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The Indian Constitution and Its Review

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Suniti Kumar Ghosh

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I also sincerely thank my friends of the Research Unit for Political Economy for undertaking to publish it.

This was written in August-September 2000. While going through the final proofs, I have made a few additions which I felt necessary.

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31 March 2001.

Note: Many important developments have occurred since the first printing of this booklet. Nevertheless there is a demand for more copies. We are reprinting it without changes.

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The Indian Constitution and its Review

On forming the government at the Centre, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) forms by far the largest component, set up a commission to review the present Indian Constitution. It bypassed India's Parliament in setting up the commission. What lends significance to the decision is the present situation in India and outside and the needs of the ruling classes.

The parliamentary political parties which are in the opposition are loud in extolling the present Constitution as *an embodiment of noble principles*, which it would be a sacrilege to alter. The BJP-led government, too, has tried to assure them that their object is "to examine the experiences of the past 50 years *to better achieve the ideals enshrined in it, without touching the basic features*". There is a competition between the parties of the ruling classes in paying homage to 'the founding fathers'.

At the outset, it may be noted that like the government, the constitution of a country is not neutral between its classes. It is the representatives of the dominant political and economic interests who draw it up and want it to serve those interests. In India, the representatives of such interests have amended the Indian Constitution about 85 times since it was adopted in November 1949 to make it serve those interests better. Today, rapid changes in the economic and political situation seem to demand changes that can contain the disillusion of the people with the system and can best retain their control over them. The ruling classes are still considering and discussing what sort of changes can yield such a result.

A. 'The Founding Fathers' and the Present Constitution

First, about 'the founding fathers' and about some basic features of the present Constitution.

India's Constituent Assembly was convened by British Viceroy Wavell and started work in the colonial days. It was constituted on the basis of the 16 May 1946 statement of the British Cabinet Mission and Viceroy Wavell. The members of the Constituent Assembly were not elected on the basis of

adult suffrage. The then existing provincial legislative assemblies of 'British India', formed under the Government of India Act 1935 (which Jawaharlal Nehru called a "charter of bondage"¹), which restricted the franchise to about 11.5 per cent of the people (chiefly owners of property) and provided for separate electorates for different religious communities, were asked to elect their representatives by single, transferable votes of their members (except Europeans), Muslim and non-Muslim members voting separately. According to an agreement between Nehru and the Chamber of Princes, on the accession of the native states to the Indian Union, about fifty per cent of the seats allotted to them were filled by nominees of the princes (who had been stooges of the British government) and the rest were supposed to represent the people of those states.

Speaking at the subjects committee meeting during the Meerut session of the Congress in November 1946, Nehru declared: "When we attain freedom, we shall have another Constituent Assembly."² Elsewhere, he made the same promise that another constituent assembly based on adult suffrage would be convened after the transfer of power. This promise, like many similar promises, was not kept and was never meant to be kept.

It was the members of the Indian Civil Service of the British Indian government who were entrusted with the basic job of drafting the Constitution. Chief among them was Sir Benegal N. Rau, the constitutional adviser to the Constituent Assembly.

As Michael Brecher, Nehru's biographer, wrote, "One of the striking features of India's 'new' Constitution is the continuity with British-Indian practice. Approximately 250 articles [out of 395 articles] were taken either verbatim or with minor changes in phraseology from the 1935 Government of India Act, and the *basic principles remained unchanged*."³ In his *Mission with Mountbatten*, Alan Campbell-Johnson made similar observations.⁴ G.D. Birla, the outstanding leader of the Indian big bourgeoisie and one of the mentors whom, as Gandhi said, "God has given me",⁵ proudly claimed: "We have embodied large portions of the [1935] Act, as finally passed, in

1. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, ed. by S. Gopal *et al.*, Vol. VII, p. 605.

2. *SWJN*, 2nd series, Vol. I, p. 19.

3. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London, 1959, p. 421 — emphasis ours.

4. Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, London, 1951, pp. 319, 355.

5. Birla, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Bombay, 1977, Vol. I, p. 10.

the Constitution which we have framed ourselves and which shows that *in it [the 1935 Act] was cast the pattern of our future plans.*”⁶ Happily or unhappily, the debt of the ‘founding fathers’ to the ‘charter of bondage’ of 1935, and to the Cabinet Mission and Wavell, is not usually acknowledged.

B. Basic Features:

1. The Preamble

Using almost the same phrase — “We the people of the United States”, which had been coined by the Philadelphia convention which drew up the U.S. Constitution in 1787, and substituting ‘India’ for ‘the United States’, the framers of our Constitution claimed in the Preamble that India was a “Sovereign Democratic Republic” and promised to uphold the noble ideals of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. On 3 January 1977, during the ‘Emergency’ rule of Nehru’s worthy daughter, Indira Gandhi, India became, through an amendment to the Constitution, a “Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic” and remains so till now.

2. Directive Principles of State Policy

Besides the Preamble, there are ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’, which, though *not “enforceable in any court”*, are “nevertheless *fundamental* in the governance of the country.” These principles offered both men and women equally “the right to an adequate means of livelihood”, “a living wage”, “equal pay for equal work for both men and women”, “conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities”. The State would also undertake to secure “that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good”, “that the childhood and youth are protected against exploitation”, and so on. The State would also secure “the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement”, etc. The State would also “endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”. These and

6. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, Bombay, 1968, p. 131 — emphasis ours.

several other noble principles are enshrined in our sacred Constitution. “We the people of India” who adopted the Constitution are supposed to include the Tatas, Birlas, princes or ex-princes as well as industrial and agricultural workers who slave for them and beggars who rummage dustbins for food — the overwhelming majority of the people of India.

In a long critique “A Constitution of Myths and Denials”^{6a} (which appeared in the January 1950 issue of *Indian Law Review* — only a few weeks after the Constitution had been adopted), Sarat Chandra Bose, who had been a member of the Congress Working Committee for some years and a legal luminary, commented: “The very preamble of the Constitution is conceived in fraud.”⁷ Bose, who died just a month after, did not live to see that the noble principles enshrined in the chapter “Directive Principles of State Policy” were conceived equally in fraud.

3. ‘Fundamental Rights’ of Citizens

The Bombay Public Security Act before the transfer of power empowered the police to arrest without warrant and detain without trial any person *acting in a manner prejudicial to public peace of the province*; in 1948 the Congress ministry amended it to include within its scope “any person *liable to act...*” (emphasis ours). This was a portent of the things to come — the way the Constitution would guarantee ‘the fundamental rights’ of Indian citizens. Article 19 Clause (1) and some articles following it acknowledge certain fundamental rights. The beauty is that the clauses that follow each of these articles take them away and empower the State to impose “*reasonable restrictions*” on them (emphasis ours). Every clause acknowledging fundamental rights and protection against arbitrary arrest and detention has its antithesis in the Constitution. While it offers ‘fundamental rights’ “in the abstract”, it makes a mockery of them “in the marginal note”, to quote Marx’s phrases.

Article 22 clause (3) (b) empowers the State to enact laws providing for preventive detention. Again, the provision for preventive detention has been included in the Concurrent List of subjects which can be administered both

6a. Article reproduced in N.C. Bhattacharya *et al* (eds.), *Sarat Chandra Bose Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta, 1982.

7. *Ibid*, p. 421.

by the Central and state governments.⁸ A member of the Lok Sabha once pointed out that Article 22 does indeed guarantee for every Indian citizen "the right, the fundamental right, of being detained without trial".⁹ A later amendment to the Constitution ensured that the 'fundamental rights' can be curbed if the "integrity of India" is questioned. And if an emergency, internal or external, is declared, they can all be suspended for years. In India 'fundamental rights' can be enjoyed by a citizen at the pleasure of the executive.

In February 1950, immediately after the inauguration of the Constitution, the Nehru government enacted the Preventive Detention Act to imprison thousands *without trial*. Detention without trial, which had till then been limited to a few states like West Bengal and Bombay, was made legal all over India.

During the first three years after transfer of power to the hands of the framers of the Constitution, fifty thousand political opponents were put behind bars and thirteen thousands were killed or wounded, according to official figures.

Under preventive detention, people are confined within prison under atrocious conditions *not* as punishment for having violated the laws of the land but to *prevent* them from doing something which they *may* do and which the Government does not want them to do.

But one fundamental right which enjoys sanctity is the right to property. At the outset this right was enshrined in Article 19 clause 1 (f) and Article 31. The Constitution ensured that if the State took over property, adequate compensation would be paid to the owner of the property. So when zamindari was abolished, very handsome compensation was paid by the State to the former zamindars, who were then no more than rent-collectors, intermediaries between the State and the ryots. When the Imperial Bank of India, private airlines or even sick industrial units were nationalised, generous compensations, much more than what they were entitled to, were paid to shareholders, foreign and native. The Constitution guaranteed the rights of the former princes of the native states and their successors to receive tax-free privy purses from the Central government, to own their palaces, *jagirs* and

8. Seventh Schedule, List III, Concurrent List, entries 3 and 4.

9. *Lok Sabha Debates*, 30 May 1956.

jewellery and to enjoy various other privileges. One such privilege was protection from prosecution in court without prior sanction by the Government. Besides, many of the scions of the princely houses have held offices of governors, ministers of the Central and state governments, ambassadors and so on. The framers of the Constitution made constitutional provisions to protect and promote the interests of the owners of large properties acquired by fair or foul means — mostly foul — during the colonial days and after.

No doubt, the Government much later (in the 44th Amendment) removed the Constitutional right to property as a fundamental right (while retaining it as a legal right). But this seemingly radical blow at property rights was merely on paper; in fact, the Supreme Court and High Courts consistently interpreted the other fundamental rights so as to thoroughly protect the right to property in practice.

Other 'fundamental rights' of citizens, including their right to life, have been trampled underfoot by men in positions of power whenever they have so desired it.

In practice, autocracy

All the Press and Security Acts of the colonial days remain in full force under the new Constitution. To quote Sarat Bose, "here in our country the different Press Acts passed in the British imperialist times, which were scathingly denounced at one time by the Congress leaders who are responsible for the new Constitution, give enormous powers to the executive to suppress the liberty of the press, and the Security Acts passed by the different provinces under Congress rule since the 15th August 1947, make what was enormous an enormity."¹⁰ The old repressive machinery of the colonial State with its Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, the Police Act of 1861, Defence of India Rules, Preventive Detention Acts and so on has undergone a process of perfection. Every succeeding "lawless law" is a greater attack on the liberties of the people than the previous one.

The Preventive Detention Act, which was utilised until 1970 by the ruling classes to suppress resistance against their growing offensive against the people, was replaced by the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) in 1971. Under the MISA anyone could be arrested and imprisoned. Under MISA several tens of thousands were clapped in prison between 1970 and

10. Bose, "A Constitution of Myths and Denials", *op cit*, 426.

1973 in West Bengal alone. Speaking on MISA in Parliament, the Home Minister of 'the largest democracy in the world', K.C. Pant, "defended detention [without trial] under MISA as being better than people being held as undertrials for long periods *under various pretexts*." He added: "This was a better method than shooting them when they indulged in violence, for their lives are protected in detention."¹¹ Actually, besides imprisoning thousands and thousands under MISA, many thousands were shot and made to 'disappear' in 1970-73 alone. This is how 'the law takes its course' in India.

There is no end to such black laws for local or all-India application. In 1970 the ruling classes added two black acts to their West Bengal arsenal — the West Bengal Maintenance of Public Order and West Bengal Prevention of Violent Activities Act. Punjab had its own crop of 'lawless laws' like the Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance, 1983 and the Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Powers Act, 1983. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which was first enforced decades ago in the Naga Hills, was later extended to other regions like Kashmir. The National Security Act was passed in 1980. It was followed, among others, by the National Security (Second Amendment) Ordinance 1984 and the Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Ordinance 1984. S. Sahay of *The Statesman* commented: "The gay abandon with which the Central government has been accumulating extraordinary powers makes one wonder whether in the not too distant future anything will be left of the normal law of the land." The "sweep of the Ordinance", he said, "is really breath-taking."¹² Any person in a 'terrorist-affected' area could be picked up as a 'terrorist' and the onus of proof whether he or she was innocent or not rested on the accused, not the accuser. The *Indian Express* observed: "[It is] a threat to social workers, trade unionists, civil libertarians, political opponents and others."¹³ Then in 1985 the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Bill (TADA) "was rushed through Parliament in record time, with almost the entire Opposition giving their assent — direct or through their silence."¹⁴ PUCL calls it "the crown-

11. *Statesman*, 11 May 1973; *Hindusthan Standard*, 11 May 1973. Emphasis added.

12. Quoted in People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), *Black laws 1984-85*, Delhi, 1985, p. 34.

13. Quoted in *ibid*, p. 36.

14. *Ibid*, p. 3.

ing act of a State which has symbolised growing oppression and terror against the people.”¹⁵ Under TADA the definition of terrorist activity was such that anybody — a worker or peasant, a journalist or advocate, an artist or academician — could be dubbed a terrorist. Reversing Section III of the Indian Evidence Act, TADA also stipulated that “the accused shall be presumed to have committed the alleged offences unless he proves his innocence”. This is a monstrous violation of the normal laws of all countries.

How the Government acting on behalf of the ruling classes used or abused the sweeping powers of imprisoning people for years without trial under TADA may be guessed from the following facts. According to the figures published by the Government of India in August 1994, 67,000 and odd persons had been confined to prison without trial since 1985. Of them, only 8,000 were tried and only 725 were convicted. “Thus”, as A.G. Noorani writes, “59,000-odd were detained without trial while 7,000 plus were tried and found not guilty.”¹⁶ Even most of those 725 persons were convicted *not* under TADA but under ordinary law. TADA lapsed in May 1995 but thousands of TADA cases have not been withdrawn. None of those who caused immense suffering to hundreds of thousands of people with the help of these infamous laws suffered in the least.

State above the law

All this is sanctioned by the written Constitution of India. But there is another part of the Constitution which is unwritten. This unwritten part of the Constitution permits the police, the paramilitary troops and the army to run berserk when the ruling classes are confronted with any resistance to their rule. The system reacts violently whenever workers, peasants and other toiling people or an oppressed nationality stand up for their rights, or during communal conflicts, when it plays a nakedly communal role. Then what prevails is not the rule of law but the rule of the gun that the State imposes on the people. The police and the military are unleashed to shoot protesters at sight, dishonour women, burn their homes and do every kind of atrocity with impunity. Hundreds and thousands are made to “disappear”, as they were in West Bengal between 1970 and 1973; in Meerut-Maliana (1987), Bhagalpur (1989), and Mumbai (1992-93); in Punjab during the Blue Star

15. *Ibid.*

16. “TADA Revived”, *Statesman*, 8.3.2000.

operation and after; and this has been happening in various places — in north-eastern states like Nagaland and in Kashmir for the last fifty years. Brutal torture, killing people and oppressing them in other ways are pastimes of the police and the armed forces in this country. The laws of the land which the present Constitution upholds permit such savagery. In many other countries the citizen's right to sue the State, its ministers and officials, for violating his or her rights is somewhat of a protection against arbitrary use of their powers. But, as A.G. Noorani observed, "the Indian legal system has retained those obnoxious features of statutes of the Raj which rendered the right illusory."¹⁷ According to Section 16 of the MISA, "no suit or other legal proceeding shall lie against the Central Government or a State Government and no suit, prosecution, or any other legal proceeding shall lie against any person, for anything in good faith done or intended to be done in pursuance of this Act." Defining the expression "good faith", the General Clauses Act, 1897 said that "a thing shall be deemed to be done in good faith where it is in fact done honestly, whether it is done negligently or not." A State functionary is placed above the law because it is virtually impossible to prove actual dishonesty on his part in a court of law.

In what are declared as "disturbed areas" the police, paramilitary troops and the army enjoy the unfettered right to burn and kill and heap every kind of indignity on the people — more gruesome than what happened in the 'Jallianwala' days.

Things have deteriorated much since 22 July, 1975 when a Socialist Party M.P., N.G. Goray, asked the Government in the Rajya Sabha:

"Now the charge is about violence. I would like to ask you, 'How many people have your police and your Border Security Police killed by shooting innocent people?' Will you please publish your records and say how many times after independence police opened fire and how many people were killed?"

"...in West Bengal", he charged, "the finest flower of youth has been liquidated under the pretext that they belonged to the 'Naxalites'.¹⁸ And

17. Noorani, "Civil Liberties", *Sunday*, 10 August 1980.

18. Quoted in David Selbourne, *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of Tyranny*, Penguin Books, England, 1977, pp. 18, 387.

'Naxalites' were supposed to have no right to life. It was no aberration of a few individuals but a well-conceived policy — a part of the present political system. Behind the facade of this Indian variety of democracy, the present political system, based on intense exploitation and widespread corruption, responds to the slightest opposition to it with State violence and terror. In fact, the very basic rights to life and liberty are illusory under the present Constitution.

There are a number of provisions in the Constitution — articles 352 to 360 — which confer absolute power on the President (our Rashtrapati) who is elected through a very indirect process and on the basis of extremely limited franchise. These emergency provisions, as Sarat Bose pointed out, have "a remarkable family likeness to Sections 42, 43 and 45 of the Government of India Act, 1935, the quintessence of which is re-incarnated in our Constitution with a minimum of verbal changes."¹⁹ The president is authorised to issue a proclamation of national Emergency "if the President [i.e., the ruling coterie] is satisfied that there is imminent danger" of external aggression or internal disturbance. Once the Emergency is proclaimed the "fundamental rights" of citizens remain suspended, the Centre can then assume all legislative and executive powers of the constituent states, and the executive at the Centre is free to use despotic powers. These articles make a mockery of "the fundamental rights" of citizens as well as the rights of the constituent states and Union territories. Once the proclamation of Emergency has been approved by Parliament by *simple majority* within two months, the Emergency will continue for an unlimited period until it is revoked by a subsequent proclamation. A state of 'Emergency' throughout India was proclaimed in 1962 for external reasons and after a break for a brief period, was reimposed in 1971. Before it was withdrawn, 'Emergency' for internal reasons was proclaimed in 1975 and continued until early 1977.

As discontent among the people has been growing with the passing of days, the black laws are proliferating and one can hardly keep count of them. In this "sovereign socialist secular democratic republic", the coercive apparatus of the State has been enlarged many times — perhaps beyond the wildest dreams of the colonial masters. There have been vast increases in the strength of the police and the army (which, too, has been engaged in

19. Bose, *op cit*, 427.

maintaining 'law and order' from Kashmir to the north-eastern states for several decades); and paramilitary forces and intelligence agencies have been growing like mushrooms.

How are 'fundamental rights' respected in every-day life in this democratic republic? For the *adivasis*, the *dalits* and other sections of the poor (irrespective of any community), who constitute the overwhelming majority of the Indian people, all democratic rights (except the right to vote at intervals of years, which right too is often denied to them in actual practice by the hoodlums of all parliamentary parties) are illusory. It is the practice of the police to pick up innocent people on the complaint of the rich and powerful or on the merest suspicion, cast them into police lock-ups and torture them to extract desired "confessions". If bribes are not attractive enough, they may be tortured to death or flung into prison to wait for trials on fictitious charges or on no charges at all for years. Here, access to the seat of justice promises dubious advantage and is too expensive; and the law's delay or apathy is proverbial. How does the judicial system work here? Recently, Union law minister, Arun Jaitley, said at a function organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association, that there are 4.04 crore cases pending in district courts alone in India while there is a backlog of 34 lakh cases in state High Courts.²⁰ At a meeting in Kolkata, which was addressed by India's Chief Justice, A.S. Anand, Amiya Gooptu, Chairman of Bengal Initiative, said: "Statistics reveal it will take 324 years to remove the backlog of pending cases even if no further cases are filed in the courts."²¹ Besides, bribery and corruption, which have tainted even sections of the judiciary, are endemic in law-courts.

A report of the Amnesty International, *India: Torture, Rape and Deaths in Custody*, published from London in March 1992, stated: "torture is pervasive and a *daily routine* in *every one* of India's 25 states, irrespective of whether arrests were made by the police, the paramilitary forces or the army. Many hundreds, if not thousands, have died because of the torture during the last decade.... *Many who were tortured to death were never charged with any crime.*" The report quotes from *The Telegraph* (Calcutta) of 21 July 1986: "Some senior officials admit that it is the 'small fry' who usually

20. Sankar Sen, "Law's Delays – I", *The Statesman*, 4.1.2001.

21. *The Times of India* (Kolkata edn.), 4.3.2001.

die in police custody.... victims are mainly petty offenders while some are innocent." "Rape and ill-treatment of women by the police", the Amnesty International report said, "is widespread throughout the country." To quote from it again, "The main reason why torture continues to be practised on such a scale throughout India is that the police feel themselves to be immune — they are fully aware that they will not be held accountable, even if they kill the victim and even if the truth is revealed."²²

The above report documents many cases of custodial torture, rape and murder, but many times more of such cases lie hidden in the dark recesses of police stations and prisons. What sees the light of day is merely the tip of the iceberg.

Recently, on 24 April 2000, a former assistant commissioner of police (Class I), New Delhi, H.L. Kapoor, wrote in an article: "Molestation of women by the police is *on the increase*. There is no denying the fact that corruption is *deeply* rooted in the police force.... Custodial deaths are among the worst of crimes attributed to the police.... Despite the relentless efforts of the National Human Rights Commission, instances of police brutality and custodial deaths are *on the rise*. *A visit to a police station is a nightmare.... Custodial rape is also a serious problem.... In some cases, people are eliminated in fake encounters.* When such cases were highlighted by Amnesty International, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Red Cross and other agencies, *they were ignored* and the aggrieved parties had to go to the Supreme Court."²³ It needs to be noted that, in the many cases of fake 'encounter' killings, few or almost none of 'the aggrieved parties' had the freedom or the resources to go to the Supreme Court.

4. Relations between the Centre and the states

Another basic feature of the Indian Constitution is that the Indian State is not a voluntary union but a forced union of various nationalities.²⁴

22. Amnesty International, *India: Torture, Rape and Deaths in Custody*, London, 1992, p. 76.

23. "Custodial Crime", *The Statesman*, 24 April 2000; emphasis added.

24. No doubt, unlike in Tsarist Russia, in India there is no single oppressor nationality. Rather, all the nationalities are oppressed by imperialism and comprador capital and shackled by feudalism. Because of imperialist domination, their economies are social development are stunted, lack integration and are getting further and further distorted. On a base of retrogressive feudal culture has been applied a layer of imperialist culture. The vast

The awakening of national aspirations among the many nationalities of India was associated with the rise of the struggle against colonial rule. In order to enthuse the peoples of the different nationalities of the Indian sub-continent and win their support before the transfer of power, the Congress high command gave promises to the people that future India would be a voluntary union of federating units. In August 1942 the AICC's 'Quit India' resolution stated: "This constitution, according to the Congress view, should be a *federal* one, with the largest measure of autonomy for the federating units, and with the residuary powers vesting in these units."²⁵ Again, in September 1945, the Congress Working Committee declared in a resolution: "In accordance with the August 1942 Resolution of the AICC it will be for a *democratically elected Constituent Assembly* to prepare a Constitution for the Government of India, acceptable to all sections of the people. The Constitution, according to the Congress view, should be a federal one with the residuary powers vesting in the units."²⁶ As a vote-catching device, the election manifesto which the Congress Working Committee issued before the elections to the provincial legislative assemblies held in early 1946 gave the promise to the people: "The Congress has envisaged a free, democratic State with the fundamental rights and liberties of all its citizens guaranteed in the Constitution. This Constitution, in its view, should be a federal one with autonomy for its constituent units.... *The federation of India must be a willing Union of its various parts.* In order to give the maximum of freedom to the constituent units there may be a *minimum list of common and essential federal subjects which will apply to all units*, and a further optional list of common subjects which may be accepted by such units as desire to do so."²⁷

majority of each nationality are kept illiterate, isolated, and unable to interact with each other in a progressive fashion. Thus the principal obstacle to the right to self-determination of nationalities is the rule of imperialism, earlier direct and now through native collaborators. The big bourgeoisie of India, which served and serves as collaborators of imperialism, is composed of compradors from different nationalities – mainly Gujarati (including Parsi) and Marwari. This section of the bourgeoisie is as much the enemy of the toiling people of Gujarat and Rajasthan as of the toiling people of other regions. And it is their unity that can overthrow the rule of the imperialists and their Indian collaborators.

25. Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 1959, p. 240.

26. N. Mansergh (editor-in-chief), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47, [TOP]* vol. 6, p. 281.

27. N. Mitra (ed.), *Indian Annual Register, 1945*, Vol. II, July-Dec., p. 108.

Did the Congress high command mean what they said? The draft constitution prepared by the constitutional advisers had suggested that the Indian State should be called 'Federation of India'. But this proposal was rejected and it was decided, instead, that "India, that is Bharat, shall be called a Union of States". It was a very significant change. 'Federation' implies that the states — federating units — *voluntarily accede to it only for certain specific subjects and residuary powers are vested in them*. But in a 'Union', the Centre determines which subjects are to be under it and which subjects to delegate to the states and retains residuary powers. Thus in place of the promised federation a unitary State was imposed. Under the central administration there is not "a minimum list" but a maximum list of subjects. We shall soon return to it.

The concentration of political, economic and financial powers in the hands of the summit of the Indian bourgeoisie — central planning in a vast country instead of regional planning (a demand of the bourgeoisie of the South — Tamil, Telugu, etc., — in the forties and opposed by the big bourgeoisie of the North and the West²⁸), the various other policies pursued by the Centre to dominate the Indian economy to suit the interests of the big compradors destroyed the national bourgeoisie in some regions who had struggled and survived during colonial rule, and crippled certain regions, though endowed with natural resources. Indeed, the right of nationalities to self-determination can be won only after imperialism and its props are overthrown. But the autonomy of a state within a large state like India is a step in the progressive direction and better than concentration of all powers in the Centre. The decentralisation of powers in Brazil, for instance, — a semi-colony like India — does not mark any final qualitative change but a progressive step.²⁹

Monopoly of power, the objective

The Indian subcontinent was partitioned and the Indian Union was brought into existence not by the consent of the people freely expressed but through

28. see Raman Mahadevan, "The Politics of Business Interest Groups" (mimeo), paper presented at the seminar on "Business and Politics in India", Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, 29-31 Mar. 1989.

29. See Michael Lowy, "A 'Red' Government in the South of Brazil", *Monthly Review*, Nov. 2000; Walden Bello, "When Davos met Porto Alegre", *Frontline*, 3-16 Mar. 2001.

manoeuvres of British imperialism and a handful of Congress and League leaders.

The scheme which is popularly known as the Mountbatten award or settlement had actually been drawn up by V.P. Menon, the reforms commissioner of India, after consultation with Patel. Their object was to ensure *continuity with the British colonial regime in respect of civil and military administration* and “enable the Congress to have at one and the same time *a strong Central Government, able to withstand the centrifugal tendencies all too apparent at the moment.*”³⁰ To suppress “the centrifugal tendencies”, that is, the urge of the different nationalities to decide their own destiny — to enjoy the right of self-determination — “all too apparent at the moment” was one of the two main objectives of the Congress high command. That is why, whatever the rhetoric, they actually killed the Cabinet Mission plan, under which there was to be an undivided India with an unpartitioned Bengal and an unpartitioned Punjab with much greater powers to the provincial governments and with a Centre that would have control over a limited number of subjects — a plan which the Muslim League had accepted. On the false plea of preventing “balkanization” of India, Nehru rejected also the plan drawn up by Mountbatten and his staff. The main features of this plan were: the provinces would enjoy the right to make their own choice regarding the future constitutional set-up; Bengal and Punjab would be free to decide whether they would remain undivided with their integrity intact and to determine their relations with the rest of India; “the constituent assemblies, if more than one, should also create machinery for joint consultation among themselves on matters of common concern, particularly Defence, and for the negotiation of agreement in respect of these matters”; the native states after the lapse of British paramountcy would be “free to arrange by negotiation with those parts of British India to which power will be demitted whatever measure of association they consider to be in the best interests of the people.”³¹

To obtain a monopoly of power (of course, under the British umbrella), the Congress leaders opposed the plan that the provinces should *initially* be

30. V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, Calcutta, 1957, 358-9 — emphasis added.

31. TOP, Vol. X, pp. 497-9, 551-2.

successor states and that the central authority or authorities should emerge on the *voluntary* coming together of the provinces — their *voluntary* agreement to part with some power or powers in favour of some central authority — the federal principle. Every national region like Bengal, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra, etc., after the accession of native states and territorial adjustment was large enough to constitute an independent State — most of them far larger and more populous than most of the States of Europe. Let alone recognising the right of the nationalities of India to self-determination after dissolution of the native states and territorial adjustment, the Nehrus were not willing to tolerate any sort of federal set-up, and they killed the provincial choice, insisted on the partition of India on artificial religious lines, and drew the knife through the living flesh of Bengal and Punjab; the national regions or parts of them were coerced to join either Hindustan or Pakistan. The partition of India on communal lines, as Michael Brecher concluded after meeting Indian leaders including Nehru, was “a voluntary choice by Nehru, Patel and their colleagues.”³²

The Constitution of India that India’s ruling classes framed tramples underfoot the rights of the various nations of this subcontinent as it does the rights of individuals. Under the Constitution the indivisibility of the Indian Union cannot be questioned; that is, the demand for the right of self-determination including the right to secession has been made illegal. India’s Parliament dominated by a coterie representing the ruling classes *can dismember a state, increase or diminish its area, alter its boundaries and even its name.*³³

How top-heavy and autocratic the Indian State is can be seen from the fact that, even though states are mere units of the existing Indian State, and state governments are constituted through the same parliamentary process in the tight grip of the comprador and landlord ruling classes, these state governments enjoy only trivial rights vis-a-vis the Centre. The Governor of a state is not elected by its people but appointed by the President, that is, the ruling coterie. When the method of selecting the state governors was debated in the ‘Constituent Assembly’, Nehru was emphatic that they should be nominated by the Central government. The main purpose was to have a

32. Brecher, *op cit*, p. 375; see also fn. on p. 374; also Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj 1919-1947*, Vol. 2, pp. 112-23, 192-5, 273-86, 297-303.

33. See *The Constitution of India*, Part I, Article 3.

powerful Central government riding roughshod over even the formal parliamentary rights of the people. According to the Constitution, "The executive power of the State shall be vested in the Governor and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with this Constitution." He exercises his functions on the advice of a Council of Ministers but is authorised also to act in his discretion. And "the validity of anything done by the Governor shall not be called in question on the ground that he ought or ought not to have acted in his discretion." Every bill passed by the legislature of a state must receive the assent of the governor before it becomes law. The Governor may reserve the bill for the consideration of the President.

Article 257 empowers the Central government to give "such directions to a State as may appear" to it to be necessary so that "the executive power of every State" does not "impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive power of the Union."

On the basis of a report from the Governor, his appointee (and sometimes, in practice, without such a report), the President can dissolve or suspend the elected legislative assembly of a state, dismiss the ministry and impose President's rule ensuring unbridled exercise of powers by the Centre. Till 1990-91, President's rule was imposed 95 times in different states and Union territories; every state in India has been under President's rule at some time or other. When an "Emergency" is declared, the Centre can assume all legislative and executive powers of the different states.

The Indian Civil Service, which was the steel-frame of the British colonial administration, became together with its successor, the Indian Administrative Service, the steel-frame of the new regime after the transfer of power.

The higher rungs of the administration of a state were and are staffed by members of the ICS or IAS, the Indian Police Service and other Central services. This gives the Centre leverage even within the administrative machinery of the state government. The Centre enjoys a stranglehold on the administrative machinery of every state. When the Constitution was drawn up, "Most of the Chief Ministers were opposed to the creation of such an all-India cadre [as the I.A.S.]. They wanted to have their own services and control them, but the Sardar [Patel] sternly discouraged such separatist tendencies."³⁴

34. V.B. Kulkarni, *The Indian Triumvirate*, Bombay, 1969, pp. 401-2.

The higher appointments to the judiciary of a state are also made by the Centre.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (as amended in 1972) confers on the armed forces, as the very name of the Act implies, special powers in "disturbed" areas. It is the prerogative not of the ministers but of the governor of a state, the administrator of a Union territory or the Central government to declare an area "disturbed". When an area is declared as "disturbed", the state legislature has no jurisdiction over it. The Act empowers any armed forces officer, warrant officer or any person of equivalent rank that he may, "*if he is of the opinion* that it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of public order after giving due warning *as he may consider necessary*, fire upon or otherwise *use force even to the causing of death*" of persons not only disobeying any law, *but also those disobeying orders prohibiting the assembly of five or more persons* or those carrying weapons or "*things capable of being used as weapons*." The Act also authorises the military personnel to destroy any shelter from which, *in their opinion*, armed attacks "*are likely to be made*". The Act also allows the arrest *without a warrant, with whatever force as may be necessary*", of any person against whom "*a reasonable suspicion*" exists, that he is "*about to commit a cognisable offence*."

'Armies of occupation' have been stationed in those parts of Jammu and Kashmir which the Indian ruling classes have occupied and in the north-east for decades and a bitter, undeclared war has been raging against the nationalities like the Kashmiris, Nagas and Manipuris fighting to be free. The Indian Constitution contains every provision for stifling the voice of the people when it appears to be subversive of the rule of the classes which became heirs to the British raj. It is so drawn up as to suppress the various nations and nationalities of India.

Under the Constitution the Union government administers all important subjects — defence and industries related to defence, atomic energy and mineral sources necessary for its production, foreign affairs, railways, important highways, shipping and navigation, major ports, airways, posts and telegraphs, telecommunication services, currency, external trade, banking, insurance, important industries, mining, maritime fishing, important institutions for scientific and technical education, certain universities, the Supreme Court, the high courts, income tax (other than tax on agricultural

income), excise duties on many goods, customs duties, corporation tax and so on. The Constitution has empowered the Centre to appropriate all important sources of revenue and the sole right to print money. Even state subjects like law and order and education are indirectly controlled by the Centre. The residuary powers are vested in the Central government. By virtue of a resolution supported by two-thirds of the members present and voting at a sitting of the Rajya Sabha, Parliament has the power to legislate on any matter enumerated in the list of state subjects. As we have noted, when an 'Emergency' is declared, the Central government *can* assume all legislative and executive powers of the constituent units. And as we have just seen, all major sources of revenue are within the Union's sphere. The states have to depend on the finances which the Central government chooses to dole out.

Some time ago a *Business Standard* editorial entitled "Budget and the Left" said: "Strangely enough, the state [West Bengal 'Left Front'] government, for all its political rhetoric and critical stance, has not raised the fundamental objection against the federal financial system of India that they should have raised first. Why should the states have to depend on the Centre for financing their annual plan? Why should the transfer of resources have to be one way only and the principle of this transfer to be done on the basis of the principles decided by the Centre?"³⁵

There is nothing strange that the 'Left Front' government raised no objection against the 'federal' financial system, for they serve the same ruling classes of India which run the Centre through their political agents — the Congress, the Janata Party, the United Front or the NDA. The ruling classes patronise all the ruling parties — ruling at the Centre or in the states; at a particular moment they rely most on that political party which, armed with their support, may be able to mobilise most people under its banner. And they provide it with more black money than they give to other parties to win votes and serve them best. To quote Stanley Kochanek, "It is estimated that business provides about 90 per cent of the election funds."³⁶ After 1974, when his book was published, election expenses of candidates for election to the Lok Sabha or a provincial assembly have multiplied. And it would not be wrong to infer that the percentage of the election funds contributed by big

35. *Business Standard*, 5.3.1992.

36. Stanley Kochanek, *Business and Politics in India*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1974, p. 232.

business has risen considerably. Big businessmen make also individual contributions directly to selected MPs. To quote him again, "The Birla group, for example, in 1967 had a special relationship with 40 MPs that they had helped at the time of the fourth general elections."³⁷ And thus Indian democracy marches on.

India is the home of many nationalities

History tells us that before British rule India was never a single entity — neither politically, nor socially nor culturally. During her long history, large Indian empires arose under the Mauryas, Guptas and Mughals, but they never embraced the whole of India. These empires with shifting frontiers did not survive for a long time but vanished with the end of the rule of a dynasty. Even within such empires large regions remained virtually independent on payment of some tribute and were never integrated into one country. India's political unity, as Karl Marx said, was "imposed by the British sword".

The Indian subcontinent is larger in area and more populous and has a greater diversity in respect of language, culture, customs and traditions than Europe without the erstwhile Soviet Union.

India has never been one nation, it is the home of many nationalities, each with a distinct identity. Moreover, there are a multitude of ethnic groups and tribal communities. The representatives of the ruling classes themselves were forced to acknowledge this truth. The Linguistic Provinces Commission, appointed by the Constituent Assembly in June 1948 with three members — all from north India — had to admit that "Indian nationalism was yet in its infancy". It repeated more than once that "*India is yet to become a nation*" and insisted that until India became a nation "*all sub-national tendencies in the existing linguistic provinces should be suppressed*". It recommended that whatever powers a province would enjoy under the new constitution should be delegated to it by a strong Centre wielding "*overriding powers in regard to its territory, its existence, and its functions*".³⁸

The States Reorganisation Commission had to concede: "It has to be remembered that linguistic and group loyalties have deep roots in the soil

37. *Ibid*, 236.

38. *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission, 1948*, New Delhi, 1948, in *On Committees and Commissions in India 1947-73*, Vol. I, compiled by Virendra Kumar, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 67-9 — emphasis added.

and history of India. The culture-based regionalism, centring round the idea of linguistic homogeneity, represents to the average Indian values easily intelligible to him. *Indian nationalism, on the other hand, has still to develop into a positive concept.*³⁹

Though "India is yet to become a nation", the Linguistic Provinces Commission found several "sub-nations" in India. What it was pleased to call "sub-nationalism" has been described in a classic periphrasis as "culture-based regionalism, centring round the idea of linguistic homogeneity" by the States Reorganisation Commission.

Attempted imposition of Hindi

The unevenness inherent in the pattern of development under colonial rule has been accentuated under comprador-feudal rule. This has only sharpened the inequalities, suspicions and prejudices among different nationalities and ethnic groups. The Indian ruling classes have nurtured and fanned such hostilities through various acts of discrimination and bullying. An outstanding example is the attempt to impose Hindi as the 'national language'.

India had never a common language, the most elementary and easily recognised bond that helps to integrate people into one nation. But the Indian Constitution imposed Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of India. The Constitution made a provision that English would continue to be used for official purposes "for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution".

To promote the growth of so-called 'Indian nationalism' (actually, national chauvinism) and suppress various nationalities, certain powerful sections of the comprador big bourgeoisie and their political representatives have tried since almost the beginning of the 20th century to foist Hindi in the Devanagari script as the common language of the whole of India. Gandhi even suggested abolition of most other scripts — Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, etc., — in order "to solidify Hindu India".⁴⁰

In 1947 he even wished that "Hindusthani could have become the lan-

39. Government of India, *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission 1955*, p. 43 — emphasis added.

40. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 34, pp. 168-9; also Vol. 61, pp. 31-2. Emphasis added.

guage of the whole of Asia.”⁴¹

(At that time the Indian big bourgeoisie was dreaming dreams of dominating the whole of Asia — from the Near East to the Pacific Ocean excluding China and Japan — as underlings of the Anglo-American powers.)⁴²

The Hindi language has been intended for use as one of the chief instruments to establish the domination of the Indian big bourgeoisie over the different nationalities of India. Since the advent of Gandhi in India’s politics, the Congress leaders had organised systematic campaigns to make Hindi the *rashtra-bhasha* of India.⁴³ This was in conformity with their plan to have a unitary India with a powerful centre in the interests of the Hindus, Jain and Parsi business magnates. It became one of the causes of the communal estrangement between the two major communities of India — Hindu and Muslim.

When the Constitution was drawn up, no referendum was held either on the language issue or any other issue. There was deep-seated resistance to Hindi as the official language of the whole of India. This was reflected even among ruling class sections belonging to non-Hindi regions.

To evade open debate and discussion which would consolidate opposition and thwart the plan of the ruling classes, “Language provisions”, writes Selig Harrison, “were *pointedly* omitted from the Draft Constitution of October 1947, as well as from all subsequent versions until the very last”. And then Hindi was elevated as the official language of India by the *one-vote margin* in the Constituent Assembly; the Congress members, the nominees of the Congress high command, who formed the large majority of the members of the Assembly, had to follow the party’s directive though almost half of them were opposed to the decision.⁴⁴

Resentment against the imposition of Hindi on the non-Hindi-speaking people was bitter. During the debates in the Constituent Assembly, a member from Tamil Nadu, T.A. Ramalingam Chettiar, said that the south was

41. CWMG, Vol. 87, p. 216.

42. See Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, pp. 313-7.

43. See Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, pp. 127-8.

44. Selig Harrison, *op cit*, pp. 9-10, 282, where he refers to B.R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Linguistic States*, Bombay, 1955, p. 14.

faced with "a matter of life and death".⁴⁵ Shankarrao Deo of Maharashtra, a long-time member of the Congress Working Committee, lashed out at those who talked glibly of a common culture to deny the rights of different nationalities. He said that "the chief of the R.S.S. organisation appeals in the name of culture. Some Congressmen also appealed in the name of culture. Nobody tells us what this word culture means. Today, as it is interpreted and understood it only means the domination of the few over the many."⁴⁶

Since then, using the State apparatus and employing huge government funds, "the few" have tried to impose Hindi as the *sole* official language of India,⁴⁷ but because of the resistance from different nationalities, that object has been only partly fulfilled. (Ruling class political forces too from the non-Hindi speaking nationalities, particularly in Tamil Nadu, have made anti-Hindi agitation their staple in order to win popularity and divert attention from their overall failure to solve people's problems.) English, a foreign language, continues to be the major official language, dominates the higher educational institutions, and is a pre-requisite for any white-collar employment, leave alone entry into the elite. English is, indeed, the language of the Indian urban elite, many of whom are not at home in any Indian language. The dominant all-India press is in English, and the importance of English is growing by the day as the Indian economy is ever more closely tied to imperialism. Compared to English, even the vaunted *rashtra-bhasha* Hindi is a second-class language in India. As a result, the healthy development of various Indian languages and spread of education have been hampered and the intellectual and cultural life of the people has been retarded.

In the wake of the failure to effectively impose Hindi throughout India, the ruling classes of all regions have persisted in trying to whip up all-India 'patriotism' -- actually, national chauvinism. The Tamil film *Roja*, which

45. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. 9, No. 33, p. 1370; cited in Harrison, *op cit*, p. 283.

46. *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. 9, No. 33, p. 1430; quoted in Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

47. Moreover, Hindustani itself was, with obvious communal-cum-chauvinistic intent, shorn of Urdu words and heavily Sanskritised, thus alienating it even further from the common people, robbing it of its richness, and wilfully hurting Muslim sentiments (Urdu being wrongly portrayed as a Muslim language).

presents a caricature of the Kashmiri freedom fighters, is a case in point.

Whose interests does this *artificial* Indian unity, this 'one-nation concept', serve? The classes to which the powers of direct administration of the Indian subcontinent minus certain parts in the east and in the north-west, were handed over in August 1947 were determined to maintain like the British raj a strong, unitary, autocratic State. In 1947 the subcontinent had a population of more than forty crores; today the Indian Union alone has a population of more than one hundred crores belonging to various nationalities with diverse ways of life and diverse cultures. "Indian nationalism" — actually, national chauvinism — is intended to stifle the national consciousness of the different peoples of India; more importantly, it is meant to divert the restive population from the appalling failure and treachery of the ruling classes and their political representatives.

Diakov was right when he said that the "one-nation concept" was "the expression of the centralistic tendencies of the summit of the Indian bourgeoisie, primarily the capitalists of the provinces of Gujarat and Marwara.... This capitalistic group aspires to a monopoly to dominate the Indian market."⁴⁸ But this same bourgeoisie was actually surrendering that market to imperialism, content to be mere underlings.

Long ago, early in January 1931, Maulana Mohammed Ali, an erstwhile colleague of Gandhi and former Congress president, said from his deathbed: "The small monopolistic caste that desires to remain in control of the destinies of the Hindu community and that being the majority community, of the Indian nation as a whole through it — is the caste... of the Banya.... To my mind most of the agitation today is being finances, and partly for selfish reasons by the banias of Bombay and Gujarat..."⁴⁹

It was a tiny coterie of such big business magnates (largely Hindu, Jain and Parsi), and their political representatives, who refused to share power with any other party, even a party of the same comprador-feudal character representing the Muslim elite. Their sole aim was to be the sole successors to the British raj; they wanted an undivided India but, for the sake of a monopoly of power they were prepared to lop off certain parts of India in the east and the north-west. As noted before, for the artificial partition of

48. Cited in Selig Harrison, *ibid*, p. 158.

49. "Last words of Maulana Mohammed Ali", 1.1.31, A.I.C.C. Papers, file G-85/1931.

India (and the dismemberment of Bengal and Punjab) Nehru, Patel and their colleagues were mainly responsible.

It has been correctly stated that "The Constitutional status of the states is not much above the status of municipal corporations in some territories. Economically they have been crippled although they are burdened with all welfare activities. Politically they have been reduced to a position where they are at the mercy of the Centre".⁵⁰ Of course, state governments in the existing set-up also do not reflect the will of the people. Nor are the disputes of the state governments with the Centre really concerning the demands of the people. But state governments do face some pressure from the agitating people. the Constitution and the financial system, by reducing the states to mere municipalities, remove the seat of power even further from the people.

Since the transfer of power India's ruling classes have been seeking to consolidate their rule over the 'Indian empire' and to extend it under the umbrella of imperialist powers.

The Indian ruling classes suffered and have been suffering from what may be called a 'Great Power' syndrome. When the Second World War drew towards an end, these classes and their political agents began to cherish dreams of becoming a zonal power in the Indian Ocean region as junior partners of Anglo-American imperialism. Addressing army officers in October 1946, when India was still a British colony, Nehru declared: "India is today among the four great powers of the world: other three being America, Russia and China. But in point of resources India has a greater potential than China".⁵¹ He affirmed: "India is likely to dominate politically and economically the Indian Ocean region".⁵² That became the burden of Nehru's speeches and writings.⁵³ The Indian ruling classes hoped that the Anglo-American powers would equip them economically and militarily to enable them to fight communism in south and south-east Asia and to emerge as a zonal power.⁵⁴ Such a status, to which they still aspire, would help them whip up national chauvinist pride among the masses of the people and divert

50. Ranajit Roy, *The Agony of West Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972 edn., p. 150.

51. *SWJN*, 2nd series, Vol. 1, p. 311 — emphasis added.

52. *Ibid.*, Vol. 14, p. 325.

53. *SWJN*, Vol. 14, pp. 160, 187, 474-5, 477; Vol. 15, pp. 123, 562, 566, *passim*.

54. See Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, II, 313-7.

them from the ruling classes' failure and treachery. To fulfil their aspirations the ruling classes wanted to have *a Centre as strong as possible*.

5. Admission or Establishment of New States

The Constitution has a provision for conquest and annexation of new territories (Article 2). In 1974, Sikkim, a small Himalayan state, was annexed and it formed a new state within the Indian Union. And the Indian government gradually extended its rule into the North-Eastern Frontier Agency area (NEFA), a disputed territory, which was not under the administration of the British Indian government. After the transfer of power, Indian troops gradually penetrated into this mountainous region. Later, the Indian government annexed it and converted it into a full-fledged Indian state — Arunachal Pradesh.

6. Article 370

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution granted 'special status' to Jammu and Kashmir (J and K), which had acceded to the Indian Union for three subjects — defence, foreign affairs and communications. The instrument of accession had included the proviso that the accession was *provisional* and *would depend ultimately on the will of its people, freely expressed*. Significantly, the Constitution assumes that J and K's accession was final, not provisional. There is no mention in the Constitution of the proviso to the accession that the people of the state would be free to decide later whether to remain within the Indian Union or not. The Constitution betrayed the pledge repeatedly given to the people of J and K as well as to the United Nations.

In the beginning, while annexing J and K within the Indian Union, the Constitution recognised the rights of the state to have its own constituent assembly, parliament, head of the state, freedom from the jurisdiction of the Indian Supreme Court, etc. But the extreme Hindu communal forces — the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (which was founded in 1951 and which was later reincarnated as the Bharatiya Janata Party — BJP) and Jammu Praja Parishad — started an agitation for the repeal of Article 370 and the end of any special status for J and K. In its election manifesto before the 1952 general elections, the Jan Sangh demanded, among other things, the complete integration of J and K into India.⁵⁵ What Nehru, as we shall see, was trying to

55. See Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1957, pp. 175-6.

achieve by stages with his policy of double-speak and double-deal, the Jan Sangh wanted to accomplish more brazenly. It was what A.S. Venu called the “peculiar combination of the Brahman and the Bania”⁵⁶ that now faced the people of J and K. Later, several amendments were made to Article 370 to make a mockery of J and K’s ‘special status’.

The Indian ruling classes wanted to grab J and K as they wanted to grab many other small countries.⁵⁷ On 14 June 1947, V.K. Krishna Menon, who was Nehru’s confidant and often acted as his emissary, made a fervent plea to Viceroy Mountbatten to ensure that, on the lapse of British paramountcy, Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India *in the interest of the ‘free world’* (a euphemism for the world dominated by the imperialists and their accomplices).⁵⁸ In a note dated 17 June to Mountbatten, Nehru, after stating that the Muslims constituted 77.11 per cent of the population of the state, wrote that it should join India.⁵⁹ To Nehru, there were only two alternatives before J and K: either accession to the Indian Union, which was his heart’s desire, or accession to Pakistan.

But in *Naya Kashmir*, a document adopted in 1944, the National Conference of J and K led by Sheikh Abdullah envisaged the future of J and K as “an independent federation.... like a Switzerland of the East”.⁶⁰ Soon the National Conference raised the slogan that the Maharaja (to whose ancestor Gulab Singh the British had sold Kashmir and her people for Rs 75 lakh) must ‘Quit Kashmir’ and launched a struggle against the autocratic, oppressive rule of the Maharaja. The National Conference also sent a memorandum to the British Cabinet Mission, which came to India in March 1946, in which it raised the question of the sale (the Amritsar treaty) and demanded that J and K be ruled by the people of the state.⁶¹ Sheikh Abdullah’s telegram to the Cabinet Mission said: “Today the people of Kashmir cannot be pacified with only a representative system of governance. They want

56. A.S. Venu, *Dravidasthan*, Madras, 1954, p. 20; cited in Selig Harrison, *op cit*, p. 124

57. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Indian Nationality Problem and Ruling Classes*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 31-8.

58. A.C. Bose, “J and K’s Accession – II”, *Statesman*, 20 December 1995.

59. *TOP*, Vol. 11, pp. 446-8.

60. A.C. Bose, *op cit*.

61. See *SWJN*, Vol. 15, p. 367 and fn. 6; also p. 366, fn. 3.

freedom. Total freedom from the autocratic Maharaja.... Therefore after the termination of the British rule Kashmir has the right to become independent. We Kashmiris want to inscribe our own destiny."⁶²

Nehru resented this demand of the National Conference for the end of monarchy and for an independent Kashmir. When he was permitted by the maharaja to go to Kashmir, he saw Sheikh Abdullah in prison and persuaded him to retract the demand for the abolition of monarchy. Yet the savage repression that had been unleashed on the people and on the leaders and workers of the National Conference continued unabated.⁶³

The partition of India on communal lines, the savage massacre of several lakhs of the innocents on both sides of the Indo-Pak border running through Punjab and the forced migration of more lakhs of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims from one part of Punjab to another had their impact on neighbouring Jammu, where many Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Punjab migrated. Many Muslims were killed and, according to Alastair Lamb, at least five lakh Muslims fled from Jammu to Pakistan.⁶⁴ The maharaja did precious little to protect his Muslim subjects. There was a revolt of the Muslims in the Poonch area of Jammu, a Muslim-majority area contiguous to Pakistan. The maharaja did try to suppress it brutally. Then, on 24 October, a large number of tribesmen from the NWFP entered J and K in aid of the Poonch rebels. When they reached the Kashmir valley, they indulged in killing, burning and plundering and spared neither Hindus nor Muslims nor Sikhs.

Released from the maharaja's prisons in September 1947, Sheikh Abdullah and other National Conference leaders and workers, secular in their outlook even when the Indian subcontinent was being ravaged by political riots in the name of religion and was partitioned on a religious basis, resisted the invaders and were not in favour of joining Pakistan. Faced with the threat from the invaders, the maharaja acceded to India on 26 October in order to obtain armed help. To rally the support of the predominantly Mus-

62. Cited in *Blood in the Valley: Kashmir*, a report by a Joint Fact Finding Team comprising representatives of eight democratic rights organisations of the different states of India, published by Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana, Bombay, 1995, p. 24.

63. See *SWJN*, Vol. 15, pp. 366-9, 378-81, 389, 398, 400, 402, 403, 406, 415-6; also Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, pp. 304-5.

64. See *Blood in the Valley*, p. 26

lim population behind India, the Nehru government issued a communication the next day accepting the accession and agreed that *the accession would be final only after law and order was restored and the people of J and K freely decided in favour of it*. Reiterating this on 2 November, Nehru said: “*It was in accordance with this policy that we added a proviso to the Instrument of Accession of Kashmir.*”⁶⁵ This pledge to the people of J and K that the question of accession to India would finally be decided by them was solemnly given again to them by Nehru in his speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly on 25 November and by the Government of India in its complaint to the United Nations Organisation. The Nehru government promised that after the restoration of normalcy in the state, “*the people of the state will freely decide their fate, and that decision will be taken according to the universally accepted democratic means of plebiscite or referendum*. To ensure free and fair plebiscite, the supervision of the United Nations will be necessary”.⁶⁶

Again, on 10 June 1948, Nehru asserted: “*On the question of accession, India has repeatedly affirmed that the freely declared will of the people of Jammu and Kashmir shall prevail*”.⁶⁷ On behalf of the Government of India Nehru repeated the same pledge times without number.⁶⁸

Did Nehru mean what he said?

Speaking in India’s Parliament on 7 August 1952, Nehru declared: “*We do not want to win people against their will and with the help of armed force, and, if the people of Jammu and Kashmir State wish to part company with us, they can go their way and we shall go ours. We want no forced marriages, no forced unions. I hope this great Republic of India is a free, voluntary, friendly and affectionate union of the states of India.*”⁶⁹

It was, no doubt, a noble principle nobly phrased. But was Nehru true to his words? Did the statement convey Nehru’s real intentions or was it intended to deceive the people, as many of his statements were?

65. J. Nehru, *Independence and After*, Delhi, 1949, p. 57; see also p. 59 — emphasis added.

66. *Ibid*, p. 65 — emphasis added.

67. *Ibid*, p. 89 — emphasis added.

68. Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Speeches 1949-53*, Gol, Publications Division, Delhi, 1957, pp. 152, 341-2, 345, 352.

68a. *Ibid*, p. 361 — emphasis added.

Within a few days from the above announcement — on 25 August 1952 — Nehru wrote in a note to Sheikh Abdullah, then Prime Minister of J and K:

"Our general outlook should be such as to make people think that the association of Kashmir State with India is an accomplished and final act and nothing is going to undo it... I have held these views concisely and precisely for the last four years."

It was an instance of double-speak and double-deal which our historians are apt to ignore.

When the U.S. foreign secretary, Dulles, visited Delhi in May 1953, he expressed the view during his interviews with Nehru that "it would be much better [than a plebiscite] to settle the problem on the basis of partition or some other ad hoc arrangement".⁷⁰ Nehru shared Dulles's view and held that the solution of the Kashmir problem lay in the division of the state and of its human chattels between India and Pakistan. Nehru "continued to suggest a settlement on Kashmir broadly on the lines of the status quo".⁷¹ The Indian expansionists felt no scruples about violating their solemn commitments to the people as well as to the United Nations and destroying the integrity of the Kashmiri nation. They were willing to share Kashmir with Pakistan but, contrary to their repeated declarations, they would not allow her people, as they had not allowed the people of Bengal in 1947⁷², to decide their own fate, to "go their way" (to borrow Nehru's phrase). When Sheikh Abdullah "convinced that even Nehru could not subdue communal forces in India", "publicly proclaimed that Kashmir should become independent", he was dismissed and promptly arrested.⁷³ Since then, lakhs of Indian soldiers and paramilitary forces and a handful of Kashmiri stooges have been relied upon by India's ruling classes to crush the long-cherished

69. Quoted in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1979, p. 122 — emphasis added.

70. Nehru's note on interview with Dulles, 22 May 1953, cited in *ibid.* 128.

71. *Ibid.* 127, 272.

72. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Bengal and the Political Economy of her Dismemberment* (forthcoming).

73. Gopal, *op cit.* II, 131-3.

aspirations and the struggle of the Kashmiri people to be free.

Another important basic feature of the Indian Constitution is the parliamentary as opposed to the presidential form of government. With the decline of the Congress and loss of its monopoly of power, shaky coalitions of a large number of political parties form the government at the Centre. They rise and fall too quickly. There is much political instability. For some time proposals have been circulating about the presidential form replacing the parliamentary form of government. If the presidential form of government is adopted, it would at least assure the survival of a government for four or five years and obviate the need for frequent costly mid-term elections; and the ruling classes would be free from worry for the period. However, as yet there is no consensus among the ruling classes regarding such a scheme.

To sum up, we would quote Sarat Chandra Bose:

“A mixture of rank autocracy and milk-soft liberalism, our Constitution is the vanishing point of sovereignty, democracy and republicanism.... The Constitution is an undeclared war upon opposition, present and future”.⁷⁴

These are among the basic features of the Constitution. As noted before, the BJP-led government has assured the opposition that the basic features would not be changed; they cannot also bring about *major* changes in them as the opposition — right and ‘left’ — is anxious to retain them. What do the ruling classes intend to do by setting up the commission and its various committees? What does the mountain of labour seek to achieve? To anticipate the future it is necessary to have some understanding of two things: first, the ideology and politics of the BJP; second, the economic and political situation in the country, which has urged the ruling classes to undertake the review.

74. Sarat Bose, “A Constitution of Myths and Denials”, *op cit*, p. 428.

C. Ideology and Politics of the BJP

To know the professed ideology and politics of the BJP we need to have some knowledge of the ideology and role of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), of which the BJP is the political wing. The RSS has spawned many organisations to carry out its tasks on various fronts and they are all under the control of RSS activists.

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh, from which the BJP has descended, was founded in 1951 by Shyama Prasad Mookerjee (who had been president of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha for some years) and the RSS. M.S. Golwalkar, the *sarsanghchalak* (the supreme leader of the RSS) sent five of its activists to help Shyama Prasad to set up the Jan Sangh. Among them were Atal Behari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani.⁷⁵ The RSS's aims were the Jan Sangh's, and later, the BJP's in the political sphere.

The organisational principle of the RSS is *ek chalak anuvartita* (obedience to one leader). Behind the facade of some elections the Congress has also functioned on the same principle during the Gandhian era and later. Gandhi insisted on unquestioning obedience to his directives. There was broad agreement on many issues between the Gandhian leadership of the Congress and the All India Hindu Mahasabha (the leaders of which like B.S. Moonje and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya took prominent roles in organising the RSS). When the All India Hindu Mahasabha was founded at Hardwar in 1915, Gandhi was a member of its Subjects Committee. Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Daulatram, etc, were intimately associated with the Mahasabha for some time.⁷⁶ Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, M.R. Jayakar and others were leaders of both organisations for quite some time. While the Mahasabha openly championed the interests of the Hindu upper strata, the Gandhian leadership of the Congress did so not openly; they wore a cloak of 'Indian nationalism'. The big Marwari and Gujarati compradors like the Birlas, as we shall see, were close to the Gandhian leadership as well as to the Mahasabha and the RSS, but for a long time they depended mostly on the former for achieving their aims.

There was an important difference also. While the Gandhian leadership

75. Tapan Basu *et al*, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, New Delhi, 1993, p.48.

76. B.B. Misra, *The Indian Political Parties*, Delhi, 1976, p. 164.

launched some *seemingly* anti-British struggles,⁷⁷ the Mahasabha and the RSS never directed their attacks against the British and always against the Muslims for a greater share of British patronage for the Hindu upper strata. Veer Savarkar raised the slogan “Hinduise all politics and militarise Hindudom”. Before World War II, he urged Hindus to join the British Indian army.⁷⁸ As B.B. Misra said, “Dominated from its inception by a class of landed aristocracy and tradition-bound upper-caste educated Hindus, its leadership used religion as a means to obscure the basic economic issue of urban and rural interests, especially in the Punjab and Bengal.”⁷⁹ The Mahasabha movement, to quote Misra again, “was unrelated to the interests of the Hindu masses”.⁸⁰

It may be noted that the Mahasabha leaders like Moonje and Malaviya, patrons of the RSS, were no less to blame for the unnatural partition of India on communal lines than Congress leaders like Gandhi and his associates. If they had not rejected the Muslim leaders’ proposals for the replacement of separate electorate by joint electorate, which the latter offered more than once — in 1927, 1930, 1931 and 1935 —,⁸¹ the awful tragedy that overtook the people of India, particularly Bengal and Punjab, and also Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura, Sind, etc., could have been averted. The use of religion for political gains for the upper strata of society has been the cause of inconceivable tragedies and poses a threat to the lives of the people of the entire Indo-Pak subcontinent.

77. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1989 and Vol. II, Bombay, 1995.

78. Myron Weiner, *op cit*, p. 172.

79. Misra, *op cit*, p. 322.

80. *Ibid*, p. 164.

81. Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. I, pp. 276-83; Vol. II, pp. 38, 85; G.D. Birla to P. Thakurdas, 22 Aug. and 1 Sep. 1932, PT Papers, File 126, Part 2; David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 243; Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay, 1957, pp. 400-2; John Gallagher, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (ed. by Anil Seal), Cambridge, 1982, pp. 194, 196-8; Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 268-9; Kanji Dwarkadas, *India's Fight for Freedom 1913-37*, Bombay, 1966, pp. 383-4, 404; Frank Moraes, *Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas*, Bombay, 1957, p. 134 and *Witness to an Era*, London, 1973, p. 32; C. Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore, 1961, p. 113.

What the RSS stands for

The RSS was inaugurated in 1925 at Nagpur by K.B. Hedgewar and reorganised in 1927 by B.S. Moonje. The time of its formation is significant. The withdrawal of the non-co-operation movement by Gandhi in February 1922 gave rise to widespread confusion and resentment. The “unprecedented fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims” during the anti-colonial struggle soon yielded to mutual distrust and strife. In 1923 a movement called *shuddhi* for re-conversion of Hindus who had been previously converted to Islam was started by Swami Shraddhanand. Both the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha took up in earnest the tasks of proselytizing Muslims and protection of the cow. The *shuddhi* and *sangathan* (organisation) movements were sought to be countered by *tabligh* and *tanzim* movements of the Muslims. Serious communal riots broke out in North India, especially in Punjab and U.P. There occurred a Hindu-Muslim riot also in Nagpur in 1923.

Hedgewar wrote that with withdrawal of the non-co-operation movement, “Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict was nakedly on view.... The yavan-snakes reared on the milk of Non-Co-operation were provoking riots in the nation with their poisonous hissing”⁸² (the RSS’s deep-seated hatred for the Muslims is reflected in such utterances). By this time B.R. Ambedkar had started organising the *dalits* against the upper caste, especially Brahmanic, social hegemony — much to the dislike of the Hedgewars. Maharashtra had a long tradition of struggle against this hegemony — the struggle which had been started by Jyotiba Phule and his Satyashodhak Samaj in the 1870s. The RSS was inimical not only towards Muslims but all assertion by the oppressed castes.

The RSS raised the slogan of ‘Hindustan for the Hindus’. Even today the RSS family stands for a Hindu Rashtra. The chief of the RSS, Sudarshan, said on 14 August 2000 in an interview on the BBC: “We do not accept the concept of the minorities.” *According to him, the minorities must accept the ‘culture’ of the majority in the land.* The RSS idea of culture, as clarified in the writings by its chiefs for decades, says A.G. Noorani, “is identical to religion”.⁸³ The RSS family claims that it is the ‘culture’ of the Hindu nation that forms the

82. C.P. Bhishikar, *Keshav Sanghnirmata*, Pune, 1979, p. 7; quoted in Tapan Basu *et al.*, *op cit.*, p. 14.

83. A.G. Noorani, “Religion and State”, *Statesman*, 31.8.2000.

national culture. Noorani writes: "Not long ago, Murli Manohar Joshi, now Minister for Human Resources Development, asked Muslims to call themselves 'Mohammadiya Hindus'."⁸⁴

The RSS's 'Hindu nationhood' would not recognise the existing differences between castes and castes, between classes and classes and between Hindus of one nationality and those of another. Its professed aim has been to defend Brahmanic culture and strengthen the hegemony of the Hindu upper castes against all challenges. It talks of building a Hindu Rashtra (nation) and State on the model of *Manusmriti* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* — a Hindu nation under upper caste hegemony and an authoritarian police State.

The RSS was organised along military lines. It set out to build a Hindu militia and set up *shakhas* in different parts of India to impart physical training to the Hindu youth. The Hindu Mahasabha officially recognised it in 1932 and encouraged and helped it to build its branches all over India. As Misra says, "Though apparently non-political and within the law, the outlook of its members, according to official reports, was definitely anti-Muslim and involved them in communal riots."⁸⁵ And in Maharashtra "the RSS was closely involved in the social conflict between the Brahman and non-Brahman communities."⁸⁶

The crucial operative element of the RSS's politics, however, was unstated: *viz*, *service to imperialism*. The RSS remained aloof from all anti-colonial struggles. M.S. Golwalkar, who succeeded Hedgewar in 1940 as its *sarsanghchalak*, fulminated against Muslims, Christians, communists, socialists, etc., who, according to him, though born in this land, were not true to their salt, or their faiths were of 'foreign origin'. But he was silent about the British imperialists, the main enemy of the Indian people. He decried composite nationalism which was directed against the British raj. He wrote: "The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis for our concept of a nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu nationhood and made many of the freedom movements virtually anti-British movements. *Being anti-British was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view*

84. *Ibid.*

85. Misra, *op cit*, 594-5 — emphasis added.

86. Myron Weiner, *op cit*, p. 191.

has had disastrous effects upon the entire course of the independence struggle, its leaders and the common people."⁸⁷ No doubt, the doctrine that the composite-nationalism of the Indian people, which sought to overthrow British rule and achieve freedom for India, was 'reactionary' is quite significant. It appears as an apology for British colonial rule.

Fiction of a 'Hindu nation'

What is "the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu nationhood"? It takes for granted that all Hindus, irrespective of ethnic origin, language, ways of life, culture, etc., constitute a homogeneous all-India Hindu nation. This all-India Hindu nationalism is a fiction. As we have noted, India is the home of many nationalities and each of them like Tamil, Telugu, Oriya, Marathi or Bengali has a common language, a common past, common ways of life, common culture and a distinct identity of its own. There is no one Hindu culture in India. Though Brahmanic culture has had a strong influence, for instance, on Bengali culture, the latter has a distinct character of its own. Its bedrock is pre-Aryan beliefs and practices and in successive periods Buddhism, Jainism, Brahmanic religion, Islam and Christianity have made their contributions to Bengal's composite culture. In old days Bengal was outside the pale of Brahmanic culture.

Hinduism is, indeed, a generic name for faiths and practices which differ from region to region, even from caste to caste. In Bengal there is hardly any temple to Ram, where Bengali Hindus worship. In Bengal Ram is looked upon as the hero of a great epic. He represented Brahmanic culture well. He killed Shambuk, who, though a Shudra, dared to study the Vedas. Indrajit or Meghnad, Ravan's son, the chief obstacle to Ram's victory over Ravan, was killed not in a fair fight. In Ram Rajya, Sita had no place. Hanuman, one of the chief gods in some regions, is not worshipped by Hindus in Bengal. The issue of cow-killing has led to slaughter of men in many places. But the cow is not venerated in Bengal as it is in some regions. Cow-protection is one of the main items of the RSS family's agenda.

The RSS seeks to impose North Indian Brahmanic culture on the entire people of India. Like the top Congress leaders before and after 1947, the RSS family is bent on forcing Sanskritised Hindi on the one hundred crore

⁸⁷. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore, 1966, pp. 142-3; quoted in Tapan Basu et al, *op cit*, p. 29; emphasis added.

people of India in order to develop "the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu nationhood" and stifle the growth of various national languages. Equally sinister was the policy of the rulers of Pakistan who tried to impose Urdu as the common language of the people of entire Pakistan, but unfortunately for them, it was successfully resisted by the people of East Bengal. And East Bengal overthrew Pakistan's rule and became a new state — Bangladesh.

In fascist footsteps

As we have said, the RSSs organisation was founded on the principle — *ek chalak anuvartita* — the fascist principle. Moonje, the Hindu Mahasabha leader and one of the founders of the RSS, saw Mussolini in March 1931 and said to him: "Your Excellency,... I shall have no hesitation to raise my voice from the public platform both in India and England when occasion may arise in praise of your Balilla and Fascist organisations. I wish them good luck and every success."

In 1938, Golwalkar wrote: "German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races — the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, *a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.*"⁸⁸ The racial chauvinism of Nazi Germany was directed not only against the Jews — Jews like Einstein had to flee their homeland and six million other Jews were exterminated in gas chambers — but also against other peoples of the world. The Nazi racists preached the superiority of the Aryan race, especially of the German people, and held that it was their 'manifest destiny' to rule the inferior races. According to them, these inferior races included the Indians about whom Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was not wanting in disparaging remarks. It is these German Nazis with their hated racial chauvinism who plunged the world into the worst war which the world has as yet seen and which claimed the lives of crores of people and caused devastation in three continents. It is very significant that the RSS leaders sought their followers to imbibe this

88. M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1938, p. 27; quoted in Tapan Basu *et al*, *op cit*, p. 26 — emphasis added.]

most pernicious and dangerous doctrine of the enemies of mankind — “a lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”. Those who preached the doctrine perished in the flames they kindled: those who follow in their footsteps may escape their fate but the lamentable fact is that in the process they are sure to cause immense suffering and losses to the common people, some evidence of which is already apparent.

Congress leaders like Gandhi also paid homage to Mussolini and Hitler. On his way back to India after the Round Table Conference in London, Gandhi met Mussolini in Italy and, despite Romain Rolland’s previous warning and despite his own creed of non-violence, he lavished praises on Mussolini in his letter of 20 December 1931 to Rolland.⁸⁹ When the League of Nations asked for his opinion on the attack that fascist Italy had launched against Ethiopia in 1935, the Mahatma had no word of condemnation for them and he refused to be interviewed on the question.⁹⁰ In 1940, from the time of Holland’s surrender to the Nazi hordes, “Hitler’s stocks are steadily rising in his [Gandhi’s] eyes”.⁹¹ The Mahatma praised Hitler’s “*sadhana*”, “his single-minded devotion to his purpose that should be the *object of our admiration and emulation*” and his *unclouded and unerring intellect*”.⁹² And Nehru, the self-styled socialist, afflicted with a ‘great power’ syndrome⁹³, hailed Hitler as “an agent of destiny to the extent that the days of small nations are past”.⁹⁴ Ironically, the “agent of destiny” was consumed by the flames that he kindled while the small nation-states like Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, to which Nehru referred, rose like the Phoenix from the ashes as independent sovereign states and are today among the imperialist states of the world.

The Tripuri Congress session in 1939 resounded with panegyrics on Hitler and Mussolini. Seth Govind Das, chairman of the reception committee, and Govind Ballav Pant, then U.P.’s prime minister, while praising Mussolini and Hitler, held that Gandhi’s position in the Congress was the same as

89. *CWMG*, Vol. 48, p. 429.

90. *CWMG*, Vol. LXI, p. 301 and fn.1, p. 302.

91. G.D. Birla, *Bapu*, Vol. 4, p. 53; *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, Bombay, 1968, p. 273.

92. *CWMG*, Vol. LXXII, pp. 70, 100, 193 — emphasis added.

93. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India’s Nationality Problem and Ruling Classes*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 30-8.

94. *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 134.

theirs in the Fascist and the Nazi party respectively.⁹⁵

Backing of the comprador bourgeoisie

It is not surprising that on many issues there was broad agreement between the Gandhian leadership of the Congress and the leadership of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. Both represented the same classes — the comprador big bourgeoisie (particularly the Marwari and Gujarati compradors), the big landlords and princes. Both sought to preserve the economic and social status quo, including the *varnashrama dharma*.⁹⁶

Though the Marwari and Gujarati big bourgeoisie leaned most on the top Congress leaders — Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, etc. — for achieving their goal — self-government within the British empire, they did not neglect the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. For instance, G.D. Birla's relations with Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai were very close. Malaviya's newspaper, *The Leader*, published from Allahabad, owed its existence to the Birlas.⁹⁷ In 1926 G.D. Birla contested and won the Banaras-Gorakhpur seat in the Central Legislative Assembly as a candidate of the 'Responsivist Party' led by Malaviya and Lajpat Rai. Lajpat Rai hoped that Birla would become the leader of the Hindus of North India.⁹⁸ It may be noted that Lajpat Rai urged in 1924 the partition of Punjab and the creation of a Muslim and a non-Muslim India.⁹⁹ G.D. Birla, whom Gandhi regarded as one of the "mentors" whom "God has given me"¹⁰⁰, extolled in a letter to Gandhi the virtues of proselytizing Muslims by force.¹⁰¹

On 2 December 1926, Motilal Nehru, then a most prominent leader of the Swarajist Party, wrote to Jawaharlal: "I could not hope for better results. It was simply beyond me to meet the kind of propaganda started against me under the auspices of the Malaviya-Lala gang.... communal hatred and

95. N. Mitra (ed.), *The Indian Annual Register (IAR)*, Vol. I, Jan.-June, pp. 324, 332, 335.

96. See Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, pp. 69-74 for Gandhi's stand on the issue.

97. R.N. Jaju, *G.D. Birla: A Biography*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 98.

98. Birla, *Bapu*, Vol. 1, p. 9; *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, pp. 21, 26.

99. See R.J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity 1917-40*, Delhi, 1974, p. 18; Dietmar Rothermund, *The Phases of Indian Nationalism and Other Essays*, Bombay, 1970, p. 20.

100. Birla, *Bapu*, Vol. 1, p. 10.

101. *Ibid*, p. 9.

heavy bribing of the voters was the order of the day.... The Malaviya-Lala gang *aided by Birla's money* are making frantic efforts to capture the Congress."¹⁰² (It may be noted that, before the elections in 1926, the Swaraj Party in north India became "as good a Hindu body as one would want" and Motilal himself, commented Viceroy Irwin, became "a true Hindu").¹⁰³

A Marwari comprador, Padmaraj Jain, was secretary of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in the early thirties. The Hindu Mahasabha was revived in Bengal in 1939 when, at the end of it, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha Conference was held in Calcutta under the presidentship of Veer Savarkar. Funds were very liberally contributed by the big Marwari compradors — the Birlas, Sir Badridas Goenka, Seth Bansidhar Jalan, D.P. Khaitan, Radhakissen Kanodia, etc. Big Hindu landlords also were generous patrons of the Mahasabha.¹⁰⁴ It was at this time that Shyama Prasad Mookerjee emerged as a prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha.

The Bharat Sevashram Sangha, which had close links with the Mahasabha, enjoyed Marwari support. The Bengal branch of the RSS did not fail to receive their patronage. The Birlas' Shilpa Vidyalaya in Calcutta was reported to accommodate the Calcutta headquarters of the RSS.¹⁰⁵ Till the other day, perhaps even now, the RSS leadership in Bengal was (and is) wholly non-Bengali.

Shyama Prasad Mookerjee

A brief discussion of the role of the founder of the Jan Sangh may not be irrelevant. The BJP is celebrating his birth-centenary this year (2000-1). The CPI(M) deputy chief minister of West Bengal (now chief minister) did not attend the inaugural function held in Calcutta but acknowledged in a statement that Shyama Prasad was a great leader of the people and added that their 'Left Front' government would celebrate the occasion.

Close were the ties between Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and the big

102. Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Bombay, 1958, pp. 49-50 — emphasis added.

103. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-34*, Delhi, 1978, pp. 121-3; David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, pp. 129-30, 131-4, 136.

104. See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 135-7.

105. *Ibid*, p. 236.

Marwari business magnates who served as compradors to European capital. Together with European business houses the Marwari compradors had almost a monopoly of Bengal's wholesale trade. Their influence on Bengal's politics was most sinister. As their prosperity depended on their service to British capital, they acted as a prop of British rule. They adopted the British policy of raising a communal divide between the two major communities of Bengal. Deterioration of communal relations in Bengal, especially from about the mid-thirties, owed much to them.¹⁰⁶ In playing this role they derived their strength from the Congress high command as the latter owed their sinews of war to them.¹⁰⁷

It needs to be borne in mind that *as early as January 1938*, G.D. Birla, the outstanding leader of the Indian big bourgeoisie, proposed to Gandhi as well as to Viceroy Linlithgow that the Indian subcontinent should be divided into two — a Muslim federation and a non-Muslim federation.¹⁰⁸ It meant partition of Bengal as well as of Punjab.

Not surprisingly, there were also close ties between the Congress high command and Shyama Prasad Mookerjee. In June-July 1945, Viceroy Wavell convened a conference of Indian political leaders of different hues at Simla to reconstitute the Viceroy's executive council with representatives of political parties. He asked the Congress and the League to suggest names of members of the Council and he would be free to choose members from among them. The panel submitted by the Congress included the name of Shyama Prasad.¹⁰⁹ In the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly held

106. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Bengal and the Political Economy of Her Dismemberment* (forthcoming).

107. CWMG, Vol. LXXVI, p. 436; Birla, *In the Shadow*, pp. 280-1; Birla, *Bapu*, Vol. III, p. 189 and Vol. IV, p. 330; S. Gopal, *op cit*, Vol. I, p. 190; TOP, Vol. IX, pp. 1009, 1010; Rani Dhavan Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 34, 56 (note 40), 167, 191, 245; Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay, 1957, p. 388 and 'Foreword' to G.D. Birla's *In the Shadow*; Kaka Kalelkar (ed.), *To a Gandhian Capitalist*, Wardha, 1951, p. 37; D.S. Tendulkar, *Mahatma* (Vols. II-VIII, Bombay, 1951-4), Vol. II, p. 285; D.V. Tamhankar, *Sardar Patel*, London, 1970, pp. 17-8; Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress*, pp. 57-8.

108. Birla to Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, 11.1.1938, Birla, *Bapu*, Vol. III, p. 144; John Glendevon, *The Viceroy at Bay*, 88-9; cited in *Words to Remember* (a book on G.D. Birla, sponsored by the Birla family), Bombay, 1983, 82-3.

109. TOP, Vol. V, pp. 1202-5.

at the end of 1945, Patel wanted the Bengal Congress to allow the Mahasabha president to go uncontested.¹¹⁰ But the Bengal Congress election committee set up a candidate against him and Shyama Prasad could not save his security deposit. All Mahasabha candidates were routed; the security deposits of all of them were forfeited. While, for instance, Shyama Prasad polled 346 votes, the Congress candidate obtained 10,216 votes.¹¹¹ In the provincial assembly election in early 1946 also, all Mahasabha candidates were defeated, except Shyama Prasad who won from a special constituency — the Calcutta University. Such was the representative character of the Hindu Mahasabha and its leader in Bengal. But the Congress high command nominated the Mahasabha president as a member of the Indian Constituent Assembly in 1946.¹¹²

After the serious political riots in Calcutta in the name of religion, engineered by interested persons, Shyama Prasad, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and other “friends from Bengal” met Patel in New Delhi in September 1946, and Patel instructed them about “what should be done for the future”.¹¹³

Who pressed for partition?

While hailing British Prime Minister Attlee’s announcement about the transfer of power by June 1948, Nehru spoke to Wavell on 21 February 1947 “of the possible partition of the Punjab and Bengal”.¹¹⁴ The Hindu Mahasabha led by Shyama Prasad immediately started a movement for the dismemberment of Bengal on communal lines — a consummation devoutly wished by G.D. Birla since January 1938. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress high command and their men in Bengal like Surendramohan Ghosh worked in close collaboration to dismember Bengal.

Early in March 1947 the Congress Working Committee raised the demand for the partition of Punjab on communal lines. Congress president

110. Rani Dhavan Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel*, p. 264.

111. Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj; A Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 559.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 570.

113. Patel’s letter to Gaganbehari Lal Mehta, 16.9.46, in Durga Das, *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. III, Ahmedabad, 1972, p. 181.

114. *TOP*, vol. IX, p. 785.

Kripalani announced that the principle would apply to Bengal also. Conveying the decision of the Committee, Nehru wrote to Wavell on 9 March that Bengal too would have to be partitioned.¹¹⁵

In March the *Hindustan Times*, the organ of the Birlas, raised the demand for the division of Bengal on communal lines, *even if India was not partitioned*.¹¹⁶ The same demand was voiced by Nehru in his letter of 9 March to Wavell and again in his letter of 1 May to Viceroy Mountbatten. Shyama Prasad did not lag behind. He too insisted several times that Bengal must be dismembered whether India was partitioned or not.¹¹⁷

While leading the movement for the partition of Bengal in close collaboration with the top leaders of the Congress, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha declared in a statement of 19 March 1947:

“Partition of Bengal alone will offer a peaceful solution of the grave communal problem confronting the province. This will give the two major communities in Bengal full freedom to develop their own culture and tradition in the areas where they are in predominant numbers; both are sure to recognise soon that it will be to their mutual interest to guarantee full protection to the respective minorities in the two (proposed) provinces.”¹¹⁸

(To the protagonist of *Hindutva*, ‘culture’ meant religion.)

Surendra Mohan Ghosh, president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, said later to Leonard Gordon that Shyama Prasad “was saying privately: let us divide now and let the British leave. Later we will take over the whole territory”.¹¹⁹

There seems to be truth in what Ghosh told Gordon. Soon after the decision to dismember Bengal was finally taken, the Hindu Mahasabha declared in a resolution: “...*there will never be peace unless the separate areas are brought back into the Indian Union and made its integral parts.*” The

115. CWMG, Vol. LXXXVII, pp. 538, 124; TOP, Vol. IX, pp. 785, 899.

116. E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power in India 1945-7*, London, 1954, p. 150.

117. TOP, Vol. IX, p. 899; Vol. X, pp. 519, 557; Durga Das (ed.), *op cit*, Vol. IV, p. 40; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 April 1947.

118. IAR, 1947, Vol. I, Jan.-June, p. 48; quoted in Gordon, *op cit*, pp. 574-5.

119. Interview with S.M. Ghosh, New Delhi, 26 June 1972, Gordon, *ibid*, p. 575.

Mahasabha sought Indian citizenship for East Bengal Hindus and nationalist Muslims and held that East Bengal would be made a part of the Indian Union in no distant future.¹²⁰ This resolution was an invitation to war, not to peace. The Mahasabha's resolution shows how hypocritical was its president's 19 March statement. The Mahasabha and its president did not want communal peace but endless conflict, which meant death and destruction for the poor of both the communities. And this endless conflict served (and serves) well the interests of their patrons.

During the movement Shyama Prasad was leading to dismember Bengal, he and the Mahasabha were preaching a pernicious theory — the theory of hostages. The Muslims in West Bengal and in the Indian Union would be treated as hostages after the division of Bengal.¹²¹ The Hindu Mahasabha conference held in April assured the non-Muslims in East Bengal that "they will have the sanction, not simply moral, but in certain eventualities also physical of the new Government of West Bengal".^{121a}

It is worth noting that leading Congressmen also were enamoured of this theory of hostages. Abul Kalam Azad wrote that at the meetings of the A.I.C.C. held on 14 and 15 June to ratify the decision of the Working Committee to partition India as well as Bengal and Punjab on communal lines, "It was being openly said in certain circles that the Hindus in Pakistan need have no fear as there would be 45 millions of Muslims in India and if there was any oppression of Hindus in Pakistan, the Muslims in India would have to bear the consequences." Azad continued: "In the meeting of the A.I.C.C., the members from Sind opposed the resolution vehemently. They were given all kinds of assurances. Though not on the public platform, in private discussion they were even told by some people that if they suffered any disability or indignity in Pakistan, India would retaliate on the Muslims in India.... It implied that partition was being accepted on the basis that in both India and Pakistan, the minority would be looked upon as hostages in order to safeguard the security of the minority of the other state. The idea of retalia-

120. *IAR*, 1947, Vol. I, Jan.-June, p. 74; also Bengal Governors' reports for first half of June, July, and second half of July, cited in Gordon, *ibid*, 586-7.

121. *Ibid*, p. 575.

121a. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 8.4.1947, cited in Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 229, fn. 90.

tion as a method of assuring the rights of the minorities seemed to me barbarous. Later events proved how justified my apprehensions were. The rivers of blood which flowed after partition on both sides of the new frontier grew out of this sentiment of hostages and retaliation." Azad added: "I remember in particular Kiran Shankar Roy... who first brought this to my notice. He also spoke to Acharya Kripalani who was then President of Congress and pointed out that it was a most dangerous theory. Once such a feeling was allowed to grow, it would lead to the oppression and murder of Hindus in Pakistan and of Muslims in India. Nobody however paid any attention to Kiran Shankar Roy. In fact, many ridiculed him for his fears. They also told him that once India was divided, we must accept the theory of hostages."¹²² That is, innocent, helpless Hindus in Pakistan, victims of "the war of succession" between their leaders and the League leaders, would be massacred for the crimes of some of their co-religionists in the Indian Union and the Muslim minority in India, though innocent, would be butchered for the criminal acts of some co-religionists of theirs in Pakistan.

This inhuman doctrine had its adherents also among some League leaders like Chowdhry Khaliuzzaman.¹²³

Whether Shyama Prasad or leading Congressmen or Khaliuzzaman, they all were out to sow hatred among men and destroy life, not to build it on a better and humane basis. Claiming to serve their co-religionists, they were actually digging the graves of the latter; for their policy could (and did) only cause violence and counter-violence to spiral endlessly higher and higher. Despite their claims to serve their own communities, they were indeed enemies of all communities. For winning a greater share of concessions doled out by the British raj for the elite of their communities, they were directing all their efforts to break up the unity of the people, which was the precondition for the people's victory in the struggle against their common enemies — British imperialism, Indian big capital and big landlordism — against poverty, ill-health, ignorance and squalor.

It may be noted that big Hindu business magnates, mainly non-Bengali, came out of the background and took an active part in partitioning Bengal

122. Azad, *op cit*, pp. 198-9.

123. Khaliuzzaman to Jinnah, 7 Oct. 1942, in Chowdhry Khaliuzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore, 1961, p. 425.

on communal lines. Meeting on 30 April 1947, they formed a committee including B.M. Birla, Sir Badridas Goenka, B.L. Jalan, D.C. Driver, M.L. Shaw and Nalini Sarkar to implement their resolution demanding partition of Bengal.¹²⁴ As noted before, G.D. Birla had been pleading with Gandhi since at least 11 January 1938 for the partition of India into two federations — one, Muslim and the other, non-Muslim — and consequent partition of Bengal and Punjab.

On 5 June 1947, after the plan to dismember India as well as Bengal and Punjab on communal lines and to award dominion status to the two new states — India and Pakistan — had been finally adopted and announced, B.M. Birla, replying to Patel from Calcutta, congratulated him, for “things have turned out according to your desire.... *I am very happy that the Bengal partition question has also been settled by you.*” He recommended to Patel that “we should consider Hindustan as a Hindu State with Hinduism as the State religion” and that Shyama Prasad (who was not even a Congress member) should be made the leader of the West Bengal Congress Assembly Party, that is, chief minister of the new province of West Bengal to be formed.¹²⁵ When the minds of tens of millions of Bengalis were haunted by anxiety, alarm and profound unhappiness, the big compradors were jubilant: their long-term plan had succeeded. Instead of being chief minister of West Bengal, Shyama Prasad was made the first minister for industries of the Nehru government after the transfer of power.

What tender solicitude did the Nehrus and the Shyama Prasads feel after the partition for Hindu Bengal, the distressed damsel for whom their hearts had been bleeding? On 1 December 1949, West Bengal’s chief minister B.C. Roy, politically one of their kind, wrote to India’s Prime Minister Nehru: “You are under the impression that your Government gave us a large grant for the purpose of ‘relief and rehabilitation’. Do you realise that the total grant received for the purpose from your Government in two years — 1948-49 and 1949-50, is a little over three crores and the rest about five crores was given in the form of a loan.... I do say that the grant so far given is insignificant for 26 lakh displaced people because it works out at about Rs 20 per capita spread over two years.”¹²⁶ (There were successive waves of

124. *The Statesman*, 1 May 1947.

125. Durga Das (ed.) *op. cit.*, volume IV, pp. 55-6 — emphasis added.

126. Saroj Chakrabarti, *With Dr. B.C. Roy and Other Chief Ministers*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 140-2.

refugee movement from East Pakistan to West Bengal and from West Bengal to East Pakistan.) What uprooted these people from their homes and turned them into refugees whose wretchedness beggars description? This was not inevitable. If Bengal's division was not forced by Nehru and Patel, the refugee problem would not arise. And the appalling tragedies which overtook Bengal could be averted; for, it was quite possible to prevent Bengal's dismemberment even in the event of India's partition.

Some Bengal Congress leaders and Muslim leaders of Bengal of all political hues were strongly opposed to the partition of Bengal and wanted and worked for an undivided separate State of Bengal — separate from Hindustan and Pakistan — when partition of India on communal lines became a certainty. Congress leaders like Sarat Chandra Bose, who resigned from the Congress Working Committee in January 1947, Kiran Shankar Roy, leader of the Congress party in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Satyaranjan Bakshi and representatives of the Bengal Muslim League drew up a draft constitution of a 'United Sovereign Bengal', which would be free to determine its relations with the rest of India. This move enjoyed the support of several Congress M.L.A.s and others, and of the parties like the Forward Bloc, the Communist Party of India (which had no negligible influence on the masses in Bengal), some small parties like the Revolutionary Communist Party of India and the Radical Party.

But the dismemberment of Bengal did not depend on the masses of Bengalis but on an agreement between three outside forces — British imperialism, the Congress high command and the top leadership of the Muslim League. The British cabinet¹²⁷ as well as Jinnah and the League's general secretary¹²⁸ agreed to the proposal for the formation of an undivided Bengal state outside Hindustan and Pakistan. It was at the insistence of Nehru and Patel that Bengal was divided.¹²⁹ One should not forget that until 1947 the main seat of Marwari capital was Calcutta.

Shyama Prasad or the Hindu Mahasabha only served as the accomplice of the big compradors and their political representatives by playing on the fears of the upper and middle classes of Bengali Hindus. These classes had

127. *TOP*, Vol. IX, 842; Vol. X, 834, 876-8, 964, 974; Vol. XI, 2.

128. *Ibid*, Vol. X, 452, 472, 479, 512; 554-5, 625, 657.

129. *Ibid*, 337, fn. 2; 1013, 1041; XI, 2; *passim*.

been firmly opposed to the partition of Bengal until almost the end of 1946. The political riots in the name of religion in Calcutta and Noakhali in the second half of 1946, the so-called nationalist newspapers like the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the aggressive communal propaganda carried on mainly by the upcountry Muslim compradors like the Ispahanis helped Shyama Prasad and the Hindu Mahasabha. No plebiscite, referendum or general election was held to seek the opinion of the people of Bengal on this most momentous issue which was a question of life and death to them as well as to future generations, despite demands from many. The date of the transfer of power was advanced by more than ten months — again at the insistence of Nehru and Patel¹³⁰ — in order not to allow any time for plebiscite. As Sarat Bose said, "Bengal's voice has to be stifled and she has to continue to be a pawn in the all-India game."¹³¹ Communalism, which was a passing phase, was given permanence so that it could be used as a source of perpetual conflicts by the ruling classes of the two new states — a means of diverting the attention of the masses from the actual problems of life.

Bengal, which was described by foreign travellers and others from various lands — from the East and the West — as one of the most prosperous countries of the world with flourishing agriculture and industry was reduced to wretchedness during colonial rule. Of course, since 1947 the neo-colonial stranglehold has continued over the whole subcontinent, preventing real economic development; but Bengal has its specific problems as well. The partition of 1947, the end of interdependence between the two parts of Bengal, the huge waves of refugee movement for years, the fiscal and industrial policies of the Central government from the time of the emergence of the Indian Union and their policies relating to refugee rehabilitation, railway freight, planning, etc.,¹³² have intensified the misery and wretchedness to an almost inconceivable extent.

In Punjab, the carnage, the dishonouring and abduction of women and girls, the burning of homes, the flight of panic-stricken millions in search of shelter in unknown lands immediately before and after the transfer of power

130. *Ibid*, 699, 716, 732; *passim*.

131. Sarat Chandra Bose, *I Warned My Countrymen*, Calcutta, 1968, p. 198.

132. For the policies of the Central government, see for instance, Ranajit Roy, *The Agony of West Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972.

assumed the vast proportions they did because of the activities of the RSS, the Akal Sena and their counterpart, the Muslim National Guards.

On 6 April 1948, when Shyama Prasad was the Union Minister for Industries, the Government of India adopted an Industrial Policy Resolution and an accompanying memorandum. These extended a warm welcome to imperialist capital. Instead of breaking the fetters of imperialist capital, they decided to strengthen them.¹³³

Gandhi was assassinated in Delhi on 30 January 1948 by Hindu fanatics. The RSS was believed to have been involved. Though forewarned, the responsible ministers of the Central government had refused to take any protective measures¹³⁴ and did not undertake full investigations into the conspiracy after the assassination for reasons of their own. Soon after, the RSS was banned. The RSS chief, Golwalkar, wrote to Nehru and Patel to get the ban lifted. Referring to "the alarming happenings in Burma, Indo-China, Java and the neighbouring states" in his letters to them of 24 September 1948, he proposed a joint front between the Congress government and the RSS to fight the danger of Communism. He wrote that the Indian youth was strongly attracted towards Communism, for "the one effective check of the RSS no longer exists". He appealed to Nehru to allow the RSS "to work honourably and help the government to fight the menace — on its own cultural lines". Writing to Patel, he felt sure that "if you with government power and we with organised cultural force combine we can soon eliminate this menace".¹³⁵ Significantly, G.D. Birla was one of the mediators in the negotiations that started between the RSS leaders and the Congress government and the ban was lifted in 1949.¹³⁶ Shyama Prasad resigned in 1950 from the Central cabinet: he wanted the Government to pursue a tough policy towards Pakistan "including the use of economic pressures and, if neces-

133. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Genesis, Growth and Character*, Calcutta, 2000 (2nd edn.), p. 263; see also pp. 264-70.

134. Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Vol. 2, Ahmedabad, 1958, pp. 755, 756; see also Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, pp. 372-3.

135. RSS pamphlet, *Justice on Trial: A Collection of the Historic Letters between Sri Guruji and the Government*, Bangalore, 1968, pp. 23-6; cited in Tapan Bose *et al*, *op cit*, p. 31.

136. Tapan Bose *et al*, *ibid*, p. 31.

sary, the application of force”¹³⁷ — a policy more tough than what Nehru thought discreet.

In its election manifesto issued before the general elections in early 1952, the Jan Sangh demanded an end to partition and reunion of India and Pakistan — obviously forced. Among many other things like adoption of Hindi as the national language and a ban on cow-slaughter, it also demanded complete integration of Kashmir into India. Its another target was the Hindu Code Bill, which granted certain rights to the women of the Hindu male-dominated society. “It claimed to stand for four fundamentals: ‘one country, one culture, one nation, and Dharma Raj, rule of law’”.¹³⁸ By ‘one culture’, the Jan Sangh and its descendant, the Bharatiya Janata Party, like their parent body — the RSS — have always meant Brahmanic culture. Seeking to revive ‘Bharatiya culture’, it aims at reviving all the negative features of Brahmanic culture and suppressing all the composite cultures of the different nationalities of India. Like its counterpart — Muslim fundamentalism — this aggressive Hindu chauvinism, blind to reason and inimical to the development of an individual’s power of thinking, is a bar to all progress, a source of endless conflicts among the exploited and the oppressed and spells disaster for them all, irrespective of castes and communities.

A special target of the Jan Sangh and the BJP has been Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which, as noted before, denying the Kashmiri people the right of self-determination, granted a ‘special status’ to J and K. Shyama Prasad, president of the Hindu Mahasabha and then founder of the Jan Sangh, was a member of the Indian cabinet which repeatedly promised the Kashmiri people the right to self-determination. He was also a member of the Constituent Assembly which added Article 370 to the Constitution. Yet, trampling underfoot all commitments to the Kashmiri people, he and the Jan Sangh launched a fight to give a burial to Article 370 and for complete integration of J and K within the Indian Union. That has been the BJP’s stand also, to which we shall return later.

One may ask: who is a great leader of the people — one who leads them towards freedom from all thralldom — political, economic and social — and towards a better life, materially and culturally, or one who sows discord

137. Weiner, *op cit*, p. 186.

138. *Ibid*, pp. 175-6.

among them and whose policies spell disaster for millions?

Referring to Shyama Prasad, Viceroy Mountbatten wrote in his personal report of 8 August 1947 to the British king, Prime Minister, Secretary of State, etc: "...Burrows [then Governor of Bengal], who knows him [Shyama Prasad] well, described him to me recently as being so low that a snake could not crawl under his belly."¹³⁹ Mountbatten himself, too, was a rather poor specimen of humanity.

D. India's Political Economy Today

Economically, it is, no doubt, the best of times for the Indian big bourgeoisie and their masters, big multinationals based in imperialist countries; and it is the worst of times for the toiling people. Recently, a distinguished scholar wrote: "Today 1.7 per cent of India's population [together with the multinationals] controls over 83 per cent of its wealth, 10 per cent of the people about 11 per cent of its wealth whereas the remaining 88 per cent have to fight among themselves for a share in the remaining six per cent of the wealth."¹⁴⁰

In 1947, political power was transferred to "friendly and reliable hands" in India by an Act of British Parliament; it was not seized. Politically, economically and militarily, India did not break out of the orbit of world imperialism. India's political elite have been underlings of imperialist powers since 1947 as they were before it. Before 1947, Indian economy was an appendage of the British economy and had no independent character of its own. Instead of being shattered, this complementarity between imperialist economy and Indian economy endures. Today whatever limited manoeuvrability India enjoyed within the framework of basic dependence on world imperialism at the end of the direct rule of the British raj has been eroded, and the country is firmly under the thumb of the triad — the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), set up by the imperialist powers. And India revolves as a satellite within the imperialist system. As William K. Tabb wrote, "...the developing countries are, in most cases, represented by an elite long since sold out to the centre of global capitalism."¹⁴¹

Since 1947, the Indian ruling classes have been inviting foreign capital, which was supposed to play a catalytic role in India's industrialisation. Besides enormous amounts of 'aid' — a euphemism for loan capital — which they sought and received from the imperialist countries and the World Bank, they not only welcomed foreign direct investment capital but also regarded a joint collaboration venture between foreign multinationals and Indian big

140. N.P. Chaubey, "Impediments to Social Change and Development", in *Impediments to Social Change in India* (ed. by Debabrata Panda), Calcutta, 2000, p. 46.

141. William K. Tabb, "The WTO? Stop World Take Over", *Monthly Review*, January 2000, p. 3.

capital as the best form of Indian industrial enterprise. But there were some restrictions on the inflow of imperialist capital and the ruling classes afforded some protection to industries in India — whether joint ventures, small-scale industries or subsidiaries and branches of multinationals.

The USA and other advanced capitalist countries were hit by recession from 1978-9. Their interests demanded unrestricted entry of their capital and commodities into countries of the third world like India. The *new imperialist offensive* began in the early eighties with the IMF imposing an 'austerity programme' and 'binding conditions' in 1981. During the eighties, with steady relaxation of controls over capital issues, licensing, etc, lowering of tariffs over imports and exports, increase in incentives to exporters, relaxation of foreign exchange regulations and so on, India's trade deficit and adverse balance of payments, chronic since the inception of India's 'development planning', grew from bad to worse. India's budget deficit increased a little less than four times and external debt about five times between 1980-1 and 1989-90. The rupee went on depreciating in value and the rate of inflation rose considerably.

Imperialist capital hungered for more. The IMF, the World Bank and the Aid-India Consortium members (the group of imperialist countries) demanded more 'liberalisation' of the economy — a more or less open door for imperialist capital, freer imports of capital goods, industrial raw materials and other commodities; further lowering of tariffs; a sharp devaluation of the rupee which would make imports dearer and exports still more cheap than before and inflate the outstanding foreign debt; change in India's patent act and cut in subsidies on food and fertilisers and cut in expenditure on social welfare (that is, 'austerity' for the poor). The ruling classes of this client state willingly surrendered to the dictates of imperialist capital. They hoped to thrive still more as underlings of imperialist capital.

So bowing to the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank they adopted in 1991 'the new economic policy' — the policy of more 'liberalisation' and 'globalisation'.

'Free trade' and 'fair competition'

What does 'globalisation' mean? As Henry Kissinger, a former U.S. Secretary of State, put it, "Globalisation is only another word for U.S.

domination.”¹⁴² Soon the WTO joined forces with the IMF and the World Bank to tighten further the imperialist stranglehold on Indian economy. In the name of ‘free trade’ and ‘fair competition’ almost all restrictions on the inflow of imperialist capital into every sector of Indian economy including insurance, mining, telecommunications have been removed. We shall cite here one instance of how fair the competition is. Briefly, a power purchase agreement was entered into first by the Congress government and then by the BJP-Shiv Sena government of Maharashtra with the U.S. multinational Enron. Under the agreement the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) would purchase all the power that Enron’s Dabhol Power Company (DPC) could generate and it would receive a minimum annual profit of 16 per cent of the capital invested by it. The MSEB purchases power from the DPC at the rate of Rs 4.50 per unit whereas the MSEB’s average cost of production is around Rs 1.50 per unit. Forced to implement the power purchase agreement, the MSEB has to close down some of its smaller power plants and to stop buying from Tata Electric Companies and the Bombay Suburban Electric Supply Ltd., which produce electricity at Rs 1.80 a unit.¹⁴³ Free trade and fair competition indeed!

A later report from Mumbai stated that the cumulative price per unit of power produced by the DPC has shot up to about Rs 6.50 a unit. And Pradyumna Kaul, an energy analyst, says that in a recent order the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission has announced a price rise of 250 per cent for farmers, 200 per cent for domestic users and 700 per cent for the powerloom industry. While the DPC’s first phase of 728 MW capacity accounts for only about six per cent of the MSEB’s installed capacity, it gets about 25 per cent share in its revenue. The MSEB pays the company about Rs 200 crore a month against a revenue collection of Rs 800 crore.¹⁴⁴

Recently, the *Times of India* reported that in July 2000 “the MSEB took just 33 per cent of Dabhol’s electricity and paid Enron a staggering Rs 7.8 per unit”. All the problems which plague today the MSEB had been fore-

142. Quoted in Samir Amin, “The Political Economy of the Twentieth Century”, *Monthly Review*, June 2000, p. 15.

143. Seema Kamdar, “An Area of Darkness”, *Statesman*, 22.4.2000.

144. Seema Kamdar, “Consumers feel the pinch of costly indulgence”, *ibid*, 19.9.2000.

seen by a committee chaired by the BJP's Jaswant Singh. Interestingly, "the project was sanctioned on the basis of Enron's claimed costs, instead of competitive bidding on the lowest tariff. The cost, according to the committee, was highest in comparison with other private projects".¹⁴⁵

It was the Congress government of Maharashtra which first entered into the power purchase agreement with Enron, which has landed the people of Maharashtra in trouble. The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance campaigned against its absurd terms during the subsequent election to the Maharashtra Assembly, won votes and formed the next government. On winning the election the BJP-Shiv Sena government went back on its pledge to revise the agreement, did not hesitate to sacrifice the interests of the people, placed its services at the disposal of the U.S. multinational and concluded an even more iniquitous agreement with it. Kaul has observed that for an investment of \$700 million for its first phase, the Enron power project has a billing of \$600 million for the first year alone operating at 65 per cent capacity utilisation.¹⁴⁶ Referring to Enron's investment for the first phase, Kaul has not taken into account Enron's initial investment in getting the power purchase agreement concluded, first by the Congress government and then by the BJP-Sena government and in having it counter-guaranteed by the Congress government and later, in 1996, by the same Jaswant Singh of the 13-day old BJP government at the Centre. It is, indeed, true that this initial investment was a fraction of the legalised plunder by the U.S. multinational. The entire business, like many similar businesses, is a proof of the fact that there is an anti-nation within the nation.

There are more portents of 'fair competition' in the future. One of the 'reforms' imperialist capital insists upon is the splitting of state electricity boards into corporations and their privatisation like the privatisation of all profitable public sector enterprises. A report of the World Bank's consultants, Putnam Haynes and Bartletts, has urged that the electricity tariffs charged by the U.P. State Electricity Board should be raised: domestic by 549.6 per cent; agriculture by 612.8 per cent; public lighting by 420.7 per cent; public water works by 254.7 per cent. 'Free competition' would mean compulsory annihilation of a public sector enterprise built up at consider-

145. *Times of India*, Kolkata, 14.2.2001.

146. Seema Kamdar, "Consumers feel the pinch of costly indulgence", *op cit.*

able cost to the people and fabulous enrichment of foreign and domestic private power producers — again at terrible cost to the people.

Recently, the Central government has asked the state governments to dispense with the authority of fixing power tariffs and to leave the job to be done by the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) — bodies of men accountable to none. As the Power Secretary of the Central government said at a workshop on operationalisation of SERCs in New Delhi, "State regulatory commissions should be free from any form of government control and should deal with important issues of tariff fixation, purely on [the] basis of commercial consideration". He added that interests of both consumers and investors should be in harmony while fixing tariff.¹⁴⁷ The state governments have to respond to *an extent* to public pressure. Now the regime has begun when, unhindered by any public pressure and guided by commercial consideration alone (which means maximum profit for the private companies), the ruling classes will be able to fix through their obliging men electricity tariffs (like other prices which are continually shooting up) as high as commercial considerations would permit. This will have an effect on the prices of other commodities.

In December 1999 the Government split the UPSEB into three corporations, despite the struggle of its workers to prevent it. The struggle was betrayed by trade union leaders. And in the wake of the steps taken by the Government to privatise the power sector gradually, the U.P. Power Regulatory Commission has raised electricity rates¹⁴⁸, ultimately to benefit private power producers.

Imperialism's tightening grip

In early 1998 Aditi Roy Ghatak wrote: "The implication of India's \$100 billion (Rs 400,000 crores or one-third of the economy) external debt is that a third of the economy may well be foreign controlled."¹⁴⁹ The \$100 billion external debt would amount to about Rs 460,000 crore at the present exchange rate (which is varying between Rs 45.70 and more than Rs 46.00 per US dollar). This appears to be an under-estimate. To have an idea of the

147. *Statesman*, 20.7.2000.

148. *Ibid*, 29.7.2000.

149. Aditi Roy Ghatak, "Ram and Rahim", *Statesman*, 15.2.1998.

extent of India's economy under foreign control, one has to take into account not only the external debt but also the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indian economy, the global depository receipts and American depository receipts invested in companies in India as well as the investments of the Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) in shares of Indian companies through the stock exchanges. It is common knowledge that FIIs dominate the Indian share market, that the prices of shares of Indian companies rise and fall according to the decisions of the FIIs. While trying to find out the extent of foreign control over Indian economy, one has to remember also the role that foreign technology plays in the control of a joint venture whether the collaboration is both financial and technical or only technical. The overwhelming majority of large industrial units in India are either subsidiaries (or branches) of multinationals based in imperialist countries or joint ventures between Indian big capital (including state capital) and multinationals, or have major technical collaborations with multinationals. As technology is the key to power, a multinational generally controls a joint venture, whatever may or may not be its equity holding.

Complete colonialisation of all sectors of Indian economy is taking place. Imperialist capital has tightened its noose around Indian agriculture, too. It is a many-pronged attack. Much of the agricultural system in India has been restructured at the behests of the U.S. imperialists, heavier and heavier doses of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, etc. India's rich biological diversity has been destroyed, irremediable ecological and environmental damage has been caused and indigenous technology suppressed. The market for inputs for food production (seeds; etc.) is dominated by a few TNCs like Du Pont, Monsanto, Ciba Geigy, Hoechst, etc., based in imperialist countries.¹⁵⁰ With the lifting of the quantitative restrictions (QRs) on food and other imports at the instance of the World Bank, the W.T.O., and the U.S.A., the market for food itself is being opened up to cheap, subsidised food from other countries. The food-processing industry in this country is also being taken over by TNCs.

The policies of the Indian ruling classes do not hinder but help the capture of the Indian food-processing industry and food market by TNCs. The

150. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *Imperialism's Tightening Grip on Indian Agriculture*, Calcutta, 1998.

Indian government has reduced subsidies on food and fertilisers, raised the administered prices of food-grains to levels beyond the reach of most people. This has led to a sharp decline in their off-take from the public distribution system (PDS) and to an unprecedented rise in stocks with the Government. Much of it will be consumed by rats and will go waste in other ways. The ruling classes are minimising the role of the Food Corporation of India in the procurement of food and dismantling the PDS by stages.

The policy suits the interests of the TNCs admirably. Large investments are being made by them in India's food-processing industry. Since 'liberalisation' the Government has offered this industry fiscal incentives like very much reduced duty on import of capital goods and reduction in excise duty which is intended to benefit TNCs like Coca Cola and Pepsi. Industries like rice-milling, biscuits, poultry have been dereserved. With the removal of QRs, the poultry industry, which has had a remarkable growth during the last 25 years or more, is threatened with the question of survival. Besides organised poultry farms, there are individual poultry farmers and the livelihood of 16 lakh Indians directly and of more Indians indirectly depends on this industry. It is afraid that, unless it receives adequate protection from the Government, it will not be able to withstand the very unfair competition with the poultry industry of the U.S.A. and Europe, which provide it with many subsidies. The imperialist countries may dump poultry products on the Indian market as they have done in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, etc., destroy the industrial base here and then charge whatever prices they want to.¹⁵¹

The world trade in agricultural commodities is under the control of a few TNCs like Cargill, thought to be the world's largest in the grains trade. According to the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries (1994), 85 to 90 per cent of global exports of wheat were marketed in the mid-eighties by three to six TNCs. Almost similar is the case with other agricultural exports.¹⁵² In this age of monopolies and oligopolies, free trade or free competition is a myth sedulously spread by the imperialists and their hangers-on to deceive people.

Cargill has entered India's grain-trading and processing in a big way.

151. See the four-page supplement "Focus on Poultry Industry", *Times of India*, Kolkata, 23.3.2001.

152. See *Aspects of India's Economy*, no. 18, Jan.-Mar. 1996, p. 67.

According to *Businessworld*, Cargill has received permission to invest over Rs \$2.50 billion in India (approximately Rs 10,500 crore). Besides setting up a jetty at Jamnagar in Gujarat for import of phosphatic fertilisers and gluton and importing sugar from Pakistan, it proposed to build a \$208 million citric acid plant. By 2000 it set up two large grain storage silos in Punjab and proposed to build two more. Besides, the Central Warehousing Corporation leased out warehouses to Cargill. It procures quality wheat directly from farmers and the procured wheat goes from its silos to its 500-tonne per day flour mill at Noida in U.P., where the wheat is processed. (On the other hand, as reported in the *Economic Times* of 25 July 1999, 24 out of the 54 flour mills in Punjab were closed and Punjab millowners held that Cargill's giant facilities, once implemented, would ease local entrepreneurs out of business.) The Indian market offers Cargill tempting opportunities for vast growth and expansion, as the Government allows it tax-breaks for 10 years and exemption of customs duty for importing machinery.¹⁵³ Dr Vandana Shiva said that Cargill was "all set to control India's food system" by entering the wheat processing sector in a major way. "This move will hijack our food and lead to the destruction of over 100 million livelihoods of Indian farmers, chakkiwalahs, small traders and small agro-based units."¹⁵⁴ Cargill has also entered the rice procurement business and has been exporting grain from India.

Recently, Prime Minister Vajpayee's sage advice to peasants was: "Look beyond wheat and paddy." He asked them to take to "horticulture, floriculture, oilseeds and vegetable production and have a good export potential."¹⁵⁵ Curtailing the production of the crops on which the people's survival depends, concentration on some others in the name of 'comparative advantage' and dependence for the essential items of food on TNCs, which can easily manipulate prices, is an invitation to disaster for hundreds of millions. While agricultural production is controlled by the Monsantos and the Du Ponds, food processing and food marketing are being left in the hands of the TNCs like Cargill. The Indian ruling classes are making food for hundreds of millions a play-thing of the powerful speculative forces represented

153. Gina Singh, "Cargill Offensive", *Businessworld*, 4.9.2000.

154. *The Asian Age*, 10.8.99.

155. *The Times of India*, Kolkata, 7.3.2001.

by a few TNCs and their Indian underlings with their insatiable appetites for profit. The stark reality of more hunger and more malnutrition looms ahead.

It appears from a report on the reaction of an RSS outfit, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, that the new agricultural policy formulated by the BJP-led government at the Centre threatens to liquidate ownership of land by the peasants — not in the interests of co-operatives or communes run jointly by themselves and for themselves but in the interests of companies promoted and run by foreign and native capitalists. The policy envisages that land ceilings would be removed; that land would be taken over by companies managed and controlled by capitalists — foreign and native; that by handing over the land to the companies, the peasants would receive shares of the companies (and receive dividends) according to the proportion of the land they own; that the cultivation of the land would be mechanised.¹⁵⁶ Capitalists invest capital to earn profit, not for charitable purposes. They and the establishment they would set up with managers, accountants, etc., would be like locusts descending on the land and devouring the crop that the land would bear. The mechanisation of some stretches of land would create for imperialist countries a rich market for tractors, threshers, irrigation pumps, etc., etc. and transfer much of the wealth that such land would produce to those countries. A few peasants may find work on such land; the large majority who earlier extracted a livelihood from it would be jobless. Today the land provides some employment for some time in the year and some food for some time in the year for most of them. All this would vanish for those whose lands would be swallowed by corporate agriculture. Today about 66 per cent of India's workforce is agricultural whereas in Britain and the USA the percentage of the agriculturists in the total workforce is two; in Germany four; and in Italy six. In the absence of other employment, not only the ownership of land but the very lives of many peasants would be liquidated. The talk of annual dividend is a mockery. Here, in India, as everybody knows and as N. Vittal, the chief vigilance commissioner of India, observed recently, industries grow sick, but not the industrialists. So, if dispossessed peasants were given equity in place of their land, these enterprises may grow sick, but not the capitalists. The latter would, indeed, prosper.

156. "RSS wing criticises agriculture policy", *Statesman*, 24.8.2000.

As we shall see, the BJP-led government has been following a policy, which, as the BJP Finance Minister himself announced, would liquidate by 2001 small-scale industrial units¹⁵⁷, which today number more than three million, in the interests of imperialist and native sharks. Soon we shall return to this. The day already bright would be far brighter in the future (if the resistance of the people fails to upset the applecart of the imperialists and their native underlings).

Indian economy, which is chronically ill, is today in dire straits. The gross fiscal deficit amounted to Rs 8,887 crore in 1980-1, rose steadily to Rs 38,238 crore in 1989-90 and has been estimated in the Central government's budget for 2000-1 at Rs 1,11,275 crore. The state fiscal deficit shot up from Rs 44,359 crore in 1997-98 to Rs 74,748 crore.¹⁵⁸ The trade deficit during 1999-2000 soared to \$8.7 billion (approximately Rs 39,800 crore) — according to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, despite all the efforts of the Government including hidden subsidies provided to exports.

As D.R. Pendse, Consulting Economic Adviser, Centre for Policy Advice, Mumbai, writes, "every single rupee expended by the Central government is financed from borrowing because Government's annual debt servicing itself far exceeds every single rupee of its total revenue." He points out that in 1999-2000 the Central government's *total* receipts (including revenue receipts, recoveries of loans, disinvestments) as published in the "Budget at a Glance", amounted to Rs 194,840 crore, while its total expenditure was Rs 303,738 crore. Out of this, the interest paid on outstanding loans incurred in the previous years amounted to Rs 91,425 crore and the instalment due for repayment to Rs 115,204 crore — a total amount of Rs 206,690 crore for debt servicing. The Government's total receipts were not adequate enough even to service its outstanding debts. So the Government went in for a fresh borrowing of Rs 108,898 crore. The Central government's total expenditure, after servicing the debts, was Rs 97,108 crore. It includes all expenditure — on defence, salaries, subsidies, etc., etc. — all plan and non-plan expenditure. To quote Pendse, "Government has to borrow to not only finance its entire expenditure but also even to repay a portion of its own debt

157. "Sinha Rings Knell of Small-Scale Industries", *Statesman*, 22.4.2000.

158. "India Heading for Debt Trap", *Statesman*, 31.10.99.

due for repayment." This was true not only for the year 1999-2000 but also for the years 1998-99 and 2000-01.¹⁵⁹ It is borrowed money — foreign and domestic -- that keeps the Government functioning and the ministers and M.P.s happy with their fantastic allowances, perks and life-long pensions after retirement from their active service to the people in those capacities.

The rupee was devalued or depreciated from Rs 4.75 to Rs 7.50 per US dollar in 1966; (there was an earlier devaluation by 30.5 per cent against the US dollar in 1949 at the dictate from the US Secretary of Treasury); from Rs 7.91 in 1981-2 to Rs 20.96 in June 1991; to about Rs 46.00 in August 2000. The devaluation of the rupee has made imports costly and exports dirt cheap. Besides, outstanding loans from international financial institutions like the World Bank and from imperialist countries like the USA have soared enormously as a result of devaluation. India has been giving away its best products at throw-away prices to other countries, mainly imperialist countries. Yet the trade deficit keeps on mounting for the benefit of the rich — foreign multinationals and their Indian compradors — to enable them to import capital goods, spare parts, industrial raw materials, technology, etc., at higher and higher prices.

According to a recent study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), India ranks seventh among the poorest countries of the world — only six small African countries are still poorer than India; India's poverty level is 52.5 per cent.¹⁶⁰ As days pass, more and more people are sinking below the poverty line. As the 1992 Census of India said, about 49 per cent of the total male population — rural and urban — and 87 per cent of the female population of India were unemployed.¹⁶¹ The scourge of unemployment and under-employment is growing much harsher every day. 'Liberalisation' and 'reforms' are throwing out of employment lakhs of those who were employed in organised or unorganised industries.

The small-scale industries constitute no negligible sector in India. *Business Standard* of 29 May 1993 stated that this sector employed 80 per cent of the total industrial labour in the manufacturing sector. According to an

159. D.R. Pendse, "Is the Central government caught in a debt trap?" *The Economic Times* (Kolkata edn.), 23.1.2001.

160. *Statesman*, 7.9.1999.

161. Aditi Roy Ghatak, *op cit.*

article in *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, “Roughly 50 per cent of manufacturing output is from small industry.”¹⁶² Recently, the BJP finance minister Yashwant Sinha told his party MPs that he was opposed to “roll-back of any kind” and that even *the country’s small-scale sector* “is likely to be wiped out”. He made it clear that the Government would not be able to “offer any kind of protection to the country’s small-scale sector, following its commitments to the WTO”. He said that it would not be possible for the Government to raise import duty or extend the time period for the small-scale sector to gear up for protection. He added: “Either they prepare for the competition [which is very unequal] or are phased out by 2001”.¹⁶³ That is, by the next year the small capitalists and the millions of workers they employ will be liquidated. This is only one instance of the genocide that the BJP-led government is perpetrating. The poison-tree was planted about a decade ago by the Congress and all the parties of the ruling classes (including the CPI-M whose occasional rhetoric may seek to deceive people) have been helping it to grow.

Eager servants of foreign capital

In an article, a former professor of economics, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, wrote: “The fact, however, is that the Government is doing much more than what is required by WTO. The BJP is implementing many disastrous policies behind the smokescreen of WTO.” He pointed out that in respect of patents, insurance, quantitative restrictions, etc., the contention that the BJP government yielded because of WTO compulsions is false. “It is entirely erroneous to claim”, he said, “that insurance has been opened under WTO requirements.... Therefore, as of date, there is no WTO compulsion for the Government to pass the Insurance Regulatory Authority Act providing for 25 per cent direct, and much more indirect, foreign holding in insurance companies. This has been done voluntarily by the Government, but behind the WTO smokescreen.” As regards the Patents Amendment Act, 1999, he observed: “By voluntarily postponing the examination of the applications [for patents] till the end of 2004, the Government has provided exclusive marketing rights to frivolous applicants. The examina-

162. S. Nanjundasamy, “Changing Role of Small-Scale Industry”, *EPW*, 28.5.1994, p.M62.

163. “Sinha Rings Knell of Small-Scale Industries”, *Statesman*, 22.4.2000.

tion of these applications will take a few more years which means that they will be enjoying exclusive marketing rights till the examination has determined their fate." As regards the quantitative restrictions on imports (QRs), he said: "But QRs could still be maintained under WTO on various other grounds such as injury to domestic producers; public morals; health of human, animal and plant life; and domestic agricultural products.... The correct strategy would have been to impose many, if not all, QRs afresh under the above clauses and fight it out. Why not use the clause of public morals to protect some of our industries?... By not resisting, the Government has shown that it is keen to withdraw QRs." As regards import duties to protect domestic industries, he wrote: "There is no prohibition under WTO to increase applied level of duties up to the level of binding. In a large number of commodities the bindings given by India are 40 per cent and above. For about one-third of commodities India has not yet given any bindings at all. This includes many consumer goods. Where then was the need to declare a *maximum* import duty of 35 per cent in the last budget? Clearly the Government is voluntarily reducing import duties by hiding behind non-existent WTO commitments." He further said: "Shettigar [the BJP's economic adviser who conceded that many of the Government's measures have been harmful for the country but argued that the present BJP-led Government had no alternative] should also know that there is no WTO agreement about inviting foreign investment.... Thus the Government is opening itself to foreign investment entirely on its own accord.

"The unmistakable conclusion is that the BJP government is undertaking much more liberalisation than is necessary under WTO. It cannot hide behind the smokescreen of WTO and *sell the interests of the country*."¹⁶⁴

About the role of the WTO and the welcome extended to it, S.P. Shukla, a former finance secretary of the Government of India, wrote: "The essence of WTO lies in ensuring continuous erosion of the authority and jurisdiction of the nation-states.... the continuing erosion of the authority and jurisdiction of nation-states will work largely and decisively against the interest of the large, silent, deprived majorities in the polities of developing countries....

164. Bharat Jhunjhunwala, "Eager Surrender", *Statesman*, 25.5.2000 — emphasis added.

The minority elites who constitute the ruling establishments in the Third World are the ones who are extending a warm welcome to WTO in the name of globalisation and integration with the world economy. For them, even a secondary or tertiary role in the new world order symbolised by WTO is a welcome prospect. Moreover their interest is doubly served by the process that erodes the nation-states, for an effective, democratic polity in the Third World can only result in an inevitable degree of restraint on the ambitious among this elite and also a degree of delinking with the forces of the super-elite of the industrial world.”¹⁶⁵

Complementarity of compradors and imperialists

In September 2000 Prime Minister Vajpayee went to the U.S.A. Besides addressing the U.N. Millennium Summit, he spoke at different meetings — a joint sitting of the US Congress, a reception offered to him at the White House, a meeting organised by 'Friends of India', etc. Speaking at the joint sitting of the US Congress, attended by a little more than a quarter of its members, Vajpayee said: "The dawn of a new century has marked a new beginning in our relations. Let us work to fulfil the promise and the hope of today." He assured the Congress that important sectors of India's infrastructure — power, banking, telecom — were being opened to private initiatives, domestic and foreign.¹⁶⁶ In reply to the welcome address at the White House, Vajpayee said that his visit to the USA was about "new hopes and new opportunities" in Indo-American ties.¹⁶⁷ Addressing US and Indian businessmen at the US-India business summit, he promised them that some major public sector companies in oil, telecom, airlines and hotels would be significantly disinvested before the end of the year. He announced that the regime for foreign direct investment, which has now been made automatic, will be further relaxed shortly. *He said the interests of India and the USA were complementary and this needed to be harnessed to the fullest. (No doubt, the interests of the US imperialists and the ambitious elite of India,*

165. S.P. Shukla, "WTO and the Nation-State: Of Annexes and Annexation", in *The State of India's Economy 1994-95*, published by Public Interest Research Group, Delhi, 1995, p. 28.

166. *Statesman*, 15.9.2000.

167. *Ibid.*, 16.9.2000.

their underlings, are complementary.) He asserted that, *having recognised each other as "natural allies", India and the USA were poised to vastly strengthen and deepen bilateral relations in the new century. "Let us build a strong foundation of Indo-US economic relations to support the architecture of our natural alliance [the alliance between a giant and a pigmy],"* he said. He raised before the businessmen a target of \$ five billion (more than Rs 22,800 crore) of annual inflow beginning next year, which was raised to \$15 billion over the next three years.¹⁶⁸ On 14 September India and the USA signed five deals worth \$ six billion in the power, e-commerce and banking sectors.¹⁶⁹ Vajpayee did not forget to add in his address to the US Congress: "*For me, the most gratifying of the many achievements of Indian democracy has been the change it has brought in the lives of the weak and vulnerable.*"¹⁷⁰

In a joint statement US President Clinton and Vajpayee reaffirmed the "vision" of a "*closer and qualitatively new* relationship between India and the USA in the 21st century". According to the statement, the evidence of it was already there with the launch of the Community of Democracies, the high-level coordinating group on bilateral trade, investment and environment, and the joint working group on counter-terrorism. The statement said that the two countries must build upon this new momentum in their relationship to *further enhance* mutual understanding and *deepen cooperation across the full spectrum of political, economic, commercial, scientific, technological, social and international issues*. The statement added that India's economic reforms and *the two countries' complementary strengths and resources* provide strong bases for expansion of economic ties.¹⁷¹

In which sphere — political, economic, commercial, scientific, technological, international — are India's strength and resources complementary to those of the USA? No doubt, there is a complementarity. While the USA is a superpower — the only superpower in the world — and acts like one in all these spheres, India is a client state, heavily dependent on the USA on all these issues. The joint statement is an unashamed declaration that the super-

168. "FDI norms to be eased further: Vajpayee", *Statesman*, 14.9.2000.

169. "American Commitment on Friendship", *Statesman*, 16.9.2000.

170. *Statesman*, 15.9.2000.

171. "Snub: India confirms commitment not to block CTBT", *Statesman*, 17.9.2000.

elite of the USA and the elite of this wretched country, which is content with, as former finance secretary S.P. Shukla said, a secondary or tertiary role, will further strengthen this complementarity. It means political slavery and economic destitution and backwardness of the Indian people in all spheres.

Misery and fabulous wealth

In 1971 was published from Bombay *Poverty in India* by V.M. Dandekar and Rath — a book commissioned by the Ford Foundation and released first by it. It is a study of India's problem of poverty and suggests ways of solving it. It said that "communism offers a classical solution to the problem of poverty" for a country like India. But the distinguished authors heartily disliked this solution. According to them, there was no solution for the poorest 10 per cent of the population (then about five and a half crore persons); they could be left to die in peace or in agony. Something could be attempted for the 30 per cent above them. Thirty years later, capitalist cannibalism demands several times that number as sacrifice at its altar.

The prices of food and other necessities of life have been rising continuously — relentlessly. Since the last budget (2000-1) drawn up by the BJP-led government was passed, there has been a leap in prices. The subsidies on food and fertilisers have been reduced. The Government administered prices of the bare necessities of life have had an astonishing rise. And we are assured that they will spiral higher and higher.

According to a recent UNICEF report, around 53 per cent of our under-five children are moderately or severely underweight, while 52 per cent suffer from moderate to severe stunting. While only 29 per cent of our rural population enjoy access to safe drinking water, a shocking 14 per cent enjoy access to adequate sanitation. The Indian government, between 1992 and 1998, allocated two per cent of its expenditure to health, two per cent to education and 15 per cent to defence.¹⁷²

While health and education go on deteriorating, the expenditure on the military rises higher and higher. The budget for 2000-1 has allocated Rs 58,587 crore to the military — an increase nearly of Rs 13,000 crore over the previous year's budgeted figure. There is no doubt that the actual expen-

172. "A Bad Report Card", *Statesman*, 23.12.99. It cites as its source *The State of the World's Children*, the annual report of the UNICEF, released on 13.12.99.

diture will exceed the budget estimate by several thousand crore rupees. While presenting the budget, the BJP finance minister boasted at the Lok Sabha that the increase "represents the largest ever increase in the defence budget in a single year. More will be provided whenever needed."¹⁷³ It is worth noting that expenditure for the military lies hidden under other items also — seemingly innocuous.

The Indian State mints poverty as well as prosperity — abject poverty for the overwhelming majority and fabulous prosperity for a handful of people. The *Forbes* magazine of the USA, which publishes lists of the richest men of the earth, has found 11 Indians among the first 200 wealthiest men of the world. One Azim Premji of the Wipro company with a net worth of \$6.90 billion ranks 38th in the list and Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance with \$6.60 billion worth, 40th.¹⁷⁴

Let us take the case of Dhirubhai Ambani. He set up a small export firm, Reliance Commercial Corporation, in 1950. In 1966 he founded Reliance Textile Industries Ltd. with an investment of only Rs 28 lakh. Then he had a meteoric rise. The prime ministers and finance ministers, whatever might be their political hues, have rushed to use the State machinery to contribute to his fabulous rise. In the last financial year (which ended on 31 March 2000) the Reliance Industries, his flagship company, made a *net* profit of Rs 2,403 crore (after deduction of depreciation of Rs 1,278 crore, interest and corporation tax). It made a provision for corporation tax of only Rs 57 crore, a little over one per cent of the gross profits. From its inception to 1996-7 it did not pay any corporation tax, like many other large companies which have been zero-tax companies in different years. The Indian State's legislation bristles with convenient loopholes which can be taken advantage of by financial wizards — the Ambanis and the like — to evade taxes. Today the Ambani empire straddles textiles, petrochemicals, oil and gas, telecommunications, power, advertising, etc. However, the Ambani concerns have not been responsible for a single technological innovation in *any* of these diverse fields. They owe their phenomenal growth to the Indian State and multinationals based in imperialist countries. After all, the Indian State is the State of the Ambanis and their brethren who are underlings of their

173. *Statesman*, 1.3.2000 — emphasis added.

174. *Statesman*, 17.6.2000.

foreign principals. So it is not at all surprising that the Indian government almost gifted away the Panna-Mukta and Mid and South Tapti oilfields to the joint venture of Reliance Industries and the US corporation Enron Oil and Gas. The oilfields were explored and developed by the public sector enterprise Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) with finances squeezed out of the people. But the joint venture would not have to pay the exploration and development costs to the ONGC. The exploration and development, drilling and installation costs of the Panna-Mukta oil-fields alone amounted to Rs 746 crore at the time of handing them over to Enron-RIL. While the Government's maximum share of crude oil in its deal with Enron-RIL was fixed at five per cent, the Government share in other joint ventures in similar situations was 25 per cent. According to the investigation by a CBI officer, the ONGC and the Government lost at least Rs 7,505 crore in the deal.¹⁷⁵ (The investigating officer was removed from his post for exposing the murky deal.) Besides, while ONGC is paid a fixed price — about half or less than half the market price — for its oil, the Reliance-Enron venture would be paid by the State the price of one of the costliest crudes in the international market. While ONGC was paid between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1997, Rs 1,741 per tonne, the Enron-RIL was paid for the quarter ending 31 March 1997 \$22.99 per barrel (around Rs 4,900 per tonne). Besides, the latter enjoys several other benefits like exemption from customs duty and reduced royalty payment.

Systematic disinformation is spread by the spokesmen of imperialist and big comprador capital, like the Iranis of *The Statesman* (who are closely allied with the Tatas), that State intervention, controls and the administered pricing system protect 'inefficient' public sector enterprises and are shackles preventing the growth and expansion of India's economy. Capitalist cannibals hide from the people the fact that it is imperialist and comprador capital which very much seek State intervention, State controls and the administered pricing system when they find them useful for robbing the people. To be brief, we would quote a few lines from an editorial in the *Economic Times* (Calcutta edn.), which can by no means be accused of bias for the public sector and against the private sector. It stated: "Naive folk may think that the private sector wants deregulation while the public sector favours

175. *Statesman*, 20.7.1997 and 27.7.1997.

controls. In the oil sector, this happens to be the very opposite of the truth. *Administered pricing for refined oil products implies a hefty subsidy from Government companies like Bharat Petroleum and IOC to private sector giants like Reliance and Essar...* Reliance and Essar wish to continue with administered pricing, which guarantees a post-tax return of 12 per cent on net worth. The reason is simple: deregulation will squeeze their profits, in the short run at any rate. Meanwhile deregulation will greatly increase the profitability of the public sector.¹⁷⁶ This is just one instance of how the wealth which justly belongs to the people is being siphoned off to the imperialists and their compradors. Without State intervention the Ambanis or other big industrialists could not have waxed so fat as they have. Now, when impending deregulation of oil prices will fatten the revenues of public sector giants, the latter are to be privatised. Meanwhile, today, deregulation means that prices of petroleum products for the poor will soar.

Multi-faceted plunder

While indirect taxes like excise, which have to be borne mainly by the poor, have continued to account for the bulk of tax revenues, direct taxes like corporation tax, income tax and capital gains tax, the burden of which falls on the rich, have remained the minor share. Though the corporation tax has been reduced very much from its earlier levels, yet many of the big companies, as we have noted, are zero-tax companies because of the loopholes deliberately inserted in the relevant legislation. The higher rates of income tax for the very rich also have been very much reduced. A person having an annual income of just above Rs 1,50,000 and Dhirubhai Ambani or Ratan Tata pay income tax at the same rate (30 per cent plus a surcharge of 15 per cent — the maximum rate). While they have lowered the tax rates for the very rich, the Indian ruling classes and their masters like the IMF are for widening the tax base, that is, for bringing people just above the poverty level into the income tax network.¹⁷⁷

Then the big sharks can defraud public sector banks and other financial institutions with virtual immunity. Non-performing assets (NPAs) — the loans advanced to parties — of the public sector banks amount to about Rs

176. "R without Reliance", *Economic Times*, 20.8.1996 — emphasis added.

177. The surcharge has been reduced to two per cent in the 2001-2 Budget.

58,000 crore.

Many are the ways in which the rich plunder public money. Tax evasion is one of them. Estimates of the pool of black money differ. According to an estimate of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance and Black Money, "the pool of black money (accumulated over the years) was Rs 11,00,000 crore in current rupees in the year 1994-95 — nearly a third larger than the GDP that year." This was no doubt an underestimate in view of the addition to the pool each year. "The National Institute for Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) in the mid-1980s carried out a study to estimate the size of the *annual* black income, and arrived at an estimate of upto 21 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which works out to about Rs 3,00,000 crore for the year 1997-98 — almost 30 per cent more than the entire Union Budget. The NIPFP estimate is also widely perceived to be an underestimate: other economists have put the flow of black income at 30, 40, even 70 per cent of the GDP."¹⁷⁸

Massive amounts of money are drained away from India through over-invoicing of imports and under-invoicing of exports and stashed in secret accounts in foreign banks. According to a study by three American economists published in an American journal — "Capital Flight from India to the United States through Abnormal Pricing in International Trade", *Finance India*, September 1995 — the capital drained away from India to the USA alone through under-invoicing of exports and over-invoicing of imports in 1993 was \$1.622 billion.¹⁷⁹ The trade with the USA was about one-sixth of India's world trade. If the same practice was (and is) followed by India's exporters and importers in their trade with the rest of the world, which was (and is) quite likely, one may guess the total amount of black money deposited by the Indian big bourgeoisie in secret bank accounts in foreign lands. The IMF estimated that the amount of money stashed in foreign banks was \$100 billion. This, again, seems to be an underestimate.¹⁸⁰

178. "Amnesty Scheme: Giant Fraud by Consensus", *Aspects of India's Economy* (Bombay), No. 25, Jan.-March, 1998, p. 51; see also pp. 82-3.

179. "Massive Capital Flight", *Aspects of India's Economy*, No. 17, Oct.-Dec. 1995, pp. 20-5.

180. "Amnesty Scheme: Giant Fraud by Consensus", *ibid*, No. 25, Jan.-Mar. 1998, p. 52.

'Reforms' to step up the loot

Not quite satisfied with its achievements, the IMF has recently demanded that India should carry out "drastic reforms". What it urges the Indian government to do is to quicken the pace of dismantling the public sector, to dereserve small-scale industries (i.e., to wipe them out, which, as we have seen, the NDA government proposes to do), to increase labour market flexibility (i.e., to legalise unbridled exploitation and retrenchment of workers whenever private profits demand), to broaden the tax base, to further reduce tariffs (customs duties, i.e., unrestricted imports) to achieve faster progress in liberalisation of foreign investment flows and so on.¹⁸¹ Briefly, it asks the Indian ruling classes to intensify further the offensive against the people.

Today India's big capital together with imperialist capital has plunged into an orgy of swindling State enterprises (built through ever heavier doses of indirect taxation and through deficit financing, i.e., by squeezing the blood of the famished people), buying up profitable State enterprises for a song, turning their own enterprises or State enterprises (which they do not think profitable enough but which contribute to the welfare of the people) sick and closing them down, cheating public sector banks and other financial institutions, cheating their workers (even of their own provident funds and other dues), etc.

By the end of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-7) there were 242 public sector enterprises (PSEs), in which a total of Rs 206,655 crores was invested. It was trumpet-tongued lying to claim that they were built to serve the 'socialistic pattern of society', which was no more than a fiction. Industries like iron and steel, fertilisers, oil, telecommunications, etc., were undertaken by the State, for private enterprise was "unable or unwilling to put up the resources required and run the risks involved". They required also long gestation periods to yield any profit when private enterprise was after quick profits. They provided the infrastructure on the basis of which private enterprises, domestic and foreign, fattened. Fleeced by foreign collaborators (who sold capital goods, industrial raw materials and technology — most often obsolete in their own countries — at prices much higher than their international prices) and by politicians and top level bureaucrats, sometimes in collusion with the mafia, and utterly mismanaged by both the poli-

181. "IMF asks India to carry out drastic reforms", *Statesman*, 2.7.2000.

ticians and the bureaucracy, many public sector enterprises failed to yield the desired profit. Some of them have been turned sick. Now, instead of redressing the wrongs that have plagued the PSEs, instead of ridding them of bureaucratic evils, the ruling classes have been pursuing the policies of closing down the sick ones (which do contribute to social welfare) and handing over controlling shares in the profitable ones to big businessmen, foreign and domestic, at throw-away prices.

Let us take, for instance, the Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL). When its shares were being sold at between Rs 183 and Rs 140 per share at the Bombay Stock Exchange, the Government chose not to disinvest despite the advice of the Disinvestment Commission. It preferred to disinvest when the price fell to Rs 70 per share.¹⁸² So Modern Foods, another PSE, was undersold: the value of its immovable assets, especially land, was not taken into consideration.¹⁸³ The same is the case with Maruti, which has a much larger share in the automobile market in India than all other car manufacturers combined. It is being gifted to the Japanese transnational, Suzuki, by devious means.¹⁸⁴

A glaring case of swindling the people is the recent sale of 51 per cent share — the controlling equity — in the public sector Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd. (BALCO) to the Sterlite Industries for Rs 551.5 crore. Its main plant is at Korba in the Chattisgarh state with a two lakh tonne per annum alumina refinery, one lakh tonne smelter, hot rolling mills, cold rolling mills, etc., and a township where 4,000 families live. It has three captive bauxite mines — all in the tribal region. And, true to their character, just before the privatisation, the BJD-BJP government of Orissa rushed to lease out two bauxite mines in the tribal region of Orissa to the company -- a post-bid enrichment of the assets to be handed over to the Sterlite group. Besides the above, BALCO has a 270 MW captive power plant which would be worth more than Rs 1,000 crore today after depreciation. It has also another unit at Asansol in West Bengal. It earned a net profit of Rs 110 crore in 1999-2000 and has a surplus fund of Rs 460 crore. All speakers at the Rajya Sabha during the debate on 27 February 2001, including some

182. Gurudas Dasgupta, "Disinvestment Plan", *Statesman*, 18.9.2000.

183. *Ibid.*

184. *Times of India*, Kolkata, 15.2.2001.

members of the ruling coalition and excepting the minister responsible for the disinvestment, condemned the deal. The demand for a joint parliamentary committee probe was rejected. The sell-out was completed on 3 March immediately after the majority in the Lok Sabha approved of it.

The workers of BALCO are haunted by the fear of retrenchment. All their unions have combined to set up BALCO Bachao Samyukta Abhijan Samiti. Under its banner they have been on strike since the sell-out. The entire Chattisgarh state observed a complete bandh on 16 March as a mark of protest. The Chattisgarh Legislative Assembly condemned the sale in an official resolution. Ajit Jogi, the chief minister of the state, has threatened to cancel the lease of the bauxite mines, as under the Constitution no tribal land can be transferred to non-tribals except in public interest. B.D. Sharma, a former national chairman of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, has filed a petition with the commission claiming that the Centre violated the Constitution by not consulting the commission and demanded immediate action on the matter.¹⁸⁵ Till now (24 March), the people are resisting the take-over of BALCO by the Sterlite group.

This is the routine practice of the Government. It has decided to disinvest more than 50 per cent of the equity of the Shipping Corporation of India, a profitable concern. This company worth Rs 3,000 crore may be taken over by some company, domestic or foreign, for a mere Rs 300 crore.¹⁸⁶ The huge wealth of the people accumulated by impoverishing them in the course of these years is being handed over to private capitalists, foreign and domestic, at ridiculous prices. The amount so obtained is used to meet budget deficits.

A very sinister and ominous development is the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2000, introduced in Parliament by the BJP-led government. The Bill seeks to hasten the process of privatisation of the coal mines in India. The coal mines were nationalised after providing more than reasonable compensation to their private owners in order to meet the rising demand of the industries for coal. Under private ownership, they had been utterly mismanaged; much coal was wasted; many layers of coal were left unmined, for mining below certain levels would not earn their

185. Different issues of *Times of India*, Kolkata, from 22 Feb. to 20 Mar. 2001.

186. *Ibid.*

owners fantastic profits they sought. The mined areas were not filled up, leading to subsidence of the soil in many places. Fire smouldered for years in many underground mines deserted by the owners. Miners were not only paid a pittance but were subjected to inhuman treatment by the mafias under the control of the owners, who in many cases were themselves mafias. The workers had neither security of jobs nor security of lives.

With nationalisation, production increased; exploration and development of new mines took place; many evils of the old order disappeared. But bureaucratic corruption, bad planning and mismanagement, import of foreign technology and foreign equipment at high costs, which did not suit Indian conditions, etc., plague the mines. The Eastern Coalfields, which has 116 mines in West Bengal and Jharkhand and is the largest subsidiary of Coal India Ltd., has been declared sick recently. Instead of ridding the nationalised mines (which are truly the wealth of the people) of the bureaucratic evils, the ruling classes propose to hand them over to private companies and restore the old order.

What is happening today in two mines already privatised in the Asansol sub-division of the Bardhaman district in West Bengal, foreshadows what is going to happen when the vast national wealth is given away to private owners -- foreign and domestic -- at nominal prices. In 1992 the West Bengal government took on lease from the Central government two mines as captive mines for the West Bengal State Electricity Board and West Bengal Power Development Corporation. These state undertakings formed the Bengal Emta Company, a joint venture (in which they retained only 26 per cent of the equity) with the privately-owned Emta Company. The entire management and control were left in the hands of the private owners. About four thousand workers toil in the mines and load coal onto the railway wagons which carry it to power companies. But the curious thing is that the new company has not a single worker on its roll. A number of contractors supply workers who are made to work much more than usual hours in inhuman conditions, have no security of jobs, are given the lowest possible wages for the days they are engaged, and are deprived of all usual benefits. The legal machinery of the Left Front government stubbornly refuses to respond to the demands of the workers and their union for rights which the existing laws permit. The most sinister implication of the policy pursued by the governments at the Centre and in the state is that they seek to split the

workforce into groups engaged by various contractors and to so weaken them that they will not be able to resist the offensive of the sharks. Both the interests of the people and of the workers are being offered as sacrifice at the altar of the super-profits of a few.

The Budget proposals for 2001-2, presented by the BJP finance minister in Parliament, have served the imperialist masters and the Indian tycoons well. As soon as they were out, the captains of industry and their chambers went into raptures over them.¹⁸⁷ *The Times of India* of 1 March 2001 commented: "Even foreign investors are bullish, thanks to proposals that will further liberalise the investment regime." The proposed budget has reduced the 15 per cent surcharge on individual and corporate income tax (the highest slab of which had been reduced earlier to 30 per cent) to two per cent (giving away Rs 5,500 crore) and the tax on dividend from 20 per cent to 10 per cent; declared a tax holiday for 10 years on infrastructure projects – power, ports, etc.; reduced excise duties on products like cars, two-wheelers, refrigerators, air-conditioners, soft drinks; raised the investment limit of FIIs in companies from 40 to 49 per cent; permitted cent per cent foreign direct investment in non-banking financial institutions; accelerated the privatisation process; promised removal of price and administrative controls in four key sectors – petroleum products, fertilisers, drugs and sugar – throwing people to the wolves; and reduced bank interest rates to make cheaper funds available to the business magnates, foreign and native; and reduced customs duties on many imports. The proposed budget has placed workers at the mercy of the tycoons; by proposing amendments to the existing labour laws it has given companies employing 1,000 persons or less – the overwhelming majority of Indian companies – the right to hire and fire workers; and permitted employment of contract labour, thus turning formal jobs into informal ones and accentuating exploitation of labour and taking away all their rights. It has provided for two per cent reduction in Government employment per year, and by accelerating the process of privatisation of PSEs it has ensured large-scale reduction in employment.

Like the working class, the middle class people, especially elderly people, are an endangered species in another way. The proposed budget has widened the tax net to include even those who earn even Rs 2,500 as interest on

187. For their reactions, see *The Economic Times*, 1.3.2001.

a deposit. It has also reduced the interest earnings from their small savings -- provident funds, etc., -- by 1.5 percentage points to offer largesse to the tycoons. The new rates of interest on their meagre savings will fail to compensate for the rise in the annual rates of inflation.

The Indian State encourages the generation of black money and money laundering. In July 1999 the Government presented a money laundering Bill in the Rajya Sabha. Commenting on it, the Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), N. Vittal, said that "Those who launder black money through banks abroad will have very little to worry" and that "*the Government has provided a good escape route for the launderers.*" "If the Prevention of Money Laundering Bill", he asserted, "is enacted in its present form, then there is a danger that *the extent of black money and the money laundering will continue to grow unchecked* and the Act will largely be a paper tiger." The Government, its financial advisers and its legal luminaries are not so naive as to be unaware of the "serious loopholes" in the bill, their creation. "Corruption", said Vittal, "is the use of public office for private profit." He stated that in India where *the extent of black money is placed at 40 per cent of the gross domestic product, the Government and rule-framers have provided loopholes for the launderers*, especially those indulging in drug-trafficking. India had the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) to check hawala transactions. This, the CVC said, was replaced by the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), whose provisions do not cover the ingredients of the hawala transactions. "As a Vigilance Commissioner", said the CVC, "I am acutely aware of the fact that exploitative corruption at the cutting edge of administration where the common citizen is harassed for his day-to-day activities by the lower level public servant, is much less in size, compared to *the collusive corruption which takes place at higher levels in the administration.*"¹⁸⁸

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) invest in the Stock Exchange for speculative purposes. Whenever it suits their interests, they withdraw their capital. With their huge resources they dominate the share market. Suitable legislation and orders are passed to enable them to evade taxes. An instance may be cited. On 13 April 2000, the Central Board of Direct Taxes issued a circular instructing Income Tax officials that the FIIs registered in Mauritius

188. "Bill can't check money laundering", *Statesman*, 19.9.2000.

were exempt from payment of taxes on capital gains. Many FIIs operate in India through the Mauritius route to avoid taxation on their capital gains. In 1999-2000 alone they invested Rs 40,000 crore in the shares of companies registered in India and made capital gains of 81 per cent — a net capital gain of Rs 32,400 crore. A 10 per cent tax on this profit would amount to Rs 3,240 crore. But they were allowed exemption from payment as they claimed residential status in Mauritius; and there is a treaty between India and Mauritius — the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) — allowing exemption to Mauritius-based companies. The interesting things are: first, Mauritius has no tax on capital gains, and the question of double taxation does not arise. Second, all the FIIs operating in India, excepting one, have no residential status in Mauritius and are not entitled to any benefit on that account. One of such FIIs operating through Mauritius, which made quite a fortune, was India Fund Inc., based in the USA. Interestingly, this FII employed (perhaps still employs) Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's daughter-in-law.¹⁸⁹

Aspects of India's Economy correctly observed: "In brief, the black economy in India is not at the margin but at the *centre* of the economy as a whole. It is one expression of the *bleeding* of the productive economy by parasitic classes."¹⁹⁰

Corresponding degeneration of political life

This lumpenisation and maldevelopment of India's economy go hand in hand with lumpenisation or criminalisation of India's politics.

India is a paradise for the corrupt — big compradors and their imperialist masters, corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and other criminals. Writing in the *Economic Times*, T.V.R. Shenoy said that when some vigilance cases were being pursued a member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) said to him grimly: "At this rate most of us shall be outside Parliament and inside Tihar [the Delhi prison]." Shenoy stated that "He was not joking" and added: "According to my information there are only two members of the

189. *Statesman*, 31.5.2000 and 2.6.2000.

190. "Amnesty Scheme: Giant Fraud by Consensus", *Aspects*, Jan.-Mar. 1998 (No. 25), p. 53 — emphasis in the original. See also Kamal Nayan Kabra, *India's Black Economy and Maldevelopment*, New Delhi, 1986.

CWC who are not subjects of an investigation today.”¹⁹¹

All this is true also of many leading members of other ruling parties — whether at the Centre or in the states. But the fears of the above member of the CWC were exaggerated; for, though they have undoubted claims to residential accommodation at Tihar or some other prison, there are in this country many escape-routes for them which ensure that they reside in palaces instead of at Tihar or the like. L.K. Advani, the present BJP Home Minister of the government at the Centre is himself accused of a dastardly crime. He led a large mob of Hindu fanatics to demolish the more than 400-year old Babri mosque at Ayodhya in U.P. in 1992. (Only a short while before, in the wake of his *rath yatra*, some thousands of lives — mostly Muslim — were crushed out of existence. The destruction of the Babri mosque inflamed communal feelings in the entire subcontinent. Many Hindu temples were destroyed by Muslim fanatics in Bangladesh as an act of retaliation.) Previously, Advani and the Union Minister of Finance, Yashwant Sinha, had been accused in the Jain hawala scam case. Recently, the Income Tax Department is reported to have found that their assets, like the assets of 15 others accused in the Jain hawala scam case, are disproportionate to their sources of legitimate income. And a division bench of the Delhi High Court has sought an action taken report from the Central government on the Income Tax Department’s reported finding.¹⁹² Fresh summonses have also been issued to another BJP stalwart and Union Minister for Human Resources Development, Murli Manohar Joshi and to a former BJP MP and minister, Uma Bharati, to appear before the Liberhans Commission set up in connection with the Babri Masjid demolition.¹⁹³ One cannot reasonably expect that such august personalities (the number of such VIPs is growing today) should be subject to the ordinary laws of the land.

Under strong public pressure a committee headed by N.N. Vohra, then Home Secretary, and with the heads of the intelligence agencies — the directors of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) — as members was set up in 1993 to take stock of the activities of crime syndicates and their links

191. Shenoy, “After Easter Sunday”, *Economic Times*, 2 Apr. 1997.

192. PTI, “Hawala ATR”, *Statesman*, 20.9.2000.

193. “Ayodhya Case”, *ibid*, 23.9.2000.

with the bureaucracy and politicians. The Vohra Committee's report as tabled in Parliament in 1995 and described by the opposition as a highly censored version of the original report, referred to the rapid growth of powerful crime syndicates and armed *senas* and the nexus between them and bureaucrats and politicians. Some of these crime syndicates have international links. Some gangs armed with 'money power' and networks of musclemen are headed by political leaders who get themselves elected to State Assemblies and Parliament with their help.

They have corrupted the Government machinery at all levels, even members of the judiciary, and are running a parallel government making the State apparatus irrelevant. The Vohra Committee mentioned in particular Bihar, U.P. and Haryana.¹⁹⁴ Bihar, U.P. and Haryana might have led the way but other states are not far behind. The famed Jayalalitha, former chief minister of Tamil Nadu, a group of her ministers and bureaucrats are just an example. When her party, AIADMK, lent support to the BJP-led government at the Centre, the prime minister Vajpayee, in order to make his throne secure, appointed counsel and judges according to her choice when she was facing her trials.

Recently, the NDA, of which the BJP is by far the largest constituent, set up many hard-core criminals as its candidates for election to the Bihar Legislative Assembly. They are accused of murder, robbery, kidnapping, extortion, looting banks and smuggling along the Indo-Nepal border. Of the 37 criminals elected to the Assembly more than two-thirds belong to the NDA and several to the RJD, the ruling party of Bihar. Nitish Kumar, who enjoyed a few brief days of glory as chief minister of Bihar through the grace of God and of the BJP governor of Bihar, welcomed these murderers and criminals with outstretched arms in order to make his throne secure. Jail-birds were brought to the Assembly in prison vans as its "honourable members". On the election-eve a retired I.A.S. official had remarked: "The Assembly will have to be converted into a jail after the polls."¹⁹⁵ It is said that the BJP jail minister of U.P. was previously in jail accused of criminal activities.

Criminals get themselves elected to the state legislatures and Parliament

194. *Statesman*, 2.8.95 and 3.8.95; *Business Standard*, 2.8.95.

195. *Statesman*, 8.2.2000 and 14.3.2000 (editorial 'Jail Raj').

because of the widespread fear of them, and rigging and booth-capturing by their musclemen. Elections at all levels, which are a proud ornament of Indian 'democracy', are mostly a farce.

Though the Central Bureau of Investigation has a life of more than three decades, it has no legal charter and there is no CBI Act. Its wings are clipped by the Delhi Police Establishment Act (DPEA), which does not allow CBI to pursue cases involving politicians and bureaucrats to their logical conclusion. An officer said: "Though our area of operation is wide, our role is limited and restricted. We totally depend on their [governors'] consent." "Even for a little clearance", said an official, "we have to depend on the Union ministry of personnel", and the process is very complicated and lethargic.

In addition, the Anti-Corruption Act makes it mandatory to get the state government's consent before any action against state officials. According to officers, mostly of the IPS, investigating cases like Bofors, St. Kitts, urea scam, telecom scam, JMM bribery case, there was a complete lack of "political will" in making the CBI more federal and more accountable to Parliament. The National Police Commission did not allow the CBI to take action against Central or state government ministers without the consent of the President and respective state governors their own kin.¹⁹⁶ Such honourable men like ministers who have dedicated their lives to the service of the country and the people can reasonably claim, and do enjoy, immunity from 'the due process of law' for their habitual lapses. India has justly earned world recognition as a land of corruption — a land of the corrupt rich and powerful.

In about mid-March (2001), India's political world was rocked by certain disclosures made in a *Tehelka.com* documentary. It is about the Indian government's arms deals and about the huge commissions which ministers, other eminent political leaders, high military and civilian officers demand and obtain from foreign arms-manufacturers through middle-men for purchases, even if the arms offered are shoddy. Rather, the more shoddy the better, for the commissions would be still more huge. The hidden cassette recorders and spy cameras recorded interesting and revealing conversations

196. "Politicians hobbling CBI, say officials", *Statesman*, 8.6.2000; see also A.G. Noorani, "Corruption", *Statesman*, 18.3.2000.

between two Tehelka journalists who posed as representatives of a non-existent London-based arms manufacturing company, Westend International, and big political leaders and senior military officers about the monetary ways of influencing them and the highest political bosses in the land. The spy cameras caught red-handed Bangaru Laxman, president of the BJP, and Jaya Jaitley, president of its ally, Samata Party, accepting token gifts of Rs one lakh and two lakhs respectively, to be followed by gifts worthy of them and of the others whose front men they are. The Tehelka disclosures, though stoutly criticised by the BJP-led government, led to the resignation of George Fernandes, the defence minister, Bangaru Laxman and Jaya Jaitley. The railways minister also resigned. As Aniruddh Bahal, one of the journalists of Tehelka, who saw the august personalities, said: "We approached people who had already consented to meet us with the full knowledge that we were arms dealers and that we would be offering inducements." It was money -- not the efficacy of the equipment nor the need for it -- that was the overriding concern. As Bahal said, "People looked at us like ravens, their only interest was in what they could get out of us."¹⁹⁷ R.K. Jain of the Samata Party, a key figure, with whom the Tehelka journalists had illuminating talks, was later sued by Yashwant Sinha, finance minister, and Mamata Banerjee, the railways minister, for his statements about them. Jain retracted after about a fortnight. We have no knowledge how correct or incorrect his statements were; but, in any case, he had to retract, for it was hardly possible to prove the correctness of what he had stated to Tehelka. The fact is, whether it is an arms deal or any other deal, fat commissions are built into the sale price of the goods by the successful bidder. The BJP-led government has rejected the demand for a joint parliament committee probe. Instead, the Government has gone in for a judicial inquiry. It will be of little worth as all such inquiries, intended to deceive people, were in the past.

The Tehelka documentary on the website had, no doubt, a dramatic and sensational impact. But, as noted before, there is nothing new about such revelations. Such stories are as old as the Indian Union. They have always been quietly ignored. Now the poison has spread wider and penetrated deeper. The other day, on 23 December 1999, an independent M.P., Jayant Kumar Malhotra, raised the question of corruption in *every* defence deal and gave

197. *Times of India*, 28.3.2001

details about the murky deals in the Rajya Sabha. He promised to submit conclusive evidence before a joint parliamentary committee which he demanded. He charged: "You have Rs 30,000 crore or more of excessively bought and wrongly bought things and junk, lying in your various Army, Air Force and Navy depots." The demand for a JPC was rejected. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India also raised objection about military spares that had reached Cochin and were not examined for 18 months, till the warranty period expired.¹⁹⁸

Speaking on the subject, the former Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, said that the Tehelka tapes only exposed the tip of the iceberg: "They do not show the other forms of blackmail, video tapes involving top politicians and officials, used by foreign agencies to get their way." He called Fernandes a "C.I.A. agent" whose agenda as the defence minister had been "to follow his master's voice".¹⁹⁹

It may be worth recalling that in a petition to the Bombay High Court, filed on 15 September 1990, Vishnu Bhagwat, then Rear Admiral and a top naval officer, charged almost the entire naval top brass including J.G. Nadkarni, then Chief of the Indian Navy, with mismanagement, corruption, moral turpitude and so on. He also stated that "helped by outside influences, a section of the top brass, who were alumni of the Naval War College, U.S.A., has acquired control of key positions..." While making his allegations against U.S. involvement in the running of the Indian navy, Bhagwat accused the top naval officers of receiving U.S. favours in kind which were bestowed upon them with a view to influencing official policy matters. These charges accusing the top brass of the Indian navy of being disloyal to India and serving U.S. imperial interests were neither withdrawn nor refuted. Bhagwat was promoted to the post of Flag Officer Commanding eastern fleet on his mere withdrawal of his petition to the Bombay High Court.²⁰⁰ Later, he became India's naval chief but was removed when Fernandes became defence minister.

Threatening very existence

A recent development threatens the very existence of the entire people.

198. *Times of India*, Kolkata, 22.3.2001.

199. *Ibid*, 26.3.2001.

200. *Statesman*, 23.8.1991.

On 11 and 13 May 1998 the BJP-led government carried out several nuclear tests at Pokhran in Rajasthan. Vajpayee boasted that they had obtained a new powerful means to "silence India's enemies and show India's strength". The BJP home minister was more explicit. Advani asked Pakistan to recognise the new development and accept the new geographical reality.

It is worth recalling that as early as 3 February 1947 (even before direct colonial rule had ended), Nehru wrote in a note on "Defence Policy and National Development": "The probable use of atomic energy in warfare is likely to revolutionise all our concepts of war and defence.... *it makes it absolutely essential for us to develop the methods of using atomic energy for both civil and military purposes.*" On 29 February 1948, he wrote to Baldev Singh, then India's defence minister: "But the future belongs to those who produce atomic energy.... Of course, Defence is intimately concerned with this. Even the political consequences are worthwhile."²⁰¹ At that time no country in the world, except the USA, possessed nuclear weapons. And Nehru's India aspired to hitch its wagon to America's star.²⁰² It was the 'big power' syndrome of India's ruling classes which prompted them to undertake the nuclear programme. The huge mountain of costs produced the first mouse when India under Nehru's worthy daughter, Indira Gandhi, tested the first atomic weapon at the same site, Pokhran, on 18 May 1974.

The jingoism that the nuclear blasts of March 1998 roused among some Indians, some of them crazy and hate-filled, was soon chilled when Pakistan replied with several nuclear tests — one more than India's.

Though so poor, India and its neighbour, Pakistan, almost equally poor and ridden with various problems, have been spending colossal sums of money on the development and manufacture of nuclear weapons and missiles to carry the nuclear warheads to their targets. It is a race for mutual destruction. The other day Vajpayee said: "We are being threatened with nuclear weapons. Do the Pakistanis understand what this means? If they think we will wait for them to drop a bomb and face destruction, they are mistaken." To this Lt. General Kamal Matinuddin of Pakistan replied: "If

201. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2nd series, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1984, p. 364; *ibid*, Vol. V, New Delhi, 1987, p. 420. Emphasis added. I owe these references to Dr. Subhasis Mukhopadhyay.

202. N. Mansengh (chief editor), *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-7s (TOP)*, London, Vol. I, pp. 665-6; *SWN*, Vol. XII, 194-5.

there's a war, we are likely to respond earlier rather than later in the use of nuclear weapons.”²⁰³

L. Ramdas, retired Admiral and chief of the Indian Navy, observed: “...the nuclear weaponisation programmes of both India and Pakistan are politically a misadventure, militarily inefficient, economically a disaster, and morally unethical and indefensible.”²⁰⁴

Since the birth of the two states, India and Pakistan, three full-scale wars have been fought between them. Another mini-scale war was fought in 1999 over Kargil, an uninhabited mountain near the line of control (LoC) in Kashmir. A recently published book *Weapons of Peace* by Raj Chengappa states that the Indian government activated all the three types of nuclear delivery vehicles and kept them at what is known as “readiness state three” (i.e., a state when some nuclear bombs would be ready to be mated with the delivery vehicle at short notice) during the Kargil conflict. According to the author, “Pakistan too is learnt to have kept its nuclear weapons in an advanced state of readiness.”²⁰⁵

It seems that the leaders of the Indian Talibans and Pakistani Talibans (all counterparts of the Afghan Talibans) have turned the subcontinent into a madhouse where they play with these dangerous weapons of mass destruction as children play with toys, regardless of the fact that much of the subcontinent may become a charnel-house as a result of the game they are playing. When the leaders decide to push the nuclear trigger, not a hair of theirs will be touched. Before nuclear bombs drop, they would fly to safer climes in Europe and America with their families and cohorts, where their patrons have several lakh crores of rupees — all Indian money — stashed in secret accounts in banks. Just as during 1947-8, the flames they kindle will consume ordinary people.

The question is, how can this regime of unbridled plunder and corruption — this regime which condemns the vast majority of the people to misery and inhuman existence — carry on? A little less than two hundred years

203. Cited in Jonathan Power, “World View: Clinton's visit unlikely to avert nuclear war”, *Statesman*, 17.3.2000.

204. L. Ramdas, “India-Pakistan Relations at a Crossroads: A Personal Statement”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Apr.-June 1999, p. 75.

205. *Times of India*, (Mumbai), 21.4.2000.

ago, Shelley said to the men of England:

“Rise like lions after slumber
 In unvanquishable number,
 Shake your chains to earth like dew
 Which in sleep had fallen on you —
 Ye are many — they are few.”

In a class society like India’s, there are, broadly, two strata of the people — the oppressors and the oppressed, the rulers and the ruled. The oppressors and plunderers who are the rulers are few while the oppressed and ruled form the vast majority. Yet for ages the vast majority have been under the rule of the oppressors and plunderers, except for a few brief years in the erstwhile Soviet Union and in China.

Force, no doubt, is the ultimate arbiter of the destinies of the people. The existing laws and law-courts, which ensure the inviolability of bourgeois property, the police and the prisons, the para-military and military forces are among the means but not the sole means used by the rulers to preserve the system. Among the means employed by them to drug the toiling people into forgetting the real problems of life, into failing to distinguish between their enemies and their friends are religious chauvinism as well as national chauvinism. “War is the health of the State”, said a radical writer Randolph Bourne during World War I. To quote Howard Zinn, “Indeed, as the nations of Europe went to war in 1914, the governments flourished, patriotism bloomed, class struggle was stilled and young men died in frightful numbers on the battlefields — often for a hundred yards of land, a line of trenches.... Ten million were to die on the battlefield, 20 million were to die of hunger and disease related to the war. And no one since that day has been able to show that the war brought any gain for humanity that would be worth one human life.”²⁰⁶ (In the aftermath of the war, an influenza epidemic swept away 14 million lives in India alone.) But World War I brought immense gain to the U.S. ruling class as World War II, which claimed several times more victims, brought later far more immense gain to it.

Here, in India in our time three wars with Pakistan and one with China have played their role. Recently, the Pokhran blasts and Kargil have helped.

206. Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*, New York, 1990 edn., p. 350.

In the background of Kargil came the unusually steep rise in the prices of the bare necessities of life like food, kerosene and diesel. The Kashmir problem and the problem of defining India's boundary with Tibet are not likely to be solved for a long time to come as they are quite helpful in creating a climate of hysteria at appropriate times. By inventing facts, suppressing true ones or publishing bits of them while at the same time hiding them under heaps of irrelevant details and plain lies, the media under the control of the rulers can manage to mould public opinion and "manufacture consent"²⁰⁷ and cloud the consciousness of the deprived and ruled — consciousness in which, as Mao Tsetung said, revolution first begins.

"Under existing conditions", wrote Albert Einstein, the great physicist, "private capitalists inevitably control directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education). It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed in most cases quite impossible, for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights."²⁰⁸

Successive ruling class slogans and their failure

Since the transfer of power in 1947, India's ruling classes, the shrewdest perhaps in the whole of the underdeveloped world, have adopted different strategies at different times to hoodwink the people. First, it was the 'socialist pattern of society'. In the name of building an independent, self-reliant, socialist economy, the ruling classes made it more dependent on imperialist capital and technology. In the name of development and industrialisation, they helped the comprador big bourgeoisie to develop rapidly, strengthened the stranglehold of imperialist capital and did not make any essential change in feudal relations in the countryside. In the name of non-alignment in foreign policy they pursued a policy of bi-alignment with Anglo-American and erstwhile Soviet social-imperialist powers. In the name of democracy and equal opportunities for all, they trampled upon the democratic rights of the people and tried to stifle the struggles of the various nationalities for autonomy and freedom. By 1966 these policies of the ruling classes matured into a political and economic crisis.

207. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York, 1988.

208. Einstein, "Why Socialism?", *Monthly Review* (New York), vol. I, No. 1, May 1949; reprinted in several subsequent issues.

Soon after the 'socialist pattern of society' lost its gloss, a populist slogan 'garibi hatao' (liquidate poverty) was added to it. When hard facts of life broke people's illusions about them as, instead of poverty being liquidated, millions of the poor were getting liquidated, 'Emergency' was declared. Soon after the Emergency, the ruling classes tried the Janata Party experiment. When the country was seething with anger and hatred for the Indira Congress, the ruling classes knocked together another set of their men — most of them already tried and tested — out of diverse groups and placed them in power to hoodwink the people and carry on the same regime of plunder and oppression. The Jan Sangh dissolved itself and merged in the Janata Party. By raising the slogan of 'Democracy versus Dictatorship' the new men (rather old men dressed in a new party garb) successfully exploited the feelings and sentiments of the people, improved their own image (that was tarnished before) and diverted the attention of the people for a while from their main enemies. But the new experiment failed within a short time. The erstwhile Jan Sangh appeared reincarnated as the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1981.

When other experiments like 'Mr Clean' Rajiv and 'United Front' failed or were about to fail, when the economic situation became very, very grim for the toiling people, the 'Hindutva' chariot started rolling crushing out of existence thousands of lives. Then the Babri *masjid* was demolished by organised Hindu fanatics of the R.S.S. family, led by L.K. Advani. When other experiments failed to dupe the people, the ruling classes have been employing 'Hindutva' and 'Hindutva' has come to hold the centre-stage of Indian politics today. Faced with a severe crisis a major section of the big bourgeoisie has discarded composite nationalism (even its attenuated form) and is promoting 'all-India Hindu nationalism'. They are nurturing the R.S.S. family and have raised its political wing, the BJP, as the main ruling party. Hindutva has now become their battle-cry to drug the people, irrespective of religion, into submission. It is directed not only against the religious minorities — the Muslims and the Christians against whom murderous attacks have been made and whose religious places have been desecrated or demolished — but also against all other toiling people the overwhelming majority of whom are Hindus. In fact its principal purpose is to exercise hegemony over the vast majority of the people. It is intended as a device to create divisions among the oppressed and ruled and disrupt their resistance against

the ruling classes whose policies are threatening their very existence.

It seems that Hindutva may have a much briefer life than the 'socialist pattern of society'. The slogan of 'Hindutva' has failed to exercise sway over the broad masses, and has remained confined to particular sections. One does not know what other strategy India's ruling classes may innovate when Hindutva fails. Recently, on 24 June 2000, the Samata Defence Minister²⁰⁹, George Fernandes, said: "If our policy fails to solve the problems of the people and our system fails to give justice to the oppressed and harassed, then a day may come when an emergency-like situation would arise."²¹⁰ The proof of the pudding is, indeed, in the eating. Already the oppressed and harassed have had some taste of the pudding offered by the NDA government — its attempts 'to solve' (or accentuate) their problems and the 'justice' provided by the system. As we have seen, Fernandes' government is the friend of the criminals, not of 'the oppressed and harassed'. How can they serve 'the oppressed and harassed' when their aim is to serve the interests of the foreign and domestic sharks and their own? The 'oppressed and harassed' constitute at least 85 per cent of the population — about 85 crores. And the great majority among them are Hindus, including *dalits*. When they refuse to be duped by Hindutva, "an Emergency-like situation", according to Fernandes, would arise. That means, every vestige of the democratic rights of the citizens would be suppressed; various nationalities would be denied even the semblance of rights; and State terrorism would seek to put down all resistance of "the oppressed and harassed" as it is already doing in J and K and in many regions of India.

209. He was obliged to resign after the Tehelka exposure in March 2001.

210. *Statesman*, 25 June 2000.

E. What the BJP-led Government Intends to Achieve

The statements of the BJP and the BJP-led government and the steps already taken by them suggest that in reviewing the Constitution four aspects are under discussion:

1. Abridgement of the already attenuated rights of citizens.
2. Abridgement of whatever rights the states still enjoy.
3. Curbing the rights of the minorities.
4. Doing away completely with J and K's 'special status' (Article 370), which, in practice, has already been reduced to a fiction.

But we need to keep in mind that these aspects themselves do not constitute the *object* of the whole exercise. The real object is to stave off somehow the sharpening disillusionment of the Indian masses with the entire set-up and the sham democracy, and to convince the masses that they indeed have an answer to the intractable problems of the Indian State. Thus the central point of the exercise is diversion.

Nevertheless we would like to touch on these targets briefly.

1. Abridgement of citizens' meagre rights

The BJP-led government is reviving the infamous Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA — which lapsed in May 1995) and adding to it even more pernicious features.

Immediately before the lapse of TADA, a Criminal Law Amendment Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by the Congress government. But the Government accepted certain amendments which sought to *omit* the provisions which made confessions to police officers admissible as evidence and imposed the burden of proving his innocence on the accused while applying for bail. It was the BJP which then insisted on retaining these pernicious features. But, though debated, the bill was not passed.

In 1999 the BJP-led government revived this bill and sent it to the Law Commission for its consideration, adding to it some fresh amendments of its own. Enriched by these amendments and the Law Commission's recommendations, this bill, pretending to combat terrorism, ensures the denial of

all democratic rights of the people and removes all safeguards which may prevent its abuse by the police. It is worse than even TADA.

Briefly, as soon as the bill is passed, it will be in force throughout India, unlike TADA which came into force in an area notified under the Act. Second, the new law shall remain in force for five years and any regular review by Parliament is ruled out. Third, 'terrorists' and 'disruptive activities' are defined in such a manner that anybody can be accused as 'terrorist' or as causing 'disruptive activities'.²¹¹ As A.G. Noorani says, "It would expose a journalist to a year's imprisonment if he fails to disclose 'as soon as reasonably practicable to the police' information which 'he knows or reasonably believes might be of material assistance' in preventing the commission of an offence or in securing the arrest of the offender." A person protesting against some unpopular measure of the Government, a lawyer defending members of banned organisations, a railway employee striking work, and so on are not safe from the clutches of this law. Any act by anybody that may "over-awe the Government" is liable to penal action. Fourth, all safeguards against the abuse of the law by the Government or the police have been removed. The police officer is enjoined only to forward the material to the Director General of Police and the review committee for their scrutiny. "This appeal from Caesar to Caesar" (to quote Noorani's phrase) is hardly any protection from abuse by the police, quite notorious for corruption and violation even of the ordinary laws of the land. This provision is as reassuring as entrusting lambs to the wolf for safe-keeping. The reports of human rights organisations, including the National and State Human Rights Commissions, are full of criticism of arbitrary arrests, wanton killings, torture, rapes and murders in police custody. The only safeguard the proposed law offers is an appeal to the Supreme Court, but the Supreme Court is almost as remote to the people at large as the moon. Fifth, the remand of the accused is extended; the accused person can be remanded in police custody for upto 30 days and in judicial custody for upto six months *without any charge being framed against him*. The right to obtain bail is very much restricted.

Sixth, a more pernicious feature of the proposed law is that 'confessions' made *before police officers* are admissible as evidence. Everyone

211. "TADA replacement Bill termed anti-people" *Statesman*, 11.3.2000; People's Union for Democratic Rights, "TADA Returns", *Frontier*, 28 May-3 June 2000; A.G. Noorani, "TADA Revival", *Statesman*, 8.3.2000.

knows how these 'confessions' are extracted and what they are worth when torture and deaths in police custody are rampant. We have already quoted H.L. Kapoor, a former Assistant Commissioner of Police, Delhi. The annual report (1996-97) of the West Bengal Human Rights Commission may also be cited. It stated that it was becoming increasingly difficult "to rely on thana records to ascertain facts or sequence of events as they took place". It said: "*Entries were made not always in accordance with facts but according to convenience. It was almost a regular practice to leave blank space in the register to be filled up later.*" It noted that *the investigation officer, in some cases, felt no compunction in planting evidence almost in a routine manner so as to implicate the target individual.* It stated: "*Fabrication of entries in the records was fairly common* and this was often used as a convenient tool to support and strengthen certain pre-conceived lines of investigation." Another "equally disturbing" factor, according to the commission, was almost a "*regular practice with the investigating officers to obtain the signature or thumb impression of the complainants and the victims on blank papers for possible use later according to the exigencies of the circumstances.*" It added that in a number of cases, *violation of human rights was motivated — directly or indirectly — "by considerations underlying interplay of monetary factors".*"²¹² The proposed law makes the 'confessions' supposed to have been made by accused persons before many such criminals dressed in police uniforms and maintained at the cost of the people admissible as evidence!!

Seventh, another obnoxious feature is that the burden of proof that he is not guilty is placed on the shoulders of the accused person. According to the normal laws everywhere, an accused person is deemed innocent until the accusers prove beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law that he is guilty. Under the proposed law the police (or the Government behind it) can send a man to transportation for life or even to death without substantiating the charge or charges against him. Eighth, trials can be held *in camera* at the discretion of *special courts* set up by the Government for the purpose, and *the identity of prosecution witnesses can be kept secret even during cross-examination.* Everybody knows how witnesses are tutored by the police or interested persons in this country to provide the required evidence. This

212. *Statesman*, 28.11.1997 — emphasis added.

provision will only encourage the malpractice and make false witnesses more fearless than before.

The new law proposed by the BJP government does away with the pretence of democracy which the ruling classes can no longer afford, for times are out of joint. Their cry is that by suppressing 'terrorism' and 'disruptive activities', they seek to preserve "the unity, integrity, security, or sovereignty of India". But no law can preserve India's integrity: only the people can (and for them the 'integrity' of India means something altogether different from what it means to the ruling classes). But the ruling classes are waging a ruthless war against the people on different fronts — economic, social and political. This proposed law is one weapon among many weapons in that war.

Collaboration between Indian and U.S. intelligence services

It is significant that recently the director of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Louis Freeh, visited India. The purpose, as reported in the press, was to explore avenues of close collaboration between the FBI and India's investigation agencies — the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Freeh had a series of meetings with the Union Law Minister, the Foreign Secretary, senior Home Ministry officials and the director of the CBI. It was reported that Freeh discussed with the director of the CBI 'the need for greater collaboration in investigation technology'. A permanent FBI office has been opened in New Delhi.²¹³ The USA's CIA has been active in India for long years. Co-operation between the spy agencies of the two states is nothing new. Till recently this co-operation was informal. But today formal co-operation has started and the US agency has assumed the role of guide and instructor to the Indian agencies. For that is what the interests of the US as well as of the Indian ruling classes demand. One may remember that during US president Clinton's visit to India, the US agencies took over complete charge of the security arrangements for their president, allowing no role in them to Indian agencies — in India — an act symbolical of India's 'independence' and 'sovereignty'.

The declared purpose behind this close co-operation between the investigation agencies of the two states is to combat 'global terrorism'. How hol-

low this claim is, becomes obvious from the record of the USA's crimes as *the worst terrorist state* in the whole of the world for the last 55 years. Why did the US imperialists drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 when they knew that Japan would surrender in a matter of days? Were they not terrorist acts of the most frightful sort, committed to serve the US imperialists' political interests? Did they not plan to drop atom bombs again on North Vietnam and South China in 1954 — a plan negatived by the British and French governments — when the resistance of the Vietnamese against the recolonisation of their country by the French imperialists ensured the sure defeat of the latter and when French troops were besieged in Dien Bien Phu?²¹⁴ The wanton destruction of Vietnam, the Gulf of Tonkin episode, the dropping of seven million tonnes of bombs on Vietnam (twice the total bombs dropped in Europe, Africa and Asia during World War II), the use of napalm bombs, nerve gas, defoliants, etc., etc., — were they not terroristic acts, the worst that the world has ever seen? Did not CIA and the British Intelligence, SIS, plan the coup to overthrow the elected government of Mohammad Mossadegh and bring back the Shah of Iran in 1953? What is their record in Central and South America? To be brief, the US imperialists even used their CIA to try to assassinate Fidel Castro of Cuba and other heads of state.²¹⁵

It would fill volumes to mention the terrorist acts of the US ruling class against its own citizens and the citizens of other countries. Here we would cite only one terroristic act against its citizens — the murder of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.²¹⁶ We would quote Jimmy Carter, a former president of the USA. Speaking at a human rights function in Boston in 1991 Carter said: "The worst human rights abuse in the world is the initiation of war. If you look at the last decade, where have the wars originated? They have originated in the USA. We gave tacit approval to Israel's invasion of Lebanon. We bombed villages around Beirut. We launched a war against Grenada. We invaded Panama, we financed and orchestrated the Contra war where

214. Geoffrey Warner, 'Escalations in Viet Nam — The Precedents of 1954', *International Affairs* (organ of the Royal Institute of International Affairs), London Vol. 41, No. 1, April 1965.

215. See Howard Zinn, *op cit*, pp. 413-5, 465-70, 542-3; also Mark Zepczauer, *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, Chicago, 1998.

216. See Zinn, *op cit*, 424-8.

35,000 people were killed in Nicaragua. We were the leading force in launching a war in Iraq without any real effort to resolve the issue peaceably.”²¹⁷

Jimmy Carter, while US president or not, was himself no angel. To quote Howard Zinn, “Carter was continuing the old hypocrisy. The US was supporting, all over the world, regimes that engaged in imprisonment of dissenters, torture and mass murder: in Chile, in Iran, in Nicaragua, and in Indonesia where the inhabitants of Timor were being annihilated in a campaign bordering on genocide.”²¹⁸

Instead of dwelling on the incredible extent of terror unleashed by the USA in Iraq *against civilians* during and after the Gulf war which began on 17 January 1991, we would quote what an American, Kathy Kelly, said from Kelly’s personal experience. Kelly wrote: “I tell them [Americans after his return to the USA] of Ameriyah, Iraq, where, on 13 February 1991, US smart bombs were so smart that they were able to enter the ventilation shafts of a building that sheltered hundreds of Iraqi women and children. The exit doors were sealed shut and the temperature inside rose to 500 degrees centigrade. All save 17 survivors were melted.”²¹⁹

For the last ten years the world has been watching while the USA, the only super-power in the world, goes on raining death and destruction on Iraq even after the Gulf war ended in 1991. To quote Jonathan Power, a Western journalist, “Every three days on average, US and British aircraft take off to bomb Iraq. The Pentagon says more than 280,000 sorties have been flown in the near decade since no-flight zones were imposed on Saddam in the north and south of the country.... [Trade] Sanctions first imposed by Security Council decree in April 1991 remain fully in place, Britain and the USA resisting any attempt to dilute them. The people of Iraq once reasonably prosperous have been reduced to penury. Well over half a million Iraqi children have died as a result, says UNICEF. Former US secretary of defence Robert McNamara [whose own record as a perpetrator of mass-scale terrorism can hardly be surpassed] is reported to have called these sanctions ‘a weapon of

217. *New Age* weekly, 29.12.1991.

218. Zinn, *op cit*, 554.

219. Kathy Kelly, “Reliving the War on Iraq”, *The Progressive* (Third World Network Features) reprinted in *Frontier*, 11.12.1993.

mass destruction'.”²²⁰

The hijacking of a plane is no doubt a terrorist act. But what about kidnapping a national of a foreign country forcibly, trampling underfoot all international laws, and bringing him to the USA to stand trial for committing some supposed offences? That is what the US government did when it abducted a Mexican citizen, a medical doctor, from his office in Mexico, brought him to the USA and held his trial despite official protests from the Mexican government. The US Supreme Court in a majority judgment ruled that this governmental lawlessness in international relations was permitted according to US law.²²¹ The US state behaves as the world's only sovereign state having the rights of a super-cop whose terrorist hand can extend to every corner of the third world.

Eminent political leaders are like that fabulous creature with one body but two faces — speaking in two voices, one loudly championing democracy, human rights, justice, liberty and all the other pious phrases, and another, somewhat in low tones, upholding the majesty and interests of the super-power, its allies and its underlings in the third world. Sometimes the US imperialists cast off their mask of hypocrisy. A few years ago, in his address to the ASEAN, the then US under-secretary of state for economic affairs, Robert Zellick, said that the US was the only remaining global power and was firmly committed to using its might to defend its interests in Asia.²²² One may bear in mind that imperialism is fascism in a colony or semi-colony whatever facade the latter may put up.

Collaboration with Zionist terrorists

The Indian ruling classes are also wooing the rulers of Israel and are forming close ties with them. Britain and the USA planted in 1948 this Jewish state in the heart of the Arab land, dividing Palestine, in order to dominate the Near East, vastly rich in oil. From the very beginning it be-

220. Power, "Why is the West still bombing Iraq?", *Statesman*, 7.7.2000; see also Anthony Arnove, "Iraq under Siege: Ten Years On", *Monthly Review*, December 2000.

221. See Soli J. Sorabjee, "A Monstrous Decision", *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi edn.), 9.7.1992; see also "A Questionable Verdict", *Frontline*, 31.7.1992; "US Overlordship Takes Us Back to the World of Pirates and Pillage", *Telegraph*, 1.7.1992; "Court Okays Kidnap", *Economic Times* (Calcutta), 6.7.1992.

222. *Economic Times* (Calcutta), 25.7.1992.

came a US outpost in this region and migrants came from Europe and America, victims of racial discrimination and with fresh memories of the holocausts. But equipped with vast economic and military aid from the U.S.A., the Israeli ruling class tried to expand their territory and grabbed by force lands of neighbouring Arab states. They occupied, besides the whole of Palestine, parts of Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon. They never hesitated to drop bombs on Lebanon whenever it pleased them. Such terrorist acts were almost a daily routine. They have refused to implement the UN resolutions which called for their withdrawal from the lands they occupied in 1967.

Recently, in June 2000, BJP home minister L.K. Advani, paid a four-day visit to Israel to build up co-operation with that country in all areas, including nuclear programmes, as he told Israel Radio on his arrival there. Besides political leaders of Israel, he had discussions with the top officers of the Israeli external intelligence agency, Mossad, and the internal security agency, Shinbet. He toured the troubled Israel-Lebanon border, met the deputy defence minister, Ephraim Sneh (former commander of Israeli forces in South Lebanon) and Israeli home minister Barak's chief security adviser, Gen. Danny Yatom, "who briefed him on Israel's strategic outlook, foreign policy and security perspectives". Advani declared in Tel Aviv that he was in favour of nuclear co-operation with Israel. His official host was Shimon Peres, a former Israeli prime minister and father of Israel's nuclear programme. The BJP minister felt that "the visit was most useful and enlightening".²²³ Quickly on the heels of Advani, BJP external affairs minister, Jaswant Singh, paid a four-day visit to Israel and had a busy schedule there.²²⁴

This surge of affection for the US FBI and Israeli Mossad and Shinbet is ominous (besides the urge for nuclear co-operation with Israel). It is ominous for the workers, peasants, and other oppressed people who are waging struggles in different forms and in different parts of the country against the fierce offensive of the ruling classes — against intensifying poverty and destitution, against retrenchment and unemployment, against handing over for a song to foreign and domestic sharks the public sector enterprises built by squeezing the blood of the impoverished people, against penetration of

223. *Statesman*, 15, 16 and 17 June 2000.

224. *Ibid*, 3.7.2000.

foreign monopoly capital into every pore of Indian economy including insurance, banking and mining and its domination. Today, while rousing religious chauvinism to divide the people and disrupt their resistance, the Indian ruling classes are selling away India and her wealth and her people as chattels. The US imperialists have today a very vast stake in India. The CIA has been operating since the birth of the Indian Union. Now the permanent presence of the FBI to direct the repressive apparatus of the Indian State has become necessary. The rich experience of Israeli Mossad and Shinbet in crushing the resistance of the Arabs driven out of their homes is also found valuable by India's ruling classes, the underlings of imperialist capital.

This guidance from the FBI, Mossad and Shinbet is ominous also for the different struggles of the nationalities for self-determination or for autonomy within the Indian State — whether in Kashmir, the north-east or even in other national regions. The Indian ruling classes, while raising the bogey of terrorism, and claiming to fight it, have unleashed unrestrained violence and terror wherever the people have stood up to fight for their rights.

2. Taking over more state subjects

In reviewing the Constitution, the BJP-led government is also talking of appropriating from the constituent states of the Indian Union some of the few powers that the present Constitution grants them. One may remember that the R.S.S.'s former political wing, Jan Sangh, stated in its election manifesto of 1957 that, if voted to power, it would amend the Constitution and declare a unitary State. It said that the present Constitution "has distributed powers between them [constituent states] in such a way as to create a feeling among provinces of rivalry with the Centre and is an obstacle in the way of national solidarity."²²⁵ At a seminar on "Constitution review: Major concerns" in New Delhi on 30 April 2000, BJP minister of state Arun Jaitley said that changes are necessary in the Centre-state relations.²²⁶

Recently, a conference of the governors of the states was held in New Delhi. Addressing the conference, Prime Minister Vajpayee asked them to assume a bigger role in formulating policy *apart from their Constitutional*

225. Election Manifesto, Bharatiya Jan Sangh, New Delhi, 1957, p. 9; see also RSS — *Its Cult*, Delhi, 1959, p. 15; cited in Selig Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades*, pp. 313-4.

226. *Statesman*, 1.5.2000.

*responsibility.*²²⁷

It appears that the BJP-led government seeks greater control over at least two subjects — education and law and order. Under the present Constitution the Centre is armed with the power to determine “standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions”, to set up Union agencies and institutions for “the promotion of special studies or research”, and so on. The BJP-led government has already taken upon itself the task of revising Indian history and manufacturing myths in the name of history, which will instil in the minds of students and people religious fanaticism of the RSS type. They have already reconstituted the Indian Council of Historical Research. The NCERT has proposed to include in the curriculum of studies in schools the study of religions.²²⁸ The BJP government of Gujarat has already introduced textbooks in schools glorifying the role of Hitler and his achievements in creating ‘the vast state of Greater Germany’ and “establishing a strong administrative set-up” within a short time. These breathe a fervent admiration for Nazism.²²⁹

Besides education, law and order is another subject which the Central government wants to take over. In the ultimate analysis the Centre’s control over law and order, though a state subject, is not negligible. As we have seen, on the report of the Governor of a state, its appointee, that law and order is in danger, the Centre can dismiss a ministry and legislature duly elected by the people and can impose its rule directly, called ‘President’s rule’, on that state. Under Article 355 of the present Constitution, the Centre can deploy its forces in any part of India even if the state government has not requested their presence. Now the BJP-led government is wanting to assume greater control over law and order and minimise the role of the state governments. They propose to establish a central law enforcement agency in the name of fighting militancy and the underworld, that is to run a ‘parallel administration’, with powers to override the administration of the state.²³⁰ The fact is, some of the members of India’s Parliament and different state

227. “PM wants greater role for Governors”, *Statesman*, 14.7.2000 — emphasis added.

228. *Statesman*, 1.4.2000.

229. *Ibid.*

230. “Govt. treads cautiously on central cop plan”, *Statesman*, 30.6.2000.

assemblies are among the worst law-breakers — convicted or accused of committing murders, dacoities, rapes, etc. — wearing different political labels and some of them are at the helm of affairs at the Centre and in the states. The root of the evil lies with the rulers themselves. The other day the *Statesman* wrote: “What happened in Mathura [in BJP-governed Uttar Pradesh] is appalling. The cook of Brother George who was beaten to death and who witnessed the murder has been intensively interrogated and tortured by police while he was illegally in their custody for over a week, well beyond any reasonable time required to examine a witness. He was brutally murdered in police custody.... Who wanted the witness to Brother George’s brutal murder silenced? Who gave the orders? Can it be that the perceived need is to keep the RSS goons and their assorted hangers-on in the VHP and the Bajrang Dal in practice?... *the reported move to transfer law and order from the State List to the Concurrent List* will achieve nothing. [The writer is supposed to know for he is a member of the Constitution review panel.] What is the Union Government’s record of solving criminal cases? Ministers monitor serious economic offences featuring the rich and the powerful to make sure that progress is stymied. The PMO [the Prime Minister’s office] was used to block the Bofors probe and the investigations into Laloo Yadav’s many scams, counsel of Jayalalitha’s choice were appointed to prosecute her when she was an ally, the securities scam, the urea scam, and the hawala case where there was so much delay that evidence disappeared. The list is not exhausted, not by a long chalk!... As law enforcement agencies are induced, bullied, persuaded, undermined and often simply ordered to abdicate their functions, the country becomes increasingly ungovernable.”²³¹ What the political agents of the ruling classes are interested in is not good governance but service to their masters and increase in their own power and pelf. Is not the talk of good governance sanctimonious hypocrisy when a BJP minister of state, Tapan Sikdar, goes to a Midnapur village and gives an *open* “call to the people to chop off the heads of CPI-M activists”?²³² Another central minister, Mamata Banerjee²³³ openly incites her followers

231. C.R. Irani, “Police Murder Witnesses — What Next?”, *Statesman*, 20.6.2000.

232. *Statesman*, 17 and 18.6.2000.

233. Banerjee has resigned after the Tehelka exposure in March 2001 of corruption in high places.

to fight and kill members of the rival party. For quite some time members of the CPI(M) on the one hand and those of the Trinamul Congress and the BJP on the other have been killing, looting and burning the houses of the members of their rival parties. Victims are ordinary villagers — not the leaders who see to it, whenever a political or communal riot, instigated by them, takes place, that their hair or the hair of their near and dear ones is never touched.

3. Persecuting minorities and diverting the majority

The third victim of the BJP-led government's Constitutional review is likely to be the religious minorities — the Muslims, Christians and others including the *dalits* and tribals. The members of the RSS family, the Hindu counterpart of the Afghan Talibans, have been for some time out on a spree to attack and kill Muslims and Christians, damage and demolish churches, burn Bibles, rape nuns, etc. At first, they justified attacks on Christians arguing that these were expressions of genuine resentment of the Hindus against conversion by Christian missionaries with offers of material rewards. When the activities of the Hindu Talibans were condemned both here and abroad, they shifted their ground and blamed the ISI (the Pakistan intelligence agency) for the atrocities. (They are finding the hand of the ISI stretching to every part of this country and doing all kinds of evil things, even bringing about railway accidents. The railways minister Mamata Banerjee found West Bengal teeming with ISI agents and accused the Left Front government of ignoring the danger. Recently, the West Bengal police admitted that of the many arrests of suspected ISI agents, only one was likely to have ISI links.)

A BJP member of the Rajya Sabha has already moved in this house an anti-conversion bill, "The Religious Conversions (Prohibition of Allurement and Use of Coercive Methods) Bill 2000" which virtually takes away the citizen's right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion (which Article 25(1) of the Constitution acknowledges). At the instance of the BJP, the "Uttar Pradesh Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill 2000" was passed by the state legislature recently. This "scandalous piece of legislation", to quote A.G. Noorani, is an attack on the rights of the minorities.²³⁴ While the immediate targets of these exercises are the minori-

234. Noorani, "The U.P. Bill", *Statesman*, 12.5.2000.

ties, their purpose is to sway the vast majority. By imbuing the Hindu masses with a chauvinistic pride in being able to bully Muslims or Christians, the ruling clique hopes to divert them from their own pathetic fate.

4. Maintaining Indian rule in Kashmir

Another important target is the people of Jammu and Kashmir. As we have said, when in 1947 tribal invaders from Pakistan areas entered Kashmir, it was the people of Kashmir, mainly Muslims, led by Sheikh Abdullah, who together with the Indian army drove back the invaders. Though communal carnage was at its worst in the neighbouring Punjab, the Muslims of J and K rose above communal considerations and prevented the entire state from being occupied by Pakistan. As the instrument of the state's accession to India stipulated, the accession was only provisional and the people of the state would finally decide their fate. As we have already noted, the Indian ruling classes betrayed their oft-repeated pledge to the people of J and K and the world when they drew up the Indian Constitution which assumed the accession as final but acknowledged its 'special status'. But the Jan Sangh, from which the BJP has descended, and its founder Shyamaprasad agitated from 1951 to eliminate even J and K's 'special status' and for complete integration of the state into the Indian Union. By a series of very dubious acts from 1953 the Constitution has been amended several times to whittle away the important aspects of the 'special status'. The BJP in its last election manifesto pledged that it would do away with the 'special status' completely, if voted to power. But as it has no absolute majority in the Lok Sabha and had to form the NDA with various other parties as its constituents, it had to drop the 'special status' item from the NDA's agenda. But its parent organisation RSS clamours for its abolition.

For about the last four decades it is the Indian armed forces — its military personnel and paramilitary forces, several lakhs strong — that actually rule in J and K, whatever ministry, a stooge of the Indian ruling classes, may exist there as their showboy. The Indian government is completely alienated from the people except some Hindu Dogras who once constituted a privileged class in the state. In the late eighties the people of J and K rose in armed revolt against the Indian government. Their one demand is that, as the Indian rulers promised many times and as the UN resolutions also urged, there should be a plebiscite in J and K so that the people may determine their

own fate. The people of J and K mostly want to be free — free from the rule of both the Indian Union and Pakistan. The people of the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir know from bitter experience that Pakistani rule, like that of the Indian Union, means the rule of foreign oppressors. The Kashmiris of both parts of Kashmir — the part occupied by Pakistan (PoK) and the part under the control of India — want to unite and to be free. Far from redeeming the promise, the Indian ruling classes have been trying to drown in blood the just demand of the people by committing every conceivable atrocity on the men, women and children of J and K.

Justice, humanity, demands that the fate of J and K should not depend on the unilateral decision of the Indian government. Nor is it a matter of bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan. Today a part of J and K, as noted before, is occupied by Pakistan; Pakistan is also encouraging outsiders to enter and fight the Indian armed forces in the rest of J and K.

The Indian people should understand that it is not only the people of J and K but they too are victims of this murderous game. Recently, the Legislative Assembly of J and K adopted a resolution demanding autonomy. It was Farooq Abdullah's National Conference government which piloted the resolution through the assembly. The National Conference is today completely alienated from the people: to maintain its existence it felt forced to raise the demand for autonomy. It is a constituent unit of the NDA. Quite expectedly, the resolution has awakened the fury of the BJP and the RSS. The NDA cabinet has rejected the demand — the demand for, as Advani said, reverting to the pre-1953 status. The NDA cabinet held that "acceptance of the resolution would set the clock back and reverse the natural process of harmonising the aspirations of the people of J and K with the integrity of the nation".²³⁵ The question is, which nation? Hypocrisy is said to be the tribute that vice pays to virtue. The BJP general secretary in-charge of J and K, Narendra Modi, claimed that during 25 years of rule by Dr Abdullah's family, the Centre had released *Rs. 1.5 lakh crore* for J and K. Yet, according to the BJP, they had failed to deliver the goods as expected by the Indian ruling classes.²³⁶ (The question is, why don't you leave them to their fate and come away, instead of wasting such enormous amount of

235. *Statesman*, 5.7.2000.

236. "BJP likens autonomy demand to Pak's Kargil misadventure", *ibid*, 5.7.2000.

the Indian people's money?) We do not know the sources of Modi's figures, but for the rest of the period since 1953, the Indian government must have released to other stooge J and K governments almost an equal sum to whatever was spent under the Abdullahs, if not more. And how many lakhs of crores of rupees have they spent directly on their armed forces and intelligence agencies, the real rulers of J and K? According to India's army chief, over Rs nine crore per day would be required to sustain a 'Siachen-like' effort in Kargil. And how much does the Siachen glacier cost? To quote a well-known journalist, "Siachen is the most strategically absurd high altitude war, fought at elevations exceeding 6,000 metres. The dispute over an undemarcated border beyond a point known as NJ-9842 has defied solution, although such a solution would obviously be in the interests of both India and Pakistan. Siachen means a per day loss of 2.7 men and Rs 2.5 to 2.6 crores (about US \$650,000) for India. According to Indian Army sources, air maintenance for the Siachen operation alone costs Rs 1,000 crores (about \$250 million) a year."²³⁷ Retired Admiral Ramdas added: "Thousands of our soldiers are suffering frost-bite, hypoxia, and severe mental stress".²³⁸

Can one calculate how many lakhs of crores of rupees have been and are being spent on the para-military and military forces and intelligence agencies in order to deny the people of J and K the right of self-determination? One may add to that the cost in suffering and lives of soldiers and civilians directly affected.

The question is, who suffers? It is not the people of J and K alone, the victims of many atrocities, who suffer. The Indian people also suffer. Not only are the lives of the armed forces being sacrificed but the Indian people are being denied their right to adequate food, education, health care and so on. If the colossal amounts of money spent on crushing the resistance of the Kashmiri people were spent on improving the lot of the Indian people, things would have been different from what they are now. This undeclared war against the Kashmiri people, euphemistically called a fight to suppress insurgency, hits many millions of Indians in the stomach.

The Kashmiri people's guerrilla war against the Indian occupying forces

237. Praful Bidwai, "Grim State of Indo-Pak Ties", *The Kashmir Times*, 16 Nov. 1998; quoted in L. Ramdas (former chief of the Indian Navy, retired), *op cit*, p. 76.

238. *Ibid.*

began towards the end of the eighties. There is no doubt that, as we have said, Pakistan is taking advantage of the struggle and helping it. But the propaganda of the Indian ruling classes that the entire struggle against the Indian forces is Pakistan-inspired, and mainly Pakistani or other foreign elements are carrying on the struggle is entirely false. It is the case of 'Give the dog a bad name and hang it'. Recently, a *Statesman* correspondent wrote: "While the *establishment in New Delhi takes succour from peddling theories of proxy war and export of international terrorism*, official figures of operations, provided by the 15 corps, tell us a different story. Of the total number of militants killed since January 1997 to August 1999, 1,134 were locals and only 328 foreigners.... The most obvious is the possibility that the local component is much higher than is being claimed by the authorities intent on projecting Kashmir as a victim of proxy war." The correspondent referred to the possibility that "locals, not necessarily militants, are being targeted during counter-insurgency operations." A senior police officer in Kashmir told the correspondent that "anti-India sentiment is stronger than before" and that "he has no idea of why and to what end he waged the war..."²³⁹

The propaganda machine of the Indian ruling classes is constantly churning out two kinds of stuff, among others. First, it claims that in J and K they are combating 'terrorism' and are determined to wipe out this menace. By 'terrorism', the US imperialists, all other imperialists and their henchmen like the Indian ruling classes mean liberation struggle, especially guerrilla war. Guerrilla war is the early form of a struggle for liberation from the oppressive and tyrannical rule of the imperialists and their henchmen, when the people are militarily weak compared with their enemies. By frequent use of the words 'terrorism' and 'terrorists', while the ruling classes themselves indulge in State terrorism of the worst sort, they seek to create public opinion against the fighters for liberation, isolate them from the Indian people and hide their own nefarious role.

We would quote some lines which a Kashmiri, Akhtar Mohi-ud-din, wrote. He had been secretary to the Cultural Academy in Kashmir and retired from civil service as additional secretary and director, department of law in 1981. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award and in 1968 the Padmashree (which

239. Aunohita Mojumdar, "A Lost Road Map in J and K", *Statesman*, 23.9.1999; emphasis added.

he later renounced). Perhaps he can be hardly accused of being a terrorist. In a letter of 14 February 1990, he wrote to I.K. Gujral, then India's Minister of External Affairs: "In Kashmir itself people are mercilessly gunned down and young men and teenagers are made special targets of this violence; communal feelings are sought to be created and fear psychosis created among minorities to divide the society vertically and accuse the majority of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, which designs have all along been frustrated by the emancipated people of Kashmir. It has been the bane of Kashmiris right from 1947 that whenever they raise their voice for basic human rights, big hue and cry is started on all sides to drown their voice in the din of war machines, bullets, disinformation, etc."²⁴⁰ In a letter to Khushwant Singh, dated 16.2.1990, Mohi-ud-din wrote: "The history of the past forty years of [the] Kashmiri's association with India is a sad tale of broken promises, state terrorism, fraudulent elections, sham democracy, corruption, coercion, interrogation centres, encouraging political opportunism and breeding and rearing anti-social elements. In this hateful game all members of the ruling class got involved, vying with each other in scoring harder and harder hits. The politicians, the journalists and bureaucrats, on the one side give long sermons of secularism, socialism and democracy and on the other remove their masks in Kashmir and uncover their hideous faces in order to terrorise and gag the voice of the people". Before concluding the letter, he wrote: "And, above all, is this [the] national interest of India [to be] perpetually in conflict with the genuine aspirations of the people of Kashmir of [?for] safeguarding their identity, living with honour and dignity and preserving and developing their National culture? If yes, (and the experience of the past forty years indicate that way) then what is the way out? Raising bogeys? Sabre-rattling and war hysteria? Massacres and media disinformation or what? These are the vital questions which need immediate attention and consideration. Meanwhile, the people of Kashmir are continuing their just struggle to achieve their basic human rights." (These letters did not reach their addressees for, according to the writer, he had information that these were censored at the Srinagar post office.)²⁴¹

240. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din, "The Hindu-Muslim Divide is the Curse of the Subcontinent", South Asia Citizens Web (SACW) Dispatch No. 2, 14 Sept. 2000.

241. *Ibid.*

Another stuff that the propaganda machine of the Indian ruling classes churns out is that the struggle is Pakistan-inspired and is being conducted mainly by Pakistani and other mercenaries. As the *Statesman* correspondent Aunohita Mojumdar wrote, "the establishment in New Delhi takes succour from *peddling theories of proxy war and export of international terrorism*." No doubt, Pakistan is encouraging the guerrilla war in Kashmir and some militants from Pakistan or 'PoK' or a country like Afghanistan are likely to have entered India-occupied Kashmir. But it would be untrue to dispute two facts to which Mojumdar referred: first, the main force conducting the struggle in spite of immense odds is Kashmiri and second, the people of Kashmir are completely alienated from the government, rather more hostile towards it than ever before.

The Indian ruling classes were determined to conduct census operations in J and K as in India. But the Kashmiris were opposed to them on the ground that in these days of turmoil the census would give a false demographic picture. But the Indian rulers ignored the Kashmiris' opposition and made preparation. Even Kashmir government employees refused to co-operate. And now the government has been forced to climb down. The director, census operations in Kashmir, told reporters on 16 September that the census cannot be conducted unless people co-operate with the Government and appealed to Hizbul Mujahiddin, one of the guerrilla organisations, to lift the ban on the census.²⁴² This is one more proof, if proof was needed, of the complete alienation of the Government from the people.

Much was made of the Kashmiri Hindu Pandits' migration from the Kashmir valley some years ago. As Akhtar Mohi-ud-din said, "It was Mr Jagmohan [who was the governor of Jammu and Kashmir in the early 1990s] who conspired to give a communal touch to the movement in Kashmir. The Pandits were terrorised by his men and renegades employed by the Government. These renegades also killed Pandits to generate that fear psychosis." Again Mohi-ud-din said: "Jagmohan organised their migration in a phased manner."²⁴³ This Jagmohan is today a BJP member of the NDA cabinet. The Indian ruling classes have left no stone unturned to blacken the image of the fighters for Kashmir's liberation. Those who have been above communal-

242. "Census chief's plea to Hizbul", *Statesman*, 18.9.2000.

243. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din, *op cit.*

ism have been painted as communalists. To weaken the struggle they wanted to raise a communal divide in J and K.

Recently, the BJP-led government “pumped in Rs 430 crore for upgrading the Kashmir channel” of Indian television.²⁴⁴ This battle to win the hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people is part of their war of suppression of them. Mohi-ud-din wrote: “My son was killed by renegade militants in 1990. He used to work in the finance department and there was Rs 16 lakh in the locker.” When the renegade militants came and demanded the money and he refused, he was killed. And as he wrote, “Four years later, in 1995, my son-in-law, who was the general manager of a co-operative, was returning home at 4 p.m. when the Border Security Force caught him and shot him in broad daylight on the road just outside his house.”²⁴⁵ Can propaganda, however skilful, heal the wounds that fester in the minds of the Kashmiri people?

Recently, Hizbul Mujahideen, a militant organisation in J and K, declared a unilateral ceasefire and wanted talks with the Indian government for a solution of the Kashmiri problem. At first Prime Minister Vajpayee welcomed the talks and declared that the talks would be held not within the framework of the Indian Constitution but on the basis of *insaniyat* (humanity). But soon he retracted and said that the proposed talks would be held within the parameters of the Indian Constitution. So no question would arise of the right of self-determination of the people of J and K. Clarifying his earlier statement, Vajpayee said that too much should not be read into his comment that the talks with Hizbul Mujahideen were being held within the framework of *insaniyat* and not the Constitution. He added that any settlement would have to be within the Constitutional framework and that not an inch of Indian soil would be surrendered.²⁴⁶ A Hizbul leader was not wrong when he accused Vajpayee of indulging in double-speak.²⁴⁷ That J and K is an integral part of India has been the refrain of the songs of the Indian ruling classes. Speaking in Washington, India’s External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, one of the ‘Hindutva’ flag-bearers, said: “Kashmir is at the core of our nationhood.”²⁴⁸

244. Editorial, “Coaxing Kashmir: Propaganda is not enough”, *Statesman*, 5.7.2000.

245. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din, *op cit.*

246. *Statesman*, 8.8.2000.

247. *Ibid.*

248. *Ibid.*, 10.9.2000.

Hizbul Mujahideen held that the Kashmir issue was a tripartite one and that the participation of Pakistan in the negotiations was necessary. Its chief said that he and his fellow guerrillas did not merely refer to the part of Kashmir which is under India's control, but the whole of "Jammu and Kashmir and its 25,000 sq. km. which is under Pakistan's control as well". He pointed out that without Pakistan's participation, the talks would be futile.²⁴⁹ The All-Parties Hurriyat Conference, an umbrella organisation in which several Kashmiri parties like Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front are represented, has repeatedly urged that there should be tripartite discussions between the people of J and K and the two governments of India and Pakistan, and that there should be no pre-condition, if the Kashmiri problem is to be solved.²⁵⁰

The Indian government has been refusing to allow Pakistan to participate in the talks on the plea that it must first stop exporting 'terrorism' to Kashmir. It would not agree to any mediation by others claiming that the Kashmir issue was a bilateral one, involving India and Pakistan only. And it would not talk to Pakistan on the plea that it was waging a 'proxy war' in Kashmir. On their own logic, even for stopping the 'export of terrorism' from Pakistan and its 'proxy war', it is absolutely necessary that there should be tripartite negotiations between the people of Kashmir and the two governments. It seems that India wants to freeze the status quo in J and K — the present division of J and K into two zones — one under the occupation of Pakistan and the other under India's control. This is what US Foreign Secretary Dulles had proposed to Nehru and to which Nehru had agreed in 1953. The Indian ruling classes would not let go what they grabbed in 1947 through profuse offers of false promises and force of arms even at immense cost to the people of J and K and to the people of India.

Warmongers armed with nuclear weapons

It is this sore that poisons the relations between the ruling classes of the two states and poses the threat of a nuclear war. The Pakistani ruling classes have made the offer for talks several times — for the resolution of the Kashmir problem, for nuclear restraint, etc. A few months ago when the Paki-

249. "Hizbul leader sings Pak tune", *Statesman*, 5.8.2000.

250. "Tripartite talks, not Hizb, the key: Hurriyat", *Ibid*, 27.8.2000.

stani ruler General Pervez Musharraf made such an offer, the RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan declared that India would have to regain the area it "lost in 1947". He said: "We have to regain Lahore — the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Khalsa Raj. We have to reclaim Nankana Sahib and several other religious places as also Sindhu and Kasoor."²⁵¹ The Hindu Talibans would not be satisfied with anything short of the forcible annexation of Pakistan. That means war, even nuclear war.

Pakistan again proposed a regime "for the avoidance of an arms race, nuclear and conventional, and confidence building in the region". Pakistan said: "We are willing to consider any restraint arrangement on a reciprocal basis with India".²⁵² But the proposal was summarily rejected by the Indian government.

The nuclear programme, peaceful or non-peaceful, is no less a menace to the people within the country than to other countries. In a long article Dr Buddhi Kota Subbarao, a nuclear scientist who was formerly a captain of the Indian navy, has exposed the way in which India's nuclear establishment operates. He has observed: "...all of India's (nuclear) reactors are on the list of the most unreliable fifty in the world."²⁵³ The staggering costs, the radiation, the nuclear wastes which cannot be satisfactorily disposed of and remain a danger to life for thousands of years, etc., claim victims among the Indian people first.

The only sensible course for both India and Pakistan would be to abandon the nuclear weaponisation programme while exerting combined pressure for nuclear disarmament all over the world.

But that would be crying for the moon. The Indian government has delinked the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) and BARC has been manufacturing nuclear warheads.²⁵⁴

At the United Nations Millenium Summit in September 2000, Pervez

251. *Statesman*, 30.4.2000.

252. *Business Standard* and *Statesman*, 15.6.2000.

253. Buddhi Kota Subbarao, "India's Nuclear Prowess: False Claims and Tragic Truths", *Manushi*, Nov.-Dec. 1998; cited in Hassan Gardezi and Hari Sharma, 'Introduction' to "The South Asia Bomb: Reality and Illusion", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Apr.-June 1999, note 37, p. 9.

254. *Statesman*, 4.6.2000.

Musharraf reiterated that his country wanted a no-war pact with India, was ready for a mutual reduction in forces and sought a nuclear-free South Asia. He declared that Pakistan was ready to have talks with India on Kashmir "at any level, at any time and anywhere". He accused India of intransigence and appealed to the Security Council to act.²⁵⁵

Speaking at the UN Millenium Summit, Vajpayee dismissed the offer for a dialogue with the blunt response that "terrorism and dialogue do not go together".²⁵⁶

A thriller entitled *Dragon Fire* by a B.B.C. correspondent, Humphrey Hawksley, is going to be published by Macmillan. Its theme is a nuclear war between India, Pakistan and China in 2007. It imagines that nuclear weapons have completely destroyed Pakistan, reduced Delhi and Mumbai to ashes and ruined a large part of China. As the press reported, the pre-publication synopsis of this product of the fertile imagination of a British journalist found immense popularity with the men in the Prime Minister's office, the Defence ministry, the Home ministry and so on. On reading the synopsis the Defence Minister Fernandes felt so enthusiastic that he sent off a letter of appreciation to the author. Fernandes stated that no one should dismiss the book as a work of fiction.²⁵⁷

Sudershan, George Fernandes and the like seem to revel in the prospect of the deaths and cruel sufferings of hundreds of millions of people and the extinction of all that we love. Beside them, the devil himself would look like a saint. Nuclear restraint presupposes prior restraint on these people who are dressed in brief authority. If they run amok, they will help their Muslim counterparts — the Pakistani Talibans — to strengthen themselves, and the people of the entire Indo-Pak subcontinent will be left at their mercy. Only the conscious, organised people of India can overcome the intransigence of the Indian ruling classes, put the Hindu Talibans in strait jackets and check the growth of the Muslim Talibans.

It has recently been reported in the press that a former Pakistan foreign secretary, Niaz A. Naik, is visiting India to prepare the ground for resump-

255. *Ibid*, 7.9.2000.

256. *Ibid*, 9.9.2000.

257. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 25.8.2000; Editorial "George Reads a Book: And he could start a fire", *Statesman*, 28.8.2000.

tion of official talks between India and Pakistan. This is unofficial and what they call 'Track-II' diplomacy. A four-member Pakistani delegation led by retired Brigadier Shaukat Qadir, a founding member of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, has already arrived in New Delhi. All of them are keen on discussing nuclear restraint and risk reduction in South Asia and the resumption of official talks between the two countries towards that end.²⁵⁸

The solution of the Kashmir problem would greatly minimise the threat of a nuclear war. The best solution would be to honour the accord which was signed on 20 August 1953 by Prime Minister Nehru and Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Bogra. The joint statement said that it was their firm belief that the J and K dispute should be settled in accordance with the wishes of the people of that state. It added that the most feasible method of ascertaining the wishes of the people was by fair and impartial plebiscite. It was a clever move on Nehru's part and served his purpose well. Issue almost immediately after Sheikh Abdullah's arrest, it helped to stem the tide of growing revolt of the Kashmiri people and bring the situation in Kashmir under control. And then, characteristically, Nehru backed out.²⁵⁹

That agreement should be respected honestly by both the government and a free and fair plebiscite should be held throughout J and K — areas occupied by Pakistan as well as areas under India's control.

For all the Herculean efforts of the BJP and its Constitution Review Commission, there appears to be no consensus among the ruling classes on most of the points discussed above. For example, Farooq Abdullah's autonomy resolution was supported by chief ministers of Punjab, Assam, and Tamil Nadu, all of whom added further demands and demanded the application of autonomy to all states. Interestingly, two of the three are part of the NDA coalition ruling at the Centre.

However, for the BJP, even if no immediate revision is born of its mountain of labour, the exercise serves a propaganda purpose in itself: to convey to the Indian masses that it does indeed possess, or is working seriously on

258. *Ibid*, 24.8.2000.

259. A.G. Noorani, "Missed Moments", *ibid*, 25.10.1999.

and is some solution to the ever deepening crisis of the Indian State and society. In fact it possesses no such thing. In the last analysis, its only solution is intensified repression.

Things may not go the BJP way. And, as Fernandes said, an emergency-like situation may arise. Only if the people refuse to be duped (they have been duped too long), dare to rise up and take their destiny in their own hands, appalling tragedies will be averted — and the road to a better life, material and cultural, shall open up.

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Appendix: Savarkar and the British rulers

A news-item entitled “‘Hindutva’ hero Savarkar had begged British for mercy”, which appeared in the *Times of India*, 4 May 2002, p. 7 (Kolkata edition), states:

“...unlike other patriots like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Ashfaqullah, who refused to ask the British Raj for mercy even at the cost of their lives, Savarkar, the father of the BJP’s Hindutva ideology, had actually sought clemency while lodged in Andamans Cellular Jail. Savarkar’s letter asking for forgiveness dated Nov. 14, 1913 is reprinted in a book, *Penal Settlement in Andamans*, published by the Gazetteers unit of Union Ministry of Education. In his letter, Savarkar described himself as a ‘prodigal son’ longing to return to the ‘parental doors of the government’. While referring to *his earlier letter of clemency in 1911*, Savarkar wrote: ‘...if the government in their manifold beneficence and mercy release me, I for one cannot but be the staunchest advocate of constitutional progress and loyalty to the English government which is the foremost condition of that progress. As long as we are in jails, there cannot be real happiness and joy in hundreds and thousands of homes of His Majesty’s loyal subjects in India, for glood is thicker than water, but if we are released, the people will instinctively raise a shout of joy and gratitude to the government, who knows how to forgive and correct, more than how to chastise and avenge.’ Savarkar went on to add, ‘Moreover, my conversion to the constitutional line would bring back all those misled young men in India and abroad who were once looking up to me as their guide. *I am ready to serve the government in any capacity they like*, for as my conversion is *conscientious* so I hope my future conduct would be. By keeping me in jail, nothing can be got in comparison to what would be otherwise. *The Mighty alone can afford to be merciful and therefore, where else can the prodigal son return but to the parental doors of the government?* (all italics ours).’”

Renaming the Port Blair Airport in the Andamans after Savarkar on 4 May last, the BJP Home Minister of India, L.K. Advani, declared: “There is no reason to feel shy of... Hindutva, propounded at great length by Veer Savarkar.... It’s a moment of great sense of achievement for me and members of the freedom fighter’s family...” (See the news item “Savarkar invoked to defend Hindutva”, *The Sunday Statesman*, 5 May 2002, p. 1).

Indeed, after his release Veer Savarkar was quite “conscientious” in keeping his pledge to the British Raj. What does Hindu nationalism or Hindutva as propounded by Savarkar mean? It practically means driving a wedge between the oppressed and exploited masses of the people in the interests of the alien rulers and their collaborators in this country. The unity of the vast masses of oppressed and exploited people, irrespective of creeds and castes, is the precondition for their liberation from all oppression -- economic, political, social, cultural and so on. By trying to break up this unity, by upholding Hindutva, Savarkar served conscientiously the tiny minority of foreign and indigenous oppressors and exploiters whose policy was one of ‘divide and rule’. Today the mantle of Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar has fallen on the Advanis, Vajpayees and Modis and they are conscientiously performing their tasks well.

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On forming the Government at the Centre, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) forms by far the largest component, set up a commission to review the present Indian Constitution. Against what background has the Government taken this step, and what does it intend to achieve by it? This essay sets the move in the context of India's political economy, the ambitions of the Indian ruling classes, and the crisis of ruling class politics.



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His other writings include *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Its Genesis, Growth and Character, India and the Raj 1919-1947: Glory, Shame and Bondage* (in two volumes), *Imperialism's Tightening Grip on Indian Agriculture*, and a few other books. He has also edited *The Historic Turning Point: A Liberation Anthology* (in two volumes), a selection from the writings which appeared in *Liberation* (central organ of the AICCCR and then of the CPI-ML) between 1967 and 1972.