

E.M.S.NAMBOODIRIPAD'S PERCEPTION OF HISTORY

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E.M.S.Namboodiripad would have described himself as being engaged in the "modest" task of applying Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of Indian society. But this description needs to be amended for two reasons: first, any application of theory is itself a theoretical task. It represents simultaneously a development of theory, an enlargement of the corpus of Marxism-Leninism, and hence an expansion of its theoretical frontiers, which, since there is no hierarchy among theoretical endeavours, can by no means be described as "modest". Secondly, EMS did not just delve into Marxism-Leninism to find answers to the concrete problems confronting the Indian revolutionary movement, such as the agrarian question or the nationality question. His stand on all these questions was informed by an overall reading of Indian history, and this reading was arrived at through an application of Marxist analysis to the historical "facts" about Indian society as thrown up by researchers¹. This overall reading, since it differs so fundamentally from the classical Marxist reading of European history, marks, in a specific sense, a major advance of the frontiers of Marxism.

To be sure, the basis for this reading had been laid by Marx himself, who had been so struck by the difference between the European and Asian histories that he had developed the concept of the "Asiatic Mode of Production" as a *sui generis* category. But EMS's perception of Indian history that I have just referred to does not relate only to some phase in the pre-colonial period of Indian history. And even though he subscribed for long to the concept of the Asiatic Mode, his general perception of Indian history remained unchanged even after Marxist scholarship had moved away from the Asiatic Mode and EMS himself, in deference to the trends in scholarly research, had appeared, as we shall see, to have diluted his allegiance to this

¹ A very good example of this is his "Communication" to *Social Scientist*, December 1982, Issue number 115, where he puts forward his views on the Nationality Question, in the context of discussing Amalendu Guha's criticism of his 1952 formulations in *The National Question in Kerala*, through a process of locating these views within an overall reading of Indian history.

concept. It is this perception of his, in the wider sense, about Indian history, with which the present article is concerned.

EMS is unique among Indian Communist thinkers in developing such an overall perception of Indian history, and in consciously locating analyses of specific issues that arose in the context of praxis, within such an overall perception. In this sense he bears a resemblance to Antonio Gramsci who had been seriously involved in studying Italian history; and it is not surprising that late in his life he had developed a deep interest in Gramsci's work. No doubt there were other Communist thinkers in India, even excluding academic Marxist scholars like Kosambi and Habib, who also wrote on Indian history. But EMS was different. He wrote neither to defend "orthodoxy", i.e. to establish that Marx's description of the sequence of the modes of production, in the classical transition to capitalism, held in the case of India as well; nor on specific themes alone. He was unique in attempting to develop, on the basis of established research, an overall sense of Indian history from a Marxist perspective. His was an authentic theoretical quest into Indian history. True, any such characterization of EMS's work entails *reading into* his published writings a pattern and a meaning, which has necessarily got to be an ascription; but this is unavoidable for the proper assessment of a major thinker.

The main feature of EMS's perception is a recognition of the remarkable continuity in Indian history, where what appear as "breaks" or "transitions" amount really to no more than "superimpositions". Indian history, he had said at the 1971 seminar of the Indian School of Social Sciences held at Chennai, is characterized by a series of "superimpositions" which nonetheless leave certain essential features at its core unchanged. Giving a facetious example of what he meant he had added: "If Indian scientists were to send a sputnik to the moon, then before doing so they would perform a 'puja' for the success of the mission."

Perhaps EMS's route to Communism is what accounts for this theoretical quest. He was born into an orthodox Brahmin landlord family and came to Communism through the social reform movement, Gandhism, and Congress socialism. A deep engagement with issues of caste, religiosity and patriarchy always remained with him, and with it, naturally, the puzzle of why this society had not grown out of this caste-based feudal system over such a long history. He brought these questions to Marxism and sought to find answers to them through the application of Marxist analysis. The novelty of his theoretical quest arose from this.

EMS's interest in the Asiatic Mode of Production was quite natural in this context. Marx had developed the concept precisely to explain the relatively unchanging nature of the Indian and other Asiatic societies over long stretches of time, and to answer the question: why did these societies not develop capitalism despite the fact that they had generated enough surpluses to sustain mighty empires? Marx had visualized these societies, especially India on which he had access to a variety of material emanating from colonial sources, as consisting of a number of "cells" in the form of village communities over which the mighty empires rested. The rulers changed; empires arose and collapsed, to be followed by newer empires; but the system of village communities on which these empires rested continued in its old unchanging ways, with the peasant, cultivating his "miserable patch of land", being completely oblivious to the battle, raging nearby between two rival armies, whose outcome would determine the identity of the overlord to whom he would have to hand over his surplus.

While the analytical characteristic of the Asiatic Mode was clearly spelt out by Marx, namely that the "fundamental principle on which it is based" is "that the individual does not become independent of the community" (Marx 1964, p.83), on the actual historical elements underlying this principle he had an open mind and kept refining and reshaping his views as new material came his way. Marx's views on the exact historical elements that went into the making of the Asiatic Mode therefore did not reach a final definitive form. The absence of private property in land (sometimes, following the lead of the French traveller and chronicler Bernier, identified as all land being the property of the King); the unity of agriculture and manufacturing (which in turn was sometimes thought of as unity within the household and sometimes as unity within the village community without the intervention of "commodity production"); the importance of irrigation works whose maintenance required a centralized State that absorbed the bulk of the surplus, leaving little room for the emergence of any significant class of proto-bourgeoisie: these were some of the elements that figured from time to time in the writings of Marx and Engels as defining the Asiatic Mode of Production.

Historians have explored at great length if these elements existed in India in the pre-British period; and the answer seems to be in the clear negative (Habib 1963). The widely prevalent system of hereditary land grants to private individuals would suggest the existence of property relations different from those visualized by Marx. And while it is true that the surplus was commoditized, which is quite different from and lacks the impact of commodity production *per se*, even the latter had made an appearance, with cash crop production

not being uncommon. As a consequence, differentiation within the so-called village community, with trade being a two-way process between town and country, had also established its presence. Whether all this would have led to a development of capitalism, either spontaneously, or, as in Japan, in conscious response to the development of capitalism in Europe, if colonialism had not imposed an altogether different trajectory on this society, remains a moot question. But, the pre-colonial Indian society was not exactly an unchanging one *in the sense that the Asiatic Mode was supposed to be.*

EMS, as suggested earlier, diluted his allegiance to the concept of the Asiatic Mode², in the sense of relying on the specific elements emphasized by Marx in developing this concept, for explaining the continuity in Indian history. But he neither abandoned his perception of this continuity, central to which was the phenomenon of caste, nor his quest for an explanation of this continuity.

He provided a provisional explanation which figured in many of his writings. The following long extract culled from one of his writings (1982) summarizes his position:

“The slave society of the type that emerged in ancient Europe did not take roots here. Not because, as our chauvinists would have us believe, the Indians are more humane than the ancient Greeks or Romans, but because the break up of the ancient-primitive communist or tribal-society took place here in a way different from that in Greece and Rome.

The division of the society into the exploiters and the exploited assumed here a form which in a way covered up the reality of exploitation. It was not into the minority of the owners and the majority of slaves but into the three *varnas*-the *Kshatriya*, the *Brahmana* and the *Vis*-that society came to be divided first. It was the *Vis* that came to be divided into the *Vaisa* and the *Sudra*, the latter consisting of the mass of toilers. The three superior *varnas* constituted the exploiting sect while the *sudras* were the exploited.

² While he uses the concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production in his 1952 book *The National Question in Kerala*, in his subsequent work *Kerala: Society and Politics* (1984) he says: “This formulation made by Marx has become a point of serious debate among scholars. Some of them make the term the basis of the study of every single country in Asia, while others virtually deny the very concept, maintaining that Engels never used it, Marx too did so only once, etc.” He goes on to add: “It should however be noted that for Marx the term ‘Asiatic Society or mode of production’ was not a substitute for a concrete analysis of society and its evolution in individual Asian countries”, and lists some common features of historical development in “oriental countries”, extending from “China in the east to Arabia and Egypt in the west”.

This division of society into *varnas* helped the dissolution of tribal society and the formation of a new order. Its development into the *jati* system with its division of labour helped the process of developing the mode of production. The proliferation of castes and sub-castes with a definite occupation or means of livelihood allotted to each is the form in which class division originated and developed in India.

This Indian edition of slavery provided the soil on which the 'glorious civilization' of India was built. We may thus amend Engels to say: 'without caste oppression and exploitation, no civilization or culture of ancient India'.

While the division of society into the exploiters and the exploited was thus common to the slavery of Greece and Rome on the one hand and to the *varna*-caste system of India, there is a major difference between the two: the exploitation and oppression was open, naked in the Greek and Roman slavery, while it was covered up in the *varna* caste system in India.

The revolts of the slaves against their masters was quite natural for the Greek and Roman society; the exploited and oppressed castes and sub castes in India, on the other hand, reconciled themselves to their 'inferior' position in society which was sanctified by religious scriptures. This prevented a repetition of the revolts witnessed in ancient European society, revolts which led to the revolutionary replacement of slavery by a feudal society which was followed by the anti-feudal revolts out of which arose the modern bourgeois society.

As opposed to this two-stage transformation, slave to feudal and feudal to capitalist, in Europe; India remained tied to the same old order under which the overwhelming majority of the people belonged to the oppressed and backward castes. This is the essence of what Marx called India's 'unchanging' society where the village was not touched by the wars and upheavals at the higher levels, the British conquest being the first revolution."

The ideological hegemony of Brahmanism contributed to the stagnation of Indian society, not just by preventing a revolt of the exploited classes; it did so in another way as well, which EMS elaborated somewhat later, basing himself on the work of the Marxist philosopher, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay. And that was by arresting the growth of science and technology, and hence of the productive forces beyond a point. Chattopadhyay had argued that the triumph of Brahmanism under Adi Shankara represented not only a reinforcement of the caste-system in the country, but a demise of science and hence of advances in technology. Paradoxically according to Chattopadhyay, the much-celebrated philosophical triumph of Adi Shankara was the harbinger of a dark age when India lost the edge it had in scientific

advances in mathematics, astronomy and other branches of learning, because of both the ideological and the social implications of the triumph. Ideologically it was a triumph of idealism over materialism; and since, as Lenin had said in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, a scientist must be a materialist in practice, this represented a setback to science, and hence to technological advance. Socially, since the practitioners of technology, the artisans and craftsmen, were those who typically belonged to the "lower castes", the counter-revolution ushered in by Adi Shankara meant a social downgrading, and hence implicit devaluing, of technological advances.

Chattopadhyay, on the basis of J.D.Bernal's work, had contrasted this with the case of Europe, a contrast that EMS accepted. Talking of the European Renaissance, Bernal had said: "What was really new was the respect given to the practical arts of spinning, weaving, pottery, glass-making and, most of all, arts that provided for the twin needs of wealth and war, those of the miners and the metal workers...The enhancement of the status of the craftsman made it possible to renew the link between his traditions and those of the scholars that had been broken almost since the beginning of the early civilization" (quoted in EMS (1989)). EMS concluded that "the defeat of the oppressed castes at the hands of Brahminic overlordship, of materialism by idealism, constituted the beginning of the fall of India's civilization and culture, which in the end led to the loss of national independence."

EMS's explanation, somewhat different from the Asiatic Mode theory but proposing its own version of an unchanging village community, did not of course provide a *materialist* explanation for the phenomenon of continuity, and its underlying stagnation; but it did draw attention to the phenomena of continuity and stagnation and to the self-perpetuating character of the caste-based feudal society, which neither generated any internal dynamics by way of technological progress, nor faced any external disruption by way of major advances in trade (such as the external disruption in Europe caused according to Henri Pirenne by the opening of the Mediterranean trade) that could have subjected it to the "dissolving influence of commerce". (The progress of commodity production in late Medieval India, which was noted above, and which EMS also underscored when he drew attention to the growth of commercial and usurious capital³, but not manufacturing capital, in the pre-colonial society, was obviously too feeble to break the back of the caste-based feudal society).

³ The growth of commercial capital of course can occur even in the absence of commodity production proper, simply on the basis of the commoditization of the surplus alone.

EMS's position on the nationality question is in conformity with this historical perspective of his. According to standard Marxist theory (articulated by Stalin in this instance) the coming into being of linguistic nationalities is associated with the formation of a unified market, since a common language facilitates such a formation. This in turn makes the emergence of linguistic nationalism a part of the process of the emergence of the bourgeoisie to a position of ascendancy. In the English context for instance, the Elizabethan era can be seen as the period of emergence of linguistic nationalism (Shakespeare being the prime product of this era), and simultaneously of a bourgeoisie to a position of ascendancy, from where it launches a bourgeois revolution in 1640 against the anti-bourgeois Stuart monarchy.

This perception however creates a conundrum in the Indian context: how does Marxist theory look at the Bhakti movement? If the Bhakti movement is seen as marking the formation of linguistic nationalities, then standard Marxist theory would suggest that this period must have been marked by the emergence of a bourgeoisie to a position of ascendancy. On the other hand if the formation of the modern bourgeoisie is seen to have occurred in the colonial period, then we cannot apply the term "linguistic nationalities" to the phenomenon that was emerging during the Bhakti movement, as EMS had done in his book *The National Question in Kerala*.

Hence if one based oneself on the classical Marxist perception, then either one would have to describe the process underlying the Bhakti movement differently, as Amalendu Guha has done by calling it the formation not of "linguistic nationalities" but of "regional communities of culture" which pre-date nationalism in any form; or one would have to trace the emergence of the bourgeoisie to a much earlier epoch, as some Soviet scholars had done who had referred to the period the Bhakti movement as characterizing "India's bourgeois revolution". In short, EMS's position in *The National Question in Kerala* was not in conformity with the standard Marxist position, for which he was criticized by Amalendu Guha.

EMS readily accepted the criticism but took the position that while the "regional community of culture" was not identical with the formation of a nationality, it was a precursor to the linguistic nationality; and it was based not on the manufacturing bourgeoisie but on the mercantile and usurious bourgeoisie which did develop under the old system. EMS's position, by seeing proto-linguistic nationalism (which is how he saw the "regional communities of culture") neither as

a feature nor as an immediate precursor of any bourgeois revolution or even of any imminent bourgeois ascendancy, also argued against the view of there being any "breaks" or "discontinuities" in Indian history, of the sort that some Soviet writers had suggested.

EMS's view on the nationality question is in conformity therefore with his general perception of Indian history, namely that it was marked by a remarkable continuity rather than discontinuity, by changes that were too gradual to qualify as basic structural shifts, by stasis rather than any major dynamics with regard to the development of productive forces, and by superimpositions rather than any externally-stimulated revolutionary transformations. At the core of this continuity was the caste-based feudal system. This perception which had initially made him adopt the analytical category of the Asiatic Mode of Production remained intact even when in deference to historical research he diluted his adherence to the concept of the Asiatic Mode. But he remained committed to his general position on continuity, even though that might have been at variance with the work of several historians, like the Soviet school just mentioned, and many others who saw, in the replacement by the sultanate of the older feudalism, of the pre-sultanate period, an important qualitative shift occurring in Indian society.

III

It was in keeping with his perception of Indian history as being marked by a strong continuity that EMS accepted the view of Marx, and Rajni Palme Dutt, about the complex impact of colonialism on Indian society. The proposition that even third world societies could have developed capitalism independently, if not spontaneously then at least in response to the emergence of capitalism in Europe, had been advanced by Paul Baran (it had earlier also figured in the writings of Mao Zedong in the context of China). From this it followed that colonialism, *by thwarting possible independent capitalist development in third world societies and imposing on them an exploitative relationship for the benefit of metropolitan capitalism*, played a largely negative historical role in these societies. On the other hand, if these societies were seen as being held in the grip of stagnation and stasis because of the nature of property relations prevalent in them, then the intrusion of colonialism, by breaking up the stability of the old order, could be seen as playing a certain positive role, even though the colonized people had to pay a heavy price for it. But a recognition of the destructive role of colonialism having a historically positive element, is not the same as welcoming colonialism, let alone approving of it. On the contrary there was no contradiction between

accepting the classical Marxist analysis of the impact of colonialism and also accepting the nationalist critique of it; in fact the two could well go together, as they did in EMS's perception.

Marx had distinguished between the destructive and the regenerative roles of colonialism, and while the destructive role was there for all to see, even though it might have had a positive historical content, the regenerative role scarcely ever materialized during the colonial period. True, in talking of the regenerative role, Marx had been referring exclusively to the development of the material production, and not to the distribution of the fruits of progress to Indians, which, according to him, had to await either a revolution in Britain or until the Indians had shaken off the colonial yoke. But even the level of material production under colonialism did not develop to the extent anticipated by Marx. Even the spin-off by way of industrial development that he had visualized as a consequence of the introduction of the railway network, did not materialize.

This fact, together with the fact that colonialism sought to enlist the support of the landlord class, whose composition might have undergone a change without changing the basic exploitative relations of the caste-based feudal society, meant that its destructive role, though massive in one sense, was inadequate in another sense. Putting it differently, colonialism, notwithstanding its destructive impact, through "de-industrialization", "drain of surplus out of the country", displacement of petty production and the break-up of the "self-sufficient village communities" (which were already disintegrating), and the introduction of modern private property, still represented a "superimposition" that did not deal the necessary smashing blows to the caste-based feudal society of the pre-colonial period.

EMS was particularly fond of quoting the paragraph from the Programme of the CPI(M) that made this point: "Neither the British colonialists whose rule continued for over a century, nor the Indian bourgeoisie into whose hands power passed in 1947, delivered those smashing blows against pre-capitalist society which are necessary for the free development of capitalist society and its replacement by socialist society." He had once remarked that critics did not appreciate the immense amount of effort that had gone into the formulation of this one paragraph. It represented the essence of his own thinking.

IV

Dealing those smashing blows to the caste-based feudal society was the task that had devolved upon the Indian bourgeoisie when it came to power at the time of independence. But the Indian

bourgeoisie was singularly unequal to the task. In EMS's view, the Indian bourgeoisie came late on the historical scene and started building capitalism at a time when the world capitalist system itself was facing a general crisis. Unlike the bourgeoisie in the classical era of the emergence of capitalism which had dealt smashing blows to the old order, the Indian bourgeoisie compromised with feudalism, precisely because it was itself threatened by the world-wide awakening of the working class and needed the support of the feudal landlords to defend its property. The threat to bourgeois property could be warded off through an alliance between feudal and bourgeois property. To be sure, the requirement of building capitalism meant that the feudal landlords had to be persuaded to become capitalist landlords, i.e. on the basis of the existing land concentration, without breaking up large landed property, capitalist relations had to be introduced into Indian agriculture, so that it could meet the needs of capitalist industrialization. But this amounted to another "superimposition", the "superimposition" of capitalism on the existing pre-capitalist relations, i.e. on the caste-based feudal society.

The bourgeoisie's historic incapacity to deal smashing blows to the old society entailed a betrayal. The pre-independence Congress Party had promised "land to the tiller", which could be achieved only on the basis of a break up of land concentration. But upon coming to power, the bourgeoisie compromised with the erstwhile feudal landlords and went back on its slogan. To be sure, some limited land reforms were enacted in Congress-ruled states, but they only gave ownership rights to the rich peasants allowing them to become capitalist farmers as well. Hence, the capitalist elements in the countryside were drawn from two major sources, and not just one: there were the erstwhile feudal landlords who in the new circumstances were turning towards capitalist landlordism; and there was a section of the rich peasants, who, having acquired ownership rights, were now willing to invest in agriculture and become capitalist farmers.

The conversion of feudal landlords into capitalist landlords meant a simultaneous conversion of erstwhile tenants of the feudal landlords into agricultural labourers. Implicit in the process of superimposition of capitalism therefore was a reduction in the rights over land of a section of tenants, their eviction from the land they had been cultivating for years and recruitment into the ranks of agricultural labourers. And since the capitalist landlords typically cultivate on the basis of modern labour-saving technology, the swelling of the ranks of agricultural labourers simultaneously meant a pauperization of vast segments of the small and marginal peasantry evicted from land.

EMS expressed the matter in the following words: "A class of new landowners is rising by seizing land from those who have been evicted from land as a prelude to the implementation of the land reform laws and from those who left their lands due to non-payment of dues, and cultivating land on capitalist basis. Many of them are the new form of the earlier feudal landlord. They have turned themselves into capitalist farmers by using the land seized from the tenants, making use of the provisions for 'self-cultivation' in the laws as well as the money received as 'compensation'...Besides, there are former rich peasants-turned-capitalist farmers who could cultivate land more profitably by taking advantage of the concessions provided in the laws...The main difference between these capitalist farmers and the old feudal landlords is that the old feudal landlords gave land to tenants from whom they collected rent, while the capitalist farmers hire labour and conduct agricultural operations more profitably" (1982a, 291).

From this it did not follow that Indian agriculture had become capitalist. There was a process of development of capitalism, but this was "superimposed" on a pre-capitalist setting (resulting in the development of what Lenin had called "semi-feudal capitalism"). EMS put the matter as follows: "In India many of the forms of exploitation of the pre-capitalist system are continuing, some in the original and some in changed forms. There exists along with these a new system of exploitation as a result of capitalist development" (1982a, 289).

The "superimposition" of capitalism on the caste-based feudal society therefore meant on the one hand a superimposition of capitalist exploitation on the pre-existing forms of feudal exploitation; on the other hand by its very nature it meant a process of pauperization as well. In short, land concentration remained; caste oppression together with patriarchy remained; the deadweight of oppressive feudal customs remained; and even as the technological basis of agriculture underwent some change and modernization, the degree of pauperization in the countryside intensified. The pauperization of the peasantry which had been unleashed by the "superimposition" of colonial oppression was further compounded by the pauperization caused by evictions on the road to capitalist agriculture.

Capitalist development under the aegis of a bourgeois-landlord State, where the bourgeoisie, having come late on the historical scene when the world capitalist system itself has entered into the period of general crisis, has to form an alliance with the landlord class, is both narrowly-based and crisis-prone. The absence of land re-distribution keeps the domestic market for industrial goods of mass consumption narrow, and arrests the development of productive forces in agriculture, which in turn acts as a constraint upon the pace of

capitalist development itself. Inflation in food prices remains a constant threat; bouts of inflation accompany the growth process; and in so far as such inflation shrinks the market for industrial goods, inflationary recessions become endemic. And since through these crises the pace and pattern of capitalist industrialization is such that the capacity of the capitalist industrial sector to absorb labour from the overcrowded rural economy remains extremely limited, the deadweight of caste oppression and patriarchy, the mix of capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, and the continuity of a state of pauperization of the masses, remain undiminished.

As the State tries to get out of the inflationary situation, which calls forth mass resistance from the industrial workers, government employees and middle class salary earners, by turning the terms of trade against the peasantry, the locus of resistance shifts to the latter. Economic crisis leads to an enmeshing of the regime in political crisis, from which it seeks to extricate itself through recourse to semi-fascist methods, of which the imposition of the infamous Emergency was a typical example. In short, the contradictions of what Lenin had called "semi-feudal capitalism" or what EMS would have called the "superimposition" of capitalism on a caste-based feudal system, pose an ever present threat to the continuation of bourgeois democracy and the preservation of even such civil liberties and rights of resistance that the working people enjoy within the system.

V

EMS's political economy analysis of post-independence planning therefore was integrated with his overall reading both of Indian history and of the world situation, characterized by the general crisis of capitalism on the one hand and the emergence of a socialist camp on the other (notwithstanding the divisions that afflicted the latter). The conclusion he drew from this reading is that since the bourgeoisie was incapable of dealing those smashing blows to the old feudal order, of breaking land concentration which provided the basis for the continuation of caste oppression, social exclusion and patriarchy, it was the historic task of the proletariat, allying itself with the peasants and the other sections of the oppressed, to deal those smashing blows. And the proletariat having acquired State power will not stop at the stage of building capitalism but will move on to socialism. Hence, marching towards socialism was the means of breaking the stasis in societies like ours; marching towards socialism alone would entail a change that would be more than a mere "superimposition". The ultimate realization of the dreams of the social reformers, and of the fighters against caste oppression, not to mention all those who were

appalled by the misery and poverty of the masses, could come only with socialism.

But EMS, again rather like Antonio Gramsci, was acutely conscious of the arduousness of the task before the socialist forces. Precisely because the task was stupendous, involving nothing short of ushering in, through stages, a revolution that would cleanse the society of centuries of oppression and filth of the worst kind, it was extremely difficult. The system of caste oppression that could only end with socialism was itself a barrier in the path of progress towards socialism, as it divided the oppressed. The series of "superimpositions" that enmeshed different forms of exploitation made the task of combining the exploited even more difficult. It required patient, systematic effort.

EMS, in discussing the impossibility of having a centralized leadership of the world communist movement today, categorized countries on the basis of the role that communist parties played in them. And in doing so, he introduced an interesting term. Instead of simply talking of capitalist and socialist countries, he introduced the additional term: "countries" in which "revolutionary proletarian parties" exert "powerful influence on policy making" (1986, 241-2). And he categorized India among such countries. By refraining from drawing a mere binary distinction between "capitalist" and "socialist" countries, EMS was drawing attention to a significant phenomenon, namely that the revolution was not one single *event* but a *process*, and that the revolutionary party could "exert powerful influence on policy making" even when it did not have State power, which was itself a progress on the path of the revolution. Once again there is an echo here of Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "war of positions". Gramsci had argued that in countries of Western Europe the revolutionary struggle had to be a protracted one involving advances as in a "war of positions" rather than victory in one surgical strike. EMS appears to be arguing along similar lines.

EMS's deep sense of history and his understanding of the revolutionary process derived from this sense, deserve serious study by the Left, which has to carry forward his analysis to the neo-liberal phase of India's capitalist development. A study of EMS's writings is especially necessary in the current conjuncture when some retreats have been forced on the Left in the "war of positions" that EMS would have seen as a hallmark of the Indian revolution.

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