

NATURE OF INDIAN STATE : REFLECTIONS ON DOMINANT MARXIST INTERPRETATIONS OF INDIAN STATE*

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Introduction:

Lenin in one of his lectures delivered at the Svevdlov University observes : "the question of the state is a most complex and difficult one, perhaps, one that more than any other has been confused by bourgeois scholars, writers and philosophers".¹ Hidden behind this is an assertion that Marxists alone have the capacity to solve the riddle called 'State'. The contributions of the Marxists in different parts of the world show that this implication is not an exaggeration. However indian experience seems to narrate altogether a different story. In India along with the traditional communist parties viz CPI, CPI (M), and CPI (ML), certain left oriented academicians have been trying to interpret the nature of Indian state. However, it is disappointing to note that even after 40 years of independence Marxists have not been able to develop a dialectical and comprehensive Marxist analysis of Indian state—its class character, form, function and its dynamics. A layman who comes in touch with these parties and persons claiming themselves to be Marxists gets puzzled to see their competing and often conflicting interpretation of the contemporary Indian state. By this diverse interpretations of Indian reality, these Marxists have made the question all the more confusing.

Can one attribute this state of confusion to the complexity of Indian reality? It is true that India with all its diversity is unique in its own sense. One can see the complexity of the social formation in the nature of social organisations, value system and the mode of production in India, though the classes peculiar to bourgeois society have come into existence, precapitalist forms of social organisations like castes, tribes and religions still play significant roles. In the cultural aspect along with semi-feudal values, linguistic, regional and communal sentiments still dominate the

* Submitted to XII Indian Social Science Congress, July 14-18, Mysore, 1987.

Indian scene. Nature of mode of production in India continue to vex the minds of the Marxists working on India.² Yet, the above mentioned observations can not be an explanation of the Indian Marxists for not formulating a theory of Indian state. For each country in this world has its own unique nature. Though there may be similarities in certain aspects, no two social formations in the world are identical. So one has to study each particular state with all its specificities. As Lenin points out the heart and soul of Marxism lies in its concrete analysis of concrete conditions. If one has the capacity to apply the methodology creativity to the concrete conditions, there is no reason why a dialectical Marxist analysis of any given phenomenon is not possible.

From this it follows that if the Marxists have not succeeded in understanding the nature of Indian state, one of the main cause should be their failure to develop Marxist framework to comprehend the nature of Indian state—its origin, its class character, its dynamics and its relationship with other aspects of the social formation in India.

The present paper is precisely an attempt to prove this hypothesis. In this, the first part of the paper evaluates the interpretations of the traditional communist parties namely CPI, CPI (M) and CPI(ML) with regard to certain issues relating to the state, ruling class and revolution. In the second part, view points of certain Marxist academicians who subscribe to the conception of relative autonomy of the state are examined. While reviewing the interpretations of these parties and academicians wherever necessary, their methodological fallacies and conceptual inadequencies are pointed out and the possible alternatives are explored. In the last section an attempt is made to develop a more meaningful and dialectical framework necessary to understand the nature and dynamics of Indian state. A brief sketch of author's own understanding of Indian state is also given.

Indian State in the Eyes of Traditional Communist Parties:

Diverse interpretations given to the Indian state are not to be attributed to the breakup of the Communist Party of India. Even when—the communists were united the party could not stick on to one single view of Indian state. Though all of them used to express their support to the theoretical document adopted in 1951³

at all India Party Conference held at Calcutta, the interpretations given to this line has changed from time to time. The Madurai Congress of the United Communist Party convened in 1953 endorsed the Party Programme of 1951 which characterized the Indian state as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state.⁴ But this kind of interpretation could not explain many of the post 1947 developments in India. For the Communists, the dynamics of the Indian state, especially its foreign policy is a hard nut to crack. Unable to digest how a semifeudal and semi-colonial state could follow an independent foreign policy, the Delhi meeting of the Central Committee gave an argument that it is possible for the Indian state to adopt an independent foreign policy since the influence of the national bourgeoisie on the Indian economy, and over the government and the state was on the increase.⁵ The next congress held at Palghat in 1956 characterised the Indian state as 'landlord bourgeois state in which the bourgeoisie is the leading force.'⁶ Though the basic strategy of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist democratic revolution was not changed, the Communist Party then stopped calling India a stooge of imperialism. Such changes within the united communist party are in a sense due to lack of homogeneity among its members. Bipan Chandra's article, 'A strategy in Crisis' has clearly pointed diverse view points held by the different groups within the united CPI on the questions of nature and dynamics of the Indian state.⁷ Their differences have subsequently got manifested with the breakup of the United Communist Party into CPI (Marxist) and CPI (Marxist Leninist).

Before judging whether the method of approach adopted by the different communist parties and the conclusions to which they have come are in accordance with the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism, a brief study of their analyses of the state and the ruling classes in India becomes necessary.

CPI: India a National Bourgeois State:

The Communist Party of India (CPI) has been characterising the Indian state as a National bourgeois state. After the breakup of the United Communist Party, the CPI openly endorsed the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU,⁸ which saw the possibility of peaceful transition to socialism in countries like India by following the non-capitalist path of development. Krushchev's attempts to see an element of progressive nature in national bourgeoisie has pro-

foundly influenced the theoreticians of the CPI. Because of their participation in the anti-imperialist struggle, certain sections of the bourgeoisie have become progressive in their outlook and practice. It is owing to their presence in the state power that the Indian state has been able to take up many progressive steps. According to CPI the class of nationalist bourgeoisie does not include the monopolists who tend to compromise with feudalism and imperialism. The CPI opines that though the monopolists exercise powerful influence over the policies of the state, the Indian state as such is not dominated by the private monopolists. The leaders of the CPI argue that the public sector has developed to such an extent that no individual monopolist can excel the state sector either in its size or scope of its activities. Because of this advantage, the CPI believes, the national bourgeois state can take up any anti-monopoly measures, provided it has a political will to do so.⁹ To the CPI, government policies like nationalisation of banks and industries, development of public sector and enactment of acts such as MRTP are anti-monopoly in their content. Their leaders consider that if the state has a political will, then it can nationalise all monopoly organisations. Similarly, in the non-aligned foreign policy of the Indian state, the CPI sees anti-imperialist and pro-socialist content. The CPI leaders think that the development of the public sector with the Soviet aid would help the state to fight both the internal monopolies and foreign imperialists. The CPI accepts that the land reforms initiated by the state has led to the development of capitalism in agriculture though one may see some vestiges of feudalism here and there. Their belief in progressive character of national bourgeoisie make them give a call for 'National democratic revolution' directed against feudalism, imperialism and monopolies. They believe in peaceful transition to socialism through the non-capitalist path of development.¹⁰ The National bourgeoisie will be an ally in such revolution.¹¹

This understanding of the CPI may tempt one to make certain observations. Though the CPI's conception that the Indian State is a state of national bourgeois may be accepted, their arguments that some sections of the national bourgeoisie even in this era of imperialism can remain consistently progressive and that they can be made allies in the revolution seem to be against the fundamentals of Leninism. Again, whether capitalism has run its full course or not, is not relevant to the question of revolution. As Lenin

says, "The basic question of every revolution is that of state power".¹² Further elaborating this point, Stalin observes, "In the hand of which class or which classes is power concentrated, which class or which classes must be overthrown, which class or which classes must take power such is the main question of every revolution".¹³ So, when the CPI accepts that the national bourgeoisie has come to power, then according to Leninism the national bourgeoisie must become the target of revolution. Surprisingly the CPI makes it an ally. Further it may also be said that their National Democratic Revolution has no relevance to India. Lenin's conception of non-capitalist path of development in backward countries with pre-capitalist modes of production¹⁴ is not applicable to India, since India has already witnessed considerable development of capitalism and given birth to the classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat. Further it is not desirable to make distinction between the national bourgeoisie and monopolies, since in reality, monopolists also become part of the national bourgeoisie. The government policies like nationalization of banks and industries, development of public sector and the policy of non-alignment are not indications of anti monopoly character of the Indian state; all these activities are necessitated by the general interests of the capitalist class, of which the monopolists form an important segment.

CPI(M): India a Landlord Bourgeois State headed by Big Bourgeoisie:

The CPI(M) views the Indian state as "an organ of the rule of the bourgeoisie and landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development".¹⁵ After 1947, the state power in India has been captured by the big bourgeoisie in collaboration with the *land-lords*. The big bourgeoisie being reactionary and compromising in its nature, the Indian state has failed to accomplish the tasks of democratic revolution which involve elimination of the feudal, semi-feudal and imperialist elements in India. Though the CPI (M) calls India a nation state, it avoids naming the big bourgeoisie as national bourgeoisie. Reacting to those who characterise Indian state as a state of the national bourgeoisie, the CPI (M) theoreticians ask, "How is it that we have a state of the bourgeoisie and all its policies only lead to the further strengthening of foreign monopolist position on the country's economy? Why is it that feudal and semi-feudal relations in land have not

been abolished? Why is it that the policies of the Congress rule are directed to pauperising the general mass of peasantry? How is it that in this whole period of Independence it is the big monopoly houses that have amassed riches while medium and small scale sectors have been pushed into the crisis after crisis?...Is this the consequence of a state of the bourgeoisie or of a state led by the big bourgeoisie?"¹⁶ Their inference is clear—all such things will not happen in a national bourgeois state, therefore our state is only a state of the big bourgeoisie. To overcome this state of affair, the CPI (M) gives call for People's Democratic Revolution by which they mean essentially an agrarian revolution directed against feudalism, imperialism and big bourgeoisie. The rich peasants and the broad minded national bourgeoisie can also be allies in the revolutionary front directed against the main enemies.¹⁷

Now let us examine how much Marxian is this interpretation of Indian state. Firstly, one may say that the characterisation of any state simply as a landlord bourgeois state headed by big bourgeoisie' is theoretically inadequate. The CPI(M)'s position does not explain clearly whether by 'landlord' they mean feudal lords or capitalist land owners. In many of their recent analyses, the CPI (M) itself admitted that the capitalism is making in-roads into Indian agriculture. Study of their party documents shows that the landlords (class enemies) and rich peasants (class allies) do not have any qualitative differences, except for the fact that the landlords hold more acres of land.¹⁸ However from their saying that the landlords employ wage labour, use modern technology and produce for market, one can infer that the landlords are basically 'the landowners who had become bourgeoisie (Lenin's expression). Similarly the CPI (M) does not clearly say whether the native bourgeoisie is national or comprador in nature. Yet their characterisation of India as a nation state and their statements about the contradictions between the native bourgeoisie and imperialism drive one to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie cannot be anything but national. As is explained in our reflections on CPI's position, it is wrong to make distinction between big bourgeoisie and non-big bourgeoisie and branding only big bourgeoisie as a reactionary force compromising with imperialism and feudalism. Even Prabhat Patnaik, known for his CPI(M)'s leanings admits that not simply the big bourgeoisie,¹⁹ even small monopolies also collaborate with foreign firms, of course, with the aim of competing with

the big bourgeoisie. Finally, one may say whether capitalism has matured or not is not a criterion to judge the state of revolution. If it is accepted that the national bourgeoisie has come to power, then no matter whether all other tasks of democratic revolution are completed or not, the next stage of revolution in this era of imperialism should be anti-capitalist socialist revolution. Answering to Utsa Patnaik's²⁰ criticism, Paresh Chatopadhyaya rightly observes, "The state of development of capitalism in Russia did not qualify her for socialist revolution. When Lenin, in April Theses advanced the theses of the transition to socialist revolution, it was not because Russia's capitalist development had suddenly taken a qualitative leap but because through the events in February the bourgeoisie had assumed state power in Russia....To put the matter schematically, Lenin based his arguments not so much on economics as on politics."²¹

CPI (ML): India a Semi-colonial and Semi-feudal State:

The Naxalites are now no more homogenous. Their parental party, CPI (ML) has now got divided and redivided into several factions or groups. However even now, almost all the groups²² in spite of many tactical differences, still hold on to the view that India is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state; which has not even gained independence. The Naxal groups stick to 1951 Party Programme of the united CPI, which considered the destruction of feudalism, distribution of land to the landless and tenants and achievement of complete and real freedom to the country as the primary objects of the present stage of revolution.²³ According to them the fear of revolutionary upsurge of the common masses forced the bourgeoisie and its political party, the Indian National Congress to come to an understanding with feudalism and imperialism. Except for the fact that the political power has changed from the hands of British Lords to the Brown Lords there has been no basic changes in any sphere after 1947. To put it in words of T. Nagi Reddy "the characteristic features of new government in name of independent India was continuity of the old regime, of the social and economic order, the same administrative machinery of Imperialism, the same bureaucracy and the police".²⁴ Hence they conclude that the reforms introduced by the government "have not changed the foundations of the Indian society in general and the ruling classes in particular.....There is no change in their founda-

tions of power.²⁵ The state power in India is shared by feudal lords, imperialists and comprador bourgeoisie.

Since the CPI (ML)'s thinking has powerful impact on most of the leftist intellectuals in India, one can not ignore the necessity of making certain general reflections relevant to the Marxist Leninist conception of state and revolution. Firstly, one may take up the question whether the Indian state is politically independent or not. The Naxalites influenced unconsciously by the logic of the dependency school generally show economic facts to argue that the Indian state is dominated by the imperialists. But according to Lenin the question whether the state is a semi-colony or not is basically a political one. In the words of Lenin "Self determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies and the formation of an independent nation state".²⁶ Criticising the Rosa Luxemburg's conception that due to the increasing penetration of the imperialists in Poland and other Balkan states there is no possibility of these countries emerging as nation states. Lenin correctly points out, "For the question of political self determination of nations and *their* independence as states in bourgeois society, Rosa Luxemburg has substituted the question of their economic dependence". It is precisely what the Naxalities in India do. It may be true that India is economically dominated by the imperialists, but it has no relevance to the question of *emergence* of India as a nation state. It is wrong to consider that only in semi-colonies the foreign finance capital can penetrate. To quote Lenin, "finance capital is such a great, such a decisive force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting and actually does subject to itself even states enjoying the fullest independence".²⁷ Out of their own necessities, at times politically independent states also depend on the metropolitan bourgeoisie. "Not only small states, but even Russia, for example, is entirely dependent economically on the power of the imperialist finance capital of the rich bourgeois countries. Not only miniature Balkan states, but even nineteenth century America was economically a colony of Europe, as Marx pointed out in Capital.... but this has nothing to do with the question of national movements and the nation state".²⁸

Since the question of semi-colony is in a sense related to the existence of comprador bourgeoisie, one may be driven to examine CPI (ML)'s conception of comprador bourgeoisie. According to its

theoricians there are two sections within the bourgeoisie—comprador and national.²⁹ They tend to identify all capitalists who collaborate with foreign monopolists as comprador in character even the public sector built with foreign assistance reflects comprador nature. But this argument is simplistic and at any rate inadequate. While analysing foreign collaborations, one should examine whether such collaboration is made entirely in the interests of the foreign finance capital or whether such collaborations are invited to meet the requirements of the indigenous capitalist development. One should also see whether our capitalists while making certain economic concessions to the foreign finance capital show its willingness to sacrifice, if necessary, even the political independence of our country. If state power is in the hands of the comprador bourgeoisie, how come the state nationalise certain foreign firms? If the Indian state is a puppet in the hands of the imperialists, how can the state shift its tilt from one superpower to another and as against the intentions of both the super powers, the state manages to extend its hand of friendship to China? These questions need to be answered. Finally one may also make an observation that the inheritance of political superstructure of the British imperialists, in itself is not a sign of lack of nationalism on the part of the bourgeoisie. It is wrong to expect that the national bourgeoisie which is equally exploitative in nature attempts to destroy the colonial state structure and replace it by a new people's state. As Lenin says, "the development, perfection and strengthening of the bureaucratic and military apparatus proceeded during all the numerous bourgeois revolutions, which Europe has witnessed since the fall of feudalism".³⁰ Even Marx points out, "All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge edifice as the principal spoils of the victor".³¹ So, to expect the bourgeoisie to take up mission of the proletariat and criticising it for not doing so, is not a scientific way of understanding the history.

II

Indian State as Viewed by the Academic Relative Autonomists:

Except for the scholarly insights thrown by a few social scientists like A.R. Desai, Paresh Chatopadhyaya and Srikant Dutt into

certain important aspects related to the state, for decades, the question of nature of Indian state has remained almost untouched by Marxist academicians in India. Even when they are to analyse certain trends in Indian politics, they have generally neglected to take into consideration the specificity of Indian society. Some times in name of class analysis, these Marxist intellectuals undermine the significance of the autonomous roles played by different social forces like castes, religions, tribes and linguistic groups. Even in the much trumpeted class analyses, a trend of reducing the study of classes to the mode of production or to the question of extent of concentration of foreign capital has dominated the left minded academicians all these days. Being the victims of economism, a characteristic typical of traditional communist parties, in India, the leftist scholars in India failed to give a comprehensive theory of Indian politics. As a result, even now the Indian academic research continues to be dominated by the liberal interpretations of Indian politics. However, thanks to the Western debate over the question of relative autonomy of the capitalist state', in the recent period, at least some of the Indian scholars have got themselves liberated from the clutches of economism and instrumentalism. The necessity of the study of the positive and autonomous role that the state plays has been recognised. Certain studies concentrating on the relationship between the state and the dominant classes have come to light. Though a comprehensive study of the nature of Indian state on these new lines has not yet come out, one has to explore the potentialities and weaknesses of this trend in the broad interests of developing a Marxist-Leninist framework to understand the complex role that the Indian state has been playing. With that motive in our mind an attempt may be made in this section to review some of the contributions of the academicians like K.N. Raj, Hamza Alavi, Sanjeeb Mukherjee and Pranabh Bardhan-so far they are related to the question of relative autonomy of the Indian state.

Perhaps the first intellectual reaction to the instrumentalist view of the state in India has come from the wellknown Indian economist, Prof. K.N. Raj. Following Kalecci,³² K.N. Raj has argued that the governments in the intermediate regimes, of which India is an example need not necessarily serve the dominant propertied classes namely the big bourgeoisie and the feudal lords. Certain developments in the post-war world created conditions which

enable the state to play a different role. These favourable conditions include (1) numerical dominance of lower middle classes at the time of independence, (2) extensive involvement of the state in economic activities and (3) availability of credit from socialist countries. K.N. Raj considers that given the conditions, "the state could...perform the role of dynamic entrepreneurs, undertake the basic involvements necessary for economic development, and promote a pattern of amalgamation of the interests of the lower middle classes with state capitalism".³³ The state can consolidate its power by gaining a measure of Independence from foreign capital; by carrying out land reforms and by creating conditions necessary for a continuous economic growth. According to Prof. Raj, the lower middle classes and the rich peasantry become the ruling classes of such intermediate regimes. Lower middle classes include along with small proprietors in agriculture, industry and commerce a wide variety of professionals, doctors, engineers, teachers, bureaucrats and others—irrespective of whether they are self employed or work as wage earners. By rich peasantry they mean capitalist land owners. What brings these two classes together seems to be their dependence on state capitalism for their own development.³⁴

At about the same period, Hamza Alavi has come out with a different theory of the state in post-colonial societies. In his analysis of the nature of Pakistani state, which he thinks has relevance even to Indian state Alavi takes up more or less a structural Marxist view. He sees the state as a military bureaucratic structure, relatively autonomous of the economic structure on the one hand and the dominant propertied classes on the other. The specific conditions that enable the state to play such an autonomous role in the post-colonial societies include (1) inheritance of overdeveloped state from the imperialist power at the time of independence and (2) inability of the dominant classes and their parties to use the state as their instrument. The state in such societies "mediates between the competing interests of three propertied classes, namely the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie and the landed classes, while at the same time acting on behalf of them all to preserve the social order in which their interests are embedded, namely the institution of private property and the capitalist mode as the dominant mode of production."³⁵

Contribution of Sanjeeb Mukherjee, another relative autono-

mist is also worth mentioning. He seems to be very much influenced by Poulantzas and Miliband. He takes up in his analysis of Indian state some of the assumptions of Poulantzas as his hypotheses.³⁶ But ironically he more or less adopts Miliband's empiricist methodology to prove his hypotheses. According to him, heterogeneous character of Indian bourgeoisie, lack of consciousness on the part of this bourgeoisie to visualise its own interests and their desire to have political stability in the country necessitate the presence of a strong state. Just like Poulantzas he presupposes that the state can comprehend the 'real' or 'true' interests of the bourgeoisie. In Sanjeeb's view, the bourgeoisie in India shares the state power with other dominant classes like feudal lords, capitalist land-owners and imperialists.

Among the recent Indian writers, Pranabh Bardhan has given an interesting account of the dynamics of Indian state. He thinks that the general view of relative autonomy i.e. the state acts not at the behest of, but for all practical purposes on behalf of the dominant proprietary classes, is highly inadequate. Opposing the instrumentalist view, he argues, "There are ofcourse serious constraints posed by the imperatives of the dominant proprietary classes, but to focus exclusively on them is to ignore the large range of choice in goal formulation, agenda setting and policy execution that the leadership usually has and the powerful impulses shaping policies and actions that are generated within the state fuelled by its conception of national interest."³⁷ Bardhan repeatedly asserts that the Indian state is relatively autonomous of the dominant coalition constituted by capitalists, landlords and professionals. He attributes relative autonomy of the state to (1) existence of over-developed state;³⁸ (2) direct ownership and control in the economic sphere and (3) enormous prestige and sufficiently unified sense of ideological purpose of the state elite. This relative autonomy enables the state to shape the class alignments, provide material basis for the new classes and undertake the regulating and development role in the economy.

Professionals and Bureaucrats as Ruling Classes:

There seems to be a strong opinion among the intellectuals of different shades (for ex. Prabhat Patnaik and A.K. Bagchi)³⁹ in favour of including the professionals and bureaucrats as members of the ruling classes in India. One may observe this tendency

in a well built form in the arguments of K.N. Raj and Bardhan. It would be interesting to know how they justify their stand. According to Bardhan and K.N. Raj, professionals and bureaucrats constitute a new class of rentiers. They argue that along with physical assets, possession of certain kinds of knowledge and skill (for ex., administrative, managerial, scientific and technical) should also be considered as private property which has taken different forms. To quote Bardhan, "if physical capital can be the basis of class stratification, so can be human capital in the form of education, skills and technical skills expertise".⁴⁰ In that case, the income the professionals and bureaucrats derive is not wage and hence they are not to be equated with the working class. K.N. Raj infact quotes Ossowski who says, "The proletariat is a man who is unprotected from the extremes of exploitation by any special qualifications, which would prevent him from being replaced by another worker with equal physical strength. According to Marx's intentions, this criterion would exclude the engineer or doctor from the class of the proletariat".⁴¹ It is also argued that because of their privileged positions and accessibility to different state organs, these professionals and bureaucrats manage to "direct education investments away from the masses... (They) have been able to protect their scarcity rent, and by acquiring licence giving powers at various levels of bureaucracy some of them have increased their capacity to multiply this rental income".⁴²

Having gone through all their views, it now becomes necessary to examine whether all these arguments have their base in Marxism. Though Marx and Engles spoke of the significant role played by these sections at various moments in history they did not clearly say whether those groups can be considered as separate classes. Quotations from the early works of Marx (as Bardhan does) are not dependable. In such conditions it becomes necessary to fill up the gaps by enriching the Marxist understanding. With that goal in our mind, an attempt is made to develop a theoretical framework which can clearly establish the status of professionals and bureaucrats in the social dynamics.

The dynamics of each aspect of society depends upon the nature of the different social forces at play. In fact civil society represents all kinds of social relations that exist among the members of the given social formation. Yet in Marxist analysis one should make distinction between primary and secondary social forces influenc-

ing the dynamics of civil society. In this context, one needs to comprehend the difference between the classes and social categories. It is reasonable to define classes and social categories. It is reasonable to define classes as these groups of people who have similar status in economy and possess particular ideological outlook and political practice corresponding to their status in economy. By social categories, one may mean, those groups of people who, though occupy different status in economy are united by certain other common interests, which may be real or imaginary. Along with social groups like castes, tribes, religious groups, students and linguistic groups one may also include the professionals and bureaucrats under the little social categories.

Each social category has its own specific interests. In the process of attempting to realise their interests social categories also influence the state and politics of that society. At times, for their own interests they make some kind of alliance with one or the other classes, while some of them may align with the ruling classes, some others may keep in touch with the dominated classes. These class loyalties may not long forever. Their own particular interests may necessitate shifting of their alliance from one class to another. The mobility of these social categories also depend upon the ability of the classes to influence them. The Marxists should have clear understanding of the potentialities and dynamics of these social categories. Nevertheless it should be kept in mind that the determining forces of history of the class divided societies in the ultimate analysis, will be classes—not social categories.

It is wrong to reduce social category to any particular class, for, each social category is in turn composed of members occupying different status in economy. Since the economic status and also the class outlook and class practice that they acquire differ from one another, social categories represent multiplicity of classes. Hence reduction of professionals and bureaucrats into any one class should be avoided.

Relative autonomy of the state: Question of Politicians and Imperialists:

How relative is the relative autonomy that the Indian state enjoys? On this point there is no unanimity among the relative autonomists. Sanjeeb Mukherjee considers that the relative autonomy of Indian state is inversely proportional to the power of the ruling classes.⁴³ While attempting to prove this hypothesis, San-

jeeb Mukherjee more or less reduces the state power to the power enjoyed by the politicians (that too Congress leaders) and the bourgeoisie to mere capitalists. Then he undertakes to study how the state elite (Politicians) is superior to the bourgeoisie in its ability to comprehend and realise the 'true' interests of the ruling classes. This conception seems to be narrow even from Miliband's point of view, for, to Miliband the concept state elite is a wide category which includes civil servants, military officials, police, judges and politicians.

How far Pranabh Bardhan deviates from this narrow conception of relative autonomy is also questionable. Bardhan feels that the Indian state has enjoyed greater autonomy up to the sixties. But with the waning of the aura of legitimacy of leaders; failures in the economic field and constraints imposed by the articulated interests of the dominant propertied classes, the relative autonomy of the state, from the seventies onwards, is reflected more often in its regulatory role than its developmental role.⁴⁴ Though this observation may be correct one needs to remember that he is also more or less reducing the state to the state elite.

Hamza Alavi's position is completely different from others. He says that the state is relatively autonomous of the dominant classes namely the metropolitan bourgeoisie, indigenous bourgeoisie and landed classes. But, to him, the state means a 'military-bureaucratic structure'. He has many reservations to include politicians in the state structure of the post colonial societies. He thinks that the politicians in country like India will only play the role of brokers.⁴⁵ There is hardly any class based political parties in the third world. In India, the multi class character of the ruling Congress party and the weakness of the indigenous propertied classes allows the state a great measure of relative autonomy, so much so, that the state can continue to serve the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie even after independence.

This view point appears to be very clumsy. One may rightly question how the contradictory interests of the indigenous propertied classes and the metropolitan bourgeoisie before independence suddenly turns into competing interests after the dawn of independence. The non aligned movement is a clear example to show that in some aspects, the metropolitan bourgeoisie and indigenous propertied classes are antagonistic in nature. To say that the state is forced by its own objective position to make cer-

tain concessions to the metropolitan bourgeoisie is one thing and to argue that since the state is relatively autonomous it can continue to serve the interests of the metropolitan bourgeoisie is another thing. One should be able to distinguish between the two.

Finally, contradicting Hamza Alavi, one may say that by the time India secured independence, it has witnessed the development of a homogenous national bourgeois class fairly conscious of its economic and political interests. That the capitalists have contradictions within themselves should not make one ignore their unity vis-a-vis other antagonistic classes. Recent studies⁴⁶ have shown that after 30's, the capitalists have gradually consolidated their position within the Indian National Congress. Moreover, it may be made clear that though Congress was an umbrella party of different classes and groups, its leadership from the beginning continued to be in the hands of the politicians who are Liberal in their outlook and practice. If one applies the criterion used to judge the class character of the professionals and bureaucrats, the political leaders of Congress, despite their contradictions with the capitalists become a part of the bourgeoisie. As political representatives of the bourgeoisie, Indian political parties especially the Congress party played a very conscious role. To say that all the foresighted policies of the state like land reforms, development of public sector, nationalisation and non alignment are initiated by the 'military-bureaucratic structure' and that the Indian politicians only played the role of brokers is against the historic reality.

III

Insearch of Marxist Leninist Framework:

While analysing the view points of traditional communist parties and recent relative autonomists, an attempt has been made in the above two sections to expose their methodological fallacies and conceptual errors. In this concluding section, on the basis of our critical reflexions on different approaches reviewed so far, an effort may be made to develop a more dialectical and more meaningful Marxist Leninist perspective to the study of Indian state.

The interpretations of traditional communist parties - CPI, CPI(M), and CPI(ML) are mostly economistic and instrumentalist in their content. The Indian state is characterised as 'Landlord bourgeoisie state' or 'semi-feudals semi-colonial state' just because

there exist certain semifeudal and colonial hangovers in the economy and culture. The relative autonomy of the state and the specificity of politics are completely ignored. Their mechanical understanding of the Marxian classics and subjective study of the Indian state are primary causes for such diverse interpretations of the concrete reality. Paradoxically, the same mistakes made the parties arrive at consensus about the stage of revolution, despite their diverse characterisations of Indian state. There may be terminological differences but the substance is the same. Whether they call it 'National Democratic Revolution', or 'People's Democratic Revolution', or 'New Democratic Revolution', all of them hold that the present stage of revolution should be directed against feudalism, imperialism and the big industrial houses (Where as CPM calls them big bourgeoisie, CPI names the same as the monopolies and CPI(ML) brands them as comprador bourgeoisie). All these parties hold the view that it is only the big bourgeoisie/monopolies/comprador bourgeoisie which collaborates with imperialism and feudalism. But other sections of the bourgeoisie are progressive, anti-imperialists and allies of 'their' democratic revolution.s. All of them have a belief in the progressive character of the national bourgeoisie. Hence they attribute non-accomplishment of the tasks of democratic revolution either to the presence of feudalism or imperialism or to the big bourgeoisie; never to the inability of the national bourgeoisie and to the moribund character of Indian capitalism.

As a reaction to the traditional interpretations, the concept of 'relative autonomy' is gaining support among the academic circles in the recent days. Though this new trend seems to have certain advantages over the traditional method, it seems one need not expect too much from this change. For, this approach is also beset with many limitations. At the outset, one may observe that there is no general agreement among the subscribers of this new trend as to what exactly the term 'relative autonomy' should mean. As is the case in the west,⁴⁷ different meanings are assigned to this concept. These academicians have not developed a general methodological framework. Moreover they entertain diverse views on the composition of the ruling classes. Their very conception of state has not yet been crystallised. Whereas one sees it as an institutional structure, others reduce it to 'government', to 'executive' or just to the political leaders holding the executive authority.

Finally one may argue that mechanical application of Western theories of state on Indian soil may sometimes be counter productive. Though one has to criticise instrumentalist method of approaching the question of state, one should also know that compartmental studies undertaken in the West in the name of 'relative autonomy' are also far away from the Marxian dialectical method.

In view of the inadequacies in the dominant perspectives on state, it becomes necessary to develop a comprehensive Marxist Leninist framework which may be useful to study the state in all its aspects. Though it is not within the scope of this paper to give an alternative interpretation of Indian state, one may be interested to reflect on certain methodological points of departure necessary to the understanding of the state.

Nature and dynamics of the state can be understood only when they are examined within the context of civil society. As Marx clearly says, "neither legal relations, nor political forms could be comprehended either by themselves on the basis of a so called general development of human mind, but on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which embraces the term 'civil society'..."⁴⁸ The study of civil society becomes necessary because, 'this civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationships and confines itself to high sounding drama of princes and states'.⁴⁹ Dialectical materialist study is opposed to the fragmented and compartmentalised study of any phenomenon. As Engels puts it, 'Dialectics comprehends things and their representation in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending'.⁵⁰ From these saying one may conclude that even to comprehend the nature of Indian state it becomes necessary to study how the state itself influences and in turn gets influenced by different social forces like classes, castes, tribes, religions and linguistics groups.

Though different forces influencing the state are to be examined one should remember that the state is essentially an outcome of the class contradictions within the civil society. Hence more stress has to be given to the study of state in its relationship with classes and class struggle. To quote Engels, "Because the state arose from the need to check but because it arose, at the same time in the midst of these classes, it is as a rule, the state of the most powerful, eco-

nomically dominant class, which through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class".⁵¹

The state does not come out of the blue. All states in the initial stage of development are shaped and developed by the conscious members of the dominant class. But once the state develops and gets perfected, then it gradually alienates itself from the individual members who gave birth to it. The state "by virtue of its relative independence once transformed to it and gradually further developed"⁵² confronts the society including the dominant classes as an alien power. However the independence that the state enjoys is not absolute, in the sense, though the state may come in conflict with particular members of the dominant classes, by virtue of its position it can not go against the general interests of the class as a whole. Because of its superior position in the society the dominant class acquires the necessary means and resources to influence the psychological makeup and the methodology of state apparatus (not to be confused with state elite as Miliband did) by inculcating homogenous interest and thought in social, political and cultural outlook in the state organs.⁵³ As a result though the state enjoys relative autonomy, in the ultimate analysis, the autonomy only helps in serving the interests of the ruling classes. Keeping this in mind, Marxists interested in the study of the Indian state should examine the origins and development of the state in India. For this one may have to understand the class character of the Indian Nationalist Movement, the role of different classes and social forces involved in the anti-imperialist movement and the contribution of the individual leaders in politics, foresighted members of the dominant classes and elites in the administration to the shaping of the modern Indian state. Then the very structure of the different state organs would be examined in depth so as to know all the implications of the relative autonomy that the Indian state enjoys.

Since the concept of relative autonomy is viewed in relation to the classes in general and the ruling classes in particular, one can not ignore the necessity of discussing these concepts. Since the existing notions of these concepts seems to be—inadequate an attempt may be made to redefine the concepts. At the outset it may be said that classes are not to be seen as mere economic categories. By a homogeneous class, one may refer to a group of

people having similar status in economy and with corresponding ideological outlook and political practice. Basing on their position in the society, the classes may be broadly divided into the ruling classes and dominated classes. In case of class divided societies like India, all those classes whose interests are embedded in the consolidation and development of the existing system of private property with capitalism as the dominant mode of production may be called ruling classes. The nature of the state and the class character of the ruling classes are always interlinked. Based on this understanding, it may be held that once the state is accepted as an independent nation state, it is not advisable to make artificial distinction between the big bourgeoisie and non big bourgeoisie (CPM) or monopolists and national bourgeoisie (CPI), for, all of them inspite of their internal contradictions have their interests in continuation of the same system.

Here it becomes indispensable to make some reflection on the concept of "class interests". By class interests Marx does not mean what individual members of the class consider to be in their interest. Class interests in Marxian sense refers to the objective possibility of the class under given conditions to realise its basic urge to hold or ensure that which they possess and to have that they need to possess. The word 'possession' includes material production and also the realm of ideas corresponding to it.⁵⁴ Alongwith economic interests, each class shall have certain political and ideological interests. Given this understanding one should be cautious in determining the interest of the ruling classes. Making wide generalisations about the interests of the ruling class, say bourgeoisie in all the countries should be avoided. One should know that owing to change in time and space, class interests of Indian bourgeoisie may in some respects differ from their counterparts in the West. Without understanding this aspect, one should not pass judgment on the success or failure of the Indian state in accomplishing the interests of the ruling classes.

The role of the states in the Third World is very complex. The states in these countries play a positive and autonomous role in many spheres of activity. In all excolonial countries where national bourgeoisie has come to power, the state actively intervenes in economy to create conditions for the development of capitalism. Though it may make short term compromises with feudalism, the state gradually replaces the precapitalist elements in the economy,

of course, to the extent the interests of the national bourgeoisie demand under the given conditions. Relative weakness of the native bourgeoisie to initiate the path of industrialisation on its own compels the state to come to their assistance. On their behalf the state establishes the basic industries, mobilises internal savings, seeks external assistance whenever necessary, regulates the individual capitalists by formulating certain rules and regulations, nationalises certain essential industries and banks and initiates planned development indispensable for the crisis ridden capitalist path of development. Alongwith these, the state may take up certain welfare measures for the masses, compel the capitalists to make certain concessions to the workers in the form of minimum wages or decent working conditions. Such intervention on behalf of the capitalists and such concessions in favour of the workers are not signs of progressive character on the part of the state. In reality all these efforts of the state are necessiated by the exigencies of capitalist development.

In the field of ideology, the state assists the ruling classes in extending their hegemony over the masses. The state intervenes and regulates the functioning of the cultural centres like education, family, religion etc. Governmental control over the mass media gives them extensive opportunities to spread the values of the ruling classes in different forms. Some times in the interests of the ruling classes it may revive age old traditions and superstitions. Further it attempts to check the emergence of a counter culture by all possible means. How the potentialities of the Indian state itself are directed towards achieving these ends and how all these inturn help in legitimising the system are to be examined in a comprehensive analysis of Indian state.

Though the state performs certain economic and ideological functions, one should never forget that the essential domain of the state is political sphere. State is basically an oppressive political structure, though its oppressive character may not always be manifest. The state with its organs namely military, police, civil services, judiciary and parliaments maintains the political stability essential for promoting the interests of the ruling classes. It attempts to accommodate the competing interests of the ruling classes and if necessary make some concessions to the dominated classes. The state in its own interest maintains democratic appearance, grant certain fundamental rights to the people, open avenues

of employment in the state bureaucracy to the dominated classes and allow political parties representing different sectional interests to participate in the functioning of the government. These functions may further strengthen the legitimacy of the system. However such concessions are viable so long the general interests of the ruling classes are not threatened. But when the existence of the ruling classes are in danger and the very basis of the state is questioned then the state withdraws all its concessions and show its real oppressive character. In such situation structural rearrangement of the different organs of the state and corresponding modifications in their roles become unavoidable. Working of about forty years of Indian democracy stands testimony to these hypotheses.

Finally, in order to understand the nature of Indian state one has to examine the role it plays in the world of nations. The emergence of the Third World after the second world war, has given birth to new contradiction in the world politics. Since these countries themselves were the victims of imperialism, they develop an inbuilt antagonism to imperialism, neo-colonialism or racism. But yet the very nature of the ruling classes in these states and the contradictions of the capitalist path of development that they initiated in their countries compel them to depend, economically, on the metropolitan countries. Because of their weaker status in the capitalist world they may have to make short term compromises. However on that basis one should not conclude that all the third world states are semicolonies of the metropolitan countries. The rise of socialist bloc in the world arena infact gives greater power of manoeuvrability to these developing states. Taking advantage of the super power rivalry the non-aligned states like India in its own interest shift its tilt from one power to another, suck the milk from both cows at the same time and yet continue to maintain their political independence. By effectively using these tactics India now has reached a stage of development where not withstanding its inferior status vis-a-vis the metropolitan bourgeoisie, it itself can exploit other weak countries of the Third World. The nature of the working of Indian Joint Ventures in the South East Asia, Africa and other parts of world show that the Indian state itself is emerging as a small imperialist state.⁵⁵

References

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3. Mohit Sen, ed., *Documents of the History of Communist Party of India Vol. VIII*, People's Publishing House, 1977, P-8.
4. *Ibid.*, P-19.
5. *Ibid.* P-420.
6. *Ibid.*, P-545. Palghat resolution also says, 'The State Policies are motivated by the desire to develop India along independent capitalist lines' About India's foreign policy it says, "The republic of India in recent years has played an increasingly important role, a role that has heightened India's international prestige and evoked in every patriotic Indian a sense of national pride". More than this the document claims that "the emergence of India as a sovereign and independent republic upholding the course of peace and freedom is factor of profound significance in the present day world" (P-526).
7. Bipan Chandra, ed., *Indian Left: Critical Appraisal*, Vikas, 1983, P. 259-400.
8. Khrushchev said, 'It is quite probable that the forms of transition to socialism will become more and more varied; moreover, achieving these forms need not be associated with civil war — it is not true that we regard violence and civil war as the only way to rencke society'. He also said, 'In present day conditions the working class in many capitalist countries has a genuine opportunity to unite the overwhelming majority of people under its leadership and to ensure that basic means of productions are placed in the hands of people.... (uniting with) The working peasantry, intellectual and patriotic forces (it) has an opportunity to turn the parliament... into an agency of gen-

uine democracy". Quoted in G.D. Embree., *Soviet Union between the Twenty Party Congresses 1952-56*; The Hague, Martinum Nijhoff, 1959, P-301-302.

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10. Indradeep Sinha, *Crisis of Capitalist Path of India: the Policy alternatives*, (Communist Party Publications, 1982), P.28.
11. 'Non capitalist path does not mean negation of the whole Capitalist Society. Non capitalist path does not presume the complete absence of capitalist development in the country concerned. Non capitalist development means cutting short further stages of capitalist development and even reversing some development (monopoly) that have already taken' *Ibid.*, P.30, 31.
12. Lenin, *Selected works Vol. II*, (Progress, Moscow, 1977), P-35.
13. J.V., *Stalin Collected Works Vol. IX*, (Moscow, 1954), P-203.
14. Lenin, n.1, pp. 406-407.
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16. 'Once More on the SUC' - 1, *People's Democracy*, 20th May 1973.
17. *CPM Programme & Rules and Regulations*, (Prajashakti, 1986) p-61 (Telugu version).
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21. Paresh Chatopadhyaya 'Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture' *An Anti Critic*, *E P W*, Dec. 1972, P A-186.
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26. Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self Determination*, (Moscow, 1983), p-9.
27. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Moscow, 1978), p-77
28. Lenin, n.26, p.11.
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30. Lenin, n.12, p.258.
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34. Ibid., p-9.
35. Alavi Hamza 'State in the Post Colonial Societies' in Harry, Goulbourne, *Politics and State in the Third World*, (Macmillan, 1979), p-42.
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39. See Prabhat Patnaik, 'Imperialism and Growth of Indian Capitalism' in Robin, Blackburn, *Explosion in subcontinent*, (Pelican, 1985), p-52; also A.K. Bagchi, *Political Economy of under development*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p-179.
40. Ibid., p-51.
41. Quoted in Raj, n.33, p-37.
42. Bardhan, n.37, p.52-53.
43. Mukherjee, n.36, p.38.
44. Bardhan, n.37, p.38-39.
45. Alavi, n.35, p.44-45.
46. See Raj K. Ray, *Industrialisation in India* (Oxford, 1982). pp.292-334; A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1980), pp. 200-8; also his *Indian's Path of Development: Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in India* (Orient Longman, 1981). pp. 144-170 and Chatopadhyaya, 'State Capitalism in India', *Monthly Review*, March 1970.
47. Even in the Western debate over relative Autonomy, there was no unity among the participants. According to Miliband relative autonomy means 'the degree of freedom which the state has in determining how best to serve what those who hold power conceive to be national interests and which in fact involves the service of the interests of the ruling classes. For Poulantzas relative autonomy is a structural element. Relative autonomy is necessary for the state to act as a factor of unity in a social formation composed of specific and relatively autonomous levels. German Derivatvists think that the relative autonomy becomes indispensable for the state to act fulfill certain social requirements of the process of capital accumulation. For a summary of this debate see my M. Phil Dissertation, On Relative Autonomy of the Capitalist state. (University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad). p. 85.

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