point of nationalist liberation struggle as the premier historical goal. It was only after this independence was achieved that a communist struggle could come into its own. Seth argues that consequentially, the politics of nationhood dogged the Indian communists, restricting their proclivity to critique the Congress. He also stresses that the changing opinions of the communists which were a reflection of the various directions that the Comintern took from 1921 onwards, created a web of inconsistencies from within which the communists grappled to extrapolate some form of viable politics.²⁷

While both Stuart and Seth represent a more sympathetic addressal of communist politics emphasizing the human ness of the various political agents of this movement and stressing the theoretical and political movement context within which their politics was articulated it is still the picture of leadership quarrels, factional disputes and theoretical interchanges that we are bequeathed. Perhaps here one needs

²⁷ On the constant references to party lines and directives it would be instructive here to note the comments of Paul Brass on the conventional wisdom that has supported the view that all Communist parties outside Russia and China are agents of an international conspiracy supported and directed from Moscow and Beijing. He stipulates that although the CPI has received support and guidance from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, this approach is oversimplified and concentrates on a limited purview of Communist politics in India. Brass suggests that a more accurate perspective would see the international Communist system as an arena in which factional groups at the centre context for dominance and ideological supremacy and use the experience of the Communist groups in the 'periphery' to support their positions. Simultaneously the Communist parties at the periphery do the same, using the outcome of conflicts at the centre to support their local positions.

to take the cue from Stuart when he presses for a broader approach that takes into account the Indian environment much further, by turning to the generally attested constituency of the Communist Party, the 'people', or more pointedly the working class and peasantry.

The Subaltern Intervention

In their monumental effort to overturn the elitist historiography of India and present the history of 'the people' the Subaltern Studies group has aroused great expectations to students of modern history and politics. Indeed, it is declared that they are free of master narratives and European historical models which produced the elitist colonial, nationalist and Marxist versions of history leaving out the consciousness of the subaltern, or "person of inferior rank."²⁸ Thus, the group of scholars under this radical aegis claim to have avoided universal categories such as class, and in doing so, have brought us closer to 'real' people in all their various differences. However, in the suggestion that historical actors should be explored in the armature of their own categories, an irresolvable problem within the project can be detected that is most vivid in the work by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*.

I take brief look at this book not to launch a critique on the enterprise of the Subaltern School, but to suggest that their approach also shares assumptions with those to whom their antagonism is vented. For, it seems that while specific

²⁸Preface to R. Guha(Ed)*Subaltern Studies Volume 1*,1982.

essentializations that the British and nationalist elite generated such as the 'inherently factional' nature of Indian politics, are contested²⁹, others, such as Chakrabarty's constructions of a specifically Indian working class culture through his study of Calcutta jute mill workers, are upheld, and disseminated with an apparent unreflexivity. This is relevant to a study of communism for two reasons. Firstly, the universalizing framework of Marxism which grants the working class the primary task of the generating emancipatory politics is irrevocably refuted along with the political actors pressing its case. Secondly, and more pertinently in the work, the actual cultural norms and attitudes Chakrabarty claims to have delivered to us, are deemed to rest more on primordial ties and relations of hierarchical, 'feudal' authority. They are contrasted with the norms of the working class of England which was apparently aware of its rights within the legal system. Thus he asserts that even trade union support, membership and militancy in the Calcutta jute mills was a result of loyalty and the 'slave-master' relationship rather than a democratic representative system that prevailed in England.

His point is that Indian culture was not capitalist or bourgeois enough to provide any space for communism or trade union activity based on notions of egalitarianism and solidarity. This is then emanating from a different tradition. For, communism is seen as important force, but one that is ill-suited to Indian conditions. However much the grand narratives of linear progress in history may be decried, a stageist conception of history is at work here whereby it is suggested that if capitalism

²⁹ D. Hardiman, "The Indian Faction: A Political Theory Examined," in R. Guha, op.cit. pp198-231.

does not emerge in the same form as in the west, the idea of communism has no role and thus again is perceived as irrelevant rather than viable political contender.

While recognising that Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has not principally scrutinized the role or operations of the Communist party, we can still procure several insights from his work which facilitate an interrogation of Chakrabarty's claim. The first problem is that Chakrabarty has taken for granted the assumption that the early industrial workers or insufficiently industrialized or non-industrial urban labour, were simply constituted by their rural origins and peasant character. In arguing this case he ignores studies that have emerged on the western working class that illustrates the competing and conflicting identities of ethnicity and gender, religion and nation, kinship and neighborhood. Therefore, these studies rebut his position that it is Indian society and structure that is exceptional because of the insufficient capitalism that has developed in the country.

Chandavarkar also criticises Chakrabarty's claim that the working class possess particular cultural characteristics according to their various stages of development. This takes as axiomatic that casual workers primarily sought temporary employment, rural migrants were unsuited to factory discipline and early industrial workers were inherently violent. It may be noted that in Chapter 1, I referred to the employers' dismissal of encouraging union activity because of the apparent propensity of the workers towards 'natural leaders' who were deemed to possess more authority in their eyes. Dipesh Chakrabarty takes this as an indication of the working class culture which is not amenable to class politics of the kind advocated by democratic 'individuals' of

the modern world. One is possibly more inclined to agree with Chandavarkar when he states, "These characterizations constituted the ideology of capitalist seeking a more firmly subordinated labour force and historians have often adopted them unwittingly."³⁰

Another example of this spurious approach to the workers' consciousness and the way it is perceived by Chakrabarty is refuted by Janaki Nair³¹. In his insistence on the endurance of 'cultural traditions', Chakrabarty cites the Bengali jute mill workers' incomprehension of the running principle of the machine as one of the reasons why they sustained injuries while trying to clean running machinery. This has been interpreted as workers' negotiation of the demands of the capitalist labour process in European labour history but here, is portrayed as a an example of the 'religico-magical' relationship of workers to machines in the Indian context. Surely, then, one could charge Chakrabarty with the adoption of the very orientalist essentializations that the Subaltern group promises to overcome.

In her sophisticated study of labour in Mysore, Nair has attempted to critique Chakrabarty's culturalist perspective which, depends a static cultural tradition of the working class. This Subaltern view seems to locate and emphasize the deep divisions that occur in the factory through the identities of caste, religion, and language. However, the fact that the workers share a relation imposed by the production process which dynamically interacts with old traditions and forges new attitudes, is ignored.

This brief glimpse in the world of working class history is necessary as this is the sphere of activity where any class politics can be viewed by the analyst. It is also

³⁰R.Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India*,1994,p.16.

³¹Janaki Nair, "Production Regimes, Cultural Processes: Industrial Labour in Mysore" in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*,30-3-1993,pp.261-281.

here where the search for communist agitation and propaganda ought to be rooted and studied without resorting to notions of 'ideological autonomy' of the working class, which would, albeit obliquely, thereby instill the aura of externality and thus illegitimacy on the communist.

The struggle to unearth a new archive on communism in India is difficult because firstly, the objections to studying the subject of the working class with a view to the crucial role it is deemed to be playing in the language of Marxist revolution must be overcome. Secondly, the fact that India is a predominantly agricultural economy means that the experience and political activity of the peasantry have also to be examined without making reductive generalizations about their inherent 'Indian-ness' or static culture. Apposite to the project at hand, work by Thirimulli and Gupta both present communists as local agitators who took to armed struggle as a result of peasant demands against perceived injustices by the landowning jargirdars of Telengana. My intention here is not to dispel the caricature of the Communist as someone prone to violence and a destructive enemy of the state, but rather to point out how such a vast extent of the official archive on these individual political actors presents an objectified picture of the communist that one should be constantly vigilant and sceptical.

By concentrating on the specific formation of the Communist Party in Kerala and presenting the case for its success in terms of reshaping of communism into a doctrine of caste equality, Dilip Menon³² has made a leap in the studies of the operation of communist practitioners within the daily life world of 'ordinary people'.

³²Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South Asia: Malabar, 1900-48, 1994.*

He not only illustrates the constructedness of community identity and belonging, thus going against the grain of the Subaltern stress on an a priori sense of community amongst subordinate groups that is born out the experiences of oppression. But, he also emphasises the idea of a community as an aspiration and not an achieved entity, as it is always in the process of formation without reaching realization. Here again, a dynamic perspective on culture is being invoked which depends on constant redefinition and contestation under the productive forces which actively redefine anew cultural norms and beliefs.

Menon's narrative of communist pragmatism and success is a rare story of the motions of communist propaganda. For one of the aspects of this study is the way this propaganda was interpreted and the creative techniques used by the left when adapting to Party directives from the centre. The best example of this ground work of the Keralan Communist is around the period of the People's War line. Menon portrays how rather than inject confusion and weakness of the communist superiors within the Party machinery, the restoration of legal status to the CPI allowed the KCP to coordinate disparate activities of union and individuals motivated by programmes of cultivating wasteland and growing more food.

This picture presents a far cry from the Bolshevik party of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* as well as the irrelevant and confused outsiders depicted in most historiography of the subject. It formulates the narrative around the activities of a political movement that attempted to resolve problems that emerged from within the deep rooted world of tradition itself. Menon also portrays the ocean of difference that

divided the party directive from its effective 'translation' on the local level. Thus, in examining what communism meant in this local, vernacular level it must be marked as constituting an advance in the studies of communism in India. For not only can the dynamism of culture remain a constant check on an essentialism that could be evoked, but the treatment of communists as an intimate and animate part of the community as opposed to an alien force quells the need for exploring their actions solely as a reaction to the Comintern or central Party demands. It is in this sphere of human action, the lived experience of various groups of people, that the history of communism needs to be sought if one is to attempt to understand the success or failure of communist politics within India.

Conclusion

This project has not been about truth. By no stretch of the imagination have I endeavored to 'wipe off the dust' from the obscured realities of the history of communism in India. Rather, the enterprise has been an exploration of paradigms, of epistememes of thought that have structured our knowledge on the subject and which, I conclude, shed most light on the political concerns and intentions of the carriers of these discourses.

The investigation has taken the form of an attempt to elucidate one such paradigm that has been simultaneously taken for granted and neglected within the discipline of recent political history. This has been the invention of a powerful and vivid discourse on the nature of communism.

This dissertation has demonstrated that many of the themes and strategies devised by the colonial officials profoundly influenced government thinking on the subject after 1947. The most recurrent theme, both before and after 1947 has been the representation of 'the communist as outsider'. Yet, this was, as I have argued, a paradox. It was reconciled through the adoption of a two pronged strategy that constituted the communist as the 'other' of a 'self' that incorporated both the British and Indian elite, thus limiting the explanatory force of the influential 'orientalism' model advanced by Edward Said.

The first stratagem was to classify them as marginal to India, ignorant of Indian realities and espousing means and strategies ill-suited and offensive to Indian sensibilities. The second was to depict the communists as antithetical to the norms, values and beliefs of a universal civilized culture. This element emphasized the atheism, divisiveness and apparently perverse characteristics of the left which were deemed parasitic to a normal and functional society.

These two themes have also found their way into much of the most influential historical writing on the subject, which is marked by its unreflexive and uncritical use of the official archive.

This study has attempted to critically question official discourses on the subject in a very limited way. But arguably, it might open up new areas of research. Notably, it would be interesting to explore how the British regime described, feared and dealt with the communists 'back home'. The comparison would draw out not only the differences in the governance of metropolitan and colonial territory but also the consequences of this different approach towards the indigenous communists themselves.

Another question that it raises is the possible 'internalization' of these various strictures on communism within the communists themselves. This is not to suggest anti-communist propaganda 'created' the communist subject, for that is certainly to stretch too far the explanatory power of the 'anti-communist' paradigm. Yet debates within the party, particularly on the question of the failure of the communists to become more 'accessible' and user friendly within the Indian polity, appear at least

superficially, to adhere fairly closely to the paradigm pervading the dominant discourses on the subject.

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