

100th Birth Anniversary of Mao Zedong

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On December 26, 1993 falls the birth centenary of the great revolutionary, Mao Zedong. It was under his leadership that the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people were able to successfully carry out the peoples democratic revolution -- evolving a link between the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. Of the three earth shaking events that radically altered the correlation of class forces on a world plane, the Chinese revolution stood only next to the Great October revolution and the victory over fascism. Though the later years of his life raised lot of controversy and led to certain deviations from Marxism Leninism, we have to appreciate his enormous contribution to the science of Marxism-Leninism and its application to the concrete situation prevailing in China.

Born in a poor peasant family in a village of Hunan province on 26th December, 1893, Mao was among the revolutionaries who under the impact of the October revolution turned towards Marxism-Leninism and was among the first to join the Communist Party when it was formed in China. Born in 1893 he led a hard life as a worker, soldier, student and a political leader after joining the Party. He was among the 10 delegates representing a membership of 50 that participated in the first Congress of the Communist Party of China held in Shanghai in 1921. The Congress marked a turning point in his life and there was no looking back.

The history of the CPC, replete with glorious armed struggles can be classified into four major periods -- (1) the war of the Kuomintang-Communist Party united front against the reactionary warlords (1924-27); (2) the war of the people's forces led by the communist party against the Kuomintang reaction (1927-36); (3) the patriotic war of the Kuomintang and communist party forces against the Japanese aggression (1936-45); and (4) the war of the people's forces against the Kuomintang and American imperialism (1946-50).

In the first stage the great patriot Sun-Yat Sen was the leader of the Kuomintang who enunciated the three principles of nationalism, democracy and people's welfare. These principles were utilised to rally the patriotic Chinese people and forge an alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communist party. After his death, the rightist Chiang-Kaishek took over the leadership of the Kuomintang and concentrated attack against the communists leading to the massacre of thousands of communists. Later, in the struggle against Japanese imperialism a situation was created for reforging the unity of the Communist party with the Kuomintang which again got split in the third stage. The fourth period resulted in the culmination of the world shaking event with the success of the people's democratic revolution and the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of China. During these periods Mao Zedong played a significant role.

A study of his works reveals the profound study he had undertaken of the concrete situation prevailing in China in relation to the position of various classes -- both of the working class, as well as, its enemies and how to utilise this to further the revolutionary movement. As early as 1926 he made an analysis of the classes in Chinese society -- necessitated by the urgency to combat the two deviations in the CPC - the first represented by Chen Tu-hsiu which emphasised only on the cooperation with the Kuomintang, and ignored the peasantry as a class -- termed as right opportunism and the second represented by Chan Tu-pao which concerned only with the working class movement and forgot about the role of the peasants -- termed as left opportunism. Mao rightly pointed out that the peasantry is the staunchest and numerically largest ally of the Chinese proletariat, the principal ally in the Chinese revolution. Moreover, he saw that the national bourgeoisie as a vacillating class and predicted that it would disintegrate during the upsurge of the revolution with its rightwing going over to the side of imperialism. This class analysis was of great importance in both strengthening the cooperation with the Kuomintang along with maintaining the independent identity of the party and the class support which was necessary.

Recognising the working class as the most revolutionary vanguard of the revolution he constantly emphasised the role of the peasantry. In the situation of war where the Communist Party was not able to stand against the reactionary armies in the cities they had to create bases in the rural areas among the peasantry. This enabled them to

consistently carry on the armed struggle in various stages till victory was achieved. They were able to create bases in vast areas and spread the revolution. The long march organised by the Red army under the leadership of the Chinese Communist party is a glorious chapter in the history of the revolutionary movement in the world.

His theoretical work ranges over a vast canvas. It sums up to an application of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions prevailing in China, a monumental task which he has undertaken with great skill, probity and thoroughness. Evaluating the character of the revolution over the years he differentiated the new type of bourgeois democratic revolutions from the old type providing its link with the socialist revolutions because of the leading role of the working class and the establishment of workers-peasant alliance in the process of revolutionary struggle. The class analysis of the Chinese society and the role of various classes in forming the united front forms an important aspect of his contribution in this direction. Since the Chinese party had to undertake armed struggle beginning with guerrilla war, his writings on military strategy and tactics contributed to the Red army gradually transforming into a people's army in carrying on the struggle in face of a vastly stronger enemy. He also skillfully utilised the three principles of Sun Yatsen mentioned above and raised the patriotic feelings of the Chinese people to carry forward the revolution. In fact he linked the Chinese revolution with the bourgeois democratic traditions. His theoretical contribution was not confined only to the field of politics, economy and military strategy. In the theoretical sphere his essay on contradiction was a popular exposition and an important contribution to the Marxist theory of knowledge.

One would find only few leaders like Mao, who could apply theoretical propositions to concrete conditions of Chinese society. In this context his organisational capacity was truly marvelous. He not only formulated broad slogans but went to the masses and organised them to comprehend the implications of these slogans. He would attend to the most detailed questions of organisation -- whether it was building the communist party, the people's army, trade unions, peasants' associations or other organisations. His greatest political achievements have been in providing leadership of the vast masses of the people in direct struggle against oppression of every type. Here, we will try to deal with some of the important contributions he made in developing Marxism and their application to the concrete conditions prevailing in China.

In December, 1939 he wrote a booklet on "Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" where he analysed the nature of Chinese society in detail. Here he stated that the "Chinese nation is known throughout the world not only for its industriousness and stamina, but also for their ardent love for freedom and its rich revolutionary traditions. The history of the Han people for instance, demonstrates that the Chinese never submit to tyrannical rule but invariably use revolutionary means to overthrow or change it. In the thousands of years of Han history, there have been hundreds of peasant uprisings, great and small, against the dark rule of the landlords and the nobility. And most dynastic changes came about as a result of such peasant uprisings. All the nationalities of China have resisted foreign oppression and have invariably resorted to rebellion to shake it off. They favour a union on the basis of equality but are against the oppression of one nationality by another."

Analysing the whole feudal society he elaborated the main features of Chinese feudal era as a self sufficient natural economy. The peasants not only produced agricultural products for themselves but most of the handicraft articles as well. The feudal ruling classes composed of landlords, nobility and the emperor owned most of the land while the peasants had very little or none at all. He analysed that the feudal landlord state was the organ of power protecting the system of feudal exploitation.

Analysing the different classes existing in Chinese society he stated that the landlord class was the enemy which formed the social base for imperialist rule in China and used the feudal system to exploit and oppress the peasants and obstructed China's political, economic and cultural development.

Regarding the bourgeoisie he drew a proper distinction between the comprador bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, the comprador bourgeoisie being the class which directly served the capitalists of the imperialist countries and was nurtured by them. And therefore he came to the conclusion that apart from the landlords, this was a class that had to be the target of the revolution. The national bourgeoisie, he explained had a dual character. On the one hand it was being suppressed by imperialism and whetted by feudalism and consequently was in contradiction with both of them. In this respect it constituted one of the progressive forces and in the course of the

Chinese revolution it displayed certain enthusiasm for fighting imperialism and the government of bureaucrats and warlords. He also pointed out that it lacked the courage to oppose imperialism and feudalism thoroughly because it was economically and politically flabby and still had economic ties with imperialism and feudalism. This tendency emerged clearly when the people's revolutionary forces grew powerful.

The peasantry according to him constituted practically 80 percent of the Chinese population. It was the main force in organising the economy - with the rich peasants forming about 5 percent of the rural population and constituting the rural bourgeoisie. Most of the rich peasants in China were feudal in character since they rented part of their land, practiced usury and ruthlessly exploited the farm labourers. However, since they themselves laboured on the land, they were part of the peasantry. The rich peasant, might make some contribution to the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry against the landlords. Therefore, he said that the rich peasant should not be regarded as belonging to the landlord class.

The middle peasant which formed 20 percent of the Chinese rural population are economically self supported, they generally did not exploit others but were exploited by imperialism and the landlord and bourgeois class. Not only could the middle peasant join the anti-imperialist revolution and the agrarian revolution but they could also champion socialism. He asserted that the positive and negative attitude of the middle peasants was one of the factors determining the victory or defeat in the revolution and this was especially true after the agrarian revolution when they became the majority of the rural population. The poor peasant, constituting about 70 percent of the rural populace without land or insufficient land was the biggest motive force of the Chinese revolution. He stated that the term peasantry "refers mainly to the poor and middle peasants".

About the Chinese proletariat he said "it is the more resolute and thoroughgoing in revolutionary struggle than any other class because it is subjected to a three fold oppression (imperialist, bourgeois and feudal) which is marked by a severity and cruelty seldom found in other countries. Since there is no economic basis for social reformism in colonial and semi-colonial China as there is in Europe, the whole proletariat, with the exception of a few scabs, is most revolutionary."

Answering the question whether the Chinese revolution would be a bourgeois democratic one or a proletarian socialist one Mao categorically asserted that it was not the latter but the former. For, the Chinese society was colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal and since the principal enemies of the Chinese revolution were imperialism and feudalism. The task therefore was to overthrow the two enemies -- imperialism and feudalism, not against the bourgeoisie, even if it betrayed the revolution. "The bourgeois-democratic revolution is one of a new special type. We call this type the new-democratic revolution", which "clears the way for capitalism on the one hand and creates the prerequisites for socialism on the other".

On the basis of the above analysis he came out in January 1940 with the perspective of new democracy. Herein he laid down the historic necessity of the revolution. Dividing the stages into two parts - the new democratic revolution and the socialist revolution, he stated that the former was necessary to prepare for the latter and the latter was a inevitable sequel to the former. He criticised the strategy of accomplishing the revolution at one stroke. He said that the new democratic revolution, was in essence, an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution of the broad masses of the people based on the worker-peasant alliance under the leadership of the proletariat. Formulating the political, economic and cultural programme for the new democratic revolution, he concluded that united front, armed struggle and party building were the three major weapons which were required to defeat the enemy. In new democracy Mao had evolved a complete system of theory that integrated Marxism with the revolutionary practice in China.

Another important theoretical work of Mao Zedong is his essay 'On Contradiction', which as mentioned earlier is a comprehensive and profound exposition of the Marxist Leninist theory. Faced with dogmatic thinking inside the party, in August 1937 he came out with this theory. Quoting Lenin, "Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects", Mao stated that "in studying this law, therefore, we cannot but touch upon a variety of questions, upon a number of philosophical problems. If we can become clear on all these problems, we shall arrive at a fundamental understanding of materialist dialectics. The problems are : the two world outlooks, the universality of contradiction, the particularity of contradiction, the principal contradiction and the

principal aspect of a contradiction, the identity and struggle of the aspects of a contradiction, and the place of antagonism in contradiction." Detailing the two world outlooks concerning the laws of development and the universe, the metaphysical and dialectical conception - which were opposites he concluded that the "dialectical world outlook teaches us primarily how to observe and analyse the movement of opposites in different things and, on the basis of such analysis, to indicate the methods for resolving contradictions. "

He quoted the following from Engels to explain the universality of contradictions. " If simple mechanical change of place contains a contradiction, this is even more true of the higher forms of motion of matter, and especially of organic life and its development....life consists precisely and primarily in this -- that a being is at each movement itself and yet something else. Life is therefore also a contradiction which is present in things and processes themselves, and which constantly originates and resolves itself; and as soon as the contradiction ceases, life, too, comes to an end, and death steps in. We likewise saw that also in the sphere of thought we could not escape contradictions, and that for example the contradiction between man's inherently unlimited capacity for knowledge and its actual presence only in men who are externally limited and possess limited cognition finds its solution in what is -- at least practically, for us -- an endless succession of generations, in infinite progress." He further quoted Lenin " In his Capital, Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday relation of bourgeois(commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz, the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this "cell" of bourgeois society) analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society...."

In Mao's words "Contradiction in each form of motion of matter has its particularity. Man's knowledge of matter is knowledge of its forms of motion, because there is nothing in this world except matter in motion and this motion must assume certain forms. In considering each form of motion of matter, we must observe the points which it has in common with other forms of motion. But what is especially important and necessary, constituting as it does the foundation of our knowledge of a thing, is to observe what is particular to this form of motion of matter, namely, to observe the qualitative difference between this form of motion and other forms". He concludes that qualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods viz the contradiction between the

proletariat and the bourgeoisie is resolved by the method of socialist revolution; the contradiction between the great masses of the people and the feudal system is resolved by the method of democratic revolution; the contradiction between the communists and imperialism is resolved by the method of national revolutionary war and so on. "Processes change, old processes and old contradictions disappear, new processes and new contradictions emerge, and the methods of resolving contradictions differ accordingly".

Analysing the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction he stated that " there are many contradictions in the process of development of a complex thing, and one of them is necessarily the principal contradiction whose existence and development determine or influence the existence and development of the other contradictions." In capitalist society, Mao stated, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie - the two forces of contradiction -- form the principal contradiction. All other contradictions are determined or influenced by this contradiction. Regarding the place of antagonism in contradictions, Mao stated that "antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites. In human history, antagonism between classes exists as a particular manifestation of the struggle of opposites."

He concluded by saying that "according to dialectical materialism, contradiction is present in all processes of objectively existing things and of subjective thought and permeates all these processes from the beginning to end; this is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction. Each contradiction and each of its aspects have their respective characteristics; this is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. In given conditions, opposites possess identity, and consequently can coexist in a single entity and can transform themselves into each other; this again is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. But the struggle of opposites is ceaseless, it goes on both when the opposites are coexisting and when they are transforming themselves into each other, and becomes especially conspicuous when they are transforming themselves into one another; this again is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction."

It is in the correct application of the theory of contradictions at various stages of the revolution that the success of the Chinese communist party lay. It rallied the working class, the peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie for the new democratic

revolution and subsequently transforming it into the socialist revolution.

Immediately after the success of the revolution in October 1949 and the formation of the People's Republic of China, the CPC took up the task of gradually realising the transition from new democracy to socialism, rapidly reconstructing and building the country's economy and in the main accomplishing the socialist transformation of the private ownership of the means of production in most parts of the country. It was under Mao's leadership that the central committee of the CPC advanced the general line in 1952, which was to realise the country's social industrial and socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industries and commerce step by step over a fairly long period of time.

During this period the party gradually charted a course for social transformation that suited specific Chinese conditions. In dealing with capitalist industry and agriculture it devised a whole series of transitional forms of state capitalism from lower to higher levels, such as the placing of state orders with private enterprises for the processing of raw materials or the manufacture of goods, state monopoly of the purchase and marketing of the products of private enterprises, the marketing of products of private enterprises, the marketing of products of state owned enterprises by private shops and joint state-private ownership of new enterprises etc. In dealing with farming it devised transitional forms of cooperation, proceeding from temporary or all the year round mutual aid teams to elementary agriculture producing cooperation of semi socialist nature and to advance agriculture producers cooperatives of a fully socialist nature, always adhering to the principles of voluntarism and mutual benefit, administration through advanced examples and extension of state capital. In fact by 1959 on the basis of this approach China made tremendous progress.

The eleventh Congress of the CPC, in 1981, in its resolution on CPC history, while evaluating the role of Mao Zedong has stated that 1957 was one of the years that saw the best results in the economic work since the foundation of the People's republic of China. This they owed to the conscientious implementation of the correct lines formulated at the 8th national Congress of the party. It states : "to start a rectification campaign throughout the party in that year and urge the masses to offer criticisms and suggestions were normal steps in developing socialist democracy. In the rectification campaign

a handful of bourgeois Rightists seized the opportunity to advocate what they called "speaking out and airing views in a big way" and to mount a wild attack against the Party and the nascent socialist system in an attempt to replace the leadership of the Communist Party. It was therefore entirely correct and necessary to launch a resolute counter-attack. But the scope of this struggle was made far too broad and a number of intellectuals, patriotic people and Party cadres were unjustifiably labelled "Rightists", with unfortunate consequences."

But during the second plenum of the 8th national congress of the CPC, a general line was adopted which overlooked the objective economic laws. Both before and after the plenum, party members and the people displayed high enthusiasm and initiative for socialism and did achieve some results. The resolution states that "left errors characterised by excessive targets, the issuing of arbitrary directions, boastfulness and the stirring up of a "communist wind, spread unchecked throughout the country." Pointing out that this was due to the lack of understanding of the laws of economic development and of the basic economic conditions in China, it stated " more important, it was due to the fact that Com. Mao Zedong and many leading comrades, both at the centre and in the localities, had become smug about their successes, were impatient for quick results and overestimated the role of man's subjective will and the efforts. After the general line was formulated, the Great Leap Forward and the movement for rural people's communes were initiated without careful investigation and study and without prior experimentation."

It further states that while from the end of 1959 till the PB meeting of July 1959 Mao himself and the CC led the party in rectifying the mistakes, in the later part of the meeting he initiated criticism of Com Peng Dehuai and then in launching a party wide struggle against "right opportunism". Stating that the resolution adopted at the 8th plenary session of the 8th CC concerning the so-called anti-party group of Peng Dehuai, Huang Kecheng and others was wrong, the resolution states that "politically, this struggle gravely undermined inner-party democracy from its central level down to the grass roots; economically it cut short the process of rectification of "Left" errors, thus prolonging their influence. It was mainly due to the errors of the Great Leap forward and of the struggle against "right opportunism" together with a succession of natural calamities and the perfidious scrapping of contracts by the Soviet government that our economy encountered serious difficulties between 1959 and 1961, which caused serious losses to our country and people.

During this period, Mao misinterpreted his own theory on contradictions with regard to class struggle in a socialist society. His arbitrariness greatly undermined democratic centralism in the party and the personality cult grew. The Central Committee of the party failed to rectify and guide him. With the result that careerists like Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and others, who were harbouring ulterior motives utilising the errors and inflating them. This the CC resolution points out "led to the inauguration of the "cultural Revolution".

The cultural revolution, the gravest mistake committed by the party cost the party and the Chinese people dearly. Initiating it in May 1966, Mao said that many representatives of the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary revisionists had sneaked into the party, the government, the army and cultural circles. According to him the power usurped by the capitalist-roaders could be recaptured only carrying out a great cultural revolution. The resolution states that "Mao Zedong's principal theses for initiating this revolution conformed neither to Marxism-Leninism nor to Chinese reality. They represent an entirely erroneous appraisal of the prevailing class relations and political situation in the party and state." The resolution further states that the cultural revolution was divorced both from the party organisation and from the masses. Party organisations at different levels were attacked and became partially or wholly paralysed, party cadres at various levels were subjected to criticism and struggle. Many opportunist elements made their way to key positions. The cultural revolution, threw the whole party and Chinese society into disorder.

It was during this period that the world situation was erroneously understood by Mao and the Chinese party. It was advocated that the world situation was ripe for revolution -- without the existence of both objective and subjective factors, the level of consciousness of the people and the development of society in each specific country.

Based on this understanding, Mao gave the slogan of revolution everywhere. This was to lead to splits in various contingents of the communist movement. Another erroneous understanding was the three world theory -- clubbing American imperialism and the socialist Soviet Union (which he termed as social imperialism) in one camp representing the first world, the second being the developed capitalist countries and the third, the developing countries. The very

existence of socialism was denied. By laying virtually exclusive emphasis on the struggle against imperialism, not only was the communist movement weakened but the national liberation movements too suffered. In China, however, in the name of fighting revisionism, the party, the leading force of the revolution was itself paralysed. This understanding played havoc, with revolutionaries becoming the target of attack, people being instigated against the Party leadership at various places and many leading comrades were victimised.

Though in his later years, Mao Zedong did commit serious mistakes and grave errors which caused harm both to the Chinese revolution as well as the international communist movement, his positive and immense contribution to the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism will have to be properly appreciated. We cannot make a subjective analysis of a personality in cases where errors have been committed in the application of the theory to practice. Such an evaluation is unhistorical and tends to overlook and in fact ignore the significant contributions made by such individuals. Denial of his historical role and contributions and highlighting the negative aspects alone will be unhistorical. The same holds true the other way round.