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On the Ideological Struggle of India Today

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In the ideological struggle of India today, we are only beginning to see the seriousness of a programme to which we can no longer afford to remain indifferent. This can perhaps be best described by borrowing an expression from Marx, namely “to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience”.

This borrowing is in need of an explanation. It is well-known that Marx uses these words in the context of taking the momentous step towards the first full formulation of Marxism, which, along with Engels, he works out in the *German Ideology*. But the context of our own ideological struggle is different. Is it not arbitrary, then, to use the same expression to refer to our task?

Significantly, however, it is not so arbitrary as it may at first appear. This is not merely because of the fact that we Indians do have an erstwhile philosophical conscience, with which it is imperative

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for our present requirement to settle our account. To come to terms with our philosophical past which hangs so heavily on us is a task which is more than ease and safety suggest. It requires a great deal of fearless zeal for truth, which hardly exists outside the working-class movement inspired by Marxism. Without Marxism, we have neither the perspective nor the moral courage for our own ideological struggle today. At the same time, the Indian working-class movement, which is the ultimate guarantee for the success of the Indian ideological struggle, requires, for its own growing strength, the seriousness and the dedication of this ideological struggle itself. The two, in other words, are dialectically interrelated between the struggle of the working class and the struggle in philosophy. "As philosophy", says Marx, "finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy. The emancipation of the German proletariat is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality."

Thus, in short, the ideological struggle we are going to discuss, though primarily concerned with the Indian philosophical situation, is also basically related to Marxism. To use the words of Marx for the purpose of describing its nature cannot be dismissed as purely arbitrary.

THE INDIAN SITUATION

But what, in the specific Indian context, is meant by "our erstwhile philosophical conscience" and how are we going "to settle our account" with it?

We have to begin with a few words on traditional Indian philosophy. First, in the general fund of traditional Indian culture, there is the accumulation of an enormous amount of philosophical materials. Secondly, these materials do not remain necessarily confined to the technical treatises accessible only to the specialists; these are also in circulation among the Indian masses and affect their behaviour pattern.

These two features of traditional Indian philosophy, taken together, create an ideological situation the kind of which does not exist in all the other developing countries. Consequently, the ideological struggle in India today has its own problem and its own perspective, its own strategy and its own technique, the understanding of which - to use the words of Marx again - "can never be attained by utilising a universal master-key in the form of a general historico-philosophical theory". What needs to be understood, in other words, is a distinct situation with its distinct problems, without trying to force all these into the structure of any preconceived formula.

We begin with the first peculiarity of the Indian philosophical situation just referred to.

India witnesses philosophical activity for a very long period. Its distinct beginnings are traced to the speculations that remain compiled for us in the ancient texts called the Upanisads. The older of these texts, according to the modern scholars, are to be placed roughly in the seventh or sixth century B.C., if not earlier. Starting at such an early period, Indian philosophical activity continues - only with occasional and brief interruptions - up to the times of the philosophical movement known as the *Navya-nyaya*, which takes an all-absorbing interest in the most abstruse and hair-splitting definitions in logic and epistemology. Its last great representative is Gadadhara, who writes his books in the seventeenth century A.D. On the time-scale, therefore, Indian history records a more or less continuous philosophical activity for a period of about two thousand and five hundred years.⁷

Moreover, contrary to many a preconceived notion about Indian philosophy, the fact is that this activity is carried on from a number of mutually incompatible standpoints. What primarily sustains this activity for so many centuries is the vital clash of ideas — points and counter-points in philosophy trying to negate or annihilate each other. Indian orthodoxy is, of course, anxious to deny this. It seeks edification in the insipid story of the synthesis of Indian thought suggestive of the attainment of the perennial truth. But the Indian

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philosophers show that without the seriousness and suffering of the labour of negation, they hardly justify their status as philosophers.

The result of all this is the accumulation of an enormous amount of philosophical materials. The number of books written on philosophy is staggering, and this even discounting those that contain only the puerile repetition of what is already contained in others.

These books are written for the elites no doubt. It generally requires a great deal of specialisation today to read the works, particularly of the more eminent of the-Indian philosophers. However, had this been merely so, we could have hardly spoken of our erstwhile philosophical conscience, and, in our ideological struggle today, would have so much felt the need of settling our present account with it. What makes all these relevant is another peculiarity of the Indian situation.

The works of the Indian philosophers are technical treatises accessible only to the specialists. But not so are the philosophical materials they contain. The philosophical ideas - or, more strictly, one type of these - are somehow or other made to circulate rather freely among the Indian masses.

This is perhaps best understood by contrasting the Indian situation with that of modern Europe. The thoughts of the eminent philosophers from Bacon and Descartes to Kant and Hegel remain primarily the concern of the specialists in philosophy, and, mainly in moments of crisis like that of the French revolution, touch at best the fringe of popular consciousness or primarily the consciousness of the urban middle class. In India, it was and still is quite different. Thus, some of the basic concepts with which certain highly sophisticated philosophers operated and in defence of which they produced literally cartloads of philosophical works, find place for themselves even in the consciousness of the common peasants, for whose basic literacy nothing spectacular is so far achieved in spite of our recent five year plans. Such, for example, are the concepts of *brahman* and *maya*, of *karma* and *moksa*, - and many others.

These, it needs to be noted, are not just religious ideas - like that of Clod or of the future world - widely current practically everywhere

outside the socialist world. On the contrary, these are distinctly philosophical ideas, about the validity or otherwise of which a great deal of theoretical controversies are still going on in the world today. Thus, for example, the concepts of *brahman* and *maya* are intended to answer two basic questions of philosophy. *First*, what is the nature of the ultimate reality - spirit or matter? *Secondly*, what exactly is the status of the physical world, ordinarily viewed as having an objective existence and known by normal experience and reason?

The admission of the concept of *brahman* means that reality is of the nature of spirit. In the Marxist literature, this "primacy of spirit" is viewed as the essence of philosophical idealism. Lenin's philosophical masterpiece *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* is above all an exposure and refutation of basically this view as propagated in the modern world with all sorts of new fangled terminologies and with the completely spurious claim of being supported by the latest discoveries in the sciences. Why does Lenin take so much care to refute this view? Because he feels that it is the first precondition for the ideological emancipation of the working millions, without which there is no real emancipation for them. Lenin would not have written a book like this just for the pleasure of writing it.

The concept of *maya* is a necessary corollary of the extreme emphasis on the concept of *brahman*. To prove the exclusive reality of the spirit, it is necessary to deny outrightly the reality of matter. *Maya* is a theory of the material world - the world in which we are supposed to have our being. This world, the concept of *maya* wants us to believe, is purely illusory - a foolish phantom conjured up by our ignorance - something like the snake seen in the rope under the spell of illusion.

Thus, in short, the concept of *brahman* along with *maya* stands for philosophical idealism in one of its most extravagant forms known in the history of philosophy. And yet these concepts have found places for themselves even in the common vocabulary of the Indian peasants. Traditional Indian philosophy, it will be wrong to imagine exists for the specialists alone.

There is thus not merely the accumulation of an enormous amount of philosophical materials in the general fund of traditional Indian culture but what is distinctive of the Indian situation is that these materials are moreover allowed to percolate among the masses. How this has happened is not a mystery. There operated for centuries - and are still operating in India today - effective techniques of propaganda, with the help of which ideas and attitudes of momentous theoretical significance are passed on to the people without requiring them to be literate. The best known of these is the recital - with enviable lucid commentary - of the epics in the rural areas. Into these epics - i.e., the form in which these are finally redacted - are crammed a good deal of philosophical ideas, particularly those of course that suited the law-givers' purpose of keeping the masses under control.

Here is just an example. The Indian law-givers, like their colleagues abroad, are fully aware of the importance of superstition as an instrument of policing the people. As Polybius, a Greek historian of the second century B.C., who became an admirer of the Roman power, very clearly put the point: "I will venture the assertion that what the rest of mankind derides is the foundation of Roman greatness, namely superstition. This element has been introduced into every aspect of their private and public life, with every artifice to awe the imagination, in a degree which could not be improved upon. Many possibly will be at a loss to understand this; but my view is that it has been done to impress the masses. The masses in every state are unstable, full of lawless desires, of irrational anger, and violent passion. All that can be done, then, is to hold them in check by fears of the unseen and other shams of the same sort. It was not for nothing, but with deliberate design, that the men of the old introduced to the masses notions about the gods and concepts of the after-life. The folly and heedlessness is ours, who seek to dispel such illusions".

We may not have from the Indian law-givers such a lucid discussion of the social function of superstition. But we have from them

the defence of a philosophical position, which is indicative of the fact that they are cunning enough to know this full well. This position may be described as “the eclipse of reason” - a position in defence of which a large number of theoretical workers are engaged today in the “ideological wasteland” created by monopoly capital and its political expression - imperialism - which also needs the ideological support of irrationalism. In any case, the Indian law-givers are strongly against free thinking or uninhibited reasoning, which has the danger of destroying superstition and thereby of leading people to see what actually goes on beneath the surface of the social phenomena in particular. Manu, the foremost of the Indian law-givers, repeatedly expresses his strong disapproval of the strictly rationalist attitude and even prescribes strong legal measures against it. His commentators explain that this is because rationalism has the danger of gravitating towards materialism, which is destructive of the venerable notions of the gods and the concept of the after-life. Still the problem remains of how to accustom the masses to the extreme undesirability of the rationalist attitude, particularly when in the Indian context it means the condemnation of the science of logic - *anviksiki* or *tarkavidya*. The most sophisticated philosophical words are produced for the purpose no doubt; but the masses are to be told about the damnation of logic in a way which it is possible for them to understand. This problem, to say the least, is formidable particularly in a country where the percentage of basic literacy is still appallingly poor.

It is amazing, therefore, that even such a difficult problem is solved in India - though it is solved neither by the philosophers nor by the law-givers but by the redactors of the Indian epics, who under direct state-patronage, considerably enlarge their original core. Here is just an example of how they graft on these a story showing the extreme impiety of free thinking.

In the *Mahabharata* as we have it, the dying Bhishma delivers a very long sermon to Yudhisthira. In the course of this, he tells him many parables, one of which is known as the parable of *Indra* and *Kasyapa*. Once upon a time, a merchant, arrogant of his immense

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wealth, ran over in his chariot a Brahmin of the *Kasyapa* clan. The latter thought that since there was no redress even of an injustice like this, life was not worth living after all. So he was about to commit suicide. To prevent him from doing this, god *Indra* appears before him in the guise of a jackal and describes to him at considerable length the miseries of living the life of a low animal. The point of all this is to show by contrast the great fortune of being born as a human being - particularly as a Brahmin. Such a life is thus too precious to be deliberately destroyed. All these, however, are preambles to the actual moral of the parable, to which the jackal next passes on. The jackal adds that it had not always been a jackal at all. In the previous birth, the same miserable creature had been a human being - in fact, a scholar and a philosopher. In this capacity of a philosopher, however, he had then committed a grave sin or the most impious act, as a consequence of which he was condemned to be reborn as this miserable animal.

What, then, is this sin? It is, in brief, the sin of having been a free thinker, a thorough rationalist freely questioning the venerable superstitions on which thrived the vested interests. He was even indulging in the pernicious pleasure of exposing the custodians of these superstitions. As the jackal put it,

“In the previous life I was attached to logic - the technique of fruitless argumentations. I was a scholar in the degraded sense, because, in the capacity of a free thinker, I was a vilifier of the scripture (*Veda*). In the assemblies, I used to put forth all sorts of purely rational considerations, which was the most improper thing to do. I used to refute the Brahmins and was hostile to what they said. I was a disbeliever and I entertained doubt about everything. So I was just a fool with pretensions to learning. Oh Brahmin, this life of the jackal which I am now suffering is the result of all these”.

This is the crux of the whole parable - the damnation of reason. For understanding its impact on popular consciousness, we have to visualise remote village scenes where hundreds of peasants are drawn in to listen to the professional reciters of the epic dilating at length

- in a very lucid language - on the moral of the parable. Could the “eclipse of reason” be better propagated for mass consumption?

We have mentioned only one parable of the *Mahabharata*. The epic contains many more like this. Even the whole of the Gita, considered by Hindu orthodoxy as its basic philosophical manifesto, is crammed into this great epic. Opinions on distinctly philosophical questions, as on moral and social values, are expressed throughout the other epic, Ramayana. There is more over the vast mythological literature - the *Puranas* - the recital and elucidation of which forms no less a feature of popular entertainment in traditional India. These also freely discuss philosophical questions.

In short, traditional India has its own mass media - like the TV, the motion picture and the paper-backs freely used by contemporary imperialism for propagating ideas and attitudes that suit its purpose.

THE IDEOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE

What follows from all these is a simple fact. Traditional philosophical ideas are there in the air as it were. Whether one likes it or not, one remains exposed to their influence. This influence is not necessarily conscious. One may be influenced by these without being aware of it. The influence is specially alarming insofar as it is unconscious, for it may frustrate - or at least greatly hinder - the basic purpose one is consciously striving after. Let us see an example.

Referring to all that is being done in the country “to give practical shape and content to the awareness of science as an ideology”, the prime minister of India observes: “And yet we must admit that all these developments have not made a significant impression on the consciousness even of our scientists, educationists and policy planners. We do still continue to live a somewhat schizophrenic existence - one half of our individual self pays homage to science and the scientific approach, while the other half remains deeply rooted in the past. Paradoxically enough, this applies even to some who work in science”.

This, to say the least, is unfortunate. One can as well relegate

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the most up-to-date scientific formulae to a neat pigeon-hole of one's consciousness and allow the rest of it to prostrate before the worst form of ossified obscurantism. This is not at all an uncommon phenomenon in our country, and it is not confined to the working scientists alone.

Such a proclivity to obscurantism has to be removed. In order to do it, we have first of all to determine its real source. Without undermining the danger of what is exported by imperialism today, we may assert that for an Indian at any rate, its largest store is that of the dregs of traditional Indian thought. Without being conscious of these dregs as dregs, even our most enlightened section is left in the morbid condition of split-personality - accepting science and at the same time paying homage to what is opposed to science.

But these dregs are not all that we have in our traditional thought. We have mentioned some factors that give special boosting to these. It remains for us to see that there is also something else in our philosophical heritage.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD IN INDIAN TRADITION

What we have so far discussed may be summed up in the form of a simple proposition. For an Indian today, an absolute emancipation from our philosophical past is at best an illusion. An individual, as an individual, may try his best to resist the influence of the traditional ideas. A limited section of our urban elite actually tries this and pretends to be "modern". By this "modern", however, is often meant nothing more than a westernised upholstery, concealing under it something quite different. But let us not for the moment digress into all that. What primarily concerns us here is a point far more important. Even admitting that in the capacity of an individual one can completely outgrow the spell of the past, the fact remains that one's neighbours remain exposed to its influence. And since the individual has to live with his neighbours, thus more or less at the mercy of the traditional ideas, he too is bound to be affected by these after all.

However, since an absolute emancipation from the past is not possible, it does not follow that we are left with the alternatives of either a passive surrender to it or a desperate zeal for its total destruction. There remains another possibility. It is to try consciously to settle the account of our present philosophical requirement with our philosophical past.

But what does this concretely mean? It means, first, to discriminate between what is living and what is dead in our philosophical heritage. Secondly, it means to scrap the former by nourishing the latter, i.e., by enriching the latter with contemporary knowledge and the experience of active struggle for the building up of a better world.

Let us try to be clearer about all this. The first question naturally is: How are we to make the proposed discrimination? How, in other words, are we to determine what is living and what is dead in traditional Indian philosophy? In order not to be arbitrary, this is obviously in need of a criterion.

What, then, is this criterion? There can be only one answer to this. It is our present philosophical requirement. But how are we to understand this requirement itself?

Are we to understand it - as the earlier generations of our philosophers actually proposed to do - in the standard of an absolute truth, which, once discovered in the early period by the venerable sages, remained only to be reunderstood and rightly admired by posterity? But the story of such an absolute truth has become obsolete; if by nothing else than the staggering rate of progress of contemporary science.

Can we hope to determine the nature of our present philosophical requirement only in terms of abstract logic and formal analysis? This would be self-deception, for this procedure can lead only to irrelevance and flea-cracking scholasticism. We have had enough of all this and let us not repeat the error over again.

That which alone 'makes the understanding of our present philosophical requirement really valid is its relevance for our concrete historical needs. It presupposes the understanding of where we are and what we want to achieve.

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It thus depends on a choice - the choice of our own historical destiny. Have we, Indians, made this choice?

MEANING OF PROGRESS

If we agree to formulate our present aim in terms of our progress, we shall be obliged to formulate the nature of our present philosophical requirement in one way. Or, do we prefer to have stagnation - to keep the Indian mind still restrained "within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies"? If there is really anybody in the country deliberately choosing the latter, he will have to formulate our present philosophical requirement in an altogether different way.

But, it will perhaps be argued, there is none in the country - not at least any that really matters - to choose the latter alternative. Who wants stagnation and vegetation in this country, which only in recent years showed so much of self-sacrifice and heroism for moving forward to political independence? There may be a negligible minority of fanatics to disapprove of the choice of progress. But our statesmen and our politicians, our policy planners and our educationists - in short, all those who are directly concerned with our historical destiny - are committed to progress.

This is apparently true. There is actually a great deal of talk of progress. At the same time, the concept of progress is bedraggled 'by various persons inclusive of those that want to evade its real implications.

What, then, are these implications?

It is being increasingly proved by the historical experience of today that there cannot be any real progress for a developing country except on the basis of comprehensive planning and public enterprise, i.e., in short, without the conscious commitment to socialism. It is not socialism as a dubious political programme but socialism in the sense in which Lenin, for example, understands it, implements it

and brings into being the socialist world under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Anything short of this conscious commitment means passivity and indifference.

In the contemporary context, passivity means a far graver danger than mere stagnation. It means the danger of neo-colonialism. For there is imperialism, which, in its last desperate bid for existence is producing “tens of billions of dollars worth of goods and services which are swallowed up every year by a military machine the only purpose of which is to keep the people of the world from solving their problems in the way they can be solved, through revolutionary socialism.” To this is to be added that a section of the local exploiters “are seeking their right to dominate also by strengthening their ties with the foreign monopolies and imperialist powers.”

The danger of neo-colonialism is thus a grave one and stagnation is the most suitable soil for receiving its seeds.

Passivity thus entails a risk much bigger than it is ordinarily supposed. It is the risk of losing what is achieved through years of struggle and of being dragged back to the colonial status.

Ordinarily, we talk of the dual danger of right reaction within the country and of imperialism spreading its tentacles from abroad. This is true. To see the whole truth, however, it is also necessary to see the interconnection between the two. Foreign imperialism cannot overpower us insofar as we build up our economic self-sufficiency, which we can build up only on the basis of revolutionary social changes. But there are forces within the country that resist all this. It is ultimately on these forces that imperialism pins its hopes.

In the contemporary context all the meanings of progress thus converge at one point. It is commitment to the active struggle for scientific socialism. This commitment has its ideological counterpart, to which Marx - already in his earlier writings - draws our attention: “material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”

In the ideological struggle of India today, we have been seeking for the criterion for distinguishing between what is living and what is dead in our traditional thought. The understanding of the historical context in which we are placed leads us to see this criterion. Since our hopes and our aspirations - even the very prospect of our survival as an independent nation - depend on how far we actually succeed in our active struggle for scientific socialism, there can be only one criterion for this purpose. In the Indian philosophical tradition, that alone is living which favours this struggle. That which goes against it is a mere deadweight of the past.

But what is it that favours this struggle? These are the forces of secularism, rationalism and science-orientation - the last basically meaning the attitude of understanding and thereby mastering nature, i.e., inclusive of the human society which is only a part of nature. Or, can we hope to build up socialism with our consciousness steeped in casteism and communalism, religion-orientation and scripture-mongering, irrationalism, obscurantism and all sorts of apologies for being indifferent to the material world on the ground of its unsubstantiality or unreality? We cannot. We can hope to build up socialism only by fighting out these ideological forces. In the Indian philosophical past, ideas and attitudes representing these forces are dead for us. These can only sink us into the mire of stagnation, cripple our courage and deny us of the vision of the future, and thus keep us passively exposed to the danger of neocolonialism.

With this clarification in mind, we may now pass on to discuss the special feature of the ideological struggle in India today. Its main tasks are:

First, to make a conscious probe into our philosophical past and to determine, on the basis of the criterion just discussed, what is dead "And what is living in it.

Secondly, to work for the eradication from popular consciousness that which is dead in our philosophical past.

Thirdly, to nourish what is living in this tradition by enriching it with contemporary knowledge and experience, which, for us, is one of the most effective ways of getting rid of the dregs of our traditional thought.

We shall try to have some clarifications on these points. We shall wind up our discussion with a brief note explaining why these tasks -philosophical though these are - can be achieved not by our philosophers themselves in the capacity of mere thinkers. The ultimate guarantee for their full accomplishment is only the Indian working-class movement.

TASKS : GENERAL AND SPECIAL

What we have been discussing here is a *special task* of the Indian ideological struggle. It will, however, be the gravest error to imagine that, this apart, there is no *general task* of the struggle. The general task is major and it is of immensely greater significance, so much so that without it the special task has neither any perspective nor any prospect of successful completion.

This general task is that of understanding, propagating and implementing the fundamentals of Marxism. There is one - and only one- path of moving towards socialism and that is the implementation of the fundamentals of Marxism. It is because of this that Marxism creates so much of hope and hostility in the world today. The hope is inspired in the toiling millions who are seeing with increasing vividness what a new world came into existence out of the mucks of an old world when human history first witnessed the successful implementation of the fundamentals of Marxism under the leadership of Lenin. The same explains the intense hostility to Marxism provoked in the vested interests seeking support in the international leadership of imperialism desperately mobilizing all its resources -inclusive of intellectual resources - for its own survival, and therefore for the rejection of Marxism.

All this is too obvious to be in need of detailed discussion. The

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most basic task in the ideological struggle of India today is the general task of reaching Marxism to the Indian masses.

But there is also a special task for us in the concrete historical context in which we are placed. Lest this be misunderstood, let us try to see two possible errors in understanding the nature of our ideological tasks. One of these errors results from the revisionist attitude, the other from the sectarian one.

As an example of the revisionist error we may discuss the attitude of Roger Garaudy expressed in his recent book *Marxism in the Twentieth Century*. He starts from the fact which profoundly transforms recent history, viz. “the decolonisation, in less than twenty years, of two continents, Asia and Africa”. From this he draws the following amazing conclusion:

“Marxism, which claims to be the heir of the whole culture of the past, cannot reduce this culture to the strictly western traditions of classical German philosophy, of English political economy, of French socialism, of Greek rationalism, of the technical spirit which emerged from the Renaissance... An Algerian, Islamic in culture, can arrive at scientific socialism by other roads than those of Hegel, Ricardo, or Saint-Simon. He has had his own Utopian socialism in the Carmathian movement, his rationalist and dialectical tradition in Averroes, his forerunner of historical materialism in Ibn Khaldun; and it is upon these traditions that he can graft scientific socialism. And this in no way excludes his integrating the heritage of our culture, *just as we have to integrate his.*” (pp. 35-6)

In the cultural context, integration is a word often badly abused. But let us not quarrel with Garaudy over the use of this word. There is truth in the view that the fundamentals of Marxism get enriched by a better understanding of the global cultural heritage. There is need for the reassessment of the cultural heritage, particularly of the newly liberated countries of Asia and Africa. It has been a deliberate policy of imperialism and its spokesmen to undermine and distort this heritage. This is profitable for imperialism, because it deprives the peoples of these countries of their normal pride of national heritage and thereby

keeps their morale low. It is profitable for imperialism also because it misleads the people with a perverted ideal concocted from their ancestral convictions - i.e., not from the truth about these convictions but from a myth about these, which requires for its own maintenance the suppression of much that is actually significant in these.

If Garaudy means only this, the Marxist today need not and must not differ with him. But it is necessary to differ with him, because he does not mean this. What he actually suggests is the possibility of building up an alternative Marxism, which, in fact, means an alternative to Marxism. This alternative, he tells us, can be built up by somehow or other bringing together various disjointed elements of the cultural heritage of the newly liberated countries. The road on which Marx and Engels themselves move is not the only road to Marxism. There are other roads to it, along which it is possible - perhaps also desirable - for the peoples of the newly liberated countries to move. Such a suggestion is devastating. It amounts to the assertion that the course actually followed by Marx and Engels is arbitrary or accidental after all. If so, the theory and practice of scientific socialism as it has historically developed and in the form in which it is leading millions of working people all over the world to shape their own destiny - in short, Marxism as we have it today - itself becomes somewhat arbitrary. The Algerians today can follow a different path and build up an alternative to it from their own cultural heritage.

But can they really do it? Or, what is immediately relevant for ourselves, can we Indians build up a substitute for Marxism from the materials of our own cultural heritage? We cannot. And the reason for this is quite simple. The road along which Marx and Engels move is not an accidental one. The heritage of classical German philosophy, British political economy and French socialism, which, through the tremendous process of dialectical transformation, culminates in Marxism is not a historical accident. These are themselves the products of the maturation of the global historical development and are qualitatively different from their seeming equivalents, if any, in the cultural heritage, say of the Algerians and Indians. Thus, for

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example, we have in traditional 'Indian philosophy' potentials of the dialectical view, associated particularly with the early Buddhists. We have, moreover, among our ancient materialists called the Lokayatas or Carvakas a brilliant anticipation of the explanation of the origin of consciousness from matter. These are extremely precious elements in the Indian cultural heritage and it will be a fatal mistake for us to remain indifferent to their real significance. Still, only the most extravagant imagination can lead us to expect the emergence of dialectical materialism or materialist dialectics on the basis of some kind of mysterious synthesis of the two.

It is not necessary for us to go into greater details of the absurdity of such an idea. But it may be important to recollect here how the founders of Marxism themselves look back at the road along which they move towards scientific socialism. Here is just an example. In 1874 Engels asserts, "Without German philosophy, which preceded it, particularly that of Hegel, German scientific socialism - the only scientific socialism that has ever existed - would never have come into being".

To dream of an alternative road to Marxism, and therefore virtually of an alternative of Marxism built up from the cultural heritage of the liberated countries of Asia and Africa, is thus a proposal to revise Marxism and thus to disarm the working people of their invincible ideological weapon, for which there is no substitute. The general task in the ideological struggle of India today - which is also the most basic task - is to arm the masses with the theory and practice of Marxism. The suggestion of any alternative to it is a sheer disaster.

THE SPECIAL TASK AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

If, however, there is the danger of a revisionist understanding of the Indian ideological struggle, it should by no means be forgotten that there is also the risk of a sectarian understanding of it. The essence of this sectarian understanding consists in viewing the general task just discussed as our only task-of imagining, in other words, that a purely

Marxist education is enough for our purpose and that this purity can be maintained even if we remain indifferent to the ideological work of settling accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience.

We can perhaps best understand this aspect of our ideological struggle with what Lenin said as late as in 1922: “It would be the biggest and most grievous mistake a Marxist could make to think that the millions of the people (especially the peasants and artisans), who have been condemned by all modern society to darkness, ignorance and superstition, can extricate themselves from this darkness *only along the straight line of a purely Marxist education*. These masses should be supplied with the most varied atheist propaganda material, they should be made familiar with facts from the most diverse spheres of life, they should be approached in every possible way, so as to interest them, rouse them from their religious torpor, stir them from the most varied angles and by the most varied methods, and so forth”.

Lenin said this while discussing what was actually done by his comrades to implement the advice of Engels to “the contemporary leaders of the proletariat to translate the militant atheist literature of the late eighteenth century for mass distribution among the people”. Lenin sharply criticises his own contemporaries for not carrying out the advice. “Our apathy, inactivity and incompetence are sometimes excused on all sorts of ‘lofty’ grounds, as, for example, that the old atheist literature of the eighteenth century is antiquated, unscientific, naive, etc. There is nothing worse than such pseudo-scientific sophistry, which serves as a screen either for pedantry or for a complete misunderstanding of Marxism. There is, of course, much that is unscientific and naive in the atheist writings of the eighteenth century revolutionaries. But nobody prevents the publishers of these writings from abridging them and providing them with brief postscripts pointing out the progress made by mankind in the scientific criticism of religion since the end of the eighteenth century, mentioning the latest writings on the subject, and so forth.”

Let us try to understand the main implications of all this.

Though Marxism alone promises real emancipation of the work-

ing peoples from the religious illusion, it is an error to think that the atheistic heritage of the eighteenth century is irrelevant for the ideological struggle aimed at this emancipation. But this does not mean an uncritical acceptance of this atheistic heritage as such. In short, we cannot afford to be totally indifferent to it nor are we going to accept and propagate it as it is. What, then, is the right attitude to it? This can be summed up in the form of the following propositions.

First, there is something obviously dead in the atheistic writings of the eighteenth century revolutionaries.

Secondly, there is nevertheless something also living in it -something that still retains significance for us.

Thirdly, in the contemporary ideological struggle, it is necessary for us to scrap the first and nourish the second.

These are the main points of settling our present account with the atheistic heritage, without which the contemporary ideological struggle for the emancipation of the masses from the religious illusion remains incompletely accomplished.

What we are trying to discuss in the present context of the Indian ideological struggle are broadly based on the above points of Lenin. In the specific Indian context of settling the account of our present philosophical requirements with our philosophical past, these points naturally acquire some specific significance.

First, what is dead in the atheistic heritage of the eighteenth century is so, because it is obsolete, naive and unscientific. But it does not have a pre-existing pernicious effect on the consciousness of the masses. By contrast, what is actually dead in the vast philosophical stock of traditional India is in circulation among the Indian masses and it has a strong grip on their consciousness. It is already having a crippling effect on them. It is, therefore, not a mere question of abridging it or adding postscripts to it. The point is to uproot it, eradicate it, to rouse the masses from its slumbering influence. The most effective way of doing it is, of course, to spread Marxist education among the masses. But the spread of only the fundamentals of Marxism is not enough for the purpose. It has the risk of super-

imposing a body of scientific ideas on the subsoil of obscurantism, irrationalism and religion-orientation. We have already seen how this actually happens even in the case of a considerable section of our working scientists: a part of their personality pays homage to science, the other part of it prostrates itself before the worst form of ossified obscurantism. The analogous risk in the Indian ideological struggle is to graft a body of ideas and attitudes on a pre-existing stock. This pre-existing stock can consciously or unconsciously frustrate the Marxist education itself. What is required, therefore, is to consciously settle our accounts with our philosophical past.

But the question is: How are we to carry out this task?

Are we to develop a merely negative attitude to our philosophical past on the ground that much in it is still having the most undesirable effect on the Indian masses? Are we to work for an indifference to it, a sheer apathy for it, mere contempt for it? This will be a disaster for various reasons.

First, this will be singing to the tune to which imperialism wanted us to sing and will still like us to sing. The cultivation of a purely nihilistic attitude to our own cultural heritage is one of the most effective ways of denuding us of our normal nationalist pride and thereby to keep us helplessly exposed to the risk of reverting back to the colonial status. Besides, the fact is that the whole of the Indian philosophical heritage is not mere muck. Nothing is perhaps a worse lie than to tell our people that our ancestors - in spite of their search for truth for over two thousand and five hundred years - bequeathed us only with deceptions and falsehoods. What a section of them wanted to prove surely turns out to be so. But even this aspect of traditional Indian philosophy is not to be simply ignored. We have to analyze and understand it to find out the nature of the material conditions that propelled them to these deceptions insofar as these were also self-deceptions. We have to determine the nature of the vested interests in society that coerced some to glorify these deceptions, insofar as these were glorified, perhaps, against their conscience.

There is also another point. While what we have received from a

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section of our traditional philosophers amounts to be full of deceptions and falsehood, another section of them was struggling in its own way precisely against the same deceptions. The understanding of the Indian philosophical situation is in need of degeneralisation. If there is mysticism, obscurantism, religion-oriented idealism and other worldliness in Indian philosophy, there are also in it extremely significant trends of rationalism, secularism, science-oriented this-worldliness and materialism. We have to recover and re-understand the full story of these trends and to tell our people, i.e., to show them with rich historical details, how we Marxists today are struggling to overcome basically the same ideological forces which a section of our own traditional philosophers themselves wanted to overcome in their own way and under the historical limitations in which they had to work. This task is exceedingly important in our ideological struggle today. There are many reasons to view it so. *First*, it enables us to talk in the Indian language, which is much more immediately understood by our masses. Somehow or other, as we have already said, a considerable number of basic Indian philosophical terminologies are already familiar to the Indian masses and it best suits their understanding of the ideological questions when these are introduced to them in the same terminologies. *Secondly*, insofar as we succeed in showing that we Marxists today are trying in many respects to carry to their actual fulfillment certain tasks which the section of our right-minded philosophers rightly took upon themselves, but which, because of their historical limitations they were obliged to leave unfulfilled - insofar as we can show this, we can most effectively tear to pieces the myth with which our revivalists are shouting themselves hoarse; *viz.* that the ideology which we stand for is totally alien to our own culture, that we Marxists have no root in our national past and that therefore it is the holy duty of the people to resist us. The ways in which all this is being told to our people need not be repeated here. What is important instead is to note that the truth is really to the contrary and that it is time for us to assert this truth with the boldest self-confidence. This truth, in other words, is that the Indian work-

ing-class movement today insofar as it is rightly inspired by Marxism has alone the courage to inherit what is best in the Indian philosophical tradition and to carry this forward to its great historical destiny. For the other sections of our society there are various considerations that prevent the carrying out of these tasks. What is actually living in Indian philosophy, when it is rightly inherited today, becomes much more than a mere intellectual curiosity. It also becomes a programme for action - the action of a revolutionary transformation of society which the working class, apart from any other section, has the boldness to undertake.

We shall end this discussion with a few clarifications of the last point. An objective analysis of the Indian philosophical activity drew its nourishment from the clash of ideas, or, in Indian terminology, from the active confrontation of *paksa* and *vipaksa* - literally the thesis and the antithesis. Therefore, our first question for the understanding of the Indian philosophical situation as a whole is the question concerning the basic contradiction in it. This contradiction, as an objective analysis shows, is the contradiction of basically two trends of irrationalism, obscurantism and religion-oriented idealism. The other of these is that of rationalism, secularism and science-orientation gravitating inevitably towards the materialist outlook. In traditional India - mainly because of the pressure of the vested interests and their spokesmen, the Indian law-givers - the first of these received a tremendous boosting, political patronage and financial support. This accounts for the usual picture of Indian philosophy with a highly inflated importance of this trend. Further, the representatives of the second trend had to struggle against the adverse historical conditions of economic under-development, social stagnation and stunted technology and science. In these circumstances it was not historically possible for the representatives of this trend to carry forward its potentials beyond a certain point. Since this trend, however, represents what is actually living in the Indian philosophical tradition, its potentials remain to be carried forward to their real culmination. This means the task of inheriting this trend and

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of nourishing it with contemporary knowledge and experience. But who is it that can really do this? Not the Indian landed aristocracy, not even the Indian bourgeoisie, for beyond a certain limit this task militates against their basic class interests. Rationalism, for example, if fully implemented among the people, enables the people to see what is going on beneath the surface of the social reality. From the point of view of the other classes, the risk in this is obvious. We have already seen how, during the Indian national movement, the dominant classes of Indian society wanted to settle their accounts with the Indian philosophical heritage. This has largely been the way of reasserting and reviving the spiritualist-idealist trends in Indian philosophy. Modern revivalism and reaction is taking full advantage of this and, in doing this, is wanting to reinvoke imperialism. The hope lies only in the working-class movement, which alone has the boldness and the courage to inherit what is best in the Indian philosophical tradition and to carry this forward to its real fulfillment.

Let us recall here the inspiring words with which Engels concludes his work on *Ludwig Feuerbach*:

“Only among the working class does the German aptitude for theory remain unimpaired. Here it cannot be exterminated. Here there is no concern for careers, for profit-making or for gracious patronage from above. On the contrary, the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests and aspirations of the workers. The new tendency, which recognised that the key to the understanding of the whole history of society lies in the history of the development of labour, from the outset addressed itself by preference to the working class and here found the response which it neither sought nor expected from officially recognised science. The German working-class movement is the inheritor of German classical philosophy.”