

National Question  
And  
Marxism

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**National Question and Marxism by Sukhwinder**

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# National Question And Marxism

Human society has evolved from the stage of Primitive Communism, Slavery and feudalism to reach its present capitalist epoch. Class struggle has been the motive force, the engine of social progress after Primitive Communism. The onset of human society's capitalist epoch leads to the formation of nations and also to various forms of national oppression, national movements. The onset of capitalism also leads to national states (states based on nation). First and foremost, nations began to be formed in Western Europe and later on, this phenomenon spread to other regions of the present world. The process of formation of nation states is not yet complete in the world. It is an ongoing process. There were only 106 countries in the 1940's (1940-1949) in the world as compared to the present 195. In the last 70 years itself, 70 new countries have emerged. But all these newly emerged countries are not nation states. Many are multinational states too. Even today, many nations (especially in multinational countries) are struggling for their independence, for their separate nation states. The struggle for the national emancipation is not a linear movement; it sometimes accelerates and sometimes slows down, but it does not cease. Even in Western Europe, the birthplace of first nation states, the process of becoming of nation states has not ended. In United Kingdom (UK), Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, Catalonia in Spain, Flemish in Belgium etc are fighting for their independence. According to the report of 'The Guardian', apart from the above mentioned struggles, 19 other nations are also fighting for their regional autonomy or independence in the North-South, West and East of Europe. In India, the Kashmiris and few nations of North-East are fighting for their independence. In rest of India too, the national problem can't be said to have been resolved. In Pakistan, the Kashmiris, the Pashtos, Baloch nations are fighting for

their independence. We all are a witness to the repression of Uyghur's in China, of Rohingyas in Myanmar. The Sri Lankan rulers have for the time being crushed the movement for national independence of Tamils but this has not put an end to the national liberation aspirations or will these aspirations end among the Tamils there.

So, we can see that national question is still a living question in a large part of the world. What should be the attitude of working class towards the national movements, national oppression? This was the question that had to be tackled by the founders of Marxism even in their early days. The founders of Marxism, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels clarified the attitude of the working class towards the national movements of their day. Comrade Lenin, Comrade Stalin and Comrade Mao furthered the thoughts of Marx and Engels on the national question.

In the guiding light of this theory, we can understand multinational India, the national question present here. India is a diverse country. The population of this country is divided into hundreds of castes, religious sects. This country is also home to hundreds of nationalities. The populace residing here also speaks hundreds of languages but only 22 have been accorded the official status. Out of these 22 languages, the Dogri language is not a separate language but a dialect of Punjabi. The demand to include 43 more languages into the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is raised time and again. There is a possibility that this demand may gather steam in the near future.

India is a multinational country. The ruling bourgeoisie of India is hell bent on making it a single nation and it has been working on this project since last 7 decades. Therefore, various nationalities residing here face oppression. In the Constitution there is a division between the powers of union government and state governments. But the rights of the states have been a thorn in the eyes of the big bourgeoisie of India since 1947. That is why the intent of the union governments, which represent the big (monopoly) bourgeoisie of India, has always been the curtailment of the rights of states. Sometimes brazenly and often through shrouded attempts, Hindi is imposed on various nationalities residing in

India. Provision of school instruction in various national languages is frequently prohibited, their schools are closed.

The national question is a very important question of the Indian revolution. Without dealing with it, no proletarian revolution in India can succeed. The Indian communist movement has dealt with this question ever since its inception and still dealing with it.

Communist Party of India, in its revolutionary period, had been an advocate of self-determination of nations including the right to secession (though in its thinking there had also been such deviations as that of considering religion as the basis of a nation). But ever since capitulating to reformism in 1951, it has abandoned the Marxist-Leninist principle of self-determination of nations and joined the choir of Indian rulers in praise of 'unity and integrity' ('ekta-akhandata') of the country. The Communist Party of India(Marxist) had been reformist by birth itself, therefore it could not be expected for it to adopt a correct position on the national question. It also has been singing the same tune of 'unity and integrity' ('ekta-akhandata', the essence of which has been to forcefully club together various nations in the Indian state.

Bhartiya Janata Party, the political wing of fascist Rashtriya Swesewak Sangh, has been ruling the country since 2014. This state on one hand is an enemy of the workers, poor peasants, other laborers, women, dalits and adivasis and also on the other hand it is a threat to various nationalities residing in India. The programme of Sangh Parivar is – One Language (Hindi), One Religion (Hindu) and One Nation (Hindustan). It has been working towards the realization of this project since about last one century. Since 1980's this fascist trend has emerged as a serious threat on the political-social scene of the country. Except Hindus, this fascist trend is hell bent on eliminating the existence of other religious minorities. It is trying to suppress the various nationalities residing in India so as to make India a single nation. On 5th August 2019, the rulers at the centre ended the special status of Kashmir by scrapping the Article 370 and 35-a. Since then Kashmir has been under curfew. Kashmir today has become the highest militarized zone in the world.

Since the Bhartiya Janta Party has formed the union government at the centre, the national oppression has intensified in India. The attempts to impose Hindi on various nationalities have been hastened by many devious means. Kashmir is being crushed under military boots. The talks with the National Socialist Council, fighting for the independence of the Nagas, have been unfruitful. The Delhi based rulers were not ready to accede to any demand of the Naga nationalists. After the talks broke, the Delhi based rulers have again unleashed military terror on Naga people. Various national liberation struggles going on in north-east India demand broad study. More can be written on these movements only after a thorough study. We will try to provide more information to the readers of '**Pratibadh**' about the national movements of north-east in the coming issues.

The revolutionary camp that emerged after Naxalbari held more or less a correct approach to the national question in India. It correctly regarded India as a multinational country, upheld the Marxist-Leninist principle of Right to Self-determination of Nations, but still we can see certain problems too. Most groups of this camp deny capitalist development in India. They regard India as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country. They enjoin the national question in India with its semi-feudal character as if a capitalist multinational country lacks one. Some groups, in voicing their dissent against national oppression steered down the fundamentalist path, ultimately perishing, as for example in Punjab, where once active 'Paigam' group, while advocating the independence of the Punjabi nationality, towed to the Khalistanis. Some groups take a class-reductionist approach to this question, they deny any national oppression in mainland India; they don't take a bold stand for the independence of Kashmir and nationalities of North-east; limiting themselves to mere lip-service; for them the only question in India is the "workers question". Though practically they do nothing in the working class too.

On one hand, national sectarianism, national chauvinism, tailism of nationalists and fundamentalists (those who identify nations with religious sects) is dangerous, on the other hand, an approach of class-reductionism, of denial of national problems, speaking in tune with the

official Delhi narrative, to adopt unsympathetic attitude towards nationalist aspirations and feelings is also equally dangerous.

To understand the national question in our contemporary world and especially in India, it is necessary that we return to the ideas of the great teachers of world proletariat. The aim of this article is to present the ideas of great teachers of working class on national question and its various aspects. Today, we also have a rich experience of socialist countries particularly Soviet Union in this regard which did an exemplary work in putting an end to national oppression. The ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on the national question, assumed a practical form here. We will also discuss this rich legacy in our article. Under the guiding light of the great teachers of working class and in the light of Soviet experience, we can defeat the deviations which are at present or in future dangerous for the national question and also find a practical solution to the national question in India. We can further the working class movement in India only by dealing with this question. In writing this article we have primarily taken the thoughts of Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Lenin and Stalin as basis. Therefore we had to rely on the writings of these teachers on the national question.

## **Origin of nations**

Nations have not been a part of human society since eternity and nor will the division of human society into nations will remain so forever. Nations come into existence at a definite stage of social progress, stage of capitalism. The origin, development and future of nations in human society can only be understood under the guiding light of historical materialism. Historical materialism teaches us that after the era of Primitive Communism, when the human society got divided into classes, class struggle has remained the motive force of development of human society. There the origin of nations is also a result of the class struggle, the struggle of bourgeoisie against feudal and other pre-capitalist social formations.

Comrade Lenin writes,

“Capitalism’s broad and rapid development of the productive

forces calls for large, politically compact and united territories, since only here can the bourgeois class—together with its inevitable antipode, the proletarian class—unite and sweep away all the old, medieval, caste, parochial, petty-national, religious and other barriers.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, Vol 20)*

Via the rapid development of productive forces, capitalism prepares the material and cultural basis of the future society, socialist social system. But it can do so only with the rapid formation of nation states. In the progressive movement of human society from feudalism to capitalism, multinational bourgeois states too, come into existence as an exception. But normally the development of productive forces remains backward here. Though, in these states there exist better conditions for the construction of a diversified economy but continually occurring national conflicts become an obstacle here in the development of productive forces. Feudal remnants too survive here in abundance due to the backwardness of productive forces.

Lenin elsewhere writes on this matter,

“Throughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speak a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature eliminated. Therein is the economic foundation of national movements. Language is the most important means of human intercourse. Unity and unimpeded development of language are the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism, for a free and broad grouping of the population in all its various classes and, lastly, for the establishment of a close connection between the market and each and every proprietor, big or little, and between seller

and buyer.

Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of **national states**, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most profound economic factors drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is **typical** and normal for the capitalist period.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Vol 20)*

During the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, the emergence of national movements is normal and so is the formation of nation states. These movements do not arise out of somebody's thoughts or subjective wishes rather they have an objective basis. Where due to some specific historical causes, the development of national movements is retarded there the formation of nation states may be retarded but “profound economic factors” remain active. These factors, sooner or later, give rise to national movements everywhere and these factors remain in force till the formation of nation states.

Comrade Stalin's work '**Marxism and National Question**' holds prime importance among the Marxist writings on the national question. Writing upon the origin of nations in this work, Comrade Stalin writes,

“A nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations. Such, for instance, was the case in Western Europe. The British, French, Germans, Italians and others were formed into nations at the time of the victorious advance of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and National Question, Page 18, Kamgaar Prakashan Delhi, English Edition)*

## Concept of a Nation

Though various Marxists and other intellectuals have written on the concept of a nation but a thorough and compact definition of nation is found in Stalin's 'Marxism and National Question'. To clarify the Marxian concept of nation, we will take this work of Stalin as basis.

According to Comrade Stalin, a nation fundamentally is a community, a stable community of people. This community is not racial or tribal but a historically formed community of people. Various races and tribes merge together to form a nation at a particular stage in social development, stage of capitalist development.

On the other hand, it is also true that empires like that of Cyrus or Alexander were also historically built by joining of various tribes and races but they can't be termed as nations. They were not nations but a temporary and loose clubbing of groups which kept forming or separating according to this or that winner in battle.

Therefore, a nation is not a temporary or short lived grouping of people but a stable community. But every stable community does not mean a nation either. For example, Russia and Austria though are stable communities but they are not nations because without a common language, a national community can't be imagined. Stalin writes,

**“We are referring, of course, to the spoken languages of the people and not to the official governmental languages.”**

*(Stalin, Marxism and National Question, page 9, emphasis ours)*

(Above mentioned quote of Stalin has a particular importance in the context of India society. Here people speak many languages but the Constitution of India recognizes only 22 of them. Delhi based rulers have pronounced the death sentence of many languages of the so-called Hindi belt by declaring them to be the dialects of Hindi itself). Some simpletons do not consider a language to be a language if it does not have a script or if it is not written.

Therefore a common language is a characteristic of a nation. It can be possible that different nations have a single language but it can't be said that a single nation speaks many different languages (and it is

also not possible that any language is above the nations or a language exists without any nation speaking it, claims which are made for Hindi in India). The English and the American people speak a same language but still it does not make them a single nation because they don't reside in a common territory. Therefore, a common territory is a characteristic of a nation.

“But this is not all. Common territory does not by itself create a nation. This requires, in addition, an internal economic bond to weld the various parts of the nation into a single whole... Thus, a common economic life, economic cohesion, is one of the characteristic features of a nation. “

*(Stalin, ibid, page 10-11)*

Writing on the next characteristic of nation, Stalin writes,

“But even this is not all. Apart from the foregoing, one must take into consideration the specific spiritual complexion of the people constituting a nation. Nations differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture. If England, America and Ireland, which speak one language, nevertheless constitute three distinct nations, it is in no small measure due to the peculiar psychological make-up which they developed from generation to generation as a result of dissimilar conditions of existence.

Of course, by itself, psychological make-up or, as it is otherwise called, “national character,” is something intangible for the observer, but in so far as it manifests itself in a distinctive culture common to the nation it is something tangible and cannot be ignored.

Needless to say, “national character” is not a thing that is fixed once and for all, but is modified by changes in the conditions of life; but since it exists at every given moment, it leaves its impress on the physiognomy of the nation.

Thus, a common psychological make-up, which manifests itself in a common culture, is one of the

characteristic features of a nation.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, p 11-12)*

Binding together six characteristics, Stalin gives a compact definition of a nation,

“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”

*(Stalin, p 12)*

Stalin also writes that any community only becomes a nation if it fulfills all the above mentioned conditions. Even if a single one of these characteristic or condition is absent then the community can't be claimed a nation.

At another place, Stalin writes that before the advent of capitalism, the nations could not have come to existence. In the feudal era, when the countries were divided into various independent kingdoms, they were not only far removed from any national bondings but also they rejected any need for such bonding. In the feudal kingdoms, there were no national markets and neither any economic or cultural centers. Any such factor that could have put an end to this economic fragmentation and bind together the divided parts into a national whole were absent.

“Of course, the elements of nationhood—language, territory, common culture, etc.—did not fall from the skies, but were being formed gradually, even in the precapitalist period. But these elements were in a rudimentary state and, at best, were only a potentiality, that is, they constituted the possibility of the formation of a nation in the future, given certain favorable conditions.”

*(Stalin, National Question and Leninism)*

## **Multinational states**

In the above mentioned quote, Lenin remarks, “**for the whole**

**of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is typical and normal for the capitalist period.”** But due to certain historical circumstances, many multinational countries also came into being and they are still present. Though, this also is true that many of the above multinational disintegrated to form separate national states. For example, the disintegration of Austro-Hungarian empire during the second decade of 20th century. Prior to the socialist revolution of 1917, Russia too was a multinational country wherein many nationalities suffered from the cruel Tsarist oppression. Therefore Russia was referred to as a “prison house of nations” by the revolutionaries. After the victorious socialist revolution in October 1917, a Socialist Soviet Union, a self-willing union of nations was formed. The national oppression ended under the Socialist Soviet Union through a process. But in 1956, revisionist clique of Khrushchev captured the state power in Soviet Union. Capitalism was restored in the Socialist Soviet Union. After the restoration of capitalism, national oppression resurfaced in Soviet Union, national strife began to increase. The willful Union formed in 1922 did not remain so now. Some nations went on the path of independence but by repression, their right to independence was crushed. When in the 1980’s and 1990’s the internal crisis of Social-imperialist Soviet Union intensified, then it broke down into 15 different countries. Likewise, revisionist Yugoslavia broke into 7 countries and so on with Czechoslovakia. Today too, there are multi-national countries in the world but voices of national independence are growing in such countries. These multinational states have been bound together with state force. E.g., the Catalan people are fighting for their independence in Spain but the Spanish rulers are crushing these independence voices with military repression. The countries of the third-world, which were witness to a delayed capitalist development and wherein a weak, deformed capitalist development took place and thereby the bourgeois democratic sphere is too narrow here, here the national oppression is much more crude.

While explaining the phenomenon of multi-national states, Comrade Stalin writes,

“But the formation of nations in those instances (here

Stalin refers to the countries of Western Europe – author) at the same time signified their conversion into independent national states...

Matters proceeded somewhat differently in Eastern Europe. Whereas in the West nations developed into states, in the East multi-national states were formed, states consisting of several nationalities. Such are Austria-Hungary and Russia...

This special method of formation of states could take place only where feudalism had not yet been eliminated, where capitalism was feebly developed, where the nationalities which had been forced into the background had not yet been able to consolidate themselves economically into integral nations.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and National Question p 18-19)*

From the above quote of Stalin, some can draw the conclusion that multi-national states are formed where feudalism has not ended. Any such confusion may not arise, therefore it is clarified that Stalin here is clarifying the time and the causes of the origin of such states. The multi-national structure of any state does not become a hindrance to the path of capitalist development there.

Stalin says,

“But capitalism also began to develop in the Eastern states. Trade and means of communication were developing. Large towns were springing up. The nations were becoming economically consolidated.”

*(Stalin, p 19)*

Karl Kautsky has been a renowned Marxist theoretician. Later on though he turned revisionist. But while still Marxist, he wrote also wrote on the national question. His work ‘Nationality and Internationality’ (1907/08) is an important work on this question. Comrade Lenin also cites this work of Kautsky on the national question. On the multi-national states, Kautsky writes,

“The nation state is the form of the state that

corresponds to modern relations, the form in which it can most easily fulfill its tasks. Yet not every state is endowed to reach this form. Just as numerous feudal or even primitive communist working methods extend into the modern method of production, so too are there leftovers from a time when the state was composed of the most various national component parts, without forfeiting strength or without extraordinary internal frictions or contradictions. Even nation states often still carry remains of the multi-national state with them. Alongside them there are however states that have completely remained states of nationality.

These are states whose inner formation, for whatever reason, remained backward or abnormal (Kautsky this view is relevant especially to India, Pakistan and other such countries of the third world). That can clearly be seen in the case of Turkey or Russia, but it is also true of two economically advanced countries, Belgium and Switzerland.”  
*(Karl Kautsky, 'Nationality and Internationality', Part 2, Critique, 38:1, p 149, Feb 2010)*

Stalin too differentiates between the national question in Russia and Austria. He writes,

“Finally, the immediate tasks facing Russia and Austria are entirely different and consequently dictate different methods of solving the national question. In Austria parliamentarism prevails, and under present conditions no development in Austria is possible without parliament. But parliamentary life and legislation in Austria are frequently brought to a complete standstill by severe conflicts between the national parties. That explains the chronic political crisis from which Austria has for a long time been suffering. **Hence, in Austria the national question is the very hub of political life;** it is the vital question. It is therefore not surprising that the Austrian Social-Democratic politicians should first of all try in one way or another to find a solution

for the national conflicts....

Not so with Russia. In the first place, in Russia “there is no parliament, thank God.” **In the second place – and this is the main point – the hub of the political life of Russia is not the national but the agrarian question.** Consequently, the fate of the Russian problem, and, accordingly, the “liberation” of the nations too, is bound up in Russia with the solution of the agrarian question.”

(Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, p 33, emphasis ours)

The national question in Austria was such that here neither any nation was a colony of other nation and neither there was any feudal relation or agrarian question here.

Kautsky opines that in some multi-national states one nation is the clear oppressing nation but it also is possible that in a multi-national country there is no clear single oppressing nation. He writes,

“Things are, in turn, different in Russia, but there they are still slightly simpler than in Austria. Russia is a large centralized state with numerous nationalities, but the main core, the overwhelming mass of the population, is formed by the Russians, and the other nations primarily live on the periphery of the empire. Of the population of European Russia there are 84 million Russians, eight million Poles, five million Jews, three million Lithuanians, roughly the same number of Finns, two million Germans and one million Romanians and Armenians respectively. Russia can grant these nations autonomy without any problems. Indeed, these nations, to the extent that they live in connected territories, could be separated off from the main country without endangering its existence in any way. This is different in Austria. It differs from Switzerland and Belgium by the large number of its nations\*a total of nine, or 11 when one includes the Slovaks alongside the Czechs, and the Serbs alongside the Croats...Austria also differs from Russia in that none of

its nations has a considerable numerical advantage over the others, and that none inhabits the centre of the empire. The Germans total 11 million people, the Hungarians (Magyar) nine million, the Czechs (with the Slovaks) eight, the Poles and the Ruthenians each account for four million, the Serbo-Croats almost account for the same number, the Romanians for three million, the Slovenians over one million, and the Italians almost one million. The latter nations live on the periphery, but the three big nations, the Germans, the Magyars and the Czechoslovakians, each extend into the centre of the empire. They then collide with each other in Bratislava, close to Vienna. No multinational state in Europe, perhaps with the exception of European Turkey, finds itself in such a difficult situation in relation to nationalities. It does not represent a typical multinational state, as there is no typical one\*each multinational state represents a unique case in itself.”

(Kautsky, Nationality and Internationality. p 150-151)

Lenin also confirms this fact. While comparing the national question of Russia and Austria, Lenin writes that first we undertake in Austria,

“Let us pose the fundamental question of the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In Austria, this revolution began in 1848 and was over in 1867. Since then, a more or less fully established bourgeois constitution has dominated, for nearly half a century, and on its basis a legal workers’ party is legally functioning.

Therefore, in the internal conditions of Austria’s development (i. e., from the standpoint of the development of capitalism in Austria in general, and among its various nations in particular), there are no factors that produce leaps and bounds, a concomitant of which might be the formation of nationally independent states...

Secondly, the profound difference in the relations

between the nationalities in Austria and those in Russia is particularly important for the question we are concerned with. Not only was Austria for a long time a state in which the Germans preponderated, but the Austrian Germans laid claim to hegemony in the German nation as a whole. This “claim”, as Rosa Luxemburg...will perhaps be kind enough to remember, was shattered in the war of 1866. The German nation predominating in Austria found itself **outside** (emphasis in original) the pale of the independent German state which finally took shape in 1871. On the other hand, the Hungarians’ attempt to create an independent national state collapsed under the blows of the Russian serf army as far back as 1849.

A very peculiar situation was thus created—a striving on the part of the Hungarians and then of the Czechs, not for separation from Austria, but, on the contrary, for the preservation of Austria’s integrity, precisely in order to preserve national independence, which might have been completely crushed by more rapacious and powerful neighbours! Owing to this peculiar situation, Austria assumed the form of a dual state, and she is now being transformed into a triple state (Germans, Hungarians, Slavs).

Is there anything like this in Russia? Is there in our country a striving of the “subject peoples” for unity with the Great Russians in face of the danger of worse national oppression?

**... The peculiar conditions in Russia with regard to the national question are just the reverse of those we see in Austria. Russia is a state with a single national centre— Great Russia.”**

(Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination*, Vol 20, emphasis ours)

India is a multinational country like Austria and unlike Russia. In India, there is no single nation that oppresses other nations. The

revisionists of India (Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI (M.L. Liberation), on this basis, deny the existence of national oppression, national question in India. It is clear from the above given quote by Kautsky, which has been attested to by Comrade Lenin, that in such multinational countries, where there is not one single oppressor nation, national oppression and national question persists.

Further, Kautsky writes that in Austria there are rich nations as well as poor nations. He writes,

“The most capitalists can be found amongst the Germans snapping up the surplus value created in Austria, even that created by other nations.”

*(Kautsky, Nationality and Internationality, p 155)*

Likewise in the case of German capitalist's domination in the Austrian economy, in India too the capitalist economy is dominated by the Gujaratis and Marwaris. According to the Forbes list of rich people in 2019, out of 100 richest Indians, 80% are Gujaratis. If we include Marwaris in it then this percentage goes up further.

Commenting upon the future of multi-national Austria, Kautsky writes,

“Seeing the power relations in Austria, its breakup does not look in sight. But it is equally true that its national relations have become unsecure, they hinder all the social and political development.”

*(Kautsky, ibid.)*

Within about 10 years of the writing of the above article by Kautsky, the Austro-Hungarian empire disintegrated into various national and multi-national states.

## **Two types of nations**

Comrade Stalin divided the nations into two types – bourgeois nations and socialist nations. Stalin writes,

“Such nations must be qualified as bourgeois nations. Examples are the French, British, Italian, North-American and other similar nations. The Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar,

Armenian, Georgian and other nations in Russia were likewise bourgeois nations before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet system in our country.

Naturally, the fate of such nations is linked with the fate of capitalism; with the fall of capitalism, such nations must depart from the scene....

But there are other nations. These are the new, Soviet nations, which developed and took shape on the basis of the old, bourgeois nations after the overthrow of capitalism in Russia, after the elimination of the bourgeoisie and its nationalist parties, after the establishment of the Soviet system. The working class and its internationalist party are the force that cements these new nations and leads them. An alliance between the working class and the working peasantry within the nation for the elimination of the survivals of capitalism in order that socialism may be built triumphantly; abolition of the survivals of national oppression in order that the nations and national minorities may be equal and may develop freely; elimination of the survivals of nationalism in order that friendship may be knit between the peoples and internationalism firmly established; a united front with all oppressed and unequal nations in the struggle against the policy of annexation and wars of annexation, in the struggle against imperialism—such is the spiritual, and social and political complexion of these nations.

Such nations must be qualified as socialist nations.”

*(Stalin, Leninism and National Question, Reply to Comrades Meshkov, Kovalchuk, and Others, March 18, 1929)*

## **Classes versus Nations**

Classes and nations were formed at different stages of social progress. Though nations came into being, much after the human society

had been divided into classes, but the elimination of nations is inextricably tied up with the elimination of classes. Today, the world is divided into different nations and further these nations are divided into classes. The class formation of different countries and nations is different, depending upon the level of development of productive forces therein.

Nations and classes came into being by the objective process of social development and their rise and development too is decided by the productive forces and production relations.

“Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.”

(Lenin, A great beginning, LCW Vol 29, p 421)

First of all the nations came into being due to the struggle of rising bourgeoisie, alongside other laboring masses against feudalism. The level of development of social production also played its role in it. The development of social production strengthened the economic ties between people, made it capable to gather in a large form of social community by increasing the density of population. The rise of this led to the elimination of feudal separation. People speaking the same language became politically united as people of one nation, economic relations matured in various regions of the nation and a single national market came into being. The nations were born. The unified nations were formed due the impact of economic necessity of uniting the areas inhabited by people speaking one language.

What is common between classes and people is that they are established distinct communities of people. Their roots are in the material life of the society and the same is reflected in their consciousness.

Classes are primarily distinct mainly due to their economic status. But a class is not mere economic composition, it is also a social organization. People belonging to a particular class, depending upon their material conditions and lifestyle, also give rise to more or less characteristics of a particular class consciousness and class psychology.

Marx writes on this,

“Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations.”

(Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol 1, p 421)

Like classes, nations too are related to a definite collective of conditions of material life of society. The particular material elements of a nation are its common territory and a community of economic life which ties all the parts of a nation in a whole. A nation is reflected in particular characteristics of its spiritual life, particular national characteristics, one language or dialect and national consciousness.

There are different historical roots of the division of society or a nation into classes and division of human society into nations and nationalities. But still, the relation between nation and classes can't be understood by separating them. The composition of a nation, development of national liberation struggle and the process of becoming of nation states can't be understood without focusing on classes.

In a bourgeois society, the increasing contradictions between various classes of a nation and together with it, the gathering of laboring masses around the working class and its vanguard, make favorable the path of socialist revolution by which the bourgeois nations are transformed into socialist nations. The sharp division of a nation into contradictory classes and sharp struggle between them does not mean that a nation has ceased to exist.

The existence of contradictory classes, entangled in a sharp

battle among themselves in a nation, does not mean that the existence of a nation as a stable community of people has ceased. The antagonisms among the classes might be very sharp but it does not mean that nation has ceased to exist.

Like every class has its own class ideology and psychology, the nation also has a common national psychological make-up.

## **National oppression – National movement – Nation state**

In order to understand national oppression and national movement, it is first necessary to understand the various eras and types of national question. The nations come into being with the advent of capitalism, they are present in the imperialist epoch and under socialism too. Till now, there have been three epochs of national movements or national question. Under the first epoch, national question has been of two types which we will discuss a bit further. To understand the national question in a historical framework it is necessary to understand the epochs and types of national question. National question too is not an unchanging phenomenon. Its character, its tasks change with the change of epochs. Comrade Stalin, while criticizing the incorrect approach of some comrades, writes,

“One of your mistakes is that you regard the national question not as a part of the general question of the social and political development of society, subordinated to this general question, but as something self-contained and constant, whose direction and character remain basically unchanged throughout the course of history. Hence you fail to see what every Marxist sees, namely, that the national question does not always have one and the same character, that the character and tasks of the national movement vary with the different periods in the development of the revolution...

...The Russian Marxists have always started out from

the proposition that the national question is a part of the general question of the development of the revolution, that at different stages of the revolution the national question has different aims, corresponding to the character of the revolution at each given historical moment, and that the Party's policy on the national question changes in conformity with this."

*(Stalin, National Question and Leninism, Reply to Comrades Meshkov, Kovalchuk, and Others, March 18, 1929)*

The question of the types of national question in relation with tasks and character of revolution, a particular historical period, is a question of the types of aims and character of national question. The question to understand the different epochs and types of national question is actually a question of understanding the class contradictions, class forces, involved nations, nationalities and types of countries, involved in the national problem. It is to understand that how these different aspects effect the tasks of national question. To muddle the different epochs of national question leads to incorrect tasks. This is also one of the reason why some people leapfrog over various aspects of the national question.

According to Comrade Stalin,

"Before proceeding to deal with the Party's concrete immediate tasks in the national question, it is necessary to lay down certain premises, without which the national question cannot be solved. These premises concern the emergence of nations, the origin of national oppression, the forms assumed by national oppression in the course of historical development, and then the methods of solving the national question in the different periods of development. There have been three such periods.

The first period was that of the elimination of feudalism in the West and of the triumph of capitalism. That was the period in which people were constituted into nations I have in mind countries like Britain (excluding Ireland), France and

Italy. In the West—in Britain, France, Italy and, partly, Germany—the period of the liquidation of feudalism and the constitution of people into nations coincided, on the whole, with the period in which centralized states appeared; as a consequence of this, in the course of their development, the nations there assumed state forms. And since there were no other national groups of any considerable size within these states, there was no national oppression there.

In Eastern Europe, on the contrary, the process of formation of nations and of the liquidation of feudal disunity did not coincide in time with the process of formation of centralized states. I have in mind Hungary, Austria and Russia. In those countries capitalism had not yet developed; it was, perhaps, only just beginning to develop; but the needs of defense against the invasion of the Turks, Mongols and other Oriental peoples called for the immediate formation of centralized states capable of checking the onslaught of the invaders. Since the process of formation of centralized states in Eastern Europe was more rapid than the process of the constitution of people into nations, mixed states were formed there, consisting of several peoples who had not yet formed themselves into nations, but who were already united in a common state.

Thus, the first period is characterized by nations making their appearance at the dawn of capitalism; in Western Europe purely national states arose in which there was no national oppression, whereas in Eastern Europe multi-national states arose headed by one, more developed, nation as the dominant nation, to which the other, less developed, nations were politically and later economically subjected. These multi-national states in the East became the home of that national oppression which gave rise to national conflicts, to national movements, to the national question, and to various methods of solving this question.

The second period in the development of national oppression and of methods of combating it coincided with the period of the appearance of imperialism in the West, when, in its quest for markets, raw materials, fuel and cheap labour power, and in its fight for the export of capital and for securing important railway and sea routes, capitalism burst out of the framework of the national state and enlarged its territory at the expense of its neighbours, near and distant. In this second period the old national states in the West—Britain, Italy and France—ceased to be national states, i.e., owing to having seized new territories, they were transformed into multinational, colonial states and thereby became arenas of the same kind of national and colonial oppression as already existed in Eastern Europe. Characteristic of this period in Eastern Europe was the awakening and strengthening of the subject nations (Czechs, Poles and Ukrainians) which, as a result of the imperialist war, led to the break-up of the old, bourgeois multinational states and to the formation of new national states which are held in bondage by the so-called great powers.

The third period is the Soviet period, the period of the abolition of capitalism and of the elimination of national oppression...

Such are the three periods of development of the national question that have historically passed before us."

*(Stalin, Report on the immediate tasks of the party in the National Question, March 10, 1921, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 111-113)*

The first epoch of the above mentioned three epochs of national question is of two types, the latter type (a multinational state) being the one in which national oppression arose. Out of these three epochs, the first epoch (second type) and second epoch became witness to national oppression and national movements whereas the third epoch (the epoch of socialist revolutions) was witness to the elimination of national

oppression.

In the above mentioned work, Comrade Stalin mentions that there is a commonality between the national oppression of the above said epochs that in them the oppression and struggle against it continued, while there is also a difference between them. The difference being that in the first epoch the national problem did not cross the borders of the various multination states, it was an internal problem of these states. In the second epoch, this turned from being a problem of any particular state to become a general problem of colonies, affecting many states and reaching far and wide across the world. "National oppression was transformed from an internal question into an inter-state question". (Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 100)

19th and 20th centuries have been witness to the anti-colonial struggles. In 20th century, at some places, these struggles were led by communists and at others by bourgeois nationalists. After the second world war, the colonial system eliminated world-over in a due process. The main factor in this was internal, i.e., the anti-imperialist struggles by the people of colonial and semi-colonial countries. Alongside this, the weakening of English imperialism in the second world war, the rise of the socialist camp which ....assisted the liberation struggles of the colonial, semi-colonial countries, also played their role. It can be said that the second type of national oppression today has been eliminated but the first type remains. In Europe and in post colonial countries, where after second world war the feudal production relations transformed into capitalist production relations, some of which emerged as multi-national states, the continuing national oppression here resemble the first type of national oppression discussed above.

Let us now return to the question as to what is national oppression ?

With regard to the Eastern Europe discussed above, Stalin writes, "But capitalism also began to develop in the Eastern states. Trade and means of communication were developing. Large towns were springing up. The nations were becoming economically consolidated. Capitalism, erupting into the

tranquil life of the nationalities which had been pushed into the background, was arousing them and stirring them into action. The development of the press and the theatre, the activity of the Reichsrat (Austria) and of the Duma (Russia) were helping to strengthen “national sentiments.” The intelligentsia that had arisen was being imbued with “the national idea” and was acting in the same direction...

But the nations which had been pushed into the background and had now awakened to independent life, could no longer form themselves into independent national states; they encountered on their -path the very powerful resistance of the ruling strata of the dominant nations, which had long ago assumed the control of the state. They were too late!... In this way the Czechs, Poles, etc., formed themselves into nations in Austria; the Croats, etc., in Hungary; the Letts, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, etc., in Russia. What had been an exception in Western Europe (Ireland) became the rule in the East.

In the West, Ireland responded to its exceptional position by a national movement. In the East, the awakened nations were bound to respond in the same fashion.

Thus arose the circumstances which impelled the young nations of Eastern Europe on to the path of struggle.

The struggle began and flared up, to be sure, not between nations as a whole, but between the ruling classes of the dominant nations and of those that had been pushed into the background. The struggle is usually conducted by the urban petty bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation against the big bourgeoisie of the dominant nation (Czechs and Germans), or by the rural bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation against the landlords of the dominant nation (Ukrainians in Poland), or by the whole “national” bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations against the ruling nobility of the dominant nation (Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine in Russia).

The bourgeoisie plays the leading role.

The chief problem for the young bourgeoisie is the problem of the market. Its aim is to sell its goods and to emerge victorious from competition with the bourgeoisie of a different nationality. Hence its desire to secure its “own,” its “home” market....

The struggle spreads from the economic sphere to the political sphere. Restriction of freedom of movement, repression of language, restriction of franchise, closing of schools, religious restrictions, and so on, are piled upon the head of the “competitor”.

Of course, such measures are designed not only in the interest of the bourgeois classes of the dominant nation, but also in furtherance of the specifically caste aims, so to speak, of the ruling bureaucracy....

The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation, repressed on every hand, is naturally stirred into movement.

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, p 19-21)*

One thing that demands attention in the above referenced quote of Stalin is that in the above-said multi-national states, the oppressed nations are not in that sense colonies or semi-colonies of the dominating oppressor nation, as was the case with the third world countries which were colonies or semi-colonies of the imperialist countries. The above mentioned multi-national states already had their existence as countries wherein the later capitalist development led to the arising of various nations and national strife, the emerging of aspirations in the oppressed nations to have their separate nation state. But the path of the formation of independent nation states of these nations had been “stopped by the very powerful resistance of the ruling strata of the dominant nations.” The path to the formation of their separate state by oppressed nations can also be blocked by a state power, as is the case in India. That is why the meaning of national oppression in the main is preventing a nation from forming an independent nation state. It is snatching away from it the right to decide its own destiny.

Further Stalin writes,

“The content of the national movement, of course, cannot everywhere be the same: it is wholly determined by the diverse demands made by the movement. In Ireland the movement bears an agrarian character; in Bohemia it bears a “language” character; in one place the demand is for civil equality and religious freedom, in another for the nation’s “own” officials, or its own Diet.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, p 22-23)*

It is clear from the above mentioned quote of Stalin that a national movement can have an agrarian character or it can be without it. There is a diversity in the demands of this movement.

In the 20th century, the national movements of the colonial and semi-colonial countries of the third world were anti-feudal (agrarian) and anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movements. But this condition does not fit in the above mentioned multi-national states.

Stalin in his above referenced pamphlet says that if the national movement draws in the workers (due to undeveloped antagonism with the bourgeoisie, lack of class consciousness, lack of organization etc) and the peasants (because of land) then the national movement takes on a mass character. In Bohemia (present day Czech Republic) the national movement had a linguistic character but it didn’t become a mass movement. But the national movement of Bohemian people didn’t cease. But we know for a fact that in 1918, Czechoslovakia separated from the Austro-Hungarian empire and in the beginning of 1993 Czech Republic became a separate nation state.

In another writing, Comrade Stalin defines the national oppression as such,

“What is national oppression? National oppression is the system of exploitation and robbery of oppressed peoples, the measures of forcible restriction of the rights of oppressed nationalities, resorted to by imperialist circles. These, taken together, represent the policy generally known as a policy of national oppression.

The first question is, on what classes does any particular government rely in carrying out its policy of national oppression? Before an answer to this question can be given, it must first be understood why different forms of national oppression exist in different states, why national oppression is severer and cruder in one state than in another. For instance, in Britain and Austria-Hungary national oppression has never taken the form of pogroms, but has existed in the form of restrictions on the national rights of the oppressed nationalities. In Russia, on the other hand, it not infrequently assumes the form of pogroms and massacres. In certain states, moreover, there are no specific measures against national minorities at all. For instance, there is no national oppression in Switzerland, where French, Italians and Germans all live freely.

How are we to explain the difference in attitude towards nationalities in different states?

By the difference in the degree of democracy prevailing in these states. When in former years the old landed aristocracy controlled the state power in Russia, national oppression could assume, and actually did assume, the monstrous form of massacres and pogroms. In Britain, where there is a certain degree of democracy and political freedom, national oppression is of a less brutal character. Switzerland approximates to a democratic society, and in that country the nations have more or less complete freedom. In short, the more democratic a country, the less the national oppression, and vice versa. And since by democracy we mean that definite classes are in control of the state power, it may be said from this point of view that the closer the old landed aristocracy is to power, as was the case in old tsarist Russia, the more severe is the oppression and the more monstrous are its forms.

However, national oppression is maintained not only

by the landed aristocracy. There is, in addition, another force—the imperialist groups, who introduce in their own country the methods of enslaving nationalities learned in the colonies and thus become the natural allies of the landed aristocracy.

*(Stalin, Report on the National Question, 29 April 1917)*

From the above mentioned reference of Stalin, it is clear that national oppression can be present in different types of states. It is not a must that it is present in only those states where feudals are in state power.

In another of his writing, Stalin while defining the oppressed nation, does not include the national bourgeoisie in it. He refers to only the people as being the victims of national oppression,

“The October Revolution went further and tried to rally the oppressed nationalities around the proletariat. We have already said above that nine-tenths of the populations of these nationalities consist of peasants and of small urban working people. That, however, does not exhaust the concept “oppressed nationality.” **Oppressed nationalities are usually oppressed not only as peasants and as urban working people, but also as nationalities, i.e., as the toilers of a definite nationality, language, culture, manner of life, habits and customs. The double oppression cannot help revolutionizing the labouring masses of the oppressed nationalities, cannot help impelling them to fight the principal force of oppression—capital.**”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 213)*

Generally, the multinational states are unable to resolve their contradictions (in essence, the struggle for market between the bourgeoisies of different nations). In states with only one nation there too the competition for market between various factions of the bourgeoisie persists but this competition does not become the cause for the

disintegration of this nation state. But in multinational states, this competition for the market between various factions of the bourgeoisie assumes the form of competition between the bourgeoisies of different nations. Due to which, sooner or later these multinational states disintegrate. Stalin writes about the fate of multinational states,

“In national states like France and Italy, which at first relied mainly on their own national forces, there was, generally speaking, no national oppression. In contrast to that, the multinational states that are based on the domination of one nation—more exactly, of the ruling class of that nation—over the other nations are the original home and chief arena of national oppression and of national movements. **The contradictions between the interests of the dominant nation and those of the subject nations are contradictions which, unless they are resolved, make the stable existence of a multinational state impossible. The tragedy of the multinational bourgeois state lies in that it cannot resolve these contradictions, that every attempt on its part to “equalize” the nations and to “protect” the national minorities, while preserving private property and class inequality, usually ends in another failure, in a further aggravation of national conflicts.**”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 100, emphasis ours)*

History proved correct the assessment of Stalin regarding the fate of multinational bourgeois states. The disintegration of Austro-Hungarian empire, disintegration of social-imperialist Soviet Union are prominent examples of such a fate. Even today, the multi-national bourgeois states which exist, they have only two paths before them – either a self-willing union of nations come into being through a socialist revolution or there will be a disintegration of them.

Karl Kautsky’s views on the fate of multi-national states and the origin of national states also demand attention. The crux of Kautsky’s views on this matter is thus:

Kautsky opines that the traders and the intellectuals are the middlemen of the international cultural brotherhood/community. At the same time, they are bearers of the national consciousness flag too. With the development of commodity production, there is a development of educational system too and the progenies of peasantry too go to these educational institutions which hitherto had no need to. Education which was a special right of the ruling classes earlier, hereby a limited level of school education becomes a must condition for the development of society. People wish that they must be taught and this education can only be imparted to them in their mother tongue. People desire that teachers too should belong to their own nationality, which they can understand without difficulty.

The development of production and science creates the need not just of teachers but also intellectuals. Small property holders, peasants, shop owners, artisans, lawyers etc – they all need doctors. People can interact with them only if they can speak their language.

For every member within the capitalist production relation, for all modern classes including the workers and capitalists, the size of the nation is important. For all other things remaining same, the wider the nation of a worker, the wider will be the worker's labor mobility. Though he can migrate to areas of higher wages but in that condition the worker is more dependent upon the capitalist and finds it difficult to interact with his/her fellow workers because there the language spoken is different from his/her. But workers can overcome this situation by easily learning the local language.

The intellectual, more so than the capitalist and the worker, has an interest in the size of the nation. For him the language is more important than just being a medium of interaction. Language is his best tool, sometimes the only thing, which he can exchange with others. The poet and the orator, be he a politician or a judge or a priest, they have the need to master the language, it's every potentiality, deepness and it's richness.

The rise of modern states lead to the strengthening of national feelings, which too are the result of capitalist mode of production, just

like the global inter-relations.

In the middle ages, the states were feebly connected with many small cantons, districts and economically independent market collectives, which were self-governed and connected through narrow strings of dependence on official authority. In all these communities their own mother tongue was spoken. It was not needed that all these Polities, which united to form a state, speak a single language.

But it changes with the advent of capitalism. Centralized administration instead of local, bureaucracy employed on regular payroll, feudal vassalage is replaced with a permanent standing military. This stable, standing military initially beared the diversity of languages but later on a single language becomes it's necessity. In military, it becomes essential that the language of the directive and top most officers be same.

Linguistic unity is much more important for the bureaucracy which has to perform the tasks of justice, police, economic management, customs, transportation, taxation system etc. Lack of linguistic unity will impair all these works. Centralized authoritative bureaucracy wishes for a single language in the state administration.

But the bureaucrats have to deal not just with themselves but with the masses too. Therefore it is important for the state representatives to learn the language of the masses.

**” The monolingualism of the population became as important as that of the bureaucracy.** Thus already in the 18th century, the absolutist state strove to become a national state, within which only one language is spoken. It looked for expansion into areas that spoke the ruling language of its empire. On the other hand it attempted to force this language on all of its subjects who did not speak this language\* predominantly through school education. **Back then, many thought, and many bureaucrats still think, that school education could shape people to fit their rulers’ needs.** ((It can be understood from this that why in Punjab and other states of India, Hindi and English are

imposed from primary level itself or even before still). In many cases, this aspiration for national unity has been successful not by school education, but, sure enough, by the power of interaction within the state. Yet where this interaction was not powerful enough to prompt the citizens of foreign language communities to use the ruling language, **the efforts of the bureaucracy to standardize the language actually created the opposite effect. The foreign nations now felt oppressed and violated.”**

*(Karl Kautsky, ibid., p 146-47, emphasis ours)*

Further Kautsky discusses the damage wrought upon various nations by the imposition of ruling language and concludes,

“In nations within the states of a nationally mixed population, an atmosphere of hostility to the state can thus develop not hostility towards every state, but towards the state in which they live. Thus develops the desire to separate from the state and to organize an independent state possibly together with fellow nationals who share the same fate in a neighboring state. Just as in the ruling nation, there develops in the ruled nation an impulse towards a nation state.

**This impulse is further boosted by the rise of the democratic movement, that necessarily comes into being at a certain level of capitalist development,** which develops on the one hand, out of the efforts of the capitalist classes to make the government subservient, and on the other, out of the increasing education of the working classes the tradesmen, peasants, wage-workers and the increasing interaction amongst them, the development of the postal system and the press, which gradually overcomes narrow-minded localism and infuses them with an interest for the politics of the state and even with the politics of the world at large... Wherever the bureaucracy and the people are of different nationalities, the contradictions between them become more pronounced. On the other hand the striving

for a parliament also becomes the striving for a national parliament, because only such a parliament can do justice to the needs of the nation and let it have its say...

**In the epoch of parliamentarianism and democracy it is even more necessary for the state to be unitarily national than in the epoch of bureaucratic absolutism\*not merely from the viewpoint of the population and the principles of democracy, but also from the viewpoint of the government itself.”**

(Karl Kautsky, *ibid.* p 147-148, emphasis ours)

The tendency of the national movements is towards the establishment of nation states. While criticizing Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin explains it further,

**“Later on we shall see still other reasons why it would be wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything but the right to existence as a separate state.** At present, we must deal with Rosa Luxemburg’s efforts to “dismiss” the inescapable conclusion that profound economic factors underlie the urge towards a national state.

Rosa Luxemburg is quite familiar with Kautsky’s pamphlet *Nationality and Internationality*. (Supplement to *Die Neue Zeit*[2] No.11, 1907–08; Russian translation in the journal *Nauchnaya Mysl*,[3] Riga, 1908.) She is aware that, after carefully analyzing the question of the national state in §4 of that pamphlet, Kautsky arrived at the conclusion that Otto Bauer “**underestimates** the strength of the urge towards a national state” (p. 23 of the pamphlet). Rosa Luxemburg herself quotes the following words of Kautsky’s:

“The national state is the **form most suited** to present-day conditions, [i. e., capitalist, civilized, economically progressive conditions, as distinguished from medieval, pre-capitalist, etc.]; it is the form in which the state can best fulfill its tasks” (i. e., the tasks of securing the freest, widest

and speediest development of capitalism). To this we must add Kautsky's still more precise concluding remark that states of mixed national composition (known as multinational states, as distinct from national states) are "always those whose internal constitution has for some reason or other remained abnormal or underdeveloped" (backward). Needless to say, Kautsky speaks of abnormality exclusively in the sense of lack of conformity with what is best adapted to the requirements of a developing capitalism.

The question now is: How did Rosa Luxemburg treat these historico-economic conclusions of Kautsky's? Are they right or wrong? Is Kautsky right in his historico-economic theory, or is Bauer, whose theory is basically psychological? What is the connection between Bauer's undoubted "national opportunism", his defense of cultural-national autonomy, his nationalistic infatuation ("an occasional emphasis on the national aspect", as Kautsky put it), his "enormous exaggeration of the national aspect and complete neglect of the international aspect" (Kautsky)—and his underestimation of the strength of the urge to create a national state?

Rosa Luxemburg has not even raised this question. She has not noticed the connection. She has not considered **the sum total** of Bauer's theoretical views. She has not even drawn a line between the historico-economic and the psychological theories of the national question. She confines herself to the following remarks in criticism of Kautsky:

"This 'best' national state is only an abstraction, which can easily be developed and defended theoretically, but which does not correspond to reality." (*Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908, No. 6, p. 499.)

And in corroboration of this emphatic statement there follow arguments to the effect that the "right to self-determination" of small nations is made illusory by the

development of the great capitalist powers and by imperialism. “Can one seriously speak,” Rosa Luxemburg exclaims, “about the ‘self-determination’ of the formally independent Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Serbs, Greeks, partly even the Swiss, whose independence is itself a result of the political struggle and the diplomatic game of the ‘concert of Europe’?!” (P. 500.) The state that best suits these conditions is “not a national state, as Kautsky believes, but a predatory one”. Some dozens of figures are quoted relating to the size of British, French and other colonial possessions.

After reading such arguments, one cannot help marveling at the author’s ability to misunderstand **the how and the why of things**. To teach Kautsky, with a serious mien, that small states are economically dependent on big ones, that a struggle is raging among the bourgeois states for the predatory suppression of other nations, and that imperialism and colonies exist—all this is a ridiculous and puerile attempt to be clever, for none of this has the slightest bearing on the subject. Not only small states, but even Russia, for example, is entirely dependent, economically, on the power of the imperialist finance capital of the “rich” bourgeois countries. Not only the miniature Balkan states, but even nineteenth-century America was, economically, a colony of Europe, as Marx pointed out in *Capital*.<sup>[4]</sup> Kautsky, like any Marxist, is, of course, well aware of this, but that has nothing whatever to do with the question of national movements and the national state.

For the question of the political self-determination of nations and their independence as states in bourgeois society, Rosa Luxemburg has substituted the question of their economic independence. This is just as intelligent as if someone, in discussing the programmatic demand for the supremacy of parliament, i. e., the assembly of people’s representatives, in a bourgeois state, were to expound the

perfectly correct conviction that big capital dominates in a bourgeois country, whatever the regime in it.

There is no doubt that the greater part of Asia, the most densely populated continent, consists either of colonies of the “Great Powers”, or of states that are extremely dependent and oppressed as nations. But does this commonly-known circumstance in any way shake the undoubted fact that in Asia itself the conditions for the most complete development of commodity production and the freest, widest and speediest growth of capitalism have been created only in Japan, i. e., only in an independent national state? The latter is a bourgeois state, and for that reason has itself begun to oppress other nations and to enslave colonies. We cannot say whether Asia will have had time to develop into a system of independent national states, like Europe, before the collapse of capitalism, but it remains an undisputed fact that capitalism, having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in that continent, too; that the tendency of these movements is towards the creation of national states in Asia; that it is such states that ensure, the best conditions for the development of capitalism. The example of Asia speaks in favour of Kautsky and against Rosa Luxemburg.

The example of the Balkan states likewise contradicts her, for anyone can now see that the best conditions for the development of capitalism in the Balkans are created precisely in proportion to the creation of independent national states in that peninsula.

Therefore, Rosa Luxemburg notwithstanding, the example of the whole of progressive and civilized mankind, the example of the Balkans and that of Asia prove that Kautsky’s proposition is absolutely correct: **the national state is the rule and the “norm” of capitalism; the multi-national state represents backwardness, or is an exception. From the standpoint of national relations, the best conditions**

**for the development of capitalism are undoubtedly provided by the national state. This does not mean, of course, that such a state, which is based on bourgeois relations, can eliminate the exploitation and oppression of nations. It only means that Marxists cannot lose sight of the powerful economic factors that give rise to the urge to create national states. It means that “self-determination of nations” in the Marxists’ Programme cannot, from a historico-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state.“**

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Vol 20, emphasis ours)*

## **Right to self-determination of the nations**

Marxism is against every type of national oppression and is the flag bearer of equality of nations. In their fight against national oppression, Marxists uphold the slogan of right of the nations to self-determination (including right to secession).

In their day Marx and Engels raised their voice against every kind of national oppression. They proclaimed the independence of India from British colonialism. They stood for the unification of Poland (it’s independence) and liberation of Ireland.

They upheld the unification of Germany which was fragmented in many parts. The borders of Eastern Europe had to be redefined for the unification of Germany. They held the unification of Germany as the most advanced national development of continental Europe. **Since both Marx and Engels belonged to the German nation, therefore they were labeled as German chauvinists since 1848 itself by their opponents, for proclaiming the unification of Germany. But history proved that their opponents were wrong; Marx and Engels were the true internationalists.**

Frederick Engels had opined that the boundaries of nation must be defined according to the national composition of population. Engels wrote,

“Nobody will venture to say that the map of Europe is definitively established. But any changes, if they are to endure, must increasingly tend by and large to give the big and viable European nations their **real** natural frontiers to be determined by language and fellow-feeling...”

*(Engels, Po and Rhone, emphasis in original)*

During their time, different parts of Poland were occupied by Russia, Austria and Prussia. In 1848-49, the newspaper from Cologne Germany, ‘Neu Rheinische Zeitung’, whose editor was Karl Marx, proclaimed its voice for the independence of Poland. The independence of Poland was connected with the overthrow of Tsarist state. Upon Marx’s advice, Frederick Engels wrote many articles for the restoration and independence of Poland between January-April 1866. The need for these articles was prompted by the fact that in the London Congress of International Workingmen’s Association, held in 1865, this issue generated a debate. This debate ensued further as the demand for the independence of Poland was included in the Geneva Congress of The International. On one hand, the central council of International stood for the independence of Poland, whereas Prudhonists rejected it altogether. **The Proudhonists were of the opinion that the working class had no interest in the liberation struggle of oppressed nationalities. This demand strays the working class from its tasks.** Engels said of this view,

“Wherever the working classes have taken a part of their own in political movements, there, from the very beginning, their foreign policy was expressed in the few words – Restoration of Poland...the working men of Europe unanimously proclaim the restoration of Poland as a part and parcel of their political programme, as the most comprehensive expression of their foreign policy...”

There are among the working men of France a small

minority who belong to the school of the late P. J. Proudhon. This school differs in toto from the generality of the advanced and thinking working men; **it declares them to be ignorant fools** (such types can be seen in our country too) and maintains, on most points, opinions quite contrary to theirs. This holds good in their foreign policy also... They admire Russia as the great land of the future.”

*(Engels, What have the working classes to do with Poland?, emphasis ours)*

In the late 1870's differences emerged between the Polish socialists on the question of restoration and independence of Poland. One section favoured the independence and restoration of Poland whereas the second emphasized on the revolution in Russia (which had occupied Poland). Engels took the side of the first section in this debate. Engels clarified his position in a letter written to Kautsky. Engels wrote,

“One of the real tasks of the Revolution of 1848 – and the real, and not illusory tasks of a revolution are always solved as a consequence of this revolution – was the constitution of the suppressed and **scattered** nationalities of Central Europe, provided they were at all viable and provided especially that they were ripe for independence. This task was accomplished by the executors of the revolution, Bonaparte, Cavour and Bismarck for Italy, Hungary and Germany in accordance with the then prevailing conditions. There remained Ireland and Poland. We may leave Ireland out of consideration here, since it affects the situation on the European continent only very indirectly. But Poland is situated in the centre of the continent, and the maintenance of its partition is the very tie which binds the Holy Alliance together again and again. We have, therefore, great interest in Poland. **It is historically impossible for a great people even to discuss internal problems of any kind seriously, as long as it lacks national independence...**

**An international movement of the proletariat is**

### **possible only among independent nations...**

So long as Poland is partitioned and subjugated, therefore, neither a strong socialist party can develop in the country itself, nor can there arise real international intercourse between the proletarian parties in Germany, etc...

It is unimportant whether a reconstitution of Poland is possible before the next revolution. We have in no case the task to deter the Poles from their efforts to fight for the vital conditions of their future development, or to persuade them that national independence is a very secondary matter from the international point of view. On the contrary, independence is the basis of any common international action..."

*(Engels letter to Karl Kautsky, 7 February 1882, emphasis ours)*

With regard to Poland and Ireland, Engels had opined,

"Thus I hold the view that there are two nations in Europe which do not only have the right but the duty to be nationalistic before they become internationalists: the Irish and the Poles. They are internationalists of the best kind if they are very nationalistic."

*(Engels letter to Karl Kautsky, 7 February 1882)*

But views of Marx and Engels on the Polish independence ceased to be relevant by the beginning of 20th century. Lenin wrote,

"But while Marx's standpoint was quite correct for the forties, fifties and sixties or for the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it has ceased to be correct by the twentieth century. Independent democratic movements, and even an independent proletarian movement, have arisen in most Slav countries, even in Russia, one of the most backward Slav countries. Aristocratic Poland has disappeared, yielding place to capitalist Poland. Under such circumstances Poland could not but lose her **exceptional** revolutionary importance."

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-determination, Vol 20)*

Lenin writes further,

“The Polish Social-Democrats were therefore quite right in attacking the extreme nationalism of the Polish petty bourgeoisie and pointing out that the national question was of secondary importance to Polish workers, in creating for the first time a purely proletarian party in Poland and proclaiming the extremely important principle that the Polish and the Russian workers must maintain the closest alliance in their class struggle.”

(Lenin, *ibid.*)

Stalin has this to say on this question,

“conditions, like everything else, change, and a decision which is correct at one particular time may prove to be entirely unsuitable at another.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Marx was in favour of the secession of Russian Poland; and he was right, for it was then a question of emancipating a higher culture from a lower culture that was destroying it. And the question at that time was not only a theoretical one, an academic question, but a practical one, a question of actual reality....

At the end of the nineteenth century the Polish Marxists were already declaring against the secession of Poland; and they too were right, for during the fifty years that had elapsed profound changes had taken place, bringing Russia and Poland closer economically and culturally. Moreover, during that period the question of secession had been converted from a practical matter into a matter of academic dispute, which excited nobody except perhaps intellectuals abroad.

**This, of course, by no means precludes the possibility that certain internal and external conditions may arise in which the question of the secession of Poland may again come on the order of the day.**

The solution of the national question is possible only in connection with the historical conditions taken in their development.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, emphasis ours)*

Stalin's assessment that the question of independence of Poland could emerge again proved to be correct. Stalin had written his above mentioned pamphlet in 1913. The socialist revolution in Russia became victorious in October 1917. After the revolution of February 1917, the demand for complete national independence arose in Poland (and Finland). After the victory of October revolution, the Soviet government accepted the demand for Polish independence unconditionally.

Talking about Ireland's slavery at the hands of England, Marx writes,

“Quite apart from all phrases about ‘international’ and ‘humane’ justice for Ireland—which are taken for granted in the International Council—it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connexion with Ireland. And this is my fullest conviction; and for reasons which in part I can not tell the English workers themselves. For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the New York Tribune[5] [an American paper to which Marx contributed for a long time]. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything until it has got rid of Ireland.... The English reaction in England had its roots in the subjugation of Ireland.” (Marx's italics)”

*(Quoted by Lenin in his 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', Vol 20)*

International Workingmen's Association, also known as Second International, passed the resolution of “Right to complete self-determination for all nations” in its 1896 London Congress. Social Democratic Labour Party of Russia (Working class parties were known by this name only, the Communist nomenclature became prevalent later) was the first Social Democratic Party which included the Right to Self-determination of nations in its program. It was included in the summer

of 1903 in its Congress. There were dozens of oppressed nations which were victims to the oppressive regime of Tsar. Under the leadership of Lenin, the Social Democratic Labor Party adopted a very sensitive attitude towards the national aspirations and their independence. Party established the name Russia in its name instead of Russian. Russian signified the Russian nation whereas Russia, a country. The message which was signified by it was that a workers party, built in Russia, is a party of the proletariat of all the nations of Russia and not just the Russian proletariat. With regard to it, Lenin wrote,

“In Russia the workers of all nationalities, especially those of non-Russian nationality, endure an economic and political oppression such as obtains in no other country. The Jewish workers, as a disfranchised nationality, not only suffer general economic and political oppression, but they also suffer under the yoke which deprives them of elementary civic rights. The heavier this yoke, the greater the need for the closest possible unity among the proletarians of the different nationalities; for without such unity a victorious struggle against the general oppression is impossible...”

“The First Congress of our Party, held in the spring of 1898, set itself the aim of establishing such unity. To dispel any idea of its being national in character, the Party called itself “Rossiiskaya” and not “Russkaya”. (The adjective Russkaya (Russian) pertains to nationality, Rossiiskaya (Russian) pertains to Russia as a country)”

(Lenin, To the Jewish Workers, Vol 8)

The question as to why is the working class interested in the national question has been discussed thoroughly above. Lenin writes on this,

“for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; “offended” nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality”

*(Lenin, The Question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation")*

Above we have discussed the thoughts of Stalin on the national oppression and national movement. In the context of this very discussion, Stalin discusses the attitude of working class towards national oppression as follows,

“But it does not by any means follow that the proletariat should not put up a fight against the policy of national oppression.

**Restriction of freedom of movement, disfranchisement, repression of language,** closing of schools, and other forms of persecution affect the workers no less, if not more, than the bourgeoisie. **Such a state of affairs can only serve to retard the free development of the intellectual forces of the proletariat of subject nations.** One cannot speak seriously of a full development of the intellectual faculties of the Tatar or Jewish worker if he is not allowed to use his native language at meetings and lectures, and if his schools are closed down.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, emphasis ours)*

Apart from this, Stalin discusses two more reasons for which the working class needs to tackle the national oppression. Stalin writes,

“But the policy of nationalist persecution is dangerous to the cause of the proletariat also on another account. It diverts the attention of large strata from social questions, questions of the class struggle, to national questions, questions “common” to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. And this creates a favorable soil for lying propaganda about “harmony of interests,” for glossing over the class interests of the proletariat and for the intellectual enslavement of the workers.”

*(Stalin, ibid)*

Discussing the third reason Stalin writes,

“But the policy of persecution does not stop there. It not infrequently passes from a “system” of oppression to a

“system” of inciting nations against each other, to a “system” of massacres and pogroms. Of course, the latter system is not everywhere and always possible, but where it is possible – in the absence of elementary civil rights – it frequently assumes horrifying proportions and threatens to drown the cause of unity of the workers in blood and tears.”

*(Stalin, ibid)*

Further Stalin writes,

“The workers therefore combat and will continue to combat the policy of national oppression in all its forms, from the most subtle to the most crude, as well as the policy of inciting nations against each other in all its forms.”

*(Stalin, ibid)*

Clarifying the attitude of Marxists towards the national oppression, Lenin writes,

**“Whoever does not recognise and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat.”**

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, emphasis ours)*

This quote of Lenin is apt for all those class-reductionist Marxists who pose a deaf ear towards the rightful concerns of nations, towards various forms of national oppression.

It is for these types of class-reductionists only, which under the garb of ‘social revolution’, deny the national question, that Lenin wrote,

“In contrast to the petty-bourgeois democrats, Marx regarded all democratic demands without exception not as an absolute, but as a historical expression of the struggle of the masses of the people, led by the bourgeoisie, against feudalism. There is not a single democratic demand which could not serve, and has not served, under certain conditions, as an instrument of the bourgeoisie for deceiving the workers. To single out one of the demands of political democracy,

namely, the self determination of nations, and to oppose it to all the rest, is fundamentally wrong in theory. In practice, the proletariat will be able to retain its independence only if it subordinates its struggle for all the democratic demands, not excluding the demand for a republic, to its revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, in contrast to the Proudhonists, who “repudiated” the national problem “in the name of the social revolution,” Marx, having in mind mainly the interests of the proletarian class struggle in the advanced countries, put into the forefront the fundamental principle of internationalism and socialism, viz., that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.[8] It was precisely from the standpoint of the interests of the revolutionary movement of the German workers that Marx in 1898 demanded that victorious democracy in Germany should proclaim and grant freedom to the nations that the Germans were oppressing.[9] It was precisely from the standpoint of the revolutionary struggle of the English workers that Marx in 1869 demanded the separation of Ireland from England, and added: “...although after the separation there may come federation.”[10] Only by putting forward this demand did Marx really educate the English workers in the spirit of internationalism. Only in this way was he able to oppose the revolutionary solution of a given historical problem to the opportunists and bourgeois reformism, which even now, half a century later, has failed to achieve the Irish “reform.” Only in this way was Marx able—unlike the apologists of capital who shout about the right of small nations to secession being utopian and impossible, and about the progressive nature not only of economic but also of political concentration—to urge the progressive nature of this concentration in a non-imperialist manner, to urge the bringing together of the nations, not by force, but on the basis of a free union of the

proletarians of all countries. Only in this way was Marx able, also in the sphere of the solution of national problems, to oppose the revolutionary action of the masses to verbal and often hypocritical recognition of the equality and the self-determination of nations.”

(Lenin, *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Vol 22)

Those who turn a blind eye towards the national question of the oppressed nations, those who issue labels such as nationalist identitarian for those who support the Right of nations to Self-determination, who struggle against the various shades of national oppression, they often stand with the oppressors.

Quoting Lenin,

“In the fear of playing into the hands of bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nations, people not only play into the hands of the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressing nation but also the reactionary nationalism.”

“The national programme of working-class democracy is: absolutely no privileges for any one nation or any one language; the solution of the problem of the political self-determination of nations, that is, their separation as states by completely free, democratic methods; the promulgation of a law for the whole state by virtue of which any measure (rural, urban or communal, etc., etc.) introducing any privilege of any kind for one of the nations and militating against the equality of nations or the rights of a national minority, shall be declared illegal and ineffective, and any citizen of the state shall have the right to demand that such a measure be annulled as unconstitutional, and that those who attempt to put it into effect be punished.”

(*Lenin, Critical remarks on the national question*, Vol 20)

Presenting the crux of the Marxist policy on the national question, Lenin writes,

“Complete equality of the rights of all nations, right to

self-determination of nations, unity of the workers of all nations, such is the national program which Marxism, the experience of whole world and experience of Russia, teaches us.”

“The national programme of working-class democracy is: absolutely no privileges for any one nation or any one language; the solution of the problem of the political self-determination of nations, that is, their separation as states by completely free, democratic methods; the promulgation of a law for the whole state by virtue of which any measure (rural, urban or communal, etc., etc.) introducing any privilege of any kind for one of the nations and militating against the equality of nations or the rights of a national minority, shall be declared illegal and ineffective, and any citizen of the state shall have the right to demand that such a measure be annulled as unconstitutional, and that those who attempt to put it into effect be punished.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, LCW Vol 20)*

Marxists oppose the national oppressions as well as support the inter-mingling of nations too. Lenin says,

“Developing capitalism knows two historical tendencies in the national question. The first is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of national states. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the break-down of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

Both tendencies are a universal law of capitalism. The former predominates in the beginning of its development, the latter characterizes a mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society. The Marxists’ national programme takes both tendencies into account, and advocates,

firstly, the equality of nations and languages and the impermissibility of **all privileges** in this respect (and also the right of nations to self-determination with which we shall deal separately later); secondly, the principle of internationalism and uncompromising struggle against contamination of the proletariat with bourgeois nationalism, even of the most refined kind.

The question arises: what does our Bundist mean when he cries out to heaven against “assimilation”? He **could not have meant** the oppression of nations, or the **privileges enjoyed by a particular nation**, because the word “assimilation” here does not fit at all, because all Marxists, individually, and as an official, united whole, have quite definitely and unambiguously condemned the slightest violence against and oppression and inequality of nations, and finally because this general Marxist idea, which the Bundist has attacked, is expressed in the *Severnaya Pravda* article in the most emphatic manner.

No, evasion is impossible here. In condemning “assimilation” Mr. Liebman had in mind, **not** violence, **not** inequality, and **not** privileges. Is there anything real left in the concept of assimilation, after all violence and all inequality have been eliminated?

Yes, there undoubtedly is. What is left is capitalism’s world-historical tendency, to break down national barriers, obliterate national distinctions, and to **assimilate nations**—a tendency which manifests itself more and more powerfully with every passing decade, and is one of the greatest driving forces transforming capitalism into socialism.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, Vol 20)*

As described by Lenin, there is a possibility that the bourgeoisie can utilize such issues as right to self-determination, issues of national oppression and other democratic demands to derail the workers. Some class-reductionists refuse to raise the national issues because of this

very reason, furthermore, they are afraid to even talk about them. Citing Plekhanov, Lenin writes,

“...in defending the draft programme (which became the Programme in 1903) of the R.S.D.L.P. in Zarya,[4] made a **special** point (page 38) of the recognition of the right to self-determination and wrote the following about it:

*“This demand, which is not obligatory for bourgeois democrats, even in theory, is obligatory for us as Social-Democrats. If we were to forget about it or were afraid to put it forward for fear of impinging on the national prejudices of our compatriots of Great-Russian origin, the battle-cry of world Social-Democracy, ‘Workers of all countries, unite!’ would be a shameful lie upon our lips.”*

(Lenin, The National Program of the R.S.D.L.P, LCW, Vol 19)

Marxists uphold the banner of self-determination of nations for eliminating the national oppression. Let us see what is meant by the self-determination of nation. Lenin writes,

“Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of national states, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most profound economic factors drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilized world, the national state is typical and normal for the capitalist period.

Consequently, if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or “inventing” abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state.

Later on we shall see still other reasons why it would be

wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning-anything but the right to existence as a separate state”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, LCW Vol 20)*

In his pamphlet ‘Marxism and the National Question’, after clarifying the attitude of working class towards national oppression and national movement, Stalin writes,

“Social-Democracy in all countries therefore proclaims the right of nations to self-determination.

The right of self-determination means that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny, that no one has the right forcibly to interfere in the life of the nation, to destroy its schools and other institutions, to violate its habits and customs, to repress its language, or curtail its rights.

This, of course, does not mean that Social-Democracy will support every custom and institution of a nation. While combating the coercion of any nation, it will uphold only the right of the nation itself to determine its own destiny, at the same time agitating against harmful customs and institutions of that nation in order to enable the toiling strata of the nation to emancipate themselves from them...

In fighting for the right of nations to self-determination, the aim of Social-Democracy is to put an end to the policy of national oppression, to render it impossible, and thereby to remove the grounds of strife between nations, to take the edge off that strife and reduce it to a minimum.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question)*

To raise the right to self-determination of nations by Marxists does not mean that they support every national movement. Marxists always keep the interests of workers movement, working class at the forefront. Union of the workers of all nations is their primary concern. As regards the national question, the task of Marxists is two-fold; on one hand they oppose the national oppression of every type, and on the other hand, they oppose the blind nationalism, the attempts to create

...among the workers, no matter even if such attempts are being made by the bling nationalists of the oppressed nation. The support to the national movements by the Marxists depends upon concrete historical conditions. Support to these movements is no absolute principle for the Marxists. On one hand, Marxists oppose nationalism as an ideology and on the other hand, they distinguish between the nationalism of the oppressor and oppressed nation.

Lenin writes,

“In our draft Party programme we have advanced the demand for a republic with a democratic constitution that would guarantee, among other things, “recognition of the right to self-determination for all nations forming part of the state.” Many did not find this demand in our programme sufficiently clear, and in issue No. 33, in speaking about the Manifesto of the Armenian Social-Democrats, we explained the meaning of this point in the following way. The Social-Democrats will always combat every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence or by any injustice. However, our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination. As the party of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations. We must always and unreservedly work for the very closest unity of the proletariat of all nationalities, and it is only in isolated and exceptional cases that we can advance and actively support demands conducive to the establishment of a new class state or to the substitution of a looser federal unity, etc., for the complete political unity of a state.”

*(Lenin, The National Question in our Programme, LCW Vol 6)*

Lenin’s saying regarding carrying forward the right of self-

determination to the proletariat of all nationalities does not mean that the Marxists reject the right to self-determination of nations(including bourgeoisie); this is evident from Lenin's above quote too. When in the Eighth Congress of Bolshevik Party, Bukharin declared that, "I wish the right to self-determination only for the labouring classes, Lenin had strongly opposed this position." (See, LCW, Vol 29, p 170-171)

Stalin opines that the support given by Marxists for the right to self-determination of nations, including secession, does not mean,

"This, of course, does not mean that Social-Democracy will support every demand of a nation. A nation has the right even to return to the old order of things; but this does not mean that Social-Democracy will subscribe to such a decision if taken by some institution of a particular nation. The obligations of Social-Democracy, which defends the interests of the proletariat, and the rights of a nation, which consists of various classes, are two different things."

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question)*

Clarifying the Marxist attitude towards nationalism, Lenin writes,

"Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the "most just", "purest", most refined and civilized brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity, a unity that is growing before our eyes with every mile of railway line that is built, with every international trust, and every workers' association that is formed (an association that is international in its economic activities as well as in its ideas and aims).

The principle of nationality is historically inevitable in bourgeois society and, taking this society into due account, the Marxist fully recognizes the historical legitimacy of national movements. But to prevent this recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements, in order that this recognition may not lead to bourgeois ideology obscuring

proletarian consciousness.

The awakening of the masses from feudal lethargy, and their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people, of the nation, are progressive. Hence, it is the Marxist's bounden duty to stand for the most resolute and consistent democratism on all aspects of the national question. This task is largely a negative one. But this is the limit the proletariat can go to in supporting nationalism, for beyond that begins the "positive" activity of the **bourgeoisie** striving to **fortify** nationalism.

To throw off the feudal yoke, all national oppression, and all privileges enjoyed by any particular nation or language, is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force, and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian class struggle, which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go **beyond** these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie. There is a border-line here, which is often very slight and which the Bundists and Ukrainian nationalist-socialists completely lose sight of.

Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight **for** any kind of national development, **for** "national culture" in general?—Of course not. The economic development of capitalist society presents us with examples of immature national movements all over the world, examples of the formation of big nations out of a number of small ones, or to the detriment of some of the small ones, and also examples of the assimilation of nations. The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationalism, hence the endless national bickering. The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such

illusions, stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations, except that which is founded on force or privilege.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, LCW Vol 20)*

Writing on the dual task arising before the Marxists regarding the national question, that is, the struggle against national oppression and struggle against bourgeois nationalism, Lenin says,

“To the workers the important thing is to distinguish the **principles** of the two trends. **Insofar** as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in **favour**, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands **for its own** bourgeois nationalism, we stand against. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination)*

Differentiating between the nationalism of the oppressed nation from the nationalism of the oppressing nation, Lenin writes,

“The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support.”

*(Lenin, ibid.)*

“In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in

historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are treated; how the Poles are not called by any other name than Polyachiska, how the Tatar is nicknamed Prince, how the Ukrainians are always Khokhols and the Georgians and other Caucasian nationals always Kapkasians.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or “great” nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view. What is important for the proletarian? For the proletarian it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not merely formal equality. In one way or another, by one’s attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russian for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the “dominant” nation subjected them in the past.”

*(Lenin, The Question of Nationalities or “Autonomisation”)*

For Marxists, the national question is always subordinate to the interests of the proletariat or to the worker question, but this does not mean that we turn away from national oppression. Lenin writes,

“Marx had no doubt regarding the secondary position of national question with respect to “workers question”. But his theory was as far off from turning eyes away from the

national movements, as sky from land.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-determination)*

Commenting upon the attitude of proletariat towards the bourgeoisie in its struggle against national oppression, in the struggle for self-determination of nations, Lenin writes,

“Rosa Luxemburg’s argument that §9 of our Programme contains nothing “practical” has been seized upon by the opportunists. Rosa Luxemburg is so delighted with this argument that in some parts of her article this “slogan” is repeated eight times on a single page.

She writes: §9 “gives no practical lead on the day-by-day policy of the proletariat, no practical solution of national problems”.

Let us examine this argument, which elsewhere is formulated in such a way that it makes §9 look quite meaningless, or else commits us to support all national aspirations.

What does the demand for “practicality” in the national question mean?

It means one of three things: support for all national aspirations; the answer “yes” or “no” to the question of secession by any nation; or that national demands are in general immediately “practicable”.

Let us examine all three possible meanings of the demand for “practicality”.

The bourgeoisie, which naturally assumes the leadership at the start of every national movement, says that support for all national aspirations is practical. However, the proletariat’s policy in the national question (as in all others) supports the bourgeoisie only in a certain direction, but it never coincides with the bourgeoisie’s policy. The working class supports the bourgeoisie only in order to secure national peace (which the bourgeoisie cannot bring about completely and which can be achieved only with complete democracy),

in order to secure equal rights and to create the best conditions for the class struggle. Therefore, it is in opposition to the practicality of the bourgeoisie that the proletarians advance their principles in the national question; they always give the bourgeoisie only conditional support. What every bourgeoisie is out for in the national question is either privileges for its own nation, or exceptional advantages for it; this is called being “practical”. The proletariat is opposed to all privileges, to all exclusiveness. To demand that it should be “practical” means following the lead of the bourgeoisie, falling into opportunism.

The demand for a “yes” or “no” reply to the question of secession in the case of every nation may seem a very “practical” one. In reality it is absurd; it is metaphysical in theory, while in practice it leads to subordinating the proletariat to the bourgeoisie’s policy. The bourgeoisie always places its national demands in the forefront, and does so in categorical fashion. With the proletariat, however, these demands are subordinated to the interests of the class struggle. Theoretically, you cannot say in advance whether the bourgeois-democratic revolution will end in a given nation seceding from another nation, or in its equality with the latter; in either case, the important thing for the proletariat is to ensure the development of its class. For the bourgeoisie it is important to hamper this development by pushing the aims of its “own” nation before those of the proletariat. That is why the proletariat confines itself, so to speak, to the negative demand for recognition of the right to self-determination, without giving guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give anything at the expense of another nation. This may not be “practical”, but it is in effect the best guarantee for the achievement of the most democratic of all possible solutions. The proletariat needs only such guarantees, whereas the bourgeoisie of every nation requires guarantees

for its own interest, regardless of the position of (or the possible disadvantages to) other nations.

The bourgeoisie is most of all interested in the “feasibility” of a given demand—hence the invariable policy of coming to terms with the bourgeoisie of other nations, to the detriment of the proletariat. For the proletariat, however, the important thing is to strengthen its class against the bourgeoisie and to educate the masses in the spirit of consistent democracy and socialism.

This may not be “practical” as far as the opportunists are concerned, but it is the only real guarantee, the guarantee of the greater national equality and peace, despite the feudal landlords and the nationalist bourgeoisie.

The whole task of the proletarians in the national question is “unpractical” from the standpoint of the nationalist bourgeoisie of every nation, because the proletarians, opposed as they are to nationalism of every kind, demand “abstract” equality; they demand, as a matter of principle, that there should be no privileges, however slight. Failing to grasp this, Rosa Luxemburg, by her misguided eulogy of practicality, has opened the door wide for the opportunists, and especially for opportunist concessions to Great-Russian nationalism.

Why Great-Russian? Because the Great Russians in Russia are an oppressor nation, and opportunism in the national question will of course find expression among oppressed nations otherwise than among oppressor nations.

On the plea that its demands are “practical”, the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations will call upon the proletariat to support its aspirations unconditionally. The most practical procedure is to say a plain “yes” in favour of the secession of a particular nation rather than in favour of all nations having the right to secede!

The proletariat is opposed to such practicality. While recognising equality and equal rights to a national state, it

values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and assesses any national demand, any national separation, from the angle of the workers' class struggle. This call for practicality is in fact merely a call for uncritical acceptance of bourgeois aspirations.

By supporting the right to secession, we are told, you are supporting the bourgeois nationalism of the oppressed nations. This is what Rosa Luxemburg says, and she is echoed by Semkovsky, the opportunist, who incidentally is the only representative of liquidationist ideas on this question, in the liquidationist newspaper!

Our reply to this is: No, it is to the bourgeoisie that a "practical" solution of this question is important. To the workers the important thing is to distinguish the principles of the two trends. Insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor, we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour, for we are the staunchest and the most consistent enemies of oppression. But insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against. We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation.

If, in our political agitation, we fail to advance and advocate the slogan of the right to secession, we shall play into the hands, not only of the bourgeoisie, but also of the feudal landlords and the absolutism of the oppressor nation. Kautsky long ago used this argument against Rosa Luxemburg, and the argument is indisputable. When, in her anxiety not to "assist" the nationalist bourgeoisie of Poland, Rosa Luxemburg rejects the right to secession in the programme of the Marxists in Russia, she is in fact assisting the Great-Russian Black Hundreds. She is in fact assisting opportunist tolerance of the privileges (and worse than privileges) of the

Great Russians.

Carried away by the struggle against nationalism in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg has forgotten the nationalism of the Great Russians, although it is this nationalism that is the most formidable at the present time. It is a nationalism that is more feudal than bourgeois, and is the principal obstacle to democracy and to the proletarian struggle. The bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support, At the same time we strictly distinguish it from the tendency towards national exclusiveness; we fight against the tendency of the Polish bourgeois to oppress the Jews, etc., etc.

This is “unpractical” from the standpoint of the bourgeois and the philistine, but it is the only policy in the national question that is practical, based on principles, and really promotes democracy, liberty and proletarian unity.

The recognition of the right to secession for all; the appraisal of each concrete question of secession from the point of view of removing all inequality, all privileges, and all exclusiveness.

Let us consider the position of an oppressor nation. Can a nation be free if it oppresses other nations? It cannot. The interests of the freedom of the Great-Russian population[1] require a struggle against such oppression. The long, centuries-old history of the suppression of the movements of the oppressed nations, and the systematic propaganda in favour of such suppression coming from the “upper” classes have created enormous obstacles to the cause of freedom of the Great-Russian people itself, in the form of prejudices, etc.

The Great-Russian Black Hundreds deliberately foster these prejudices and encourage them. The Great-Russian bourgeoisie tolerates or condones them. The Great-Russian

proletariat cannot achieve its own aims or clear the road to its freedom without systematically countering these prejudices. In Russia, the creation of an independent national state remains, for the time being, the privilege of the Great-Russian nation alone. We, the Great-Russian proletarians, who defend no privileges whatever, do not defend this privilege either. We are fighting on the ground of a definite state; we unite the workers of all nations living in this state; we cannot vouch for any particular path of national development, for we are marching to our class goal along all possible paths.

However, we cannot move towards that goal unless we combat all nationalism, and uphold the equality of the various nations. Whether the Ukraine, for example, is destined to form an independent state is a matter that will be determined by a thousand unpredictable factors. Without attempting idle “guesses”, we firmly uphold something that is beyond doubt: the right of the Ukraine to form such a state. We respect this right; we do not uphold the privileges of Great Russians with regard to Ukrainians; we educate the masses in the spirit of recognition of that right, in the spirit of rejecting state privileges for any nation.

In the leaps which all nations have made in the period of bourgeois revolutions, clashes and struggles over the right to a national state are possible and probable. We proletarians declare in advance that we are opposed to Great-Russian privileges, and this is what guides our entire propaganda and agitation.

In her quest for “practicality” Rosa Luxemburg has lost sight of the principal practical task both of the Great-Russian proletariat and of the proletariat of other nationalities: **that of day-by-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the right, the equal right of all nations, to their national state. This (at present) is cut principal task in the national question,**

**for only in this way can we defend the interests of democracy and the alliance of all proletarians of all nations on an equal footing.**

This propaganda may be “unpractical” from the point of view of the Great-Russian oppressors, as well as from the point of view of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations (both demand a definite “yes” or “no”, and accuse the Social-Democrats of being “vague”). In reality it is this propaganda, and this propaganda alone, that ensures the genuinely democratic, the genuinely socialist education of the masses. This is the only propaganda to ensure the greatest chances of national peace in Russia, should she remain a multi-national state, and the most peaceful (and for the proletarian class struggle, harmless) division into separate national states, should the question of such a division arise.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, LCW Vol 20, Emphasis ours)*

Commenting on the same, Stalin writes,

“Whether the proletariat rallies to the banner of bourgeois nationalism depends on the degree of development of class antagonisms, on the class consciousness and degree of organization of the proletariat. The class-conscious proletariat has its own tried banner, and has no need to rally to the banner of the bourgeoisie.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, p 22)*

What then is the solution to national question ? Lenin answers this question thus,

**“The class-conscious worker will answer the bourgeoisie—there is only one solution to the national problem (insofar as it can, in general, be solved in the capitalist world, the world of profit, squabbling and exploitation), and that solution is consistent democracy.”**

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, emphasis ours)*

“At all events, does it not remain an indisputable and undisputed fact that national peace under capitalism has been achieved (insofar as it is achievable) exclusively in countries where consistent democracy prevails?”

Since this is indisputable, the opportunists’ persistent references to Austria instead of Switzerland are nothing but a typical Cadet device, for the Cadets[5] always copy the worst European constitutions rather than the best.

In Switzerland there are three official languages, but bills submitted to a referendum are printed in five languages, that is to say, in two Romansh dialects, in addition to the three official languages. According to the 1900 census, these two dialects are spoken by 38,651 out of the 3,315,443 inhabitants of Switzerland, i.e., by a little over **one per cent**. In the army, commissioned and non-commissioned officers “are given the fullest freedom to speak to the men in their native language”. In the cantons of Graubunden and Wallis (each with a population of a little over a hundred thousand) both dialects enjoy complete equality.”

*(Lenin, Critical remarks on the National Question, LCW Vol 20)*

## **National Cultural autonomy versus Regional autonomy**

The controversy regarding the solution to the national question within the communist movement also involves the controversy between national cultural autonomy versus regional autonomy. It would be relevant to discuss briefly this controversy. The pioneers of the theory of national cultural autonomy were Social Democrats, Springer and Bauer. While defining the national cultural autonomy, Stalin writes,

“This means, firstly, that autonomy would be granted, let us say, not to Bohemia or Poland, which are inhabited mainly by Czechs and Poles, but to Czechs and Poles

generally, irrespective of territory, no matter what part of Austria they inhabit.

That is why this autonomy is called national and not territorial.

It means, secondly, that the Czechs, Poles, Germans, and so on, scattered over the various parts of Austria, taken personally, as individuals, are to be organized into integral nations, and are as such to form part of the Austrian state. In this way Austria would represent not a union of autonomous regions, but a union of autonomous nationalities, constituted irrespective of territory.

It means, thirdly, that the national institutions which are to be created for this purpose for the Poles, Czechs, and so forth, are to have jurisdiction only over “cultural,” not “political” questions. Specifically political questions would be reserved for the Austrian parliament (the Reichsrat).”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question)*

Refuting the theory of National Cultural autonomy, Stalin writes,

“The first thing that strikes the eye is the entirely inexplicable and absolutely unjustifiable substitution of national autonomy for self-determination of nations. One or the other...For there is no doubt a) that cultural-national autonomy presupposes the integrity of the multi-national state, whereas self-determination goes outside the framework of this integrity, and b) that self-determination endows a nation with complete rights, whereas national autonomy endows it only with “cultural” rights. That in the first place.

In the second place, a combination of internal and external conditions is fully possible at some future time by virtue of which one or another of the nationalities may decide to secede from a multi-national state, say from Austria.

...What, in such a case, becomes of national autonomy, which is “inevitable for the proletariat of all the nations”?...

Further: National autonomy is contrary to the whole

course of development of nations. It calls for the organization of nations; but can they be artificially welded together if life, if economic development tears whole groups from them and disperses these groups over various regions? There is no doubt that in the early stages of capitalism nations become welded together. But there is also no doubt that in the higher stages of capitalism a process of dispersion of nations sets in, a process whereby a whole number of groups separate off from the nations, going off in search of a livelihood and subsequently settling permanently in other regions of the state; in the course of this these settlers lose their old connections and acquire new ones in their new domicile, and from generation to generation acquire new habits and new tastes, and possibly a new language. The question arises: is it possible to unite into a single national union groups that have grown so distinct? Where are the magic links to unite what cannot be united?"

(Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*)

Further in continuation Stalin writes that the unity of a nation is broken not just by migration, but also with the intensification of class struggle within the nation.

George Thomson too has dealt with this question in his book 'Marx to Mao-tse Tung',

"In affirming the right of every nation to secede and form an independent state, Lenin did not mean that the party of the proletariat was committed in all cases to advocating the exercise of that right. On the contrary, he recognized that in some cases secession might be inexpedient :

"The right of nations to self-determination (that is, the constitutional guarantee of an absolutely free and democratic method of deciding the question of secession) must under no circumstances be confused with the expediency of secession for a given nation. The Social-Democratic Party must decide the question, exclusively on its merits in each case in

conformity with the interests of social development as a whole and with the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism. (LCW rg,42g.)

It can also happen, of course, that secession is precluded by the objective situation. Some nationalities are too small or too scattered to form independent states. How, then, is the national question to be solved in cases where secession is judged to be inexpedient or impracticable? There are, as Lenin points out, two opposite solutions of this problem—the bourgeois solution of cultural-national autonomy and the proletarian solution of regional and local autonomy. According to the principle of cultural-national autonomy, the members of each nationality form a ‘national association’, which controls their social and cultural life, including education. Thus, the schools are segregated according to nationality. Lenin asks:

“Is such a division, be it asked, permissible from the standpoint of democracy in general and from the standpoint of the interests of the proletarian class struggle in particular? A clear grasp of the essence of the ‘cultural national’ autonomy programme is sufficient to enable one to reply without hesitation: it is absolutely impermissible. . . . If the various nations living in a single state are bound by economic ties, then any attempt to divide them permanently in ‘cultural’ and particularly educational matters would be absurd and reactionary. On the contrary, efforts should be made to unite the nations in educational matters, so that the schools should be a preparation for what is actually done in real life. At the present time we see that the different nations are unequal in the rights they possess and in their level of development. Under these circumstances, to segregate the schools according to nationality would actually and inevitably worsen the conditions of the more backward nations. . . .

Segregating the schools according to nationality is not

only a harmful scheme but a downright swindle on the part of the capitalists. The workers can be split up, divided and weakened by the advocacy of such an idea, and still more by segregation of the ordinary people's schools according to nationality; while the capitalists, whose children are well provided with rich private schools and specially engaged tutors, cannot in any way be threatened by any division or weakening through 'cultural-national autonomy'. (*LCW rg. 503-S.*)

Thus, the effect of cultural-national autonomy is to divide the workers and so place them more firmly under bourgeois control. Against this Lenin put forward the principle of regional and local autonomy. True national equality he argued, calls for:

“wide regional autonomy and fully democratic self-government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants on the basis of economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc. (*LCW ry. 427.*)

In order to eliminate national oppression, it is very important to create autonomous areas, however small, with entirely homogeneous populations, towards which members of the respective nationalities scattered all over the country, or even all over the world, could gravitate, and with which they could enter into relations and free associations of every kind. (*LCW 20.50.*)

The principle of local autonomy also includes : the right of the population to receive instruction in their native tongue in schools to be established for the purpose at the expense of the state and the local organs of self-government; the right of every citizen to use his native language at meetings; the native language to be used in all local, public and state institutions; the obligatory official language to be abolished. (*LCW 2.472.*)

On the last point Lenin has also this to say :

“The requirements of economic exchange will themselves decide which language of the given country it is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations.” (LCW I9.355.)

“Is not an ‘official language’ a stick that drives people away from the Russian language? Why will you not understand the psychology which is so important in the national question, and which, if the slightest coercion is applied, besmirches, soils, nullifies the undoubtedly progressive importance of centralization, large states, and a uniform language ? (LCW r 9.499.)

There still remains the problem of the large industrial centers, whose population is necessarily heterogeneous, being drawn from all parts of the country and from countries overseas, and is at the same time so closely mixed that even the principle of local autonomy is insufficient to ensure full national equality. This was already a world-wide problem in Lenin’s time :

“There can be no doubt that dire poverty alone compels people to abandon their native land, and that the capitalists exploit the immigrant workers in the most shameless manner. But only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the progressive significance of this modern migration of nations. (LCW ry.454.)

Referring to the school census of 1911, Lenin remarks:

“The extremely mixed national composition of the population of the large city of St. Petersburg is at once evident. This is no accident but results from a law of capitalism, which operates in all continents and in all parts of the world. Large cities, factory centre’s, railway centre’s, commercial and industrial centre’s generally, are certain, more than any others, to have very mixed populations, and it is precisely these centre’s that grow faster than others and attract ever larger numbers of the inhabitants of the backward rural areas.

(LCW I9.532)

He observes that, if the principle of cultural-national autonomy had been applied in St. Petersburg, there would have been no less than twenty-three ‘national associations’, each with its own schools. He continues :

“The interests of democracy in general and of the working class in particular demand the very opposite. We must strive to secure the mixing of the children of all nationalities in schools in each locality.... It is not our business to segregate the nations in matters of education in any way; on the contrary, we must strive to create the fundamental democratic conditions for the peaceful coexistence of nations on the basis of equal rights. (LCW r9.532)

Here, too the solution lies in the fullest extension of democracy. Lenin shows this by taking an extreme case. After noting that the school population of St. Petersburg included one Georgian child, he remarks :

“We may be asked whether it is possible to safeguard the interests of the one Georgian child among the 48,076 schoolchildren of St. Petersburg on the basis of equal rights. And we should reply that it is impossible to establish a special Georgian school in St. Petersburg on the basis of Georgian ‘national culture’ . . . But we shall not be defending anything harmful, or striving after anything impossible, if we demand for this child free government premises for lectures on the Georgian language, Georgian history, etc., the provision of Georgian books from the Central Library for this child, a state contribution towards the fees of the Georgian teacher, and so forth. Under real democracy.”. the people can achieve this quite easily. But this real democracy can be achieved only when the workers of all nationalities are united. (LCW r9.533.)

Lenin while opining that autonomy (regional) is a reformist program whereas the right to self-determination to nations is a

revolutionary program, also says that often the reforms are but only a step towards the revolution. He writes,

“The Polish Social-Democrats consider our programme “national-reformist”. Compare these two practical proposals: (1) for autonomy (Polish theses, III, 4), and (2) for freedom to secede. It is in this, and in this alone, that our programmes differ! And is it not clear that it is precisely the first programme that is reformist and not the second? A reformist change is one which leaves intact the foundations of the power of the ruling class and is merely a concession leaving its power unimpaired. A revolutionary change undermines the foundations of power. A reformist national programme does not abolish **all** the privileges of the ruling nation; it does not establish complete equality; it does not abolish national oppression **in all its forms**. An “autonomous” nation does not enjoy rights equal to those of the “ruling” nation; our Polish comrades could not have failed to notice this had they not (like our old Economists) obstinately avoided making an analysis of **political** concepts and categories. Until 1905 autonomous Norway, as a part of Sweden, enjoyed the widest autonomy, but she was not Sweden’s equal. Only by her free secession was her equality manifested **in practice** and proved (and let us add in parenthesis that: it was this free secession that created the basis for a more intimate and more democratic association, founded on equality of rights). As long as Norway was merely autonomous, the Swedish aristocracy had **one** additional privileges; and secession did not “mitigate” this privilege (the essence of reformism lies in **mitigating** an evil and not in destroying it), but **eliminated it altogether** (the principal criterion of the revolutionary character of a programme).

Incidentally, autonomy, as a reform, differs in principle from freedom to Recede, as a revolutionary measure. This is unquestionable. But as everyone knows, in practice a reform

is often merely a step towards revolution. It is autonomy that enables a nation forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state to crystallize into a nation, to gather, assess and organise its forces, and to select the most opportune moment for a declaration ... in the “Norwegian” spirit: We, the autonomous diet of such-and-such a nation, or of such-and-such a territory, declare that the Emperor of all the Russias has ceased to be King of Poland, etc.”

*(Lenin, The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up, LCW Vol 22)*

Lenin writes that the Marxists do not demand the “right to autonomy” for nations, they demand autonomy for nations,

“As far as autonomy is concerned, Marxists defend, not the “right” to autonomy, but autonomy itself, as a general universal principle of a democratic state with a mixed national composition, and a great variety of geographical and other conditions.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination)*

## **On Federal Structure**

In general, the Marxist position was against the federal structure. It began favorable around October revolution of 1917. Bolshevik Party approved of it as a transitional policy in order to establish a firm unity between various nations.

While discussing the question Irish independence, Karl Marx too had approved of the federal relations between Ireland and England. Marx had written,

“The position of the International on the Irish Question is thus clear. Its first task is to hasten the social revolution in England. To this end, the decisive blow must be struck in Ireland...it is a precondition for the emancipation of the English working class to transform the present forced union (that is, the enslavement of Ireland) into an equal and free

confederation, if possible, or complete separation, if need be.”

*(Karl Marx, Confidential Communication on Bakunin, March 28, 1870)*

Commenting on this approval of federal structure by Marx, Lenin writes,

“Though, in principle, an enemy of federalism, Marx in this instance granted the possibility of federation, as well,[2] if only the emancipation of Ireland was achieved in a revolutionary, not reformist way, through a movement of the mass of the people of Ireland supported by the working class of England.”

Along with this, Lenin attaches a note to it,

“By the way, it is not difficult to see why, from a Social-Democratic point of view, the right to “self-determination” means neither federation nor autonomy (a though, speaking in the abstract, both come under the category of “self-determination”). The right to federation is simply meaningless, since federation implies a bilateral contract. It goes without saying that Marxists cannot include the defence of federalism in general in their programme. As far as autonomy is concerned, Marxists defend, not the “right” to autonomy, but autonomy itself, as a general universal principle of a democratic state with a mixed national composition, and a great variety of geographical and other conditions. Consequently, the recognition of the “right of nations to autonomy” is as absurd as that of the “right of nations to federation.”

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, LCW Vol 20)*

In the above mentioned quote, Lenin’s opposition to the federal structure is clearly evident. Such views regarding the federal structure are also expressed elsewhere by Lenin,

“Capitalism’s broad and rapid development of the

productive forces calls for large, politically compact and united territories, since only here can the bourgeois class—together with its inevitable antipode, the proletarian class—unite and sweep away all the old, medieval, caste, parochial, petty-national, religious and other barriers.

The right of nations to self-determination, i. e., the right to secede and form independent national states, will be dealt with elsewhere.[1] But while, and insofar as, different nations constitute a single state, Marxists will never, under any circumstances, advocate either the federal principle or decentralisation. The great centralised state is a tremendous historical step forward from medieval disunity to the future socialist unity of the whole world, and only via such a state (inseparably connected with capitalism), can there be any road to socialism.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, LCW Vol 20)*

Further,

“You are opposed to autonomy. You are in favour only of regional self-government. I disagree entirely. Recall Engels’s explanation that centralisation does not in the least preclude local “liberties”... We are certainly in favour of democratic centralism. We are opposed to federation... Federation means the association of equals, an association that demands common agreement. How can one side have a right to demand that the other side should agree with it? That is absurd. We are opposed to federation in principle, it loosens economic ties, and is unsuitable for a single state. You want to secede? All right, go to the devil, if you can break economic bonds, or rather, if the oppression and friction of “coexistence” disrupt and ruin economic bonds. You don’t want to secede? In that case, excuse me, but don’t decide for me; don’t think that you have a “right” to federation.”

*(Lenin, A Letter to S. G. Shahumyan, LCW Vol 19)*

In Comrade Stalin's two writings – "Marxism and National Question" and "On the path of Nationalism (Letter from Caucasia)" we find an approval of federal structure. But in his article of 1917 "Against Federalism", there is an opposition of the federal structure and there is a note at the end of the article, affixed perhaps in 1920, wherein he explains as to how the position of Bolshevik Party changed regarding the federal structure.

In this article Stalin says that the regions of Russia (border regions) were already tied to the Central Russia through economic and political bonds and more Russia grows powerful, more these bonds will be stronger. In such a situation, to turn Russia into a federation would definitely break these bonds "which would be completely illogical and reactionary."

He says,

"Isn't this obvious that federalism in Russia can't solve the national problem and such Quixote like attempts to turn the wheel of history backwards will only make this issue more complex?"

In the note given at the end, Stalin talks about the changing attitude of party regarding federal structure.

He says that this article has unapproving attitude towards the federal structure of the state, the attitude which was dominant in the party at that time. He quotes Lenin's letter to S.G. Shahumyan (see above) to clarify the party's attitude dominant at that time. The resolution passed at the Bolshevik Party Conference held in April 1917 does not mention the federal structure.

Stalin says that Lenin, for the first time in his book 'State and Revolution' (August 1917) took a serious step towards approval of federal structure as a transitional form towards "one centralised republic". Though there were many conditions involved in it. Lenin writes in this book,

"Approaching the matter from the point of view of the proletariat and the proletarian revolution, Engels, like Marx, upheld democratic centralism, the republic — one and

indivisible. He regarded the federal republic either as an exception and a hindrance to development, or as a transitional form from a monarchy to a centralized republic, as a 'step forward' under certain special conditions. And, as one of these special conditions, he mentions the national question. . . . Even in regard to England, where geographical conditions, a common language and the history of many centuries would seem to have 'put an end' to the national question in the separate small divisions of England—even in regard to that country, Engels reckoned with the patent fact that the national question was not yet a thing of the past, and recognized in consequence that the establishment of a federal republic would be a 'step forward.' Of course, there is not the slightest hint here of Engels abandoning the criticism of the shortcomings of a federal republic or that he abandoned the most determined propaganda and struggle for a unified and centralized democratic republic”

*(Quoted by Stalin in his article 'Against Federalism', March 28, 1917)*

Further Stalin writes that only after the October revolution did Bolshevik Party adopt the position of a federal state, furthered it as a plan to construct the Soviet republic, during the transitional period. This position appeared for the first time in January 1918 in the 'Declaration Of Rights Of The Working And Exploited People' which was written by Lenin and approved by Party's central committee. This declaration says,

“The Russian Soviet Republic is established on the principle of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics.”

Officially, Bolshevik Party in it's Eighth Congress (1919) stamped it. This Congress passed the program of the Communist Party of Russia. Program says,

“The party recommends as a transitional form towards complete unity, the federal unificaton of states organised on soviet models.”

Stalin gives three reasons for the changed position of Party, from rejecting the federal structure to approval of federal structure as a

transitional form towards complete unity of labouring masses of different nationalities,

“First, the fact that at the time of the October Revolution a number of the nationalities of Russia were actually in a state of complete secession and complete isolation from one another, and, in view of this, federation represented a step forward from the division of the working masses of these nationalities to their closer union, their amalgamation.

Secondly, the fact that the very forms of federation which suggested themselves in the course of Soviet development proved by no means so contradictory to the aim of closer economic unity between the working masses of the nationalities of Russia as might have appeared formerly, and even did not contradict this aim at all, as was subsequently demonstrated in practice.

**Thirdly, the fact that the national movement proved to be far more weighty a factor, and the process of amalgamation of nations far more complicated a matter than might have appeared formerly, in the period prior to the war, or in the period prior to the October Revolution.”**

*(Stalin, Against Federalism)*

## **Formation of administrative units on the basis of national composition of population – a step towards eliminating national oppression**

In their time, Marx and Engels had advocated for the reunification of the fragmented nations. They championed the cause of restoration of Poland (which had been divided by different countries) and of the unification of Germany. Because Marx and Engels were German, therefore when they upheld the unification of Germany, their opponents labeled them as German chauvinists.

In India too, the question of unification on the basis of national

population is unsolved. The British colonialists divided Punjab and Bengal during the independence of India. Soon after that, Indian and Pakistani rulers divided Kashmir among themselves. Though states were formed on the linguistic basis in India, but still this question remains unsolved in Punjab, North-East and other regions of country. When we talk of unification of different nations, then the Marxists bearing class-reductionists deviations label us as national chauvinists. It is sometimes the case with some Marxists that they don't have anything except the labels. That's why it is their chief concern to slam labels on others. They are not ready to uphold any question relating to the oppressed nations of India. So, leaving them aside, it would be better to focus on what the founders of Marxism have taught us regarding the unification of nations ?

Above we have given the reference of Engels wherein he says that the map of Europe is yet to be finally decided and he opines that the true and natural boundaries "are decided by the language and sympathies". On this ground he advocated for the unification of nations.

Karl Kautsky has this to say on this matter,

"How is one then to constitute the individual nation?

The most obvious option would be to ascertain the region that each nation inhabited and guarantee them the self-administration of their own national affairs within this region. ....the nation cannot exist without a territory. It does not matter how many members of a nation live amongst other nationalities, but the core of the nation must live permanently in an enclosed territory. The life of its linguistic culture is concentrated here and in the absence of a permanent influx of people from this territory, and thus in the absence of a permanent impact of its linguistic culture, the scattered members of the nation would soon lose their community of language and their nationality."

*(Karl Kautsky, Nationality and Internationalism, Part 2, ibid., p 154)*

Writing on the formation of administrative divisions according

to national composition of population, Lenin says,

“Social-Democrats, in upholding a consistently democratic state system, demand unconditional equality for all nationalities and struggle against absolutely all privileges for one or several nationalities...

Social-Democrats demand the abolition of the old administrative divisions of Russia established by the feudal landowners and the civil servants of the autocratic feudal state and their replacement by divisions based on the requirements of present-day economic life and **in accordance**, as far as possible, **with the national composition of the population**.

All areas of the state that are distinguished by social peculiarities or by the national composition of the population, must enjoy wide self-government and autonomy, with institutions organised on the basis of universal, equal and secret voting.”

*(Lenin, Theses on the National Question, Vol 19, emphasis ours)*

At another place Lenin writes,

“The elimination of national oppression, if at all achievable in capitalist society, is possible only under a consistently democratic republican system and state administration that guarantee complete equality for all nations and languages, which provides such schools where instruction is given in all native languages and where there is no provision of any special rights to any nation, no fundamental law restricting the rights of national minorities.”

The Party demands broad regional autonomy, the abolition of supervision from above, the abolition of a compulsory official language, and the fixing of the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions in accordance with the economic and social conditions, **the national composition of the population**, and so forth, as assessed

by the local population itself.”

*(Lenin, Resolution on the National Question, The Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.))*

In May 1914, Lenin prepared the ‘Bill on the Equality of Nations and the Safeguarding of the Rights of National Minorities’ to present in the fourth Duma from Bolshevik side. In its first point itself, Lenin emphasised the formation of administrative units on the basis of national composition of population.

**“The boundaries of Russia’s administrative divisions, rural and urban (villages, volosts, uyezds, gubernias, parts and sections of towns, suburbs, etc.), shall be revised on the basis of a register of present-day economic conditions and the national composition of the population.”**

*(Lenin LCW, Vol 20, p 281, Emphasis ours )*

Lenin also opines that while forming the administrative units, national composition of population is an important factor but it is not the only one and not the most important factor. He states that to separate the cities of mixed populace, on the grounds of “national element”, from the adjacent countryside and areas, which economically are inclined towards it would be absurd and impossible. We can see it in the case of Chandigarh, for which the Marxists with class-reductionist deviations, advocate its separation from Punjab and handing it over to Delhi on the grounds that its “majority” population is non-Punjabi. We are giving the full reference of Lenin to make clear this whole context,

“It would, however, be inexcusable to forget that in advocating centralism we advocate exclusively **democratic** centralism. On this point all the philistines in general, and the nationalist philistines in particular (including the late Dragomanov[7]), have so confused the issue that we are obliged again and again to spend time clarifying it.

Far from precluding local self-government, with **autonomy** for regions having special economic and

social conditions, a distinct national composition of the population, and so forth, democratic centralism necessarily demands **both**. In Russia centralism is constantly confused with tyranny and bureaucracy. This confusion has naturally arisen from the history of Russia, but even so it is quite inexcusable for a Marxist to yield to it.

This can best be explained by a concrete example.

In her lengthy article “The National Question and Autonomy”,<sup>[2]</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, among many other curious errors (which we shall deal with below), commits the exceptionally curious one of trying **to restrict** the demand for autonomy to Poland alone.

But first let us see **how** she defines autonomy.

Rosa Luxemburg admits—and being a Marxist she is of course bound to admit—that all the major and important economic and political questions of capitalist society must be dealt with exclusively by the central parliament of the whole country concerned, not by the autonomous Diets of the individual regions. These questions include tariff policy, laws governing commerce and industry, transport and means of communication (railways, post, telegraph, telephone, etc.), the army, the taxation system, civil<sup>[3]</sup> and criminal law, the general principles of education (for example, the law on purely secular schools, on universal education, on the minimum programme, on democratic school management, etc.), the labour protection laws, and political liberties (right of association), etc., etc.

The autonomous Diets—on the basis of the general laws of the country—should deal with questions of purely local, regional, or national significance. Amplifying this idea in great—not to say excessive—detail, Rosa Luxemburg mentions, for example, the construction of local railways (No. 12, p. 149) and local highways (No. 14–15, p. 376), etc.

Obviously, one cannot conceive of a modern, truly

democratic state that did not grant such autonomy to every region having any appreciably distinct economic and social features, populations of a specific national composition, etc. The principle of centralism, which is essential for the development of capitalism, is not violated by this (local and regional) autonomy, but on the contrary is applied by it **democratically**, not bureaucratically. The broad, free and rapid development of capitalism would be impossible, or at least greatly impeded, by the **absence** of such autonomy, which **facilitates** the concentration of capital, the development of the productive forces, the unity of the bourgeoisie and the unity of the proletariat on a country-wide scale; for bureaucratic interference in **purely** local (regional, national, and other) questions is one of the greatest obstacles to economic and political development in general, and an obstacle to **centralism** in serious, important and fundamental matters in particular.

One cannot help smiling, therefore, when reading how our magnificent Rosa Luxemburg tries to prove, with a very serious air and “purely Marxist” phrases, that the demand for autonomy is applicable **only** to Poland and **only** by way of exception! Of course, there is not a grain of “parochial” patriotism in this; we have here only “practical” considerations ... in the case of Lithuania, for example.

Rosa Luxemburg takes four gubernias—Vilna, Kovno, Grodno and Suvalki—assuring her readers (and herself) that these are inhabited “mainly” by Lithuanians; and by adding the inhabitants of these gubernias together she finds that Lithuanians constitute 23 per cent of the total population, and if Zhmuds are added, they constitute 31 per cent—less than a third. The natural inference is that the idea of autonomy for Lithuania is “arbitrary and artificial” (No. 10, p. 807). The reader who is familiar with the commonly known defects of our Russian official statistics will quickly see Rosa

Luxemburg's mistake. Why take Grodno Gubernia where the Lithuanians constitute only 0.2 per cent, **one-fifth of one per cent**, of the population? Why take the whole Vilna Gubernia and not its Troki Uyezd alone, where the Lithuanians constitute the **majority** of the population? Why take the whole Suwalki Gubernia and put the number of Lithuanians at 52 per cent of the population, and not the Lithuanian uyezds of that gubernia, i. e., five out of the seven, in which Lithuanians constitute **72 per cent** of the population?

It is ridiculous to talk about the conditions and demands of modern capitalism while at the same time taking not the "modern", not the "capitalist", but the medieval, feudal and official-bureaucratic administrative divisions of Russia, and in their crudest form at that (gubernias instead of uyezds). Plainly, there can be no question of any serious local reform in Russia until these divisions are abolished and superseded by a **really** "modern" division that really meets the requirements, **not** of the Treasury, **not** of the bureaucracy, **not** of routine, **not** of the landlords, **not** of the priests, but of capitalism; and one of the modern requirements of capitalism is undoubtedly the greatest possible national uniformity of the population, for nationality and language identity are an important factor making for the complete conquest of the home market and for complete freedom of economic intercourse.

Oddly enough, this obvious mistake of Rosa Luxemburg's is repeated by the Bundist Medem, who sets out to prove, not that Poland's specific features are "exceptional", but that the principle of national-territorial autonomy is unsuitable (the Bundists stand for national extra-territorial autonomy!). Our Bundists and liquidators collect from all over the world all the errors and all the opportunist vacillations of Social-Democrats of different countries and different nations and appropriate to themselves the **worst** they

can find in world Social-Democracy. A scrap-book of Bundist and liquidator writings could, taken together, serve as a model Social-Democratic museum of **bad taste**.

Regional autonomy, Medem tells us didactically, is good for a region or a “territory”, but not for Lettish, Estonian, or other areas (okrugs), which have populations ranging from half a million to two million and areas equal to a gubernia. **“That would not be autonomy, but simply a Zemstvo....** Over this Zemstvo it would be necessary to establish real autonomy” ... and the author goes on to condemn the “break-up” of the old gubernias and uyezds.[4]

As a matter of fact, the preservation of the medieval, feudal, official administrative divisions means the “break up” and mutilation of the conditions of modern capitalism. Only people imbued with the spirit of these divisions can, with the learned air of the expert, speculate on the contra-position of “Zemstvo” and “autonomy”, calling for the stereotyped application of “autonomy” to large regions and of the Zemstvo to small ones. Modern capitalism does not demand these bureaucratic stereotypes at all. Why national areas with populations, not only of half a million, but even of 50,000, should not be able to enjoy autonomy; why such areas should not be able to unite in the most diverse ways with neighbouring areas of different dimensions into a single autonomous “territory” if that is convenient or necessary for economic intercourse—these things remain the secret of the Bundist Medem.

We would mention that the Brunn Social-Democratic national programme is based entirely on national-territorial autonomy; it proposes that Austria should be divided into “nationally distinct” areas “instead of the historical crown lands” (Clause 2 of the Brunn programme). We would not go as far as that. A uniform national population is undoubtedly one of the most reliable factors making for free, broad and

really modern commercial intercourse. It is beyond doubt that not a single Marxist, and not even a single firm democrat, will stand up for the Austrian crown lands and the Russian gubernias and uyezds (the latter are not as bad as the Austrian crown lands, but they are very bad nevertheless), or challenge the necessity of replacing these obsolete divisions by others that will conform as far as possible with the national composition of the population, **Lastly, it is beyond doubt that in order to eliminate all national oppression it is very important to create autonomous areas, however small, with entirely homogeneous populations, towards which members of the respective nationalities scattered all over the country, or even all over the world, could gravitate, and with which they could enter into relations and free associations of every kind. All this is indisputable, and can be argued against only from the hidebound, bureaucratic point of view**

**The national composition of the population, however, is *one* of the very important economic factors, *but not the sole and not the most important factor.* Towns, for example, play an *extremely important* economic role under capitalism, and everywhere, in Poland, in Lithuania, in the Ukraine, in Great Russia, and elsewhere, the towns are marked by mixed populations. To cut the towns off from the villages and areas that economically gravitate towards them, for the sake of the “national” factor, would be absurd and impossible. That is why Marxists must not take their stand entirely and exclusively on the “national-territorial” principle.**

The solution of the problem proposed by the last conference of Russian Marxists is far more correct than the Austrian. On this question, the conference advanced the following proposition:

“...must provide for wide regional autonomy (not for

Poland alone, of course, but for all the regions of Russia][5] and fully democratic local self-government, and the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions must be determined [not by the boundaries of the present gubernias, uyezds, etc., but] by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question)*

We will end the discussion on formation of administrative units according to the national composition of population with another reference of Lenin,

“The German chauvinist Lensch, in the articles we mentioned in Thesis 5 (footnote),[3] quoted an interesting passage from Engels’s article “The Po and the Rhine”. Amongst other things, Engels says in this article that in the course of historical development, which swallowed up a number of small and non-viable nations, the “frontiers of great and viable European nations” were being increasingly determined by the “language and sympathies” of the population. Engels calls these frontiers “natural”. [19] Such was the case in the period of progressive capitalism in Europe, roughly from 1848 to 1871. Today, these democratically determined frontiers are more and more often being **broken** down by reactionary, imperialist capitalism. There is every sign that imperialism will leave its successor, socialism, a heritage of less democratic frontiers, a number: of annexations in Europe and in other parts of the world. Is it to be supposed that victorious socialism, restoring and implementing full democracy all along the line, will refrain from democratically demarcating state frontiers and ignore the “sympathies” of the population? Those questions need only be stated to make it quite clear that our Polish colleagues are sliding down from Marxism towards imperialist Economism.

The old Economists, who made a caricature of Marxism, told the workers that “only the economic” was of importance to Marxists. The new Economists seem to think either that the democratic state of victorious socialism will exist without frontiers (like a “complex of sensations” without matter) or that frontiers will be delineated “only” in accordance with the needs of production. In actual fact its frontiers will be delineated democratically, i.e., in accordance with the will and “sympathies” of the population. Capitalism rides roughshod over these sympathies, adding more obstacles to the rapprochement of nations. Socialism, by organising production without class oppression, by ensuring the well-being of all members of the state, gives full play to the “sympathies” of the population, thereby promoting and greatly accelerating the drawing together and fusion of the nations. To give the reader a rest from the heavy and clumsy Economism let us quote the reasoning of a socialist writer who is outside our dispute. That writer is Otto Bauer, who also has his own “pet little point”—“cultural and national autonomy”—but who argues quite correctly on a large number of most important questions. For example, in Chapter 29 of his book *The National Question and Social-Democracy*, he was doubly right in noting the use of national ideology to cover up **imperialist** policies. In Chapter 30, “Socialism and the Principle of Nationality”, he says:

“The socialist community will never be able to include whole nations within its make-up by the use of force. Imagine the masses of the people, enjoying the blessings of national culture, baking a full and active part in legislation and government, and, finally, supplied with arms—would it be possible to subordinate such a nation to the rule of an alien social organism by force? All state power rests on the force of arms. The present-day people’s army, thanks to an ingenious mechanism, still constitutes a tool in the hands of

a definite person, family or class exactly like the knightly and mercenary armies of the past. The army of the democratic community of a socialist society is nothing but the people armed, since it consists of highly cultured persons, working without compulsion in socialised workshops and taking full part in all spheres of political life. In such conditions any possibility of alien rule disappears.”

This is true. It is **impossible** to abolish national (or any other political) oppression under capitalism, since this **requires** the abolition of classes, i.e., the introduction of socialism. But while being based on economics, socialism cannot be reduced to economics alone. A foundation—socialist production—is essential for the abolition of national oppression, but this foundation must also carry a democratically organised state, a democratic army, etc. By transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the **possibility** of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes reality “only”—“only”!—with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the “sympathies” of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this, in turn, will serve as a basis for developing the practical elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations that will be completed when the state **withers away**. This is the Marxist theory, the theory from which our Polish colleagues have mistakenly departed.”  
*(Lenin, The discussion on self-determination summed up, LCW, Volume 22, Emphasis ours)*

## Question of Language

“Language is the most important medium for human interaction”  
(Lenin). Language is an important factor in the building of a nation. The

above quoted reference of Stalin wherein he defines the nation, he gives six characteristics of a nation in which language occupies an important place. In order to destroy a nation, to make it subservient, it is necessary for the oppressors to crush their language, to eliminate it. Though often the oppressors fail in their attempts. Marxists have always upheld the equality of languages, they have opposed the attempts of the state to give special preference to any single language.

The flag bearer of the equality of nations and languages, Comrade Lenin, writes,

“The elimination of national oppression, if at all achievable in capitalist society, is possible only under a consistently democratic republican system and state administration that guarantee complete equality for all nations and languages, which provides such schools where instruction is given in all native languages and where there is no provision of any special rights to any nation, no fundamental law restricting the rights of national minorities.”

(Lenin, Resolution on the National Question, April 1917)

And,

“Recognition of the equality of nations and languages is important to Marxists, not only because they are the most consistent democrats. The interests of proletarian solidarity and comradely unity in the workers’ class struggle call for the fullest equality of nations with a view to removing every trace of national distrust, estrangement, suspicion and enmity. And full equality implies the repudiation of all privileges for any one language and the recognition of the right of self-determination for all nations.”

(*Lenin, Corrupting the Workers with Refined Nationalism, Volume 20, page 290*)

Lenin cites the example of Switzerland as an example of equality of languages, which we have already discussed.

In his article “Is a Compulsory official language needed?” Lenin opposes the idea of having a single official language in a multinational

country. He opines that in a multinational country as Russia, having single official language would mean the imposition of ‘Great Russians’, which are a minority of the total population of Russia, on the remaining population. He opines that the Russian is a great and powerful language, it is powerful and great language of the likes of Turgenev, Dobryulov, Tolstoy and Cherneshvesky. We are in favour of this that every citizen of Russia gets the opportunity of learning this great language but it should be a willful choice, not by coercion. If Russian is made the compulsory official language then it would entail the element of coercion in it. Therefore Marxists opine that no language should be the official language. (See, LCW, Vol 20, pages 71-73)

Same views are expressed again by Lenin in his letter to SG Shahumyan (See LCW, Vol 19, page 499).

But the ideas of Lenin are applicable to a multinational country, not to a single nation country or in a single nation region of a multinational country. There must not be a single official language in a multinational country because it would mean language based oppression on the other nationalities residing in the country. But in a specific nation of a country, that particular language of the nation can be official language or, to say, it should be the official language. The languages of the different republics which were part of the Soviet Union enjoyed the status of official languages of their respective nations. The Russian part of the Socialist Soviet Union had Russian as its official language.

Stalin writes in this regard,

“The policy of tsarism, the policy of the landlords and the bourgeoisie towards these peoples (various nations residing in Russia – author), was to kill whatever germs of statehood existed among them, to mutilate their culture, to restrict their languages, to keep them in ignorance, and lastly, as far as possible to Russify them. The result of this policy was the underdevelopment and political backwardness of these peoples.

Now that the landlords and the bourgeoisie have been overthrown...the Party’s task is to help the labouring masses

of the non-Great-Russian peoples to catch up with central Russia, which has forged ahead, to help them:

**a) to develop and strengthen their Soviet statehood in forms corresponding to the national complexion of these peoples;**

**b) to set up their courts, administration, economic organisations and organs of power, functioning in the native languages and staffed with local people familiar with the manner of life and the mentality of the local population;**

**c) to develop their press, schools, theatres, recreation clubs, and cultural and educational institutions generally, functioning in the native languages.**

*(Stalin, The Immediate task of the Party in the National Question, Theses for the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.) Endorsed by the Central Committee of the Party, February 10, 1921, emphasis ours)*

Stalin also says that any particular region is not absolutely unitary nation, there are people of other nationalities residing there too, as for example Jewish in Poland, Letts in Lithuania, Russians in Caucasia, Poles in Ukraine etc. They form the national minorities here. These national minorities must have the right to use their language. (See Stalin, Marxism and the National Language, page 76-77)

Lenin too has expressed similar thoughts in this regard.

## **On Link language**

Different nations, speaking different languages, also need to interact with each other. They do so via the link language. Such a link language develops on it's own through the needs of economic exchange. Marxists don't oppose the development of such a link language developed via such a process. Lenin writes,

“Russkoye Slovo[6] (No. 198), one of the most widely

circulating liberal newspapers in Russia, points to this fact and draws the correct conclusion that the hostility towards the Russian language in Russia “stems exclusively from” the “artificial” (it should have said “forced”) implanting of that language.

“There is no reason to worry about the fate of the Russian language. It will itself win recognition throughout Russia,” says the newspaper. This is perfectly true, because the requirements of economic exchange will always compel the nationalities living in one state (as long as they wish to live together) to study the language of the majority. The more democratic the political system in Russia becomes, the more powerfully, rapidly and extensively capitalism will develop, the more urgently will the requirements of economic exchange impel various nationalities to study the language most convenient for general commercial relations.

The liberal newspaper, however, hastens to slap itself in the face and demonstrate its liberal inconsistency.

“Even those who oppose Russification,” it says, “would hardly be likely to deny that in a country as huge as Russia there must be one single official language, and that this language can be only Russian.”

Logic turned inside out! Tiny Switzerland has not lost anything, but has gained from having not one single official language, but three—German, French and Italian. In Switzerland 70 per cent of the population are Germans (in Russia 43 per cent are Great Russians), 22 per cent French (in Russia 17 per cent are Ukrainians) and 7 per cent Italians (in Russia 6 per cent are Poles and 4.5 per cent Byelorussians). If Italians in Switzerland often speak French in their common parliament they do not do so because they are menaced by some savage police law (there are none such in Switzerland), but because the civilised citizens of a democratic state themselves prefer a language that is

understood by a majority. The French language does not instill hatred in Italians because it is the language of a free civilised nation, a language that is not imposed by disgusting police measures.

Why should “huge” Russia, a much more varied and terribly backward country, inhibit her development by the retention of any kind of privilege for any one language? Should not the, contrary he true, liberal gentlemen? Should not Russia, if she wants to overtake Europe, put an end to every kind of privilege as quickly as possible, as completely as possible and as vigorously as possible?

If all privileges disappear, if the imposition of any one language ceases, all Slavs will easily and rapidly learn to understand each other and will not be frightened by the “horrible” thought that speeches in different languages will be heard in the common parliament. The requirements of economic exchange will themselves decide which language of the given country it is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations. This decision will be all the firmer because it is adopted voluntarily by a population of various nationalities, and its adoption will be the more rapid and extensive the more consistent the democracy and, as a consequence of it, the more rapid the development of capitalism.”

*(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question, Vol 20)*

In the above quote reference, Lenin says that “The requirements of economic exchange will themselves decide which language of the given country it is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations”. Here Lenin is pointing to the link language. To learn, study the link language does not mean that any nation disposes off it’s own language and adopt the link language as their own mother tongue. This can only be an exception. Only a minor section of a nation can, in specific circumstances can temporarily do so.

## **Language and sub-language or dialect**

Stalin says that language is directly connected with all the activities of humans including the productive activities.

Language is a medium, a tool by which humans interact with each other, exchange ideas, understand each other. Productive activity is impossible in a society without language. In the absence of a language which is understood by the members of a society, the production would cease, society will be disrupted and its existence as a society would perish. Therefore, language is not just a medium of interaction but also a medium of struggle and for the development of society.

In the process of social development, the clan languages develop into tribal languages, tribal languages develop into languages of nationalities and nationalities languages develop into nations.

Capitalist development ends feudal fragmentation, national markets come into being, nationalities develop into nations. Thereby, the languages of nationalities become languages of nations. Sub-languages or dialects merge into one national language. Stalin mentions two forms of dialects, one “class” and other “regional” dialects. Stalin opines that “class” dialects can’t become separate, independent national languages. And also, in general, “regional” languages too can’t develop into independent, separate national languages. But some of these, under special circumstances cant develop into independent national languages.

We will try to clarify this point with Stalin’s reference,

“It is not difficult to understand that in a society which has no classes there can be no such thing as a class language. There were no classes in the primitive communal clan system, and consequently there could be no class language — the language was then the single and common language of the whole community. The objection that the concept class should be taken as covering every human community, including the primitive communal community, is not an objection but a playing with words that is not worth refuting.

As to the subsequent development from clan languages to tribal languages, from tribal languages to the languages of

nationalities, and from the languages of nationalities to national languages — everywhere and at all stages of development, language, as a means of intercourse between the people of a society, was the common and single language of that society, serving its members equally, irrespective of their social status. I am not referring here to the empires of the slave and mediaeval periods, the empires of Cyrus or Alexander the Great, let us say, or of Caesar or Charles the Great, which had no economic foundations of their own and were transient and unstable military and administrative associations. Not only did these empires not have, they could not have had a single language common to the whole empire and understood by all the members of the empire. They were conglomerations of tribes and nationalities, each of which lived its own life and had its own language. Consequently, it is not these or similar empires I have in mind, but the tribes and nationalities composing them, which had their own economic foundations and their own languages, evolved in the distant past. History tells us that the languages of these tribes and nationalities were not class languages, but languages common to the whole of a tribe or nationality, and understood by all its people.

Side by side with this, there were, of course, dialects, local vernaculars, but they were dominated by and subordinated to the single and common language of the tribe or nationality.

Later, with the appearance of capitalism, the elimination of feudal division and the formation of national markets, nationalities developed into nations, and the languages of nationalities into national languages. History shows that national languages are not class, but common languages, common to all the members of each nation and constituting the single language of that nation.

It has been said above that language, as a means of intercourse between the people of a society, serves all classes

of society equally, and in this respect displays what may be called an indifference to classes. But people, the various social groups, the classes, are far from being indifferent to language. They strive to utilize the language in their own interests, to impose their own special lingo, their own special terms, their own special expressions upon it. The upper strata of the propertied classes, who have divorced themselves from and detest the people — the aristocratic nobility, the upper strata of the bourgeoisie — particularly distinguish themselves in this respect. “Class” dialects, jargons, high-society “languages” are created. These dialects and jargons are often incorrectly referred to in literature as languages — the “aristocratic language” or the “bourgeois language” in contradistinction to the “proletarian language” or the “peasant language.” For this reason, strange as it may seem, some of our comrades have come to the conclusion that national language is a fiction, and that only class languages exist in reality.

There is nothing, I think, more erroneous than this conclusion. Can These dialects and jargons be regarded as languages? Certainly not. They cannot, firstly, because these dialects and jargons have no grammatical systems or basic word stocks of their own — they borrow them from the national language. They cannot, secondly, because these dialects and jargons are confined to a narrow sphere, are current only among the upper strata of a given class and are entirely unsuitable as a means of human intercourse for society as a whole. What, then, have they? They have a collection of specific words reflecting the specific tastes of the aristocracy or the upper strata of the bourgeoisie; a certain number of expressions and turns of phrase distinguished by refinement and gallantry and free of the “coarse” expressions and turns of phrase of the national language; lastly, a certain number of foreign words. But all the fundamentals, that is,

the overwhelming majority of the words and the grammatical system, are borrowed from the common, national language. Dialects and jargons are therefore offshoots of the common national language, devoid of all linguistic independence and doomed to stagnation. To believe that dialects and jargons can develop into independent languages capable of ousting and supplanting the national language means losing one's sense of historical perspective and abandoning the Marxist position. References are made to Marx, and the passage from his article St. Max is quoted which says that the bourgeois have "their own language," that this language "is a product of the bourgeoisie" [2] that it is permeated with the spirit of mercantilism and huckstering. Certain comrades cite this passage with the idea of proving that Marx believed in the "class character" of language and denied the existence of a single national language. If these comrades were impartial, they should have cited another passage from this same article St. Max, where Marx, touching on the ways single national languages arose, speaks of "the concentration of dialects into a single national language resulting from economic and political concentration." [3]

Marx, consequently, did recognize the necessity of a single national language, as a higher form, to which dialects, as lower forms, are subordinate."

*(Stalin, Marxism and the problems of Linguistics, pages 10-13, Foreign Language Press, Peking 1976)*

" "Class" dialects, which it would be more correct to call jargons, do not serve the mass of the people, but a narrow social upper crust. Moreover, they do not have a grammatical system or basic word stock of their own. In view of this, they cannot possibly develop into independent languages.

Local ("territorial") dialects, on the other hand, serve the mass of the people and have a grammatical system and basic word stock of their own. In view of this, some local

dialects, in the process of formation of nations, may become the basis of national languages and develop into independent national languages. This was the case, for instance, with the Kursk-Orel dialect (the Kursk-Orel “speech”) of the Russian language, which formed the basis of the Russian national language. The same must be said of the Poltava-Kiev dialect of the Ukrainian language, which formed the basis of the Ukrainian national language. As for the other dialects of such languages, they lose their originality, merge with those languages and disappear in them.

Reverse processes also occur, when the single language of a nationality, which has not yet become a nation owing to the absence of the necessary economic conditions of development, collapses as a result of the disintegration of the state of that nationality, and the local dialects, which have not yet had time to be fully uniformized in the single language, revive and give rise to the formation of separate independent languages. Possibly, this was the case, for example, with the single Mongolian language.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the problems of Linguistics, pages 41-42, Foreign Language Press, Peking 1976)*

When the dialects develop into national languages, become one with it, then there remains no separate vocabulary, no separate grammatical system. There is only a difference of few words and a different accent of speaking. Dialect does not have separate existence after it has merged with the national language. The entire collective of all these dialects is what makes the national language. As for example there are many dialects of Punjabi. According to Punjabi University, Patiala, there are 29 dialects of Punjabi language. The entire whole of these dialects is what is Punjabi language or the national language of Punjab. It can't be said that this particular is the Punjabi language and this one is it's dialect.

The scientific basis of the language-dialect divide is mutual intelligibility, which means if speakers of two dialect forms can

understand each other without training, then those are the dialects of same language.

If we pay attention to the languages of the so-called Hindi belt from this criteria, we find that the rulers of Delhi have forcefully declared many languages to be mere dialects of Hindi. Initially it were the British Colonialists which annihilated people's languages in this area (and in other areas of the country too). Since 1947, Delhi rulers continued this policy of linguistic enmity. Today, the class-reductionist Marxists have become vocal supporters of such a policy of linguistic discrimination. The Delhi rulers and class-reductionist Marxists are declaring many languages of the so-called Hindi belt to be dialects of Hindi, whereas, the reality is that the language being spoken in one part of this whole area is completely incomprehensible to the speakers of the other area. The question that beg the answer is as to why the scientific basis of mutual intelligibility is not applicable on the so-called dialects ? Here, only this much discussion is possible on the language question. Further in the article we will discuss about how the language question was understood in the Soviet Union.

## **Is self-determination of nations possible under the capitalist imperialist system ?**

The class-reductionist Marxists answer this question in the negative. They are of the opinion that the national issues will only be resolved in the socialism, therefore the nations which fight against national oppression should put on hold their struggles. They should fight on the general issues of "education and employment", stalling the struggle for national independence. They warn the oppressed nations of the brutality of Indian armed regime which will not allow their struggles to be successful. They are of the view that the struggles against national oppression in India would derail the socialist revolution in India! They have pronounced nationalism as decayed corpse. They don't see any progressive element in the struggle of oppressed nations against national oppression.

Let us look at how the founders of Marxism, especially Comrade Lenin and Stalin saw this question.

Lenin writes,

“It would be no less mistaken to delete any of the points of the democratic programme, for example, the point of self-determination of nations, on the ground that it is “infeasible,” or that it is “illusory” under imperialism. The assertion that the right of nations to self-determination cannot be achieved within the framework of capitalism may be understood either in its absolute, economic sense, or in the conventional, political sense.

In the first case, the assertion is fundamentally wrong in theory. First, in this sense, it is impossible to achieve such things as labour money, or the abolition of crises, etc., under capitalism. But it is entirely incorrect to argue that the self-determination of nations is likewise infeasible. Secondly, even the one example of the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905 is sufficient to refute the argument that it is “infeasible” in this sense. Thirdly, it would be ridiculous to deny that, with a slight change in political and strategical relationships, for example, between Germany and England, the formation of new states, Polish, Indian, etc, would be quite “feasible” very soon. Fourthly, finance capital, in its striving towards expansion, will “freely” buy and bribe the freest, most democratic and republican government and the elected officials of any country, however “independent” it may be. The domination of finance capital, as of capital in general, cannot be abolished by any kind of reforms in the realm of political democracy, and self-determination belongs wholly and exclusively to this realm. The domination of finance capital, however, does not in the least destroy the significance of political democracy as the freer, wider and more distinct form of class oppression and class struggle. Hence, all arguments about the “impossibility of achieving”

economically one of the demands of political democracy under capitalism reduce themselves to a theoretically incorrect definition of the general and fundamental relations of capitalism and of political democracy in general.

In the second case, this assertion is incomplete and inaccurate, for not only the right of nations to self-determination, but **all** the fundamental demands of political democracy are “possible of achievement” under imperialism, only in an incomplete, in a mutilated form and as a rare exception (for example, the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905). The demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies, as advanced by all revolutionary Social-Democrats, is also “impossible of achievement” under capitalism without a series of revolutions. This does not imply, however, that Social Democracy must refrain from conducting an immediate and most determined struggle for all these demands—to refrain would merely be to the advantage of the bourgeoisie and reaction. On the contrary, it implies that it is necessary to formulate and put forward all these demands, not in a reformist, but in a revolutionary way; not by keeping within the framework of bourgeois legality, but by breaking through it; not by confining oneself to parliamentary speeches and verbal protests, but by drawing the masses into real action, by widening and fomenting the struggle for every kind of fundamental, democratic demand, right up to and including the direct onslaught of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, i.e., to the socialist revolution, which will expropriate the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may break out not only in consequence of a great strike, a street demonstration, a hunger riot, a mutiny in the forces, or a colonial rebellion, but also in consequence of any political crisis, like the Dreyfus affair,[4] the Zabern incident,[5] or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc.

The intensification of national oppression under imperialism makes it necessary for Social-Democracy not to renounce what the bourgeoisie describes as the “utopian” struggle for the freedom of nations to secede, but, on the contrary, to take more advantage than ever before of conflicts arising also on this ground for the purpose of rousing mass action and revolutionary attacks upon the bourgeoisie.”

*(Lenin, The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, Vol 22)*

In a reference we had earlier given, Lenin had said that in a capitalist society, only to a limited extent is national peace possible, that too in a completely democratic republics.

Lenin frequently cites the example of Switzerland as an example of equality of languages and national peace in capitalism. Those Marxists, who reject national oppression in India, especially in “mainland” India, do they consider India as a “completely democratic republic”? Is India that Switzerland whose example Lenin cites? In context of the national question, Switzerland should be seen as an exception in the present imperialist-capitalist system. In the rest of the world, there is probably no such capitalist multinational country where there is no national struggle for autonomy, self-determination etc.

We know that in a post colonial country as India, where after 1947 the feudal relations were transformed via Junker path, the democracy is too narrow. We can’t deny the existence of national oppression in such a country. National oppression can only be eliminated when the nations enjoy the right to self-determination and there is a voluntary union of different nations in a multinational country.

Explaining the attitude of Marx towards the independence of Ireland, Lenin says that initially Marx understood that Ireland would be independent not by it’s own national struggle but by the working class movement of England. But later on he had changed his position. Lenin writes,

“At first Marx thought that Ireland would not be

liberated by the national movement of the oppressed nation, but by the working-class movement of the oppressor nation. Marx did not make an Absolute of the national movement, knowing, as he did, that only the victory of the working class can bring about the complete liberation of all nationalities. It is impossible to estimate beforehand all the possible relations between the bourgeois liberation movements of the oppressed nations and the proletarian emancipation movement of the oppressor nation (the very problem which today makes the national question in Russia so difficult).

However, it so happened that the English working class fell under the influence of the liberals for a fairly long time, became an appendage to the liberals, and by adopting a liberal-labour policy left itself leaderless. The bourgeois liberation movement in Ireland grew stronger and assumed revolutionary forms. Marx reconsidered his view and corrected it. "What a misfortune it is for a nation to have subjugated another." The English working class will never be free until Ireland is freed from the English yoke. Reaction in England is strengthened and fostered by the enslavement of Ireland (just as reaction in Russia is fostered by her enslavement of a number of nations!)."

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, LCW Vol 20)*

Marx and Engels in their day had supported the restoration of Poland. In 1896 Kautsky emphasized that the Polish Social-democrats should include the demand of restoration of Poland in their program. In 1902 Franz Mehring opposed it. He was of the view that now the conditions have changed. Now the proletariat of Poland needs to unite with the proletariat of the three countries which have occupied Poland. It's interest clearly demand that in those three states, in which Poland has been divided, Polish workers should unconditionally unite with their class comrades and struggle.

"The times are past when a bourgeois revolution could

create a free Poland: today the renaissance of Poland is possible only through a social revolution, in the course of which the modern proletariat will break its chains.” (*Mehring’s quote, cited by Lenin in his The National Question in Our Programme, LCW Vol 6, p 457*)

Subscribing to Mehring’s thoughts, Lenin remarks,

“We fully subscribe to Mehring’s conclusion. We shall only remark that this conclusion remains unassailable even if we do not go as far as Mehring in our arguments. With out any doubt the present state of the Polish question differs radically from that which obtained fifty years ago. **However, the present situation cannot be regarded as permanent. Class antagonism has now undoubtedly relegated national questions far into the background, but, without the risk of lapsing into doctrinairism, it cannot be categorically asserted that some particular national question cannot appear temporarily in the foreground of the political drama. No doubt, the restoration of Poland prior to the fall of capitalism is highly improbable, but it cannot be asserted that it is absolutely impossible, or that circumstances may not arise under which the Polish bourgeoisie will take the side of independence, etc. And Russian Social-Democracy does not in the least intend to tie its own hands. In including in its programme recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, it takes into account all possible, and even all conceivable, combinations. That programme in no way precludes the adoption by the Polish proletariat of the slogan of a free and independent Polish republic, even though the probability of its becoming a reality before socialism is introduced is infinitesimal.**”

*(ibid, p 457-458, emphasis ours)*

We can see the far-sightedness of Lenin in the above quote. He says that it is not impossible that the Polish bourgeoisie won’t ever take

side of independence in future. The Polish bourgeoisie again upheld the banner of Polish independence around the February revolution in Russia. After the October revolution, Russia approved of the independence of Poland.

From the above mentioned quote of Mehring, to which Lenin gave his approval, it is clear that it is not necessary in a multi-nation country that the liberation of a nation is only possible through democratic revolution. Liberation can be won by the social revolution (which can only mean a socialist revolution) brought by the unity of proletariat of an oppressed nation and of oppressing nation. It is not necessary that proletariat will of certain go into an alliance with the bourgeoisie for the liberation of it's country or nation. It is also clear from the above quote that if at a particular moment the bourgeoisie of a nation did not bear the flag of independence, it does not mean so that it will never do it again.

Mehring's above quote and Lenin's discussion on it creates problem for those Marxists who claim that any nation can considered to be oppressed, only if their bourgeoisie is oppressed (In actual, Marxism teaches us that it can be or it can't be the case). According to their it would be a funny situation, as when Marx-Engels and Kautsky supported the restoration of Poland, then Poland was an oppressed nation (including bourgeoisie), when Mehring opined that now only the proletariat will break the chains of slavery of Poland, then Poland did not remain oppressed nation (including bourgeoisie) and then when Lenin opined that in future certain conditions can arise that Polish bourgeoisie again takes the side of liberation of Poland (and it came to be so) then Poland along with its bourgeoisie became oppressed again! Such is the ridiculous fate of those Marxists who are unable to understand the national question.

In this very article ('National Question in our Program'), Lenin writes that 'Polish Socialist Party', victim of a nationalist deviation, only has concerns regarding the independence of Poland. Thereby it weakens the alliance of Polish proletariat with he workers of German, Russian, Austrian nation. "This is nothing more than sacrificing the most vital interests of the proletariat to the bourgeois-democratic

conception of national independence.” (ibid, p 459)

Lenin’s quote is also a lesson to those who assert that in a multinational India, to hold the view that a nation is oppressed must definitely lead to the task of national liberation through democratic revolution in alliance with one of the section of bourgeoisie. It can be so in a certain situation but it is not an absolute rule for communists.

Lenin writes,

“The P.S.P. takes the view that the national question is exhausted by the contrast—“we” (Poles) and “they” (Germans, Russians, etc.). The Social-Democrat, however, gives first place to the contrast—“we,” the proletarians, and “they,” the bourgeoisie. **“We,” the proletarians, have seen dozens of times how the bourgeoisie betrays the interests of freedom, motherland, language, and nation, when it is con fronted with the revolutionary proletariat.”**

*(Lenin, The National Question in Our Programme, p 460, emphasis ours)*

The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation is more fearful from the revolutionary proletariat. It is therefore not necessary that proletariat in all circumstances should ally with it. It is the stubbornness of class reductionist Marxists that oppressed nation must be a flag bearer of national liberation, it must ally with a section of the bourgeoisie. By doing this, they in actuality impose the framework of 20th century colonial-semi colonial countries, on the national question of multinational countries. It is necessary to understand the difference between the national question of colonies, semi-colonies and that of multinational countries in order to correctly understand the national question. They should not be confused with one another.

Writing on the solution of national question within capitalism, Stalin writes,

“Only under the reign of socialism can peace be fully established. But even within the framework of capitalism it is possible to reduce the national struggle to a minimum, to undermine it at the root, to render it as harmless as possible

to the proletariat. This is borne out, for example, by Switzerland and America. It requires that the country should be democratized and the nations be given the opportunity of free development.”

(Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, p 27)

In changed circumstances of the first world war and later, the Bolshevik Party and then Communist International (Third) changed their positions regarding national question. Now the fate of national liberation movements in colonies, semi-colonies began to be linked with the fate of working class movement in developed capitalist countries, socialist revolutions. It was also stated that only by establishing soviet republics through abolishing the foreign occupation in colonial, semi-colonial countries can these nations be fully liberated.

Stalin writes,

“The Russian Marxists have always started out from the proposition that the national question is a part of the general question of the development of the revolution, that at different stages of the revolution the national question has different aims, corresponding to the character of the revolution at each given historical moment, and that the Party’s policy on the national question changes in conformity with this.

In the period preceding the First World War, when history made a bourgeois-democratic revolution the task of the moment in Russia, the Russian Marxists linked the solution of the national question with the fate of the democratic revolution in Russia. Our Party held that the overthrow of tsarism, the elimination of the survivals of feudalism, and the complete democratisation of the country provided the best solution of the national question that was possible within the framework of capitalism.

Such was the policy of the Party in that period.

It is to this period that Lenin’s well-known articles on the national question belong, including the article “Critical

Remarks on the National Question” where Lenin says :

“. . . I assert that there is only one solution of the national question, in so far as one is possible at all in the capitalist world—and that solution is consistent democratism. In proof, I would cite, among others, Switzerland” (vol. XVII, p. 150 6).

To this same period belongs Stalin’s pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question.*”

*(Stalin, National Question and Leninism)*

After this, Stalin quotes the same reference from his pamphlet which we have already given above, whereby he discusses the possibility of reducing the national strife and making it harmless for workers within capitalism. Further, he discusses the changed policy of the Party.

**“In the next period, the period of the First World War, when the prolonged war between the two imperialist coalitions undermined the might of world imperialism, when the crisis of the world capitalist system reached an extreme degree, when, alongside the working class of the “metropolitan countries,” the colonial and dependent countries also joined the movement for emancipation, when the national question grew into the national and colonial question, when the united front of the working class of the advanced capitalist countries and of the oppressed peoples of the colonies and dependent countries began to be a real force, when, consequently, the socialist revolution became the question of the moment, the Russian Marxists could no longer content themselves with the policy of the preceding period, and they found it necessary to link the solution of the national and colonial question with the fate of the socialist revolution.”**

*(ibid, emphasis ours)*

It is clear that the conditions which have been discussed in the above reference, that it was not eternal policy of Bolsheviks, it was a

product of special circumstances.

Lenin too presents such thoughts regarding the change in policy on national question under changed circumstances,

“Under the present international situation, there is no other path of liberation for the dependent, weak nations except the union of soviet republics...

From these fundamental premises it follows that the Communist International’s entire policy on the national and the colonial questions should rest primarily on a closer union of the proletarians and the working masses of all nations and countries for a joint revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landowners and the bourgeoisie. This union alone will guarantee victory over capitalism, without which the abolition of national oppression and inequality is impossible.”

*(Lenin, Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions For The Second Congress Of The Communist International, 5 June, 1920)*

During that period of world war which weakened the world imperialism, Socialist revolution in Russia became victorious, at that time when in many countries the struggles of workers and the liberation struggles in colonies, semi-colonies was heating up, at that time it was absolutely correct to connect the national liberation struggles with the struggle for socialism, with the establishment of soviet system, because socialist Russia and later on Soviet Union was the first country in world wherein socialism had eliminated the national oppression.

But we know in the situation after second world war, the colonial and semi-colonial countries one after the other became independent. Some of these countries became successful in doing so through the national liberation struggles under the leadership of communist parties. Here new democracies and people’s democracies were established, further on these countries embarked on the path to socialism. Alongside this process most of the countries became politically independent in the leadership of bourgeoisie and here bourgeois states were established. These countries did not become independent through socialism .

Therefore it is only the dogmatists that think that the Marxist policy on national question remains unchanged. Marxism teaches us the concrete decision making of concrete situations.

The Marxist policy on the national question is also dependent on this decision. In changed circumstances, Communists adopt changed policies.

## **National Question in Capitalist Multinational Countries**

National movements originate during the time of social transformation from feudalism to capitalism. The direction of these movements is towards the formation of a nation state. Due to national movements many nation states came into existence. But in certain specific historical conditions (we have discussed these under the heading ‘Multi national state’) multinational states too came into existence. Many such states, due to further capitalist development, disintegrated and changed into nation states. Multinational bourgeois state cannot resolve the contradictions of various nations. That is why, sooner or later, they are bound to disintegrate. But right now many multinational states are in existence. But almost in all these countries, there is an existence of national liberation movements at some or the other stage of advancement. India is one such country. The question arises as to what is the stage of revolution in such a multinational country, where capitalist production relations have become predominant and there exists a bourgeois democratic state, where nations do not have the right to self-determination (i.e., where national oppression is present)? Will the various nations separately carry out their national revolutions? Or can a socialist revolution take place in such a country? And can with a socialist revolution the national question be resolved in such countries and the nations be liberated, a voluntary union of nations come into existence? We hold that in such countries the national question can also be resolved through the socialist revolution. This we say only in the case of capitalist

multinational countries. This cannot be so in the case of colonial, semi-colonial countries. In the latter countries, national liberation is the first condition. Only then can such countries embark on the path to socialism (if these countries gain liberation in the leadership of the communist party). But we know that national question in this form had almost ceased to exist by the 60s and 70s of the last century.

We have discussed before the question of Poland. (See the sub-heading ‘Self-determination of nations’ and ‘Is the Self-determination of nations possible under the capitalist-imperialist system?’) Since the 1840s, Marx and Engels raised their voice for the unification and liberation of Poland, which was under the yoke of three countries. Fredrick Engels had said that until Poland is unified and liberated, working class movement cannot develop here.

Lenin had said that Marx and Engel’s position regarding Poland was correct from the 40’s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century only up til the three-quarters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When in most of the slavic countries independent movements of the proletariat emerged, aristocratic Poland vanished and capitalist Poland took its place then **the national question assumed secondary importance for the workers of Poland.** (Here it should be especially noted that such a situation can never arise in the colonial, semi-colonial countries that the question of national or country’s liberation assumes a secondary importance for the workers there). Lenin had said, with Mehring’s reference, that that time had passed when bourgeois revolution could construe an independent Poland, now the resurrection of Poland was possible only through social revolution. Lenin had said that class contradictions had, without a doubt, pushed the national question in Poland to a remote background, that the possibility of coming into existence of an independent Polish republic before socialism was almost nil.

In October 1917, Socialist revolution succeeded in multinational Russia, where many nations were victims of national oppression. This revolution gave independence (right to self-determination) to various oppressed nations. It constructed a voluntary union of various nations, a federal state.

Till February 1917, the stage of revolution in Russia was that of democratic revolution. At that time, the Bolshevik Party had one program of democratic revolution for the entire country, for the toilers of all nations residing in the country. Bolshevik party never stated that Russian toilers should undertake democratic revolution while the toilers of all other oppressed nations should embark on a national democratic revolution. Stalin says “In the period preceding the First World War, when history made a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution the task of the moment in Russia, the Russian Marxists linked the solution of the national question with the fate of the democratic revolution in Russia..” (National Question and Leninism)

After the overthrow of tsarist monarchy in February 1917, Russia entered the stage of socialist revolution. Now, the Bolshevik party had a program of socialist revolution for entire Russia (including oppressed nations).

Comrade Stalin, in his article ‘October Revolution and the Question of Middle Strata’ had written that. “The question of the middle strata is undoubtedly one of the basic questions of the workers’ revolution. The middle strata are the peasantry and the small urban working people. The oppressed nationalities, nine-tenths of whom consist of middle strata, should also be put in this category....The proletariat cannot retain power unless it enjoys the sympathy and support of the middle strata....The October Revolution proved that the proletariat can seize power and retain it, if it succeeds in wresting the middle strata, primarily the peasantry, from the capitalist class..”

In this article Comrade Stalin states that socialist revolution in Russia was victorious and was retained because the working class of Russia was able to win over, in Russia as well as the oppressed nationalities, the middle strata. Meaning that proletariat was able to achieve the socialist revolution in Russia only by the construction of the united front of three classes. In the oppressed nationalities too, the proletariat did not ally with any faction of the bourgeoisie (then it would have been the united front of four classes, which would have been the united front of democratic or national democratic revolution) for the united front.

The slogan, in relation to the oppressed nations, given by the Bolshevik party immediately after the October Revolution ‘Right of Self-determination to the workers’ was a part of this policy, the policy of isolating the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations and policy of the united front of three classes, of the party.

In this context, Comrade Lenin writes, “Take religion, or the denial of rights to women, or the oppression and inequality of the non-Russian nationalities. These are all problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The vulgar petty-bourgeois democrats talked about them for eight months. In not a *single* one of the most advanced countries in the world have these questions been *completely* settled on *bourgeois-democratic* lines. In our country they have been settled completely by the legislation of the October Revolution. .” (Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution, Collected works vol.32 page 53)

## **Party of the Working Class in a multinational country**

Comrade Lenin and Stalin always stressed on the need of a single, centralised party of the working class in a multinational country like Russia. They rejected the formation of different parties of workers of different nations in a multinational country.

Lenin writes,

“In Russia the workers of all nationalities, especially those of non-Russian nationality, endure an economic and political oppression such as obtains in no other country. The Jewish workers, as a disfranchised nationality, not only suffer general economic and political oppression, but they also suffer under the yoke which deprives them of elementary civic rights. The heavier this yoke, the greater the need for the closest possible unity among the proletarians of the different nationalities; for without such unity a victorious struggle against the general oppression is impossible. The more the predatory tsarist autocracy strives to sow the seeds of

discord, distrust and enmity among the nationalities it oppresses, the more abominable its policy of inciting the ignorant masses to savage pogroms becomes, the more does the duty devolve upon us, the Social-Democrats, to rally the isolated Social-Democratic parties of the different nationalities into a single Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.”

*(Lenin, To the Jewish workers, LCW Vol 8, p 495-496)*

Comrade Stalin writes on this matter,

“We have still to settle the question of how to organize the proletariat of the various nations into a single, common party. One plan is that the workers should be organized on national lines—so many nations, so many parties. That plan was rejected by the Social-Democrats. Experience has shown that the organization of the proletariat of a given state on national lines tends only to destroy the idea of class solidarity. All the proletarians of all the nations in a given state must be organized in a single, indivisible proletarian collective.”

*(Stalin, Report on the National Question, The Seventh (April) Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks), April 24-29, 1917)*

While emphasizing on the need of a single proletarian party in a multinational country, Lenin also stressed that such a party must pay attention to the needs of the workers of every nationality and towards the specific characteristics of their culture and representation must be given to national minorities in the local, regional and central institutions.

Lenin writes,

“that the Party must really ensure the satisfaction of all the Party interests and requirements of the Social-Democratic proletariat of each nationality, giving due consideration also to the specific features of its culture and way of life; and that this may be ensured by holding special conferences of Social-Democrats of the particular nationality, giving representation to the national minorities on the local, regional and central bodies of the Party, forming special groups of authors, publishers, agitators, etc.”

At the end of this article Lenin attached a note,

“The representation of a national minority on the Central Committee of the Party could, for example, be arranged in the following manner: the general Party congress may elect to the Central Committee a definite number of members from among candidates nominated by the regional congresses in those parts of Russia where at present separate Social-Democratic organisations exist.”

*(Lenin, Attitude Towards the National Social-Democratic Parties, LCW Vol 10, p 159-60)*

Many facts point that the Bolshevik concept of a single party in a multinational country was not an absolute rule. In Russia, besides the RSDLP, there existed other national social democratic workers parties too. The most prominent example of this was the “Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland” party, formed in 1893. In 1899, the social democratic section of Lithuania joined with it and its name was changed to “Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania”. This party did not merge with the RSDLP, it maintained its separate existence. In 1918 it merged into Communist Party of Poland. Comrade Rosa Luxemburg was one of its most prominent leaders. Writing on this party (Social Democracy of Poland), Lenin says,

“Incidentally, this reveals how groundless and even frivolous are the attempts sometimes made by the “Fracy” to “use” our disagreements with Rosa Luxemburg against Polish Social-Democracy. The “Fracy” are not a proletarian or a socialist party, but a petty-bourgeois nationalist party, something like Polish Social-Revolutionaries. There never has been, nor could there be, any question of unity between the Russian Social-Democrats and this party. On the other hand, no Russian Social-Democrat has ever “repented” of the close relations and unity that have been established with the Polish Social-Democrats. The Polish Social-Democrats have rendered a great historical service by creating the first really Marxist, proletarian party in Poland, a country imbued with

nationalist aspirations and passions. Yet the service the Polish Social-Democrats have rendered is a great one, not because Rosa Luxemburg has talked a lot of nonsense about §9 of the Russian Marxists' Programme, but despite that sad circumstance."

*(Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self-Determination, LCW Vol 20)*

## **How the national question was solved in Socialist Soviet Union**

Tsarist Russia was known as a prisonhouse of nations. Here the Russians were in majority and Russian Tsarism was the centre of the empire. The other nationalities residing in this empire were brutally oppressed by the Tsarism, be it the Poles, Ukrainians or the backward Asiatic nationalities. The working masses of the Tsarist empire were exploited by the feudal remnants and capitalist plunder, whereas the non-Russian nationalities had to endure, besides to the above exploitation, the national oppression too.

[According to the data released by Information Bureau of Soviet Union (1929), during the census of December 1926, there were 182 nationalities residing in Soviet Union, speaking upto 149 languages. Poland and Finland got separated from the Russia in 1917 itself.]

For achieving the victorious revolution, Russian working class, under the leadership of Bolshevik party, not only was able to win over the peasantry and other exploited laboring masses, to form unity with them, but it also was able to win the faith of the oppressed nationalities of the Russia. This helped in staging a successful socialist revolution, in stabilizing the proletarian state by fighting with the internal and external attacks of the enemy classes and also laid the foundation for the construction of socialism.

It was a far-sightedness of the Bolshevik Party that understood the national question in Russia correctly and found a correct solution to it. Even when the national question was not a burning question of Russian

society, the Party upheld the right of the self-determination of nations in order to correctly solve the national question, to put an end to the national oppression. It became the first party to inscribe it in its party programme of 1903. Writing on this matter Stalin comments,

**“In 1912, when we Russian Marxists were outlining the first draft of the national programme, no serious movement for independence yet existed in any of the border regions of the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, we deemed it necessary to include in our programme the point on the right of nations to self-determination, i.e., the right of every nationality to secede and exist as an independent state. Why? Because we based ourselves not only on what existed then, but also on what was developing and impending in the general system of international relations; that is, we took into account not only the present, but also the future. We knew that if any nationality were to demand secession, the Russian Marxists would fight to ensure the right to secede for every such nationality.”**

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, page 232, emphasis ours)*

[Today there is no serious national movement in mainland India (leaving aside Kashmir and North-East) but this does not mean that we should not have an understanding of the national question, a programme for its solution, as some class-reductionist Marxists claim.]

The socialist revolution became victorious in Russia in October 1917. In 1922, a self-willing union of nations, Soviet Union came into existence. In a due process, the national oppression was eliminated here. Nationalities gained independence, the right to self-determination, statehood and some even national formation (which we will discuss later), all due to socialism. Along with this, masses of various nationalities of Russia became free of capitalist and in some cases both, capitalist and feudal, exploitation.

Bolshevik Party then took urgent steps to put an end to national

oppression in Russia (and later Soviet Union). In 1921, Stalin wrote the ‘The immediate tasks of the Party on National Question’, the reference of which we have already quoted above.

While comparing the national policy in Tsarist Russia and upon it’s overthrow, Comrade Stalin writes,

“Everybody is acquainted with the liberals’ demand for universal compulsory education. The Communists in the border regions cannot be more Right-wing than the liberals; they must put universal education into effect there if they want to end the ignorance of the people and if they want to create closer spiritual ties between the centre of Russia and the border regions. But to do so, it is necessary to develop local national schools, national theatres and national educational institutions and to raise the cultural level of the masses of the border regions, for it need hardly be shown that ignorance is the most dangerous enemy of the Soviet regime. We do not know what success is attending our work in this field generally, but we are informed that in one of the most important border regions the local People’s Commissariat of Education is spending on the native schools only ten per cent of its credits. If that is true, it must be admitted that in this field we have, unfortunately, not gone much further than the “old regime.”

Soviet power is not power divorced from the people; on the contrary, it is the only power of its kind, having sprung from the Russian masses and being near and dear to them. This in fact explains the unparalleled strength and resilience which the Soviet regime usually displays at critical moments.

Soviet power must become just as near and dear to the masses of the border regions of Russia. But this requires that it should first of all become comprehensible to them. It is therefore necessary that all Soviet organs in the border regions—the courts, the administration, the economic bodies, the organs of direct authority (and the organs of the Party as

well)—should as far as possible be recruited from the local people acquainted with the manner of life, habits, customs and language of the native population; that all the best people from the local masses should be drawn into these institutions; that the local labouring masses should participate in every sphere of administration of the country, including the formation of military units, in order that the masses should see that the Soviet power and its organs are the products of their own efforts, the embodiment of their aspirations. Only in this way can firm spiritual ties be established between the masses and the Soviet power, and only in this way can the Soviet power become comprehensible and dear to the labouring masses of the border regions.

Some comrades regard the autonomous republics in Russia and Soviet autonomy generally as a temporary, if necessary, evil which owing to certain circumstances had to be tolerated, but which must be combated with a view to its eventual abolishment. It need hardly be shown that this view is fundamentally false and that at any rate it is entirely foreign to the policy of the Soviet Government on the national question. Soviet autonomy must not be regarded as an abstraction or an artificial thing; still less should it be considered an empty and declaratory promise. Soviet autonomy is the most real and concrete form of the union of the border regions with central Russia. Nobody will deny that the Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkestan, Kirghizia, Bashkiria, Tataria and the other border regions, if they desire the cultural and material prosperity of their masses, must have native schools, courts, administration and organs of authority, recruited principally from the local people. Furthermore, the real sovietization of these regions, their conversion into Soviet countries closely bound with central Russia in one integral state, is inconceivable without the widespread organization of local schools, without the creation of courts, administrative

bodies, organs of authority, etc., staffed with people acquainted with the life and language of the population. But establishing schools, courts, administration and organs of authority functioning in the native language—this is precisely putting Soviet autonomy into practice; for Soviet autonomy is nothing but the sum total of all these institutions clothed in Ukrainian, Turkestan, Kirghiz, etc., forms.

How, after this, can one seriously say that Soviet autonomy is ephemeral, that it must be combated, and so on?

One thing or the other:

Either the Ukrainian, Azerbaijan, Kirghiz, Uzbek, Bashkir and other languages are an actual reality, and it is therefore absolutely essential to develop in these regions native schools, courts, administrative bodies and organs of authority recruited from the local people—in which case Soviet autonomy must be put into effect in these regions in its entirety, without reservations;

Or the Ukrainian, Azerbaijan and other languages are a pure fiction, and therefore schools and other institutions functioning in the native languages are unnecessary—in which case Soviet autonomy must be discarded as useless lumber. The search for a third way is due either to ignorance of the subject or to deplorable folly.

One serious obstacle to the realization of Soviet autonomy is the acute shortage in the border regions of intellectual forces of local origin, the shortage of instructors in every branch of Soviet and Party work without exception. This shortage cannot but hamper both educational and revolutionary constructive work in the border regions. But for that very reason it would be unwise and harmful to alienate the all too few groups of native intellectuals, who perhaps would like to serve the masses but are unable to do so, perhaps because, not being Communists, they believe themselves to

be surrounded by an atmosphere of mistrust and are afraid of possible repressive measures. The policy of drawing such groups into Soviet work, the policy of recruiting them for industrial, agrarian, food-supply and other posts, with a view to their gradual sovietization, may be applied with success. For it can hardly be maintained that these intellectual groups are less reliable than, let us say, the counterrevolutionary military experts who, their counter-revolutionary spirit notwithstanding, were drawn into the work and subsequently became sovietized, occupying very important posts.

But the employment of the national groups of intellectuals will still be far from sufficient to satisfy the demand for instructors. We must simultaneously develop in the border regions a ramified system of courses of study and schools in every branch of administration in order to create cadres of instructors from the local people. For it is clear that without such cadres the organization of native schools, courts, administrative and other institutions functioning in the native languages will be rendered extremely difficult.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, pages 94-97)*

While addressing the students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, Comrade Stalin discusses the new nations that have developed in the socialist Soviet Union and their tasks for their further development,

“What are the characteristic features of the life and development, of these countries, of these republics, which distinguish them from the colonial and dependent countries? Firstly, these republics are free from imperialist oppression. Secondly, they are developing and becoming consolidated as nations not under the aegis of the bourgeois order, but under the aegis of Soviet power. That is a fact unprecedented in history, but it is a fact for all that.

Thirdly, inasmuch as they are industrially underdeveloped, they can in their development rely wholly and entirely on the support of the industrial proletariat of the Soviet Union.

Fourthly, being free from colonial oppression, enjoying the protection of the proletarian dictatorship, and being members of the Soviet Union, these republics can and must be drawn into the work of building socialism in our country. The main task is to make it easier to draw the workers and peasants of these republics into the work of building socialism in our country, to create and develop the prerequisites, applicable in the specific conditions of life in these republics, that can promote and hasten this process.

Hence, the immediate tasks that face the leading cadres in the Soviet East are:

1) To create industrial centres in the Soviet republics of the East to serve as bases for rallying the peasants around the working class. You know that this work has already begun, and it will advance together with the economic growth of the Soviet Union. The fact that these republics possess all kinds of raw materials is a guarantee that in time this work will be completed.

2) To raise the level of agriculture, above all irrigation. You know that this work has also been pushed forward, at any rate in Transcaucasia and in Turkestan.

3) To start and further promote the organisation of co-operatives for the broad masses of the peasants and handicraftsmen as the surest way of drawing the Soviet republics in the East into the general system of Soviet economic construction.

**4) To bring the Soviets closer to the masses, to make them national in composition, and in this way implant national-Soviet statehood, close to and comprehensible to the toiling masses.**

5) To develop national culture, to set up a wide network of courses and schools for both general education and vocational-technical training, **to be conducted in the native languages** for the purpose of training Soviet, Party, technical and business cadres from the local people.

It is precisely the fulfillment of these tasks that will facilitate the work of building socialism in the Soviet republics of the East.

There is talk about model republics in the Soviet East. But what is a model republic? A model republic is one which carries out all these tasks honestly and conscientiously, thereby attracting the workers and peasants of the neighbouring colonial and dependent countries to the liberation movement.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, pages 236-238)*

The Communist Party of Russia, in its 12th Congress in April 1923, adopted the resolution of ‘National Factors in Party and State Affairs’. The tenth clause in this resolution states,

“On the basis of what has been said, the congress recommends the members of the Party to secure the accomplishment of the following practical measures:

c) the executive organs of the Union should be constructed on principles that will ensure the actual participation in them of representatives of the republics and the satisfaction of the needs and requirements of the peoples of the Union.

d) the republics should be accorded sufficiently wide financial and, in particular, budgetary powers, enabling them to display initiative in state administration and cultural and economic matters.

**e) the organs of the national republics and regions should be staffed mainly with people from among the local inhabitants who know the language, manner of life, habits and customs of the peoples concerned.**

f) special laws should be passed ensuring the use of the native languages in all state organs and in all institutions serving the local and national population and national minorities—laws that will prosecute and punish with all revolutionary severity all violators of national rights, particularly the rights of national minorities.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 337-38, emphasis ours)*

Commenting upon the attitude of Communists towards various nationalities residing in Soviet Union, Lenin writes,

“The strictest rules must be introduced on the use of the national language in the non-Russian republics of our union, and these rules must be checked with special care. There is no doubt that our apparatus being what it is, there is bound to be, on the pretext of unity in the railway service, unity in the fiscal service and so on, a mass of truly Russian abuses. Special ingenuity is necessary for the struggle against these abuses, not to mention special sincerity on the part of those who undertake this struggle. A detailed code will be required, and only the nationals living in the republic in question can draw it up at all successfully. And then we cannot be sure in advance that as a result of this work we shall not take a step backward at our next Congress of Soviets, i.e., retain the union of Soviet socialist republics only for military and diplomatic affairs, and in all other respects restore full independence to the individual People’s Commissariats.

It must be borne in mind that the decentralisation of the People’s Commissariats and the lack of co-ordination in their work as far as Moscow and other centres are concerned can be compensated sufficiently by Party authority, if it is exercised with sufficient prudence and impartiality; the harm that can result to our state from a lack of unification between the national apparatuses and the Russian apparatus is infinitely

less than that which will be done not only to us, but to the whole International, and to the hundreds of millions of the peoples of Asia, which is destined to follow us on to the stage of history in the near future. It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities. The need to rally against the imperialists of the West, who are defending the capitalist world, is one thing. There can be no doubt about that and it would be superfluous for me to speak about my unconditional approval of it. It is another thing when we ourselves lapse, even if only in trifles, into imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, thus undermining all our principled sincerity, all our principled defence of the struggle against imperialism. But the morrow of world history will be a day when the awakening peoples oppressed by imperialism are finally aroused and the decisive long and hard struggle for their liberation begins.”

*(Lenin, The Question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation", LCW, Vol.36)*

In the socialist period, the Bolshevik Party had to struggle against two types of deviation on the national question. The first deviation, which was the main threat on national question, was the Great-Russian Chauvinist deviation. The roaders of this deviation were in much haste on eliminating the national differences under socialism. They were of the opinion that under socialism, all the nations should merge into one whole and various national languages also be merged into one language.

The second deviation on the national question was of local nationalism. The roaders of this deviation cocooned themselves in their own national shells and turned away from the class differences present within their nationality and also away from the tasks of the socialist construction. Discussing these two deviations, Comrade Stalin writes,

“The picture of the struggle against deviations in the

Party will not be complete if we do not touch upon the deviations that exist in the Party on the national question. I have in mind, firstly, the deviation towards Great-Russian chauvinism, and secondly, the deviation towards local nationalism. These deviations are not so conspicuous and assertive as the “Left” or the Right deviation. They could be called creeping deviations. But this does not mean that they do not exist. They do exist, and what is most important they are growing. There can be no doubt whatever about that. There can be no doubt about it, because the general atmosphere of more acute class struggle cannot fail to cause some intensification of national friction, which finds reflection in the Party. Therefore, the features of these deviations should be exposed and dragged into the light of day.

What is the essence of the deviation towards Great-Russian chauvinism under our present conditions?

The essence of the deviation towards Great-Russian chauvinism lies in the striving to ignore national differences in language, culture and way of life; in the striving to prepare for the liquidation of the national republics and regions; in the striving to undermine the principle of national equality and to discredit the Party’s policy of nationalizing the administrative apparatus, the press, the schools and other state and public organisations.

In this connection, the deviators of this type proceed from the view that since, with the victory of socialism, the nations must merge into one and their national languages must be transformed into a single common language, the time has come to abolish national differences and to abandon the policy of promoting the development of the national cultures of the formerly oppressed peoples.

In this connection, they refer to Lenin, misquoting him and sometimes deliberately distorting and slandering him. Lenin said that under socialism the interests of the nationalities

will merge into a single whole—does it not follow from this that it is time to put an end to the national republics and regions in the interests of internationalism? Lenin said in 1913, in his controversy with the Bundists, that the slogan of national culture is a bourgeois slogan—does it not follow from this that it is time to put an end to the national cultures of the peoples of the USSR in the interests of . . . internationalism? Lenin said that national oppression and national barriers are destroyed under socialism—does it not follow from this that it is time to put a stop to the policy of taking into account the specific national features of the peoples of the USSR and to go over to the policy of assimilation in the interests of . . . internationalism?

And so on and so forth.

There can be no doubt that this deviation on the national question, disguised, moreover, by a mask of internationalism and by the name of Lenin, is the most subtle and therefore the most dangerous species of Great-Russian nationalism. Firstly, Lenin never said that national differences must disappear and that national languages must merge into one common language within the borders of a single state before the victory of socialism on a world scale. On the contrary, Lenin said something that was the very opposite of this, namely, that “national and state differences among peoples and countries . . . will continue to exist for a very, very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale” (Original Comment: JVS: *My italics*) (Vol. XXV, p. 227). How can anyone refer to Lenin and forget about this fundamental statement of his?

True, Mr. Kautsky, an ex-Marxist and now a renegade and reformist, asserts something that is the very opposite of what Lenin teaches us. Despite Lenin, he asserts that the victory of the proletarian revolution in the Austro-German federal state in the middle of the last century would have led

to the formation of a single, common German language and to the Germanisation of the Czechs, because “...”

It goes without saying that such a “conception” is in full accord with Kautsky’s social-chauvinism. It was these views of Kautsky’s that I combated in 1925 in my speech at the University of the Peoples of the East.

But can this anti-Marxist chatter of an arrogant German social-chauvinist have any positive significance for us Marxists, who want to remain consistent internationalists?

Who is right, Kautsky or Lenin?

If Kautsky is right, then how are we to explain the fact that relatively backward nationalities like the Byelorussians and Ukrainians, who are closer to the Great-Russians than the Czechs are to the Germans, have not become Russified as a result of the victory of the proletarian revolution in the USSR, but, on the contrary, have been regenerated and have developed as independent nations? How are we to explain the fact that nations like the Turkmenians, Kirghizians, Uzbeks, Tajiks (not to speak of the Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanians,- and others), in spite of their backwardness, far from becoming Russified as a result of the victory of socialism in the USSR, have, on the contrary, been regenerated and have developed into independent nations? Is it not evident that our worthy deviators, in their hunt after a sham internationalism, have fallen into the clutches of Kautskyan social-chauvinism? Is it not evident that in advocating a single, common language within the borders of a single state, within the borders of the USSR, they are, in essence, striving to restore the privileges of the formerly predominant language, namely, the Great-Russian language?

What has this to do with internationalism?

Secondly, Lenin never said that the abolition of national oppression and the merging of the interests of nationalities into one whole is tantamount to the abolition of national

differences. We have abolished national oppression. We have abolished national privileges and have established national equality of rights. We have abolished state frontiers in the old sense of the term, frontier posts and customs barriers between the nationalities of the USSR. We have established the unity of the economic and political interests of the peoples of the USSR. But does this mean that we have thereby abolished national differences, national languages, culture, manner of life, etc.? Obviously it does not mean this. But if national differences, languages, culture, manner of life, etc.; have remained, is it not evident that the demand for the abolition of the national republics and regions in the present historical period is a reactionary demand directed against the interests of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Do our deviators understand that to abolish the national republics at the present time means depriving the vast masses of the peoples of the USSR of the possibility of receiving education in their native languages, depriving them of the possibility of having schools, courts, administration, public and other organisations and institutions in their native languages, depriving them of the possibility of being drawn into the work of socialist construction? Is it not evident that in their hunt after a sham internationalism our deviators have fallen into the clutches of the reactionary Great-Russian chauvinists and have forgotten, completely forgotten, the slogan of the cultural revolution in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat which applies equally to all the peoples of the USSR; both Great-Russian and non-Great-Russian?

Thirdly, Lenin never said that the slogan of developing national culture under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat is a reactionary slogan. On the contrary, Lenin always stood for helping the peoples of the USSR to develop their national cultures. It was under the guidance of none other than Lenin that at the Tenth Congress of the Party, the

resolution on the national question was drafted and adopted, in which it is plainly stated that: “The Party’s task is to help the labouring masses of the non-Great Russian peoples to catch up with Central Russia, which has gone in front, to help them:

a) to develop and strengthen Soviet statehood among them in forms corresponding to the national conditions and manner of life of these peoples;

b) to develop and strengthen among them courts administrations, economic and government bodies functioning in their native language and staffed with local people familiar with the manner of life and mentality of the local inhabitants;

c) to develop among them press, schools, theatres, clubs, and cultural and educational institutions in general, functioning in the native languages;

d) to set up and develop a wide network of general-educational and trade and technical courses and schools, functioning in the native languages.”

Is it not obvious that Lenin stood wholly and entirely for the slogan of developing national culture under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat?

Is it not obvious that to deny the slogan of national culture under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat means denying the necessity of raising the cultural level of the non-Great-Russian peoples of the USSR, denying the necessity of compulsory universal education for these peoples, means putting these peoples into spiritual bondage to the reactionary nationalists?

Lenin did indeed qualify the slogan of national culture under the rule of the bourgeoisie as a reactionary slogan. But could it be otherwise?

What is national culture under the rule of the national bourgeoisie? It is culture that is bourgeois in content and national in form, having the object of doping the masses with

the poison of nationalism and of strengthening the rule of the bourgeoisie.

What is national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat? It is culture that is socialist in content and national in form, having the object of educating the masses in the spirit of socialism and internationalism.

How is it possible to confuse these two fundamentally different things without breaking with Marxism?

Is it not obvious that in combating the slogan of national culture under the bourgeois order, Lenin was striving at the bourgeois content of national culture and not at its national form?

It would be foolish to suppose that Lenin regarded socialist culture as non-national, as not having a particular national form. The Bundists did at one time actually ascribe this nonsense to Lenin. But it is known from the works of Lenin that he protested sharply against this slander, and emphatically dissociated himself from this nonsense. Have our worthy deviators really followed in the footsteps of the Bundists?

After all that has been said, what is left of the arguments of our deviators?

Nothing, except juggling with the flag of internationalism and slander against Lenin.

Those who are deviating towards Great-Russian chauvinism are profoundly mistaken in believing that the period of building socialism in the USSR is the period of the collapse and abolition of national cultures. The very opposite is the case. In point of fact, the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the building of socialism in the USSR is a period of the flowering of national cultures that are socialist in content and national in form for under the Soviet system, the nations themselves are not the ordinary “modern” nations, but socialist nations just as in content their national cultures

are not the ordinary bourgeois cultures, but socialist cultures. They apparently fail to understand that national cultures are bound to develop with new strength with the introduction and firm establishment of compulsory universal elementary education in the native languages. They fail to understand that only if the national cultures are developed will it be possible really to draw the backward nationalities into the work of socialist construction.

They fail to understand that it is just this that is the basis of the Leninist policy of helping and promoting the development of the national cultures of the peoples of the USSR.

It may seem strange that we who stand for the future merging of national cultures into one common (both in form and content) culture, with one common language, should at the same time stand for the flowering of national cultures at the present moment, in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But there is nothing strange about it. **The national cultures must be allowed to develop and unfold, to reveal all their potentialities, in order to create the conditions for merging them into one common culture with one common language in the period of the victory of socialism all over the world.** The flowering of cultures that are national in form and socialist in content under the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country for the purpose of merging them into one common socialist (both in form and content) culture, with one common language, when the proletariat is victorious all over the world and when socialism becomes the way of life—it is just this that constitutes the dialectics of the Leninist presentation of the question of national culture.

It may be said that such a presentation of the question is “contradictory.” But is there not the same “contradictoriness” in our presentation of the question of the state? We stand for the withering away of the state. At the

same time we stand for the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the mightiest and strongest state power that has ever existed. The highest development of state power with the object of preparing the conditions for the withering away of state-power—such is the Marxist formula. Is this “contradictory”? Yes, it is “contradictory.” But this contradiction is bound up with life, and it fully reflects Marx’s dialectics.

Or, for example, Lenin’s presentation of the question of the right of nations to self-determination, including the right to secession. Lenin sometimes depicted the thesis on national self-determination in the guise of the simple formula: “disunion for union.” Think of it—disunion for union. It even sounds like a paradox. And yet, this “contradictory”, formula reflects that living truth of Marx’s dialectics which enables the Bolsheviks to capture the most impregnable fortresses in the sphere of the national question.

The same may be said about the formula relating to national culture: the flowering of national cultures (and languages) in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country with the object of preparing the conditions for their withering away and merging into one common socialist culture (and into one common language) in the period of the victory of socialism all over the world.

Anyone who fails to understand this peculiar feature and “contradiction” of our transition period, anyone who fails to understand these dialectics of the historical processes, is dead as far as Marxism is concerned.

The misfortune of our deviators is that they do not understand, and do not wish to understand, Marx’s dialectics. That is how matters stand as regards the deviation towards Great-Russian chauvinism.

It is not difficult to understand that this deviation reflects the striving of the moribund classes of the formerly dominant

Great-Russian nation to recover their lost privileges.  
Hence the danger of Great-Russian chauvinism as the chief danger in the Party in the sphere of the national question.

What is the essence of the deviation towards local nationalism? The essence of the deviation towards local nationalism is the endeavour to isolate and segregate oneself within the shell of one's own nation, the endeavour to slur over class contradictions within one's own nation, the endeavour to protect oneself from Great-Russian chauvinism by withdrawing from the general stream of socialist construction, the endeavour not to see what draws together and unites the labouring masses of the nations of the USSR and to see only what can draw them apart from one another.

The deviation towards local nationalism reflects the discontent of the moribund classes of the formerly oppressed nations with the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat, their striving to isolate themselves in their national bourgeois state and to establish their class rule there.

The danger of this deviation is that it cultivates bourgeois nationalism, weakens the unity of the working people of the different nations of the USSR and plays into the hands of the interventionists.

Such is the essence of the deviation towards local nationalism.

The party's task is to wage a determined struggle against this deviation and to ensure the conditions necessary for the education of the labouring masses of the peoples of the USSR in the spirit of internationalism."

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, page 293-301, emphasis ours)*

Stalin writes that the socialist period is not one of elimination of various nations and languages, rather it is a period of their flowering,

"Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of

all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that the old, tsarist Russia consisted of not less than fifty nations and national groups? The October Revolution, however, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene, gave them new life and a new development. **Today, India is spoken of as a single whole. But there can scarcely be any doubt that, in the event of a revolutionary upheaval in India, scores of hitherto unknown nationalities, having their own separate languages and separate cultures, will appear on the scene.** And as regards implanting proletarian culture among the various nationalities, there can scarcely be any doubt that this will proceed in forms corresponding to the languages and manner of life of these nationalities.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, page 240)*

Commenting upon the relation between internationalist proletarian culture and national culture, Stalin writes,

“The Buryat comrades raise the question of the assimilation of the individual nationalities in the course of building a universal proletarian culture. Undoubtedly, some nationalities may, and perhaps certainly will, undergo a process of assimilation. Such processes have taken place before. The point is, however, that the process of assimilation of some nationalities does not exclude, but presupposes the opposite process of the strengthening and further

development of quite a number of existing and developing nations; for the partial process of assimilation of individual nationalities is the result of the general process of development of nations. It is precisely for this reason that the possible assimilation of some individual nationalities does not weaken, but confirms the entirely correct thesis that proletarian universal culture does not exclude, but presupposes and fosters the national culture of the peoples, just as the national culture of the peoples does not annul, but supplements and enriches universal proletarian culture.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, page 241)*

The above mentioned quotes of Lenin and Stalin reflect the approach of Bolshevik Party towards the national policy under socialism. The party, which was waging the struggle against national oppression from the pre-revolution days itself, the task was upon it now that after the revolution, it lead the masses in eliminating various types of national oppression, discrimination and injustices and also struggle against the deviators on this question.

Famous historian E.H.Carr, in the first part of his book ‘Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923’ has given an interesting account of how the Bolshevik party dealt with the national question in the initial years of October revolution. It is necessary to present in brief, if not complete, description of how the Bolshevik party was practically dealing with the national question.

The demand for complete national independence was raised in the two nations of western border region, Finland and Poland, right after the revolution. Prior to 1917, the demand for autonomy, but not of national independence, used to be raised in both of these nations. Lenin had written regarding this,

“There are two nations in Russia which are most cultivated and, in virtue of a whole series of historical and social conditions, most differentiated, and which could most easily and ” naturally” exercise their right to separation. The

experience of the revolution of 1905 showed that even in these two nations the ruling classes, the landowners and the bourgeoisie, renounce revolutionary struggle for freedom and seek a rapprochement with the ruling classes in Russia and with the Tsarist monarchy out of **fear** of the revolutionary proletariat of Finland and Poland. “ (Quoted by EH Carr in Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Part 1, p 28)

But when the revolution broke out in Russia the ruling classes of Poland let loose their fear and the demand for national independence spread rapidly in these countries. Poland that time was under the German occupation. It was already presenting the option of freedom to the puppet government of Polish state. After the October revolution, the Soviet government unconditionally accepted the independence of Poland.

On the other hand, there was a strong social-democratic party in Finland. There was still a military presence of Russia in Finland who could help their Finnish comrades. The conditions for the proletarian revolution looked ripe here. But when the Finnish government exerted pressure to exercise their right for independence, then Soviet government had to accept it. Stalin writes about this,

“In fact the Council of People’s Commissars against its will gave freedom not to the people, but to the bourgeoisie, of Finland, which by a strange confluence of circumstances has received its independence from the hands of socialist Russia. The Finnish workers and social-democrats found themselves in the position of having to receive freedom not directly from the hands of socialists, but with the aid of the Finnish bourgeoisie.

... the tragedy of the Finnish proletariat was the indecision and incomprehensible cowardice of the Finnish social-democrats.”

*(ibid., p 288)*

The situation in Ukraine was thus that here the majority were peasants. The nationalism of these peasants was directed against the Polish and Russian landlords and Jewish traders. Primarily it was anti-

Jewish and anti-Polish. It lacked local proletarian class. Most of its industrial workers – managers and workers, migrants, were especially Russian.

In the initial phase the national movement in Ukraine didn't get much support. It was mainly restricted to the small circle of school teachers, professors, priests and other established intellectuals. Their nationalism was not directed against the Polish landlords or Jewish traders but against the Russian bureaucrats. Tsarist state had banned the Ukrainian literature and press in 1870. There was some relaxation given in 1905 but then in 1914 this ban was again enforced. But the Ukrainian peasant didn't have much concern about it and the Russian workers even less. Therefore, the internal basis of Ukrainian nationalism was very weak. Other important factor was the Ukrainian dependence on Russian market and the economic importance of Ukraine for the Russian market. Ukraine accounted for 20% population of the Tsarist Russia. Its land was host to most modern industrial units in Russia, its industrial base was primarily Russian. Its iron and coal were relatively under-developed but in totality they were important for the Russian industry. Like Finland and Poland, for Ukraine to be separated from Russia due to this economic reality was difficult.

But despite all these factors, national movement gained momentum in Ukraine too, during the February revolution. Hershevsky (a Professor), Inichainko and Petliura were three leaders of this movement. In March 1917 the Ukrainian Rada (or Soviet) was formed under the presidentship of Hershevsky. It got the support of Ukrainian national Congress in April 1917. It declared the order of 'Autonomous Ukrainian Republic' on 13 June 1917 after failed talks with the temporary government in Petrograd. During the days of the October revolution, the Ukrainian Rada hindered the Red guards in their struggle against the forces of White Generals Kornilov and Kalevin. By December 1917 and January 1918, the Nationalist government got the support of French and British imperialists.

On the other hand, the Bolsheviks started organizing the independent strength of the workers, peasants, militiamen in Ukraine.

On 17 December 1917, the Congress of the workers, peasants and military deputies began in Kiev. Meeting of the local Bolshevik Party was held for the preparation of this congress and it kept its new name as 'Social Democratic Worker's Party of Russia of Social Democracy of Ukraine (Bolshevik)'. Its name is what catches the attention. It was clear that this name was adopted to pay heed to the national aspirations of the Ukrainians. Rada being dominant in Kiev, the Bolsheviks made Kharkov as its centre. On 24 December 1917, 'All Ukrainian Congress of Soviets' was called. Two days later, the Congress elected the 'Central Executive Committee of Ukraine'. This Committee declared to "Take all power of Ukraine in its hands". Rada chief Vinichainko himself had accepted that the support to their government in Ukraine was too less. On 8 February 1918, the Soviet Red army dethroned the Rada government and established the Ukrainian Soviet government. But his Soviet government could last only three weeks. The locals took it as a foreign power. On the request of Rada, the German forces entered Ukraine. On 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1918, the German supported Petiulora formed the Rada government under his leadership. This was a reactionary, anti-people government.

After much ups and downs, the Soviet government consolidated in August 1921 in Ukraine. The bourgeoisie was routed in the interest of "Dictatorship of the laboring and exploited masses of poor peasants and proletarians" which signified the Ukrainian national independence.

In 1918 and 1919, there were only two options in front of Soviet government in relation to Ukraine. One was to include it directly into the Russian Soviet unit. Other was to form separate Ukrainian Soviet unit in order to pacify the Ukrainian national aspirations. **Lenin had a firm belief that the fragmentation under the slogan of national self-determination was a sure path towards final unity of hearts.** Lenin used to present the self-determination of nations in this simple formulation "**Disunion for Union**". (See reference in 'Marxism and the National and Colonial Question' by Stalin, p 299, Emphasis ours).

In December 1919, Soviet state was established in Ukraine for the third time. Lenin had prepared the proposal "Soviet state in Ukraine".

With the support of the Central Committee of the Party, this proposal was presented in the special Party Conference held in Moscow. **This proposal “rejected the attempts to relegate the Ukrainian language to subordinate position through dubious means and it was demanded that all the officials in Ukraine must be able to speak the Ukrainian language.”**

In February, the White Russian Soviet Socialist Republic Byelorussia was established. This was also an example of the fragmentation in the name of right to self-determination. The situation was simple than Ukraine here. Here the White Russian bourgeois movement had just begun. Here too the Ukrainian path was followed strictly. In March 1917, White Russian National Congress released a manifesto which sided for the “Federal Republic Democratic System”. In August 1917, White Russian Rada was established in Minsk. By the end of 1917, Bolshevik Revolutionary Military Committee dethroned Rada and established the “Council of People’s Commissars of Western Region and Frontier” and declared the right of “Self determination of the Labouring people of White Russia”. This initial Soviet state continued for few weeks in Minsk. In February 1918, the German forces dethroned it and established the White Russian Rada again. After the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the Germans retreated. Here too, like Ukraine, there were two options before the Soviet government. One was to include it into the Russian unit and the other was to form a separate White Russian unit. The Soviet government, committed towards the right of self-determination, chose the latter option. On 1 January, 1919, the temporary government of “White Russian Independent Soviet Republic” was formed. Like Ukraine, its path was also full of ups and downs in the following years.

One historian noted, “To the White Russians, the nationhood came as an almost unsolicited gift of the Russian revolution.” (Reference of D.Mirsky by EH Carr, p 310). Another writer wrote that White Russian workers, peasants had always considered themselves to be a part of Russian laboring masses, only small section of the White Russian intellectuals advocated the independence of the White Russians.

When in the Party Congress, Stalin was accused of “artificially creating a White Russian nation”, then he defended himself thus,

“Some forty years ago Riga was a German town; but since towns grow by drawing on the country, and the country is the preserver of nationality, Riga is now a purely Lettish town. Some fifty years ago all the towns of Hungary had a German character; now they are Magyarised. The same will happen with White Russia, in the towns of which non-White Russians still predominate.”

(Reference by EH Carr, p 311)

Likewise, the republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania came into being. It was a period,

“at which the slogan of” self-determination for the workers” was officially current ; and Stalin’s announcement of policy was clear and unequivocal : Soviet Russia has never looked on the western regions as its own possessions. It has always considered that these regions constitute the inalienable possession of the working masses of the nationalities that inhabit them, that these masses have a full right of freely determining their political destiny.”

(Reference by Carr, p 312)

The Western border regions of Russia was inhabited by relatively developed nations. But in the Eastern border regions like Volga Pass, Northern Plains of Causcasia, Central Asia (East of Caspian Sea) there were certain problems. The population of these regions still had a leftover of Medieval Mongol civilization in their origin and language. It had relation with Asia, not Europe. 1 crore people out of this whole region were still nomads. The primitive tribal organization still persisted. Their living standard and cultural level was much below the people of Russia and Western border regions. Here the fragmented Russian inhabitants had the role of settler colonialists.

Most of the population in these regions was Muslim. Therefore here the national question comes almost in the form of Muslim question. Here the first step was to implement the manifesto of the rights of

citizens, under the appeal of “To all the Muslim Labouring masses of Russia and East”. In 19 January 1918, Soviet government established a Commissariat for the internal matters of Muslims, whose Commissar was a Tatar and his assistants a Tatar and a Bashkir. At this time in Petrograd, “Holy Quran of the Osman” was gifted to regional Muslim Congress which had been brought from Samarqand to Imperial library. At this time, during the break of Brest-Litovsk Treaty and a new offensive by Germans, the Commissariat of Muslim Affairs issued appeals such as **“To the Muslim Revolutionary people”, “To uphold the red flag of Muslim Socialist Army”**. **In November 1918, the Congress of Muslim Communist Organization was held in Moscow and “Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations” was established. Lenin and Stalin addressed it’s second Congress in November 1919.**

The Soviet state started getting firm only by the middle of 1920, after tackling the foreign attacks, opposition by local mullahs and incited revolts. In 1920, the Bashkir and Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and Chuvash Autonomous Regions came into being. After this, the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Kalmik Autonomous region were formed.

In north Caucasus, the Soviet state started getting firm by the end of 1920. On 13 November 1920, Stalin addressed the Congress of Dagestani people at Temir-Khanshuro which was a temporary capital of Dagestan. He addressed, “Now... the Soviet Government is in a position to take up the question of autonomy for the Daghestan people... Daghestan must be governed in accordance with its specific features, its manner of life and customs... The Soviet Government considers that the Sharia, as common law, is as fully authorized as that of any other of the peoples inhabiting Russia.”

It was clear that Soviet government was not in favor of any kind of oppression in matters of religion, customs etc. It wanted to give people the time to get educated and thus get rid of religious backwardness, superstitions and outmoded customs. It was not in favour of any kind of adventurism or hurry in this regard.

Of all the border regions, the issue of Crimea was solved the

last. Here, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic came into being on 18 October 1921.

The Russian region of Central Asia was called Turkestan. It was a part of medieval sultanate of Chinghiz Khan. Tashkent, Samarqand, Kokoand, Bukhara, Khiva, Marat were it's main cities. Turkestan was included into the Tsarist Empire in 1870. Emir of Bukhara and Khan of Khiva had nominal independence by the end of Tsarist Empire. Ebing far away, the Russian occupation in this region had been weak. When cotton started to grow in this region, it became an important trade centre. The population of this region was about 1.20 crore which included 5 lakh Russian migrants. Taskhent was main administrative centre of Turkestan. Here, Turkestan Soviet Federal Republic came into being on 30 April, 1918.

On 1 June 1919, Nakromnets (People's Commissariat for Nationalities) emphasized on the importance of Turkestan in it's official journal. It identified it as a departure point for the liberation of East and declared that "Turkestan is the base of communism in Asia which awaits for help from the Centre". On 12 July 1919, Central Committee of Bolshevik Party focused the attention of Tashkent government towards, **"to include the local population of Turkestan into government work in an increasing proportion."** "To stop the forceful acquisition of local organizations of Muslims." A British official stationed in Tashkent observed about the first thing in following manner – To fill 95% of administrative posts by local people in Turkestan means an "end of the Bolshevik government".

In 1924 and later, Turkestan was divided into various national republics according to national aspirations of different nations residing here. Turkman Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkmenistan) and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbekistan) were formed in 1924. Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic (Kirghizstan) was formed out of Kazakhstan in 1936. **The Kazakhstan Autonomous Republic formed in 1920 was promised that the Kazakh areas present in Turkestan, will be transferred to Kazakhstan "As per manifesto of people's will". Soviet state fulfilled this promise in 1924.**

Apart from Russian and Turk migrants, Transcaucasia had 8 local national groups. Out of these Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani were the biggest, with each having population of around 20 lakh. Mixing of people of various nations was a source of conflict. Here the economic and social composition was as diverse. The living standard of peasants was lower than the European Russia but it was lowest in Azerbaijan. The feudal system of land ownership was still intact among the Beks of Azerbaijan and Princes of Christian Georgia. The existence of trading class and radical intellectuals was less in Armenia and even less in Georgia. But apart from few railway workers, the proletariat was almost absent.

The ethnic borders which separated the three large national groups were not clear. In this respect, Armenia was the one suffering most, reason for it being that constant repression by Turkey and fragmentation of Armenian population. In Georgia and Azerbaijan there were more Armenians than even in Armenia. In Georgia's capital Tiflis, the population of Armenians was even larger than Georgians.

The revolution of February 1917 gave momentum to the national movements here and weakened the Russian control. A long period of strife and chaos started. ]

In these regions the Soviet state started having a firm hold by the initial months of 1921 after tackling interference by Turkey, Germans and British and local strife's. In March 1922 Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic came into being. In the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic an autonomous republic was formed in minority districts of Azaria, Abkhazia and Yugo Osetia and one autonomous region. In 1936, the place of Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic was replaced by three national republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Point which needs to be noted here is that the Tiflis city which was part of Georgia but where Georgian population was in minority, was given to Georgia because geographically it was situated here.

We have given a very brief description of how the Soviet state tackled the national question during the initial years of October revolution . The readers can refer the EH Carr's above book for further detail.

## **Construction of administrative units on the basis of national composition of population**

Bolshevik party professed from the beginning that in order to eliminate the national oppression, a necessary step is that the boundaries of the state and autonomous units be such that it reflect the national composition of the population.

After the October revolution, the party not only emphasized on this but it also put it into practice.

Presenting his report in the 10th Congress of Bolshevik Party on 10th March, 1921, Comrade Stalin writes,

“Comrades, the most characteristic feature of this congress as regards the discussion on the national question is that we have passed from declarations on the national question, through the administrative redivision of Russia, to the practical presentation of the question. At the beginning of the October Revolution we confined ourselves to declaring the right of peoples to secede. **In 1918 and in 1920 we were engaged in the administrative redivision of Russia on national lines with the object of bringing the labouring masses of the backward peoples closer to the proletariat of Russia.**”

(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 119-120, emphasis ours)

Commenting upon the formation of administrative units on the basis of national composition in Turkestan, Stalin writes,

“I have spoken above about bringing the Soviets closer to the toiling masses of the different nationalities-about making the Soviets national in character. But what does that mean, and how does it manifest itself in practice? I think that the national delimitation recently completed in Turkestan can serve as a model of the way the Soviets should be brought closer to the masses. The bourgeois press regards this delimitation as “Bolshevik cunning. ” It is obvious, however, that this

was a manifestation not of “cunning,” but of the deep-rooted aspiration of the masses of the people of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to have their own organs of power, close to and comprehensible to them. In the pre-revolutionary epoch, both these countries were torn to pieces and distributed among various khanates and states, thus providing a convenient field for the exploiting machinations of “the powers that be.” The time has now come when it has become possible for these scattered pieces to be reunited in independent states, so that the toiling masses of Uzbekistan and of Turkmenistan may be brought closer to the organs of power and linked solidly with them. The delimitation of Turkestan is, above all, the reunion of the scattered parts of these countries in independent states. That, these states later expressed the wish to join the Soviet Union as equal members of it merely shows that the Bolsheviks have found the key to the deep-rooted aspirations of the masses of the people of the East, and that the Soviet Union is a voluntary union of the toiling masses of different nationalities, the only one in the world. To reunite Poland, the bourgeoisie needed a whole series of wars. To reunite Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, however, the Communists needed only a few months of explanatory propaganda.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 238-239)*

“Further, I have received a note alleging that we Communists are artificially cultivating a Byelorussian nationality. That is not true, for there exists a Byelorussian nation, which has its own language, different from Russian. Consequently, the culture of the Byelorussian people can be raised only in its native language. We heard similar talk five years ago about the Ukraine, about the Ukrainian nation. And only recently it was said that the Ukrainian Republic and the Ukrainian nation were inventions of the Germans. It is obvious,

however, that there is a Ukrainian nation, and it is the duty of the Communists to develop its culture. You cannot go against history. It is obvious that although Russian elements still predominate in the Ukrainian towns, in the course of time these towns will inevitably be Ukrainianised. About forty years ago, Riga had the appearance of a German city; but since towns grow at the expense of the countryside, and since the countryside is the guardian of nationality, Riga is now a purely Lettish city. About fifty years ago all Hungarian towns bore a German character; now they have become Magyarised. The same will happen in Byelorussia, where non-Byelorussians still predominate in the towns.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 122)*

“As regards the first point, there is some truth in what Shumsky says. It is true that a broad movement in favour of Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian public life has begun and is spreading in the Ukraine. It is true that we must under no circumstances allow that movement to fall into the hands of elements hostile to us. It is true that a number of Communists in the Ukraine do not realize the meaning and importance of that movement and are therefore taking no steps to gain control of it. It is true that a change of sentiment must be brought about among our Party and Soviet cadres, who are still imbued with an ironical and skeptical attitude towards Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian public life. It is true that we must painstakingly select and build up cadres capable of gaining control of the new movement in the Ukraine. All that is true. Nevertheless, Shumsky commits at least two serious errors. Firstly. He confuses Ukrainisation of the apparatus of our Party and other bodies with Ukrainisation of the proletariat. The apparatus of our Party, state and other bodies serving the population can and should be Ukrainised, a due tempo in this matter being observed. But it is impossible to Ukrainise

the proletariat from above. It is impossible to compel the mass of the Russian workers to give up the Russian language and Russian culture and accept the Ukrainian culture and language as their own. That would be contrary to the principle of the free development of nationalities. It would not be national freedom, but a peculiar form of national oppression. There can be no doubt that with the industrial development of the Ukraine and the influx into industry of Ukrainian workers from the surrounding countryside, the composition of the Ukrainian proletariat will change. There can be no doubt that the composition of the Ukrainian proletariat will become Ukrainised, just as the composition of the proletariat in Latvia or Hungary, say, which was at one time German in character, subsequently became Latvianised or Magyarised. But this is a lengthy, spontaneous and natural process. To attempt to replace this spontaneous process by the forcible Ukrainisation of the proletariat from above would be a utopian and harmful policy, one capable of stirring up anti-Ukrainian chauvinism among the non-Ukrainian sections of the proletariat in the Ukraine. It seems to me that Shumsky has a wrong idea of Ukrainisation and does not take this latter danger into account. (Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p 261-62)

## **Language policy of Socialist Soviet Union**

The Bolshevik Party always upheld the equality of languages. It opposed any sort of special rights for any language, in a multi-national country like Russia it opposed the making of any one language as official language. Bolsheviks emphasized that in every national territory, the language of that concerned nationality be used in education as well as for all governmental and cultural activities. Additionally, Bolsheviks also took care of ensuring the rights of national minorities residing in these national territories.

Language based oppression is one of the main forms of national oppression and it was widely prevalent in the ‘prisonhouse of nations’ ie Tsarist Russia. Tsarism not only strangled the development of productive forces of non-Russian nations but it also tied them to tangles of illiteracy. To strangle the cultural development of oppressed nations, one of the main method used by the Tsarism was to put restrictions on the use of mother language in schools, press and other cultural institutions.

“The development and improvement of the native dialects and the development of cultural education among the native population through these means, do not enter into the plans of the Government.” declared the Tsar’s Department of Public Education.

The Seventh Congress of Noblemen held in 1911, expressed the ideas of the autocratic black-hundreds more frankly:

“The Russian State school must be Russian and nationalistically patriotic. A patriotic school cannot be foreign in nature. The Russian language must uncompromisingly dominate; all education must be carried on in Russian. Russia is a conglomeration of different nationalities; why should we deliberately create race separatism to which each nationality is prone? It behaves as noblemen to say that the school must be Russian – and Russian for Russians.”

*(Quoted in The National Policy of the Soviet Union, A Rysakoff)*

The majority population of the oppressed nationalities of Russia was illiterate. Illiterate, backward people were the need of the Tsarist state and it’s educational policy was completely subservient to this need. That’s why the local languages were completely banned in schools and Russian was the only medium of instruction. Tsarist state declared various languages to be just dialects/jargon which can’t be a medium of literature or of learning. (The same policy is being implemented by the Indian rulers who, completely following the path of the British colonialists, have declared many languages, especially of the so-called Hindi belt, to be dialects of Hindi and thereby forced them out of the education sphere. And many Marxists too are all praises of these oppressive measures of

the Indian state). The Public Education Department of Tsarist state declared, “There can be no talk, no thought even of raising the native dialects to literary languages which could be taught in the schools. It would be quite absurd to entertain any such idea”, boasted an official statement of the Department of Public Education. (Ibid.)

As mentioned above, the Tsarist Russia had 182 small, big nationalities which spoke 149 languages. But out of these, only 14 were written languages. These were – Russian, Ukrainian, Bylorussian, Armenian, Moldavian, Lettish, Lithuanian, Tajik, Azarbaijani, Tatars, Uzbeki, Kazakhi, Turkmeni, Bashkiri. (See, Marxism and Language problem in India, Satendra Narayan Majumdar, page 86-87)

The Socialist Soviet Union gave written script to 60 more languages. Some nationalities gave up the demand of written language on their own. This was due to practical reasons. These nationalities had live economic and cultural contacts with people of different nationalities. Therefore, for them, it was more practical to use this other language for educational and literary purposes. The decision to not develop the written language for these nationalities was taken after their agreement. The policy of developing the written language was not based upon the fact that how many speakers the particular language had. Even for very small nationalities, whose majority did’nt speak any other language, written language was developed. For example, many such small groups were given written languages – Koryak (6000), Chuchiz (15,000), Eskimo (1500), Nanayi (8000), Mansi (7000) etc.

Below, a list of some nationalities is given whose written language was developed for the first time after the great October Socialist revolution. This list has been taken from the census of 1959. The population number is in thousands (in brackets)-

1. Avarian (270.4)
2. Abazian (19.6)
3. Altaian (45.3)
4. Lezginz (223.1)
5. Darginz (158.2)
6. Kamuik (135)

7. Lakt (63.5)
8. Nogiyan (41.2)
9. Tbasrant (34.2)
10. Udmurt (624.8)
11. Marus (504.2)
12. Chechen (418.8)
13. Osetian (410)
14. Karkalpaks (172.6)
15. Karelian (167.3)
16. Kalmeeek (106.1)
17. Ingushz (106)
18. Abkhazai (65.4)
19. Balkar (42.4)
20. Nantsi (23)
21. Khanti (19.4)
22. Chukcheez (11.7)
23. Nanayi (8)
24. Tuviniyai (100)
25. Adijeez (79.6)
26. Khakasiai (56.6)

(Entire list from the book quoted above)

The Soviet government paid special focus on the all-round development of the nationalities which were oppressed in Tsarist period. Compulsory, universal education was necessary to eliminate illiteracy, to develop culturally these nationalities. But the goal of universal education can't be realized if mother language is not the medium of education. Therefore, the Soviet government arranged for the education of different nationalities in their mother languages, emphasized on the publication of literature, newspapers and magazines in these languages.

In pre-revolutionary period, only 25 newspapers were published in the languages of the oppressed nationalities. In 1930, this number increased to 349 and by May 1931 it was 700. (See A Rysakoff, *ibid*). After revolution, the universal primary education was given in mother languages there was hardly any exception to this rule. 93.5% Ukrainian,

98.1% Georgian, 96.9% Uzbek, 95.5% Turkish, 95.7% Tatar children were being imparted education in their mother tongue. By 1931, the illiteracy was removed from the age group of 18-45.

A great achievement in the cultural reorganization of nationalities was the latinization of scripts of Eastern, Northern and North-Eastern people. The script used by these people was either religious Arabic script, which was in the reach of only a handful of propertied people, or Lam-Heilograph (Buryato-Mongolia) or Russian script, which were unsuccessful in expressing the Phonetics of these national languages Carolian, Yakut etc). The advent of Latin script removed the artificial hurdles in the way of cultural development of backward nationalities. This simplified the written language of these nationalities and made it accessible to the masses.

Likewise, the Dagestani script was developed for the Dagestani native languages.

Apart from other steps taken to end the national oppression, the 10th Congress of Bolshevik Party emphasized on the need to employ local staff in governmental, administrative, economic and judicial departments. The situation with regard to this in 1930 was – 94.9% in Azerbaijan, 60.7% in White Russia (Bylorussia or today's Belarus), 12% in Bashkiria, 66% in Georgia, 14% in Kazakhstan, 39% in German Volga Republic, 36.8% in Tataria, 21.2% in Tajikistan, 22.2% in Uzbekistan, 48% in Chuvashia. These are the average figures of republic and district administration. If only figures for district administration are considered, then it stands thus – 69% in Azerbaijan, 20% in Bashkiria, 72% in White Russia, 42.4% in Kazakhstan, 41.6% in Uzbekistan, 20% in Chuvashia, 60.1% in Tartaria. The selected staff of administrative organizations had major local participation. In most of the republics and autonomous regions, the village soviets had 95% and district executive committees had 91% local officials.

## **The future of nations**

The advent of nations corresponds with a definite stage of human

history, the advent of capitalist stage. The nations continue to exist in the three phases of human history – Capitalist phase (the capitalism of free competition), the phase of imperialism and the socialist phase. In this whole process, some nations get assimilated by other nations but the main process of development, of origin of new nation states also continues. With the establishment of socialism at world scale, it's firm rooting at global level, the breakup and amalgamation of nations will start. Together with the departure of classes from the arena of human history, the nations too will depart.

Lenin writes that the nations arise in the initial periods of capitalism but in the later period, primarily due to immigration and especially in cosmopolitan cities, the process of inter-mingling of nations start,

“A rough idea of the scale which the general process of assimilation of nations is assuming under the present conditions of advanced capitalism may be obtained, for example, from the immigration statistics of the United States of America. During the decade between 1891-1900, Europe sent 3,700,000 people there, and during the nine years between 1901 and 1909, 7,200,000. The 1900 census in the United States recorded over 10,000,000 foreigners. New York State, in which, according to the same census, there were over 78,000 Austrians, 136,000 Englishmen, 20,000 Frenchmen, 480,000 Germans, 37,000 Hungarians, 425,000 Irish, 182,000 Italians, 70,000 Poles, 166,000 people from Russia (mostly Jews), 43,000 Swedes, etc., grinds down national distinctions. And what is taking place on a grand, international scale in New York is also to be seen in every big city and industrial township.

No one unobsessed by nationalist prejudices can fail to perceive that this process of assimilation of nations by capitalism means the greatest historical progress, the break down of hidebound national conservatism in the various backwoods, especially in backward countries like Russia.”

(Lenin, Critical Remarks on the National Question)

Lenin writes that the aim of socialism is to put an end to the divisions of humanity into miniature states and to every type of national isolation. But this is possible only through the dictatorship of the oppressed class, complete independence of all oppressed nations and through the abolition of classes. He writes,

“The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small states and all national isolation; not only to bring the nations closer to each other, but also to merge them. And in order to achieve this aim, we must, on the one hand, explain to the masses the reactionary nature of the ideas of Renner and Otto Bauer concerning so-called “cultural national autonomy” and, on the other hand, **demand the liberation of the oppressed nations, not only in general, nebulous phrases, not in empty declamations, not by “postponing” the question until socialism is established, but in a clearly and precisely formulated political programme which shall particularly take into account the hypocrisy and cowardice of the Socialists in the oppressing nations.** Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.”

*(Lenin, The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, emphasis ours)*

Comrade Stalin writes in a country, in a multinational country, the establishment of socialism is the period of flourishing of nations,

“First and foremost, they were not clear on the fact that in the U.S.S.R. we have already entered the period of socialism; moreover, despite the fact that we have entered this period, the nations are not only not dying away, but, on the contrary, are developing and flourishing.

Have we, in actual fact, already entered the period of socialism? Our period is usually called the period of transition from capitalism to socialism. It was called a transition period in 1918, when Lenin, in his celebrated article, “‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and Petty- Bourgeois Mentality,”<sup>3</sup> first described this period with its five forms of economy. It is called a transition period today, in 1930, when some of these forms, having become obsolete, are already on the way to disappearance, while one of them, namely, the new form of economy in the sphere of industry and agriculture, is growing and developing with unprecedented speed.

Can it be said that these two transition periods are identical, are not radically different from each other? Obviously not.

What did we have in the sphere of the national economy in 1918? A ruined industry and cigarette lighters; neither collective farms nor state farms on a mass scale; the growth of a “new” bourgeoisie in the towns and of the kulaks in the countryside.

What have we today? Socialist industry, restored and undergoing reconstruction, an extensive system of state farms and collective farms, accounting for more than 40 per cent of the total sown area of the U.S.S.R. in the spring-sown sector alone, a moribund “new” bourgeoisie in the town and a moribund kulak class in the countryside.

The former was a transition period and so is the latter. Nevertheless, they are as far apart as heaven and earth. And nevertheless, no one can deny that we are on the verge of eliminating the last important capitalist class, the kulak class. Clearly, we have already emerged from the transition period in the old sense and have entered the period of direct and sweeping socialist construction along the whole front. Clearly, we have already entered the period of socialism, for the socialist sector now controls all the economic levers of the

entire national economy, although we are still far from having completely built a socialist society and from having abolished class distinctions. Nevertheless, the national languages are not only not dying away or merging into one common tongue, but, on the contrary, the national cultures and national languages are developing and flourishing. Is it not clear that the theory of the dying away of national languages and their merging into one common language within the framework of a single state in the period of sweeping socialist construction, in the period of socialism in one country, is an incorrect, anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist theory?

Secondly, the authors of the note were not clear on the fact that the dying away of national languages and their merging into one common language is not an intrastate question, not a question of the victory of socialism in one country, but an international question, a question of the victory of socialism on an international scale. They failed to understand that the victory of socialism in one country must not be confused with the victory of socialism on an international scale. Lenin had good reason for saying that national differences will remain for a long time even after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat on an international scale.

Besides, we must take into consideration still another circumstance, which affects a number of the nations of the U.S.S.R. There is a Ukraine which forms part of the U.S.S.R. But there is also another Ukraine which forms part of other states. There is a Byelorussia which forms part of the U.S.S.R. But there is also another Byelorussia which forms part of other states. Do you think that the question of the Ukrainian and Byelorussian languages can be settled without taking these specific conditions into account?

Then take the nations of the U.S.S.R. situated along its southern border, from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan and Buryat-

Mongolia. They are all in the same position as the Ukraine and Byelorussia. Naturally, here too we have to take into consideration the specific conditions of development of these nations.

Is it not obvious that all these and similar questions that are bound up with the problem of national cultures and national languages cannot be settled within the framework of a single state, within the framework of the U.S.S.R.?

That, comrades, is how matters stand with respect to the national question in general and the above-mentioned note on the national question in particular.”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, page 302-304)*

Commenting upon the future of nations, Comrade Stalin writes,

“You commit a grave error in putting a sign of equality between the period of the victory of socialism in one country and the period of the victory of socialism on a world scale, in asserting that the disappearance of national differences and national languages, the merging of nations and the formation of one common language, are possible and necessary not only with the victory of socialism on a world scale, but also with the victory of socialism in one country. Moreover, you confuse entirely different things: “the abolition of national oppression” with “the elimination of national differences,” “the abolition of national state barriers” with “the dying away of nations,” with “the merging of nations.”

It must be pointed out that for Marxists to confuse these diverse concepts is absolutely impermissible. National oppression in our country was abolished long ago, but it by no means follows from this that national differences have disappeared and that nations in our country have been eliminated. National state barriers, together with frontier guards and customs, were abolished in our country long ago, but it by no means follows from this that the nations have

already become merged and that the national languages have disappeared, that these languages have been supplanted by some one language common to all our nations.

You are displeased with the speech I delivered at the Communist University of the Peoples of the East (1925), 3 in which I repudiated the thesis that with the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, for example, national languages will die away, that the nations will be merged, and in place of the national languages one common language will appear.

You consider that this statement of mine contradicts Lenin's well-known thesis that it is the aim of socialism not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and every form of isolation of nations, not only to bring the nations closer together, but also to merge them.

You consider, further, that it also contradicts another of Lenin's theses, namely, that with the victory of socialism on a world scale, national differences and national languages will begin to die away, that after this victory national languages will begin to be supplanted by one common language.

That is quite wrong, comrades. It is a profound illusion.

I have already said that it is impermissible for Marxists to confuse and lump together such diverse phenomena as "the victory of socialism in one country" and "the victory of socialism on a world scale." It should not be forgotten that these diverse phenomena reflect two entirely different epochs, distinct from one another not only in time (which is very important), but in their very nature.

National distrust, national isolation, national enmity and national conflicts are, of course, stimulated and fostered not by some "innate" sentiment of national animosity, but by the striving of imperialism to subjugate other nations and by the fear inspired in these nations by the menace of national enslavement. Undoubtedly, so long as world imperialism exists this striving and this fear will exist—and, consequently,

national distrust, national isolation, national enmity and national conflicts will exist in the vast majority of countries. Can it be asserted that the victory of socialism and the abolition of imperialism in one country signify the abolition of imperialism and national oppression in the majority of countries? Obviously not. But it follows from this that the victory of socialism in one country, notwithstanding the fact that it seriously weakens world imperialism, does not and cannot create the conditions necessary for the merging of the nations and the national languages of the world into one integral whole.

The period of the victory of socialism on a world scale differs from the period of the victory of socialism in one country primarily in the fact that it will abolish imperialism in all countries, will abolish both the striving to subjugate other nations and the fear inspired by the menace of national enslavement, will radically undermine national distrust and national enmity, will unite the nations into one world socialist economic system, and will thus create the real conditions necessary for the gradual merging of all nations into one. Such is the fundamental difference between these two periods.

But it follows from this that to confuse these two different periods and to lump them together is to commit an unpardonable mistake. Take the speech I delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. There I said:

“Some people (Kautsky, for instance) talk of the creation of a single universal language and the dying away of all other languages in the period of socialism. I have little faith in this theory of a single, all-embracing language. Experience, at any rate, speaks against rather than for such a theory. Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of

humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that the old, tsarist Russia consisted of not less than fifty nations and national groups? The October Revolution, however, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene, gave them new life and a new development.”<sup>4</sup>

From this passage it is evident that I was opposing people of the type of Kautsky, who always was and has remained a dilettante on the national question, who does not understand the mechanics of the development of nations and has no inkling of the colossal power of stability possessed by nations, who believes that the merging of nations is possible long before the victory of socialism, already under the bourgeois-democratic order, and who, servilely praising the assimilating “work” of the Germans in Bohemia, light-mindedly asserts that the Czechs are almost Germanised, that, as a nation, the Czechs have no future.

From this passage it is evident, further, that what I had in mind in my speech was not the period of the victory of socialism on a world scale, but exclusively the period of the victory of socialism in one country. And I affirmed (and continue to affirm) that the period of the victory of socialism in one country does not create the necessary conditions for the merging of nations and national languages, that, on the contrary, this period creates favourable conditions for the renaissance and flourishing of the nations that were formerly oppressed by tsarist imperialism and have now been liberated from national oppression by the Soviet revolution.

From this passage it is apparent, lastly, that you have overlooked the colossal difference between the two different historical periods, that, because of this, you have failed to understand the meaning of Stalin’s speech and, as a result,

have got lost in the wilderness of your own errors.

Let us pass to Lenin's theses on the dying away and merging of nations after the victory of socialism on a world scale.

Here is one of Lenin's theses, taken from his article, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," published in 1916, which, for some reason, is not quoted in full in your letters :

"The aim of socialism is not only to abolish the division of mankind into small states and all isolation of nations, not only to draw the nations together, but to merge them. . . . Just as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only by passing through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can arrive at the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through a transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., of their freedom of secession" (see Vol. XIX, p. 40 5 ).

And here is another thesis of Lenin's, which you likewise do not quote in full:

"As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries—and these differences will continue to exist for a very, very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale—the unity of international tactics of the communist working-class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the fundamental principles of communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as would correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences" (Vol. XXV, p. 227).

It should be noted that this passage is from Lenin's pamphlet "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder,

published in 1920, that is, after the victory of the socialist revolution in one country, after the victory of socialism in our country.

From these passages it is evident that Lenin does not assign the process of the dying away of national differences and the merging of nations to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, but exclusively to the period after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, that is, to the period of the victory of socialism in all countries, when the foundations of a world socialist economy have already been laid.

From these passages it is evident, further, that the attempt to assign the process of the dying away of national differences to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, is qualified by Lenin as a “foolish dream.”

From these passages it is evident, moreover, that Stalin was absolutely right when, in the speech he delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, he denied that it was possible for national differences and national languages to die away in the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, and that you were absolutely wrong in upholding something that is the direct opposite of Stalin's thesis.

From these passages it is evident, lastly, that, in confusing the two different periods of the victory of socialism, you failed to understand Lenin, distorted Lenin's line on the national question and, as a consequence, involuntarily headed for a rupture with Leninism.

It would be incorrect to think that after the defeat of world imperialism national differences will be abolished and national languages will die away immediately, at one stroke, by decree from above, so to speak. Nothing is more erroneous than this view. To attempt to bring about the merging of nations by decree from above, by compulsion, would be playing into

the hands of the imperialists, it would spell disaster to the cause of the liberation of nations, and be fatal to the cause of organising co-operation and fraternity among nations. Such a policy would be tantamount to a policy of assimilation.

You know, of course, that the policy of assimilation is absolutely excluded from the arsenal of Marxism-Leninism, as being an anti-popular and counter-revolutionary policy, a fatal policy.

Furthermore, we know that nations and national languages possess an extraordinary stability and tremendous power of resistance to the policy of assimilation. The Turkish assimilators—the most brutal of all assimilators—mangled and mutilated the Balkan nations for hundreds of years, yet not only did they fail to destroy them, but in the end were forced to capitulate. The tsarist-Russian Russifiers and the German-Prussian Germanisers, who yielded little in brutality to the Turkish assimilators, rent and mangled the Polish nation for over a hundred years, just as the Persian and Turkish assimilators for hundreds of years rent and mangled and massacred the Armenian and Georgian nations, yet, far from destroying these nations, in the end they were also forced to capitulate.

All these circumstances must be taken into account in order correctly to forecast the probable course of events as regards the development of nations directly after the defeat of world imperialism.

It would be a mistake to think that the first stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat will mark the beginning of the dying away of nations and national languages, the beginning of the formation of one common language. On the contrary, the first stage, during which national oppression will be completely abolished, will be a stage marked by the growth and flourishing of the formerly oppressed nations and national languages, the consolidation of equality among nations,

the elimination of mutual national distrust, and the establishment and strengthening of international ties among nations.

Only in the second stage of the period of the world dictatorship of the proletariat, to the extent that a single world socialist economy is built up in place of the world capitalist economy—only in that stage will something in the nature of a common language begin to take shape; for only in that stage will the nations feel the need to have, in addition to their own national languages, a common international language—for convenience of intercourse and of economic, cultural and political cooperation. Consequently, in this stage, national languages and a common international language will exist side by side. It is possible that, at first, not one world economic centre will be formed, common to all nations and with one common language, but several zonal economic centres for separate groups of nations, with a separate common language for each group of nations, and that only later will these centres combine into one common world socialist economic centre, with one language common to all the nations. In the next stage of the period of world dictatorship of the proletariat—when the world socialist system of economy becomes sufficiently consolidated and socialism becomes part and parcel of the life of the peoples, and when practice convinces the nations of the advantages of a common language over national languages—national differences and languages will begin to die away and make room for a world language, common to all nations.

Such, in my opinion, is the approximate picture-of the future of nations, a picture of the development-of the nations along the path to their merging in the-future.”

*(Stalin, National Question and Leninism, Article 9, p 5-9)*

## **In Conclusion**

In this article we have presented a summary of the thoughts of

Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin in an attempt to understand the various aspects of the national question. We have taken help from Kautsky's article 'Nationality and Internationalism' too. In the light of their thoughts on various aspects of national question, we have drawn some important conclusions too. We believe that the national question in India can only be understood in the guiding light of Marxism.

For the success of proletarian revolution in India, as it is necessary to understand the dominant production relations in India, the relation of Indian bourgeoisie with imperialism, the peasant question here, it is very important to understand the national question in India too. This article is an attempt towards this direction. We make no such claim that these are any final words on the national question. Certainly, this question needs to be studied further and we will try to continue this work in future.

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**Translated from Punjabi by Manav**

# National Question in India

India is a diverse country. Here, by diversity we mean its multi-national character. India is home to hundreds of nations-nationalities. These nations are at different stages of development. Some are more developed than the others. India is not a voluntary union of nations. Rather it's a bind. The Bolsheviks used to call Tsarist Russia as 'Prison of nations'. This imagery is applicable to India as well.

India's big bourgeoisie is always parroting about 'unity and indivisibility' to strengthen its control over a wide region's market. It's 'unity and indivisibility' means the 'unity and indivisibility' of the market. To recognise India as a multi-national country, to advocate the right to self-determination of nations, the demand of referendum by the people of a nation amounts to sedition in the eyes of the rulers sitting atop the Delhi throne (India's big capitalists). **The imperialists too till now want to keep India as 'united and undivided'. Its interest too lies in a big unified market. That is why in this matter it fully supports the big bourgeoisie of India.**

The rulers of India are beset by the illusion that in the long run India can be kept 'one and undivided' only by wiping out the distinct identity, language and culture of the different nations residing here. In such a way will India be turned into one nation. Since 1947 the rulers of India are trying to accomplish this task. As a result, the different nations residing in India are being severely repressed by the Indian state. Since the last several decades, Kashmir and several nations of North-East India have taken the path of armed struggle for national freedom. They are unlimited repression from the Indian rulers. Several nations are struggling for regional autonomy in the form of demand for statehood. Hence, the conflict between centre and states have been ever increasing

and these conflicts have intensified ever since 2014, when the BJP formed the government in Delhi.

The National question is one of the most important questions of Indian revolution. The proletarian revolution cannot succeed here without understanding it and without suggesting its solution from the Marxist perspective. That is why it is very important to have a correct communist orientation towards the national question. But the communist movement in India has been prone to class reductionist deviations at various junctures. Case in point is the orientation towards the caste question of the Communist Party of India before independence. Then the party was of the understanding that with the advancement in class struggle, the caste problem would fade by itself. It did not particularly plan on how to struggle against the caste problem by understanding its past and present. Even after independence these trends continued in the communist movement of India in one form or another. These trends are clearly brought out in the attitude towards the national question in India. Several communist revolutionary group/organisations of India believe India to be multi-national country. But from this understanding regarding India, several groups do not draw out any practical task. In practice they do not give any attention whatsoever to the contradiction between the central state power and the various nations and its various manifestations. Thus, in theory they may believe India to be a multi-national country, even upholding the right to self-determination of nations but in practice they become part and parcel of the 'united and undivided India' chorus being parroted by the Indian rulers.

In our country there is a trend to discredit the national question by labelling it as being solely the issue of the bourgeoisie. Many a times the childish question is posed that what would the workers get even if the national question is resolved? The viewpoint of such trends is that the only benefit to the working class is in the form of increase in wages. These trends often view the national question as a potential source of split in the working-class movement. No one can deny that the bourgeoisie uses these issues to split the workers/toilers but the solution to this does not lie in communists distancing themselves from legitimate

democratic, national issues rather the solution is that the communists should present their programme for the resolution of such issues. In a multi-national country, the communists cannot turn their backs on the national question.

Like the Communist Party of India, before independence, used to think that the caste question would be resolved in the class struggle itself, in a similar vein even today many comrades are of the view that with the advent of socialism, the national question will be solved. Undoubtedly, the working class would like to solve the national question by building up of a socialist state (although, the possibility that while India remains capitalist some nations may become independent of it cannot be rejected outright), but we will have to tell the people how socialism will solve these issues. The various nations will have to be won over by propagating our program regarding the national question. Akin to what the Bolsheviks of Russia did before the revolution.

But it needs to be kept in mind that the working class cannot support every national movement. It supports any national movement up to the extent that it's character is democratic. The working class opposes the special privileges of any nation.

The Working class opposes every type of exploitation and oppression. In a country like India, the emancipation of the working class is possible only if in addition to fighting against its own exploitation-oppression, it fights the oppression based on caste, oppression on women and national oppression.

Due to the particular path of capitalist development in India (In majority of India capitalist development has taken place slowly via the Junker path), in the absence of a democratic revolution, owing to its colonial past and due to the division of various nations into religions and castes, the problem has been further complicated. To understand it requires a deep understanding of Marxism, the writings of the great teachers of the working class i.e., Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao and other Marxist thinkers on the national question.

The specificity of the national question in India also lies in the fact that here there is no such nation which could be labelled as the

oppressor nation. This has further compounded the national question. Some people, on this basis, reject any national oppression here. Some people present this matter as if except Kashmir, North-East, rest of India has turned into a single nation and Kashmir, nations of North-East are the colonies of this 'Indian nation'.

The rulers of India want to make it into a single nation. The Sangh Parivar already considers India as one nation. Since ascending to power in the centre in 2014, it has started implementing with utmost gusto its program of one language (Hindi), one religion (Hindu), one nation (Hindustan). Undoubtedly the sailing is not so smooth for the Sangh Parivar. It is natural that these oppressive steps be opposed and they are being opposed. The question is that can India become a nation? Can the different nations (stable nations, in the words of Fredrick Engels) merge into a single nation by giving up their distinct existence? Does any such example exist in History? If India cannot become a nation then what is its future? Lenin has said that for the capitalist period national state is typical and normal, that the most profound economic factors drive towards this goal, that the national state is the rule in capitalism. Then the question arises that does this rule not hold in the case of India? Can India leap over this period of historical development? Clearly, Marxists answer these questions in the negative.

Then what should be the attitude of the working class towards this question? How will the working-class state resolve the national question? Clarity over these questions can assure the success of proletarian revolution in India and confusion can prove an obstacle to even moving forward an inch in this direction.

In the proceeding article, we will discuss the present and history of the national question in India and give concrete suggestions for its solution.

Kashmir and North-East, since nearly the last quarter century, sometimes reeks of and are sometimes ablaze with dissent. In Punjab, mass indignation which resulted from the coercion by the rulers of Delhi and the legitimate issues of Punjabi nationality, such the issue of capital city, issue of distribution of waters, issue of Punjabi speaking

regions, issue of Punjabi language etc. was led astray in the form of communal, regressive movement of Khalistan. But these issues stand as it is even today. Except Kashmir and North-East, in rest of India or in mainland India, today the national question has not sharply emerged. But this crisis can take on a volatile form at any time. In view of the above mentioned conditions, it is important that we develop a correct, Marxist understanding towards the national question.

## THE ORIGIN OF VARIOUS NATIONS IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT, A BRIEF HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF NATIONAL DISPUTES HERE

### **India before turning into a colony**

Before becoming a colony of India, vast empires (sultanates) used to emerge from time to time but none had control over whole of India (including today's Bangladesh and Pakistan). These big empires like the Mauryan empire, Mughal empire had very weak control over the areas in their jurisdiction. Frequently, rebellion used to break out in the leadership of one or the other principality. Some or the other area used to go out of control of these empires.

The Mughal empire collapsed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this time, the balance of power between Indian empires and the European trading companies active in India, which had at their backs their respective nations of origin, was quickly shifting in the favour of European companies. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, all European companies had some godowns and some strongholds in India. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they established trading stations and settlements. In 18<sup>th</sup> century, they started subjugating the Indian empires. It is worth noting that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the European companies were not conflicting with the Mughal empire, from which they had gained trading privileges via gifts and power, but

rather with the different principalities.

The dissolution of the Mughal empire started during the rule of Aurangzeb and proceeded apace after his death. The rebellions against the Mughal empire started increasing. New principalities started emerging.

In 1713, Aurangzeb's governor of Bengal, Murshad Kuli Khan banished his proposed successor, which was sent by the Mughal empire, from the state. He stopped paying taxes to Delhi. Between 1714-18 Murshad Kuli Khan captured Bihar and Orissa and merged them in Bengal. Although in words Bengal accepted Mughal rule but in deeds it was fully independent.

The Mughal governor of Deccan Asaf Jah established independent Hyderabad principality by breaking away from the Mughal empire. In 1739, Awadh become free of Mughal control. With this, independent principality Awadh, whose capital was Lucknow, came into existence.

Marathas were the candidates of usurping power at the all India Level. Not only did they establish themselves in Western India but they also sent their armies to Central India.

By 1730s a large part of Central India had come under Marathas' reign. Resultantly, four principalities that of Gwalior, Nagpur, Indore and Baroda came into existence. To some extent they were under the central administration of the Peshwa headquarters in Poona.

In 1761, the Afghan forces under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Abdali fought the Marathas at Panipat. Both sides incurred immense losses in this war. Although Ahmad Shah won but due to the damages incurred in the battle, he had to return to Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of Ahmad Shah's forces from India, Punjabis started expelling the remaining troops of the Afghan forces from Punjab and soon they were successful in setting up an independent principality in Punjab.

This is only a rough and not a comprehensive picture of India before it became a colony of England. That 'united and undivided' India about which the present rulers of India never tire of speaking was never united and undivided before becoming a colony of England. If India

would not have become a colony of England then due to capitalist development the tasks of democratic revolutions would have been accomplished, resulting in healthy and rapid capitalist development then it would have resulted in the establishment of numerous national states here. But the colonisation of India aborted this process. The process of the colonisation of India which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was completed by 29 March 1849 when the English conquered Punjab. They had already conquered the rest of India.

### **England's colony India**

European colonialists had come to India as traders. Then India was a feudal society. England, among these European colonialists, succeeded in capturing India (except Goa, which was under control of Portugal). When the British East India company set foot in India it was not a considerable power. It established its trading centres in Surat, Baroch, Ahmedabad, Agra and Masulipatnam by 1623. From the beginning itself it tried to capture the areas where it had set up trading centres. For this it merged trade and diplomacy with war.

Due to the lack of a strong united empire in Southern India, the conditions were more suitable for the English there. The strong Vijayanagar empire had been overturned in 1565 and in its place several small and weak principalities had sprung up. The English had established its first trading centre in the south, in Masulipatnam, in 1611. In 1639 they made Madras the centre of their activities. In 1668, the East India company obtained the island of Mumbai and fortified it. 1686 the English clashed with the Mughal empire. But the English had to face serious defeats in this. Yet they succeeded in continuing trading activities in India. The British East India company's plans, of conquering and establishing political dominance over various regions of India, which were thwarted by the Mughal empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century resurfaced by 1740s due to the decline of the Mughal empire. When the English East India company had routed its Dutch and Portuguese rivals in South India then its French rivals (French East India company) emerged. Sharp battles continued for almost 20 years, from 1744-1763, between the French and the English

for the control over India's territories, wealth and trade. The English emerged victorious from this war.

The beginnings of the political dominance over India by the English can be searched for in the battle of Plassey in 1757 when the English East India company defeated Siraj-ud-Daula, the governor of Bengal. The beginning of the process of colonisation of India culminated with the conquering of Punjab by the English on 29 March 1849.

The social structure of India underwent important changes after it became a colony of the British. Like, for the first time the whole of India came under the control of a centralised state power. As the by-product of India's colonial exploitation, limited capitalist development ensued here. After conquering the whole of India, British introduced a new land administration system in India under which land became a commodity that could be bought and sold. Alongside rent-in-kind, the trend of the payment of rent in cash began. The circulation of money increased. Modern industries began to be established in India in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Coal mines began to be established in 1850-55. To maintain its military dominance and to ease up trade, the British started the railways in 1853. The first textile mill was set up in Bombay in 1854. There were 56 cotton mills in 1879 and 20 jute mills in 1882. Between 1880-1895 there were 144 cotton mills, 29 jute mills and 123 coal mines. By 1913-14 the number of cotton mills had increased to 274 and that of jute mills to 64. The number of workers in the coal mines at that time was 1,51,273. In 1940 there were 1000 factories in India employing 17 lakh workers. Although only limited industrialisation had taken place in India at that time, yet it (and with the raw material requirements of the industries established in England) gave impetus to capitalist development in agriculture. Various territories of cash crops emerged in different regions of India. The differentiation of peasantry started. The Indian society became feudal-colony in 1849 from a feudal society and then due to limited capitalist development it became a semi feudal-colony.

Due to this capitalist development in India, new classes originated in both villages and cities. The modern proletariat and the

modern bourgeoisie were the two most important classes among these.

Owing to capitalist development in colony India, on the one hand a countrywide (but uneven) anti-colonialism consciousness was born and with it different nations began to take shape. Hence, national consciousness and national movements too started developing. Nations/Nationalities are the product of capitalist development. Comrade Stalin has said,

“A nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations.”

“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”

(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question)

Before the onset of capitalism, nations could not have come into existence. In the feudal era, when countries were divided in various independent empires, not only were they away from national bounds rather they rejected the need for such bounds. In feudal empires neither were there national markets nor economic and cultural centres. There were no such factors that could put an end to the economic disunity and combine the dispersed areas into a national whole.

“Of course, the elements of nationhood—language, territory, common culture, etc.—did not fall from the skies, but were being formed gradually, even in the precapitalist period. But these elements were in a rudimentary state and, at best, were only a potentiality, that is, they constituted the possibility of the formation of a nation in the future, given certain favourable conditions.” (Stalin, The National Question and Leninism)

In England’s colony India, due to the capitalist development (although it was very limited) the emergence of nations began. In the

various regions of India, people speaking various languages began to be constituted in nations. Uneven development is a rule of capitalism. Under this law, capitalist development in colonial India was uneven too. That is why there is unevenness here in the emergence/make-up of the nations. In some regions of India, the emergence of nations started earlier while in others it started later. The process of origin, emergence of nations in India continued even after independence from British imperialism (15 August, 1947).

The emergence of nations in India in the colonial era due to capitalist development began in the coastal regions. It gave rise to the bourgeoisie of various nation and also to the “India level” bourgeoisie. But in this so-called India level bourgeoisie, the Gujarati and Marwari bourgeoisie dominated.

In India, in addition to the local bourgeoisie, the European bourgeoisie too was a part of trading, industry and the banking sector. The various factions of the bourgeoisie, with the intention of protecting and advancing their interests, formed their organisations. The European capitalists in accordance with the nature of enterprises either formed their different or common organisations with the Indian capitalists.

The European chamber of commerce was formed in Calcutta in 1834. Then European chamber of commerce was established in Madras and Bombay in 1836.

India’s first chamber of commerce, the Bengal national chamber of commerce was set up in 1887. In 1900, in Calcutta, the Marwari chamber of commerce was established. The Indian chamber of commerce was established in Bombay in 1907. In 1909, the South Indian chamber of commerce came into existence. In 1925 the Indian chamber of commerce was set up. In 1927 was found the Maharashtra chamber of commerce. The Congress party, which originated in 1885 emerged in a process as a coalition of the bourgeoisie of various nations. This coalition had come into existence for the solution of the principal contradiction of Indian society which was the contradiction between the people of India and British colonialism.

This abovementioned regional chambers of commerce saw the

protection of their interests and the expansion of their businesses in the formation of linguistic administrative units/states. The mass movements which arose in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for linguistic states and stopping the partition of Bengal had the support of these chambers of commerce.

In 1905 the Bengal national chamber of trade and commerce opposed the partition of Bengal. In fact, this organisation had opposed the partition of Bengal when the English colonialists had only prepared a plan for the same. The next year, in accordance with its economic interests, it supported the anti-partition mass struggle.

After 1905, these chambers of commerce collectively pressurised the Congress due to which the Congress was forced to accept the principle of federation (1916) and the formation of the administrative units of India in the form of linguistic states.

## **The administrative units of India during the colonial era**

The English colonialists had no intention of breaking feudal chains in India or paving the way for capitalist development. Instead colonialism obstructed the path of healthy capitalist development. The limited capitalist development that took place happened due to the need of the English colonialists of exploiting the natural resources and cheap labour-power of India. Similarly, the English did not want the development of any type of democratic consciousness in the people of India or the healthy, natural development of various nations. That is why the English had no intention of forming linguistic administrative units/states. For lording over India, they made administrative units according to their convenience by splitting, fragmenting the regions of various languages.

The British had divided India into two unequal parts. Into India under its direct rule and India under native principalities, which included almost 600 principalities and 40% of the geographical area.

After the revolt of 1857 the British change their policy towards the native principalities. Before 1857 the English did not lose any chance

of grabbing Indian principalities. This policy was now dropped. Many Indian principalities were not only loyal to the British rather they also helped them to crush the revolt of 1857. In return for their loyalty the British gifted them the chance to maintain their principalities. Meaning that they could run their principalities in some regions of India as loyalists of the British colonialists. The British had learned a lesson from the revolt of 1857 that the native principalities in the future would be dependable allies in the face of such revolts. These native principalities fulfilled the rule of strong props of the colonial rule in India. This colonial (afterwards imperialist) feudal alliance stifled the growth of productive forces and development of nations in India.

The British, in the beginning, divided India into three presidencies – Bengal, Bombay and Madras. In the Bengal presidency, Bihar and Orissa were also included in addition to Bengal. Afterwards, Assam and other regions of the West were added to it, which were transferred into the North-Western province in 1836 and was changed into United province in 1902. Middle Province was formed in 1861. The city and Delhi and Delhi region, which was a part of the North-Western Province was merged into Punjab in 1858. In 1901 the North-Western border region was separated from Punjab. In 1935 it was transformed into North Western Frontier Province.

The boundaries of Bombay and Madras presidency remained relatively stable while the boundaries of the Bengal presidency were changed numerous times. In 1905 Bengal was partitioned into two states. One of its parts included West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and in the other were included East Bengal and Assam. In 1912 the English, bowing down to the national movement of the Bengalis, had to nullify the partition of Bengal and unify it again. Assam, Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur were converted into different states. The final big reconstitution of states by the British was done in 1935 when Sindh was separated from the Bombay Presidency and made into a different state and Bihar and Orissa were made into two separate states.

It can be seen from the above description how the British colonialists fragmented the emerging nations in India. No heed was paid

to the language of the population in the formation of administrative units. Frequently people speaking one language were divided into several administrative units. For instances the Marathas were fragmented in Bombay Presidency, Middle Province, Hyderabad principality and other Southern principalities. Telugu speaking population was fragmented in Hyderabad principality, Madras Presidency, Travancore and Cochin principalities. Oriya people were divided in Madras and Bengal presidency, Middle province and 24 principalities. In colonial India there was not even a single nation which was unified in a single administrative unit/state. This was a calculated scheme of the English colonialists so that national consciousness may not germinate in the emerging nations, intellectual development of people may not take place by obtaining education in their own languages and therefore no danger might originate for the colonial state system.

### **The origin of national movements in India in the colonial era**

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the capitalist development in India, the rise of various nations and national consciousness started revealing itself. It began with the emergence of disputes between different national groups for the distribution of administrative positions and for the distribution of resources for the fulfilment of needs in various states, principalities. The manifestation of this national consciousness also came forward in the form of opposition against the suppression of language of a nation. For instance, according to their policy of 'divide and rule' the British colonialists imposed Bangla in Assam. Assamese nationalists sharply opposed this. in 1936 the British made Bangla the language of school education and judicial work. Bangla was the state language of Assam for nearly 35 years. The Assamese nationalists opposed this linguistic oppression. As a result, in the beginning of 1870 Assamese language was recognised.

A similar situation regarding language prevailed in Orissa, a part of Bengal presidency. Here Bangla dominated which was being opposed by the Oriya nationalists. Similar contradictions were surfacing in the

Madras presidency. The population of Telugus was greater than that of Tamils. But the Tamils were ahead in education, government jobs. This was opposed by Telugus.

Till the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century English officers gave quite a bit of importance to the Indian languages and their study. At this time, they were trying to find the means by which to mingle with and influence the people of India. The officers of the British East India Company wrote a letter to the government of Bengal on 19 September 1830. In this it was said that the government should increase usage of English in public work of all departments and start communicating in English with the kings who understand English and other reputed people. Additionally, it was also stated in the letter that the court proceedings should be undertaken in such a language which is understood by judges, the parties involved in the case, their lawyers and the masses.

From 1840s, this language policy of the British in India started changing. Now the British started promoting English in the upper strata of the Indian society in a well-thought out and planned manner. Sidelining all Indian languages, they slowly started imposing English in court proceedings, administrative communication, higher education and other areas. This change in the language policy of the British changed the perspective of the emerging nations in India regarding “We-Them”. In the beginning of emergence of national consciousness, Assamese language was opposed to the Bangla and Oriya to Bangla and Telugu. Then, this national consciousness had not yet started targeting colonialism. In the second state of national consciousness, the activities of enlighteners and reformers were directed against British colonialism. Due to their activities the disputes between various nations of India receded into the background and the contradiction of these nations with the British colonialism came into the foreground. Now the languages of the developing nations of India were not threatened by each other’s languages rather the main threat was English. The British colonialists were culpable in the disputes which had broken out earlier between different nations regarding languages, jobs. This was being grasped by more and more people every day. The political aims of the enlighteners were also helpful

in this and via these they raised the demand that all nations of India be unified in nation based administrative units/states. For example, the struggle for unification of all the regions of Oriya speaking population started in the beginning years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Famous enlightener and editor of the newspaper 'Prajabandhu' Pandit Nilmani Vidya Ratan organised a conference in Madras in 1902, which demanded the unification of Orissa based on its programme. A year later an organisation named Utkal Samilni came into existence which included most of the people who supported this demand. A very important role in the development of national consciousness of the Oriya nation was played by the Oriya poet, Pandit Gopbandhu Das, who established a school named Satyavadi Vidyapeeth near Puri, which for 20 years was the centre for Orissa's cultural life and education. Vidyapeeth composed many prose and poetical works and wrote research papers on Orissa's history. These works were clearly brimming with love for the nation and country. Vidyapeeth used to publish the monthly 'Satyavadi' and the weekly 'Samaaj'. The activists of Satyavadi Vidyapeeth participated in India's struggle for independence against the British.

A similar process of awakening of national consciousness took place in Bengal. Rabindranath Thakur in his article 'Bangla Literature' written in 1894 wrote, "During the time when that creative work (the work of Raja Rammohan Roy) was being done, Bangla had no prestige, knowledge of Bangla fetched no respect, neither wealth; it was difficult to express ideas in Bangla and it was nearly impossible to get through to people these ideas. It had neither the backing of the kings nor the encouragement of the savants." Still he saw change, "With the exception of the person who is extraordinarily stubborn, no one would be proud of his/her ignorance of the Bangla language."

The activities of enlighteners and reformers, which had played its part in awakening the various nations in India, were limited to big cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras etc. Despite this they played an important role in the formation and development of national literary languages. The spread of new economic relations, the beginning of the dissolution of village communities, development of commodity-money

relations, increased mobility of population slowly turned the consciousness of the people against the domination of the British. All of this increased the importance of the means of contacting the masses. The fulfilment of which could only occur by the spread of works in national languages and development of journalism in national languages. The extent of leaflets-newspapers in national languages to establish contact with the masses increased.

Literature played a vital role in the development of national consciousness in various nations of India. Literature was no longer the privilege of the upper strata rather it was within reach of a large section of the people. An important part was played by the fact that writers, poets of various nations wrote not in the old classical and bookish language rather they wrote in a language which was closer to the spoken language of the masses. For instance, in Bangla language this happened due to the influence of Rabindranath Thakur and Pratham Chaudhary. The paper being published by them 'Sabujputtr' emphatically tried to fill the widening gulf between the written and spoken language. Both of them gave preference to adopting 'Chalit Bhasha' (spoken language) rather than the extremely Sanskritised 'Sadhubhasha'.

Telugu language had for long been divided into language of literature and language of the masses. Literary Telugu was called Granthka (bookish) and spoken language was called Vihaark (common). In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a movement to adopt the common language in literature started. Famous writer and enlightener Kandkuri Veeroshlingam was the founder of this movement. Alongside increased national consciousness and the consolidation of the basis of Andhra national movement, the modern Telugu movement arose, which had the support of broad masses and was directed against the pomposity filled Granthka. This movement had acquired clear democratic character by the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its devout activists worked for eliminating illiteracy of the rural population and established schools and libraries in villages. Due to the activities of the enlighteners, literature was getting closer to the lives of the common folk and was becoming a serious social force.

Similar is the history of the emergence of the modern literary language of the Malayalam nation. In medieval Kerala, in literature, besides Sanskrit and Tamil, a special language named Manipratham was used which was a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam. Along with this a spoken language named Natubhasha was present and developing. In the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century a tendency emerged among the writers of Kerala to use the Malayalam language which the people could understand. In the area of prose, writers like Chandu Menon (1846-1899) and other famous writers represented this trend. In poetry such thoughts were expressed by the Venmani trend. The poets of this trend adopted the Malayalam which was normally spoken.

Mass movements and especially the struggle against British colonialism gave new topics to national languages in India. Like the turn towards the proud history of one's nation, description of love towards the country and struggle against rituals whose time had passed. In the creation of national consciousness, prose and poetry were very important in singing praises about the natural beauty of national region.

(Note: The above description has been taken from Boris Kluyev's book 'India, national and language problem'. Though this book has been written from the revisionist viewpoint yet several facts and descriptions given in it are helpful in understanding the national question in India.)

In this manner national consciousness arose in various nations of India. Here we have discussed the emergence of national consciousness in a few nations. In the nations which developed in India (some earlier, others later), the process of the origin of national consciousness has been more or less the same.

## **The struggle for linguistic states in India during colonial era**

The struggle for linguistic states in the colonial period of India

can be said to be the next stage in development of national consciousness in the emerging nations in India. For the formation of a nation, for the material and spiritual development of its people it is necessary that it has its own geographical area. When Karl Kautsky was a Marxist, then he had written in his article, “Nationality and Internationality” that,

“How is one then to constitute the individual nation?

The most obvious option would be to ascertain the region that each nation inhabited and guarantee them the self-administration of their own national affairs within this region...

.... the nation cannot exist without a territory. It does not matter how many members of a nation live amongst other nationalities, but the core of the nation must live permanently in an enclosed territory. The life of its linguistic culture is concentrated here and in the absence of a permanent influx of people from this territory, and thus in the absence of a permanent impact of its linguistic culture, the scattered members of the nation would soon lose their community of language and their nationality.”

(Karl Kautsky, Nationality and Internationality, Part 2, p 154)

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century voices had starting rising for the unification in fixed geographical, administrative units/states of the population of the various nations of India. On 17 November 1891, Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote in his newspaper ‘Kesari’ that, “The present administrative division of India (the haphazard division done by the English colonialists, which has been already mentioned -author) is the result of historic processes and in some cases is purely the result of conjectural conditions (Here, maybe Tilak is unaware of the English colonialists deliberately fragmenting the emerging nations –author) .... If instead of this linguistic units are taken up, then each one would be homogenous to some extent and would be helpful in the development of the concerned people and their languages.” (Boris Kluyev, India, National and Language Problem, p 145).

In Orissa, the demand for the unification of entire Oriya region arose in 1902 and in Assam, this demand arose in 1905. Approximately

at this time organisations came into existence for the struggle to form states on national basis in Bihar, Sindh and the southern parts of India but the rise in national struggles came with the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the mass movement that arose against it. At that time, justifying the division of Bengal, the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon had said that the partition had reduced to nought the political plans of those terrorists and fighters who in their struggle for political principalities were searching for an opportunity to turn the entire power of the Bengali nation against the British government. (Boris Kluyev, *ibid*, p 145)

This statement of Lord Curzon shows the real intentions of the colonialists behind the fragmentations of different nations which were developing in India. The tables were turned on the colonialists when they partitioned the Bengali nation. The Bang-Bhang opposition movement of 1905-08 spread among the masses. There wasn't a single city or village which remained on the side lines in the call for unification of all the regions of Bengali population. Lakhs of people participated in strikes against the partition of Bengal. The Congress party, in view of the events in Bengal, started setting up its state units in various national regions. In 1907 itself state units of Congress were set up in Sindh (which was part of Bombay presidency) and Andhra (which was part of Madras presidency). In 1908, a state unit was also set up in Bihar (although Bihar was not a single national region).

In 1911, the 'Andhra Mahasabha' demanded a separate Andhra Pradesh state. In the anti-imperialist upheaval of 1918-22 the struggle advanced for making linguistic states in nations such as Tamil, Malayali, Gujarati, Bengali and Oriya etc., for providing education in mother tongue etc.

Amidst pressure from the regional (national) chambers of commerce and mass movements the Congress was forced to accept, in Nagpur session 1920, the principle of making states on the basis of language. After this it further proliferated its units on national basis (on the basis of various nations). After the acceptance by the Congress in 1920 of the principle of linguistic states, in 1921 the Madras, Bihar and Orissa legislative assemblies passed resolutions to spur the government

to re construct administrative units on the basis of language. At the time when the Simon Commission visited India in 1928, the Government of India and India office was flooded by letters demanding the unification of Oriya speaking people in one state and making separate Andhra, Tamil and Kannada states.

The All-party committee of 1928, also known as the Motilal Nehru committee demanded the administrative reorganisation of the country on the criteria of language. The committee had said that the then present political and administrative division of the country was arbitrarily imposed by the British rulers. That this was a barrier in the economic, political and cultural development of the people. But this committee also avoided the direct demand of the abolition of native principalities. The report stated that, “If a province has to educate itself and do its daily work through the medium of its own language, it must necessarily be a linguistic area. If it happens to be a polyglot area, difficulties will continually arise and the medium of instruction and work will be two or even more languages. Hence it becomes most desirable for provinces to be regrouped on a linguistic basis. Language as a rule corresponds with a special variety of culture, of traditions and literature. In a linguistic area all these factors will help in the general progress of the province.” (See, *Marxism and the Language Problem in India* by Satyendra Nath Mazumdar, p 53-54)

The 1928 all-party conference was chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru. In the same conference he declared, “So that each state may educate itself and conduct its daily work in the medium of its language, it is important that it is a unilingual region. That is why the reorganisation of states on linguistic basis is extremely necessary.” (Boris Kluyev, *ibid*, p 146).

These were the promises that the Congress made with the various nations during the independence struggle of India. But these promises were never truly fulfilled. Later, the Congress went back on its promises. Only due to pressurisation by the masses were these promises half-fulfilled.

## **The poisonous weed of communalism**

Here it is necessary to discuss the adverse impact of communalism, which sprouted in India, on the independence struggle, the healthy development of nations. Communalism not only time and again weakened the independence struggle of India rather it also stopped the healthy development of nations here. Thousands of innocents lost their lives in communal riots.

Famous historian Ram Sharan Sharma defines communalism along these lines, “Communalism arises when the followers are instigated in the name of religion for political purposes. Harassing the people of other religions under the guise of protecting one’s religion is also communal.” (Communal history and Ram’s Ayodhya [in Hindi]).

Historian Sumit Sarkar has mentioned in numerous places in his book ‘Modern India’, the origin of communalism in India of the colonial era and the adverse effect it had on the struggle of the people of India. To understand this problem, it is necessary to quote some long passages from the book here.

Sumit Sarkar writes,

“Much more significant ultimately was the encouragement of divisions within Indian elite-groups, along lines predominantly religious, but also sometimes caste and regional. Such divisions often had deep roots and no doubt nationalists tended to exaggerate the element of direct and conscious British responsibility. But, as we shall see, conflicts over scarce resources in education, administrative jobs, and later political spoils lay in the very logic of colonial underdevelopment, even apart from deliberate official policies. Political reforms consistently extended and sharpened such rivalries right through our period. Hunter’s Indian Musalmans rapidly set the fashion in official circles of talking and thinking of Muslims as a homogeneous ‘backward’ community. Dufferin in 1888 described them as ‘a nation of 50 million allegedly uniform in religious and social customs and sharing a ‘remembrance of the days when, enthroned at Delhi, they

reigned supreme from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin'. (Dufferin to Cross, 11 November 1888) These were a set of assumptions ahistorically false as they proved politically useful to our foreign rulers. Recent studies of the United Provinces by Francis Robinson and of the Punjab by N.G. Barrier vividly reveal how the introduction of elected municipalities immediately sharpened Hindu-Muslim tensions in both provinces. By 1886, the Punjab Government of Lyall was already introducing separate electorates in towns like Hoshiarpur, Lahore and Multan. The original motive might have been, as Barrier argues, the reduction of an already-existing conflict; yet it remains an undeniable fact that separate electorates inevitably hardened the lines of division by encouraging and even forcing community leaders to cultivate their own religious followings alone. At the level of Council reforms too, Lansdowne was insisting in March 1893 that representation had to be of 'types and classes rather than areas or numbers': the acceptance of demands for separate electorates lay not too far ahead in the future. Communal tensions beyond a certain point of course also posed serious law and order problems. Yet Secretary of State Hamilton's confidential letter to Elgin on 7 May 1897 perhaps best typifies the most usual British thinking on the subject: 'I am sorry to hear of the increasing friction between Hindus and Mohammedans in the North West and the Punjab. One hardly knows what to wish for; unity of ideas and action would be very dangerous politically divergence of ideas and collision are administratively troublesome. Of the two the latter is the least risky, though it throws anxiety and responsibility upon those on the spot where the friction exists.'" (Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Macmillan, p 20-21). Further Sumit Sarkar writes,

“The second major type of sectional consciousness bred and often directly fostered by colonialism was religious

division— Hindu and Muslim ‘communalism. Clear thinking on this very complex subject has been hindered considerably by the development in the twentieth century of two opposite stereotypes—the communalist assumption of Hindus and Muslims as homogeneous and inevitably hostile entities, two ‘nations’ ever since medieval times; and the nationalist countermyth of a golden age of perfect amity broken solely by British divide-and-rule. Both stereotypes assume kinds of country-wide integration and uniformity almost certainly impossible prior to the development of communications and economic connections in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indian nationalism and Hindu and Muslim communalism are in fact both essentially modern phenomena: Instances of local conflicts between Hindus and Muslims may certainly be found occasionally in past centuries, just as there are numerous instances of Shia-Sunni clashes and caste quarrels. But communal riots do seem to have been significantly rare down to the 1880s. Thus in 1944 Coupland, a scholar with clear imperialist affiliations who surely had no reason to underplay the issue (he even declared that the Hindu-Muslim problem was ‘the cause of the continuance of British rule’), found one major instance at Benares in 1809 (where Hindus are said to have destroyed 50 mosques), and the next big outbreak only in 1871- 72, followed by a series of riots from 1885 onwards. (R. Coupland, *Constitutional Problem in India*, p. 29).

That communalism in a large measure sprang from elite conflicts over jobs and political favours has long been a truism, and scholars have generally concentrated on this level alone. Thus Francis Robinson’s very detailed work on U.P. Muslims frankly excludes mass riots from its purview through its focus on ‘elite groups concerned in making polities’. (*Separatism among Indian Muslims*, p. 6) The roots of elite communalism will be studied in the next section along

with its historical contemporary, intelligentsia or 'middle-class' nationalism. But the tragic fact has to be admitted that communalism also acquired a mass dimension from an early date—though a dimension obviously not unconnected with the activities of elite groups. While the potentially communal dimensions of the Pabna riots or the Moplah outbreaks were not developed in our period—perhaps because of the absence as yet of a separatist intelligentsia leadership in Bengal or Malabar—Hindu and Muslim elites were much more evenly balanced in the United Provinces and the Punjab, and it was in this region that riots were becoming increasingly common from the 1880s onwards. Socio-economic tensions might have been ultimately responsible in part. Thus Hindu peasants faced Muslim talukdars and landlords in large parts of Avadh and the Aligarh-Bulandshahr region, urban Muslim concentrations in U.P. towns mainly consisted of artisans, shopkeepers and petty traders while most of the big merchants and bankers were Hindus, while in the Punjab Hindu traders and moneylenders easily became unpopular among Muslim peasants. But the riots themselves usually occurred over issues quite far removed from economic grievances. In a movement only just beginning to be explored, a rash of rioting over cow slaughter spread over much of northern India. Gerald Barrier mentions 15 major riots of this type in the Punjab between 1883 and 1891, and such disturbances reached their climax in eastern U.P. and Bihar between 1888 and 1893, the districts worst affected being Ballia, Benares, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Arrah, Saran, Gaya and Patna. Serious riots occurred also in Bombay city and a number of Maharashtrian towns between 1893 and 1895. A Gujarati mill-owner had organized a cow-protection society in Bombay in 1893, while an additional aggravating factor was Tilak's reorganization of the Ganapati festival on a sarvajanic or community basis. Songs written for Ganapati

Utsavas urged Hindus to boycott the Muharram, in which they had freely participated before (the reformist journal *Sudhakar* even commented in 1898 that Muharram had been much more of a national festival than Ganapati), and some of them were openly inflammatory: ‘What boon has Allah conferred upon you/That you have become Mussalmans today? Do not be friendly to a religion which is alien. . . . The cow is our mother, do not forget her.’ (R. Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, p. 78; In the industrial suburbs of Calcutta, the first recorded riot took place in May 1891, followed by disturbances at Titagarh and Garden Reach during Bakr-Id in 1896 and the large-scale Talla riot in north Calcutta in 1897.” (Ibid, p 59-60).

“The quite unprecedented growth of both Hindu and Muslim communalism was in fact by far the most serious and permanent negative development of these years. There was a violent anti-Hindu outburst at Kohat in the N.W. Frontier Province in September 1924, with 155 killed. Three waves of riots in Calcutta between April and July 1926 killed 138; there were disturbances the same year in Dacca, Patna, Rawalpindi and Delhi; and no less than 91 communal outbreaks in U.P., the worst-affected province, between 1923 and 1927. The recurrent ostensible issues were the Muslim demand for stopping music before mosques, and Hindu pressures for a ban on cowslaughter. Communal bodies proliferated, and political alignments were made increasingly on a communal basis. Even at the height of Hindu-Muslim fraternization in

1919-22, Congress and Khilafat volunteer organizations had usually remained separate bodies, united because of the alliance between their leaders, but potentially divisive if the leaders quarrelled. Khilafat had brought orthodox mullahs into politics on a large scale, and the December 1921 programme of the *Jamiyat-al-Ulama-i-Hind* visualized free

India as a kind of federation of religious communities. Congress propaganda, particularly at lower levels, had also been far from consistently secular—Ram-Rajya, after all, was not a concept with much meaning or attraction for Muslims. The alliance between Congress and Khilafat leaders, weakened by Gandhi's unilateral withdrawal of February 1922, lingered on till early 1925, when Mohammad Ali, who as late as December 1923 had presided over the Kakinada Congress, broke with Gandhi in the wake of repeated riots. The Khilafatists in any case had been deprived of their principal slogan when Kamal Attaturk abolished the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924.

So far as divisions among politicians and educated people are concerned, the crucial factor behind the growth of communalism in the 1920s lay in the very logic of participation in the post-1919 political structure. The Montford reforms had broadened the franchise, but preserved and even extended separate electorates; there was, therefore, a built-in temptation for politicians working within the system to use sectional slogans and gather a following by distributing favours to their own religious, regional or caste groups. A second, related, factor was the considerable spread of education in the 1920s, without corresponding growth in employment opportunities. 'The resentments and bitterness of school, office and shop. . . (were) sharpened by the disappointment of rising expectations' (P. Hardy, *Muslims of British India*, p. 204)—as had started happening from the 1880s, but on a much larger scale now, the scramble for scarce resources fed communal rancour. Lower down the social scale, economic and social tensions, as before, could often take a distorted communal form, particularly now that an appropriate ideology was very much present. In a city like Kanpur, for instance, the background to the massive riot of March 1931 had been set partly by the decline during the

1920s in predominantly Muslim handloom weaving at a time when Hindu merchants and industrialists were forging ahead. A Bengal Government report of November 1926 related communal tensions in the Mymensingh countryside to 'the economic rivalry of Hindu landlords and Muhammadan talukdars or jotedars in this district, which is reflected in the keen interest taken by the Muhammadan electors in the late of the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill'. (Government of Bengal Political Confidential 516 [1-14] of 1926) The entire Swarajist leadership in Bengal, including even the 'Leftist' Subhash Bose, took up a pro-zamindar stand in the discussions on the tenancy amendment which went on intermittently between 1923 and 1928, and thus contributed directly and heavily to Muslim alienation.

The link between elite and popular communalism was provided by the rapid growth of communal associations and ideologies. The Muslim contribution here is well-known—the spread of tabligh (propaganda) and tanzeem (organization) from 1923 onwards, the Kohat outburst of 1924, the revival of the Muslim League as Khilafat bodies petered away, the murder of Swami Shraddhanand in 1926. At its Lahore session in 1924 presided over by Jinnah (the first since 1918 to meet separately from the Congress), the Muslim League raised the demand for federation with full provincial autonomy to preserve Muslim-majority areas from the danger of 'Hindu domination', apart from separate electorates—a slogan that would remain basic to Muslim communalism till the 1940 demand for Pakistan. It needs to be emphasized, however, that much of this was a reaction against the very rapid spread of Hindu communalism in these years. Tabligh and tanzeem were in large part a response to Arya Samajist shuddhi and sangathan, started after the Moplah forcible conversions and extended in 1923 by Shraddhanand to western U.P. in a determined bid to win back for Hinduism Malkana Rajput,

Gujar and Bania converts to Islam. The Hindu Mahasabha, started at the Hardwar Kumbh Mela in 1915 by Madan Mohan Malaviya along with some Punjabi leaders, had become practically defunct in the Non-Cooperation years. A major revival began from 1922-23, and the Benaras session of August 1923, which incorporated the shuddhi programme and called for Hindu self-defence squads, represented an alliance of Arya Samajist reformers with Sanatan Dharma Sabha conservatives in a common Hindu-communal front presided over, as usual, by Malaviya. While the emphasis on the link between Hindu and Hindi in much Mahasabha propaganda led to its specific appeal remaining largely confined to north India (86.8% of delegates to the 1923 session came from U.P., Delhi, Punjab and Bihar— as contrasted to only 6.6% from Bengal, Bombay and Madras combined); a development of ultimately very great significance was the foundation, at Nagpur in 1925, of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh by K.B. Hedgewar, an associate of Tilak's old follower Moonje.

Despite their theoretical secularism, No-Changers and Swarajists alike failed to adequately counter Hindu communalism, or even often to clearly disassociate themselves from its organizations and ideology. Gandhi went on a 21 day fast after the Kohat riot in September 1924, staying at Muhammad Ali's Delhi house and bringing about a very temporary reduction of tension through a Unity Conference of leaders. He also denounced, in words which still have great contemporary relevance, the barbaric folly, of killing human beings for the sake of the life of a cow. (Young India, 29 May 1924) Yet in U.P. No-Changers like Purushottamdas Tandon kept close relations with Malaviya, and Gandhi himself never broke with him. At places like Benaras, the Swaraj party and the Hindu Sabha were virtually the same organization. From 1925 onwards, Malaviya made

very effective use of Hindu communalism in his bitter rivalry with Motilal Nehru, organizing with the help of Lajpat Rai an Independent Congress Party which was little more than a Mahasabha front. Election preparations often involved direct encouragement of Hindu communalist intransigence, as at Allahabad in 1925-26 where repeated Muslim offers of compromise on the music-before-mosques issue (including in May 1926 a plea that music should be stopped only for five or ten minutes during the evening prayer) were rejected. In Bengal, Das' Hindu-Muslim Pact was abrogated in 1926, and Sasmal who had tried to defend it was defeated next year in a Midnapur election by fellow Congressmen using the slogan of Hinduism in danger. Even Motilal before the 1926 elections descended at times to communalist appeals, trying desperately and unsuccessfully to woo some Hindu Sabha groups to counter the propaganda that he was pro-Muslim and a beef-eater.

In the 1926 elections, the Swarajists went down everywhere except in Madras before the combination of Hindu Mahasabha and advocates of Responsive Cooperation. The sharpening communal alignment was indicated by the fact that in Bengal Swarajists still won 35 out of 47 Hindu seats, but only one Muslim seat out of 39. Much more important was the fact that the searing memories of the mid-'20s contributed greatly to the general Muslim aloofness in the next round of struggle against foreign rule in 1930-34. The real winner was British imperialism. It is not always remembered that the Hindu communalist leadership's record in bolstering up British rule is not much less notable than that of the Muslim League—from Madan Mohan Malaviya, the apostle of 'Hind-Hindi-Hindu' who bitterly opposed Non-Cooperation in 1921, to Shyamaprasad Mukherji the later founder of the Jana Sangh, who was a minister in Bengal in August 1942 at a time when the British were drowning the

Quit India movement in blood.” (Ibid, p 233-237)

The monster of communalism, reared by the British colonialists, shed boundless blood of the people of India. This continues even today. The highest price has been paid by the Punjabis. During the partition of Punjab in 1947, communalism played an important role. In the massacre during Punjab’s partition, nearly 20 lakh people were butchered. Around 1.5-2 crore people were dislocated. Communalism put a barrier in the development of Punjabi nation. It was strongly divided in three religions, Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs. These divisions though have weakened since but couldn’t be fully erased. Communalism has proved a barrier in the consolidation of many nations of India. It has constructed religion based divide in the different people of a single nation. The national identity of the people has been obscured by the religions one. People’s mind was poisoned by the idea, that religion, sect equals the nation. This poison persists in the minds of several nations of India.

### **1947 and after**

After 15 August 1947 India became politically independent from the British imperialism. This independence was primarily the result of immense sacrifices through decades by the toiling masses, workers and peasants of India. The historical struggles of the toiling masses of India like the Telangana, Tebhaga, Punnapra-Vayalar, Royal Indian Navy revolt etc. are some of the names from a long list of struggles. The main role in liberating India was of these rebellions by the people which arose for the independence of India.

A second helpful factor in the independence of India was the weakening of British imperialism in the second world war. Due to the ideological weakness of the Communist party of India and the serious mistakes borne out of them, it could not assume the leadership of the independence struggle of India. The advantage of this weakness of the Communist party of India was taken by the Congress party, the representative of the bourgeoisie. Hence, the bourgeoisie, which was politically represented by Congress, captured state power of India in 1947.

During the time of independence (in 1947) feudal relations were dominant in Indian agriculture. For the power incumbent bourgeoisie, the capitalist transformation of Indian agriculture was an important task and it furthered capitalist development in India. The period of 1947-1968 was the second period of capitalist development in India (the first period was the capitalist development which took place in the colonial era). Now India was primarily a capitalist country although there were sizeable feudal remnants in various regions of India.

For the bourgeoisie (big bourgeoisie) that assumed state power in India in 1947 one of the most challenging tasks was the “unity and indivisibility” of a multi-national India, actually it meant to maintain the unity and indivisibility of the big market of India. One of its biggest worries was to prevent the secession of any nations from India (Pakistan, alongside the present-day Bangladesh had already seceded from it). The bourgeoisie did not want to let slip any other part of India from its hands. This was the reason that Congress party which had kept promising linguistic states went back on its promises. But placating (although under capitalist relations, this is possible only on a temporary basis) the various nations which had awoken was a big challenge facing Indian bourgeoisie. The question of centralised state versus federal system also came up in the constituent assembly. Naturally, the decision favoured a centralised, unitary structure in accordance with the interests of the big bourgeoisie which aspired for control over the market of whole of India. Because generally such can be the bourgeois state in a multi-national capitalist country. Here a federal structure (in which the right of the final decision rests with the national assemblies and these nations must have the right to secede from any union, federation whenever they wish to) is not possible. This is possible only in Socialism. In a multi-national country, bourgeois state power rests on the exploitation-oppression of toiling masses as well as national oppression. It is the sworn enemy of national autonomy, right to self-determination of nations and federal structure. It proceeds towards forcible unification by crushing the culture, language of various nations.

The new rulers of India received in heritage an extremely

centralised state system from the British imperialists. When the constituent assembly met for the first time in 1946 and the beginning of 1947, then the idea of federation with limited powers to the centre dominated. Before the constituent assembly could do something, the Mountbatten plan was announced on 3 June 1947. Under this Punjab and Bengal was partitioned on the basis of religion. Using the partition as an excuse, representatives of the big bourgeoisie of India side tracked the question of federation and built a strong wave in favour of a strong centre. In the meeting of the union constitution committee on 6 June 1947 it was decided that constitution must have a strong centre with federation and it was also decided that for the distribution of power between centre and the lower administrative units there should be three detailed schedules and besides the powers enlisted in these schedules, the rest of powers should be in the hands of the centre.

On 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 1947 the Union Powers Committee handed a report to the chairperson of the Constituent Assembly in which it was emphasised that “the soundest framework for our constitution is a federation with a strong centre.” It was stated in the report that the idea to limit the authoritative domain of the central authority under the Cabinet Mission Plan was a compromise so as to work along with the Muslim League, that the Union Powers Committee is in consensus on this idea that a weak centre, which is necessary to maintain peace (!), for coordinating on important common issues (!), would be unable to speak on the international stage for the entire country (!) and would be harmful for the interests of the country (!). In this manner the new rulers of the country suppressed the legitimate rights of the emerged, developing nations in India under the platitudes of “peace”, “interests of the country as a whole”.

In context to this timeline of events, the draft committee decided in favour of calling India a union, although the constitution would be in its structure definitely federal. But it was a federal structure only in name. Actually it provided limited autonomy to the various nations under an extremely centralised state system. The centre has been pouncing at even this limited autonomy from the last 75 years. In the last 75 years

the toiling masses of India have fought many glorious struggles against the exploitation-oppression of the rulers. Alongside this, the history of India in the last 75 years has also been the history of struggle, immense sacrifices against national oppression. It is a history of the crushing of languages, culture of the various nations residing in India by the rulers of India. It is a history of plunder of the natural resources of the various nations. It is a history of drowning in blood the legitimate struggle of the nations longing for freedom by the rulers of India. It is a history of forcible unification of the various nations by the rulers of India in the name of “unity and indivisibility”.

National liberation movements are not only a part of the history of India but also its present. Even today, the struggle of various nations for national autonomy and complete freedom persists in one form or the other.

### **The struggle for linguistic states in independent India**

As mentioned earlier, the struggle for the formation of linguistic states in India had begun before independence and this democratic struggle of nations continued after and is present even today.

As stated before, the Congress party that had been promising linguistic states to the developing nations of India since 1920, put on ice its national programme as soon as it ascended power.

In the formation of linguistic states, the big bourgeoisie saw the breakup of India, due to which the big market would have slipped out of its hands. The partition of Punjab and Bengal in 1947 on the basis of religion and the communal killings that followed helped the big bourgeoisie and its representatives to create an environ against the demand of linguistic states.

As mentioned before, the regional chambers of commerce which emerged in India during the colonial era, and represented the interests of the bourgeoisie of the various emerging nations, had also forced the Congress to adopt the national programme of 1920 which included the demand of making linguistic states. These chambers of

commerce sped up their activities from 1940s. Southern India Chamber of Commerce emphatically proposed to the Industrial planning committee of Madras government that economic planning by its nature should be provincial and that the government (local government) should use every resort to improve the condition of trade and industry and a big chunk of it, to the extent that it is possible, should be reserved for the sons of the soil. (see, Suniti Kumar Ghosh, National Question in India and the ruling classes, page 20) The chamber of commerce was unhappy due to the fact that in the race for industries and enterprises, the citizens of other states were prevailing over citizens of Madras state and in a resolution in the industry and commerce conference it demanded the protection of regional rights. (Ibid, page 21-22)

Bengal chamber of commerce too, for the development of its state, made a regional plan. The opposition of these regional chambers of commerce was the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). This organisation, set up in 1927, represented the common interests of the big bourgeoisie of India. It opposed the dominant role of the regional bourgeoisie in the regional markets. It opposed the regionalisation of industries and demanded that, for the development of India as a whole, complete freedom and facilities should be provided for setting up private enterprises-industries in favourable regions. It expressed its unhappiness on the fact that in Madras presidency industries and other enterprises were not allowed to be set up by people from other regions. It held that this policy of regional development, would result in the monopolisation of industry and commerce by the people of that state (ibid). The Indian chamber of commerce and industry feared that under the Cabinet Mission Plan, which was based on the concept of superfederalism, which advocated giving less powers to the centre and more to the federal units, states “would enjoy greater autonomy with regard to all the matters regarding states. Almost all the aspects of trade and commerce would become states’ matters” (FICCI, Vol 3, 1947, p 86).

When the constitution assembly was set up, the big bourgeoisie, through various constitutional committees and sub-committees, lobbied

for the demand that most of the industries/businesses should be under the central government. Along with Nehru many Congress leaders were in the favour of these demands. Afterwards, addressing the annual meeting of FICCI in 1948, Nehru said that, “more dangerous than communalism is provincialism. If every state makes its own economic policy and creates new problems, then these are not needed at all.” (Ibid, Vol 3, p 29)

At this time during the partitioning of Bengal and Punjab along communal lines, lakhs of people died in communal killings. With the backing of FICCI, the Congress used this situation to its advantage. The division of powers between centre and states was changed completely. The rights which had been won via long struggles by various states from the colonial state were taken away. Afterwards, although Congress was forced to accept the demand of forming linguistic states amidst pressure from the mass struggles (we will discuss these later) but the leadership of the Congress and the big bourgeoisie, which was represented by the Commission on Linguistic Provinces of the Constituent Assembly, Linguistic Provinces Committee of Congress and J.R.D. Tata, H.P. Modi, Purshottamdas Thakurdas etc., were not in the favour of this demand. The fact is worth mentioning that after 1927 the big bourgeoisie of India never supported the formation of linguistic states.

After independence the central government was increasingly pressurised by mass movements to create linguistic states. The Congress wanted to take the wind out of the sails of this demand one way or another. They wanted to finish off these issue by stalling it. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most cunning leaders of the bourgeoisie of India, though expressed agreement with the demand of linguistic states but on the pretext of recovering from the pain of partition along communal lines of Bengal and Punjab and the communal killings he suggested to postpone the formation of linguistic states. When this issue came up for discussion in the constituent assembly, no consensus could be reached. In 1948, the constitution assembly set up the ‘Commission on Linguistic Provinces’ under the leadership of Justice S.K. Dar. This commission had to examine the legitimacy of the demand of

linguistic states. Dar commission advised against making linguistic states and said that it would create a threat to “national unity” and administrative inconvenience.

At this time (1948-49) mass movements started gaining pace for the demand of linguistic states. The purpose of the campaign for Greater Karnataka was to unify the Kannada speaking population which was fragmented among the states of Madras, Mysore, Bombay and Hyderabad. Similarly, a campaign initiated for Greater Maharashtra, whose purpose was to unite the Maratha speaking population in a single political unit. In the same manner the Malyalis were demanding their own state which was to be constructed by combining the Cochin, Travancore and Malabar principalities. The demand for a Maha Gujarat via unification of the Gujarati speaking population also arose at this time.

These mass movements forced the Congress to set up the J.V.P committee in December 1948. Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and Patabhi Sitaramayyia were the members of this committee. This committee had to re-examine the demand of linguistic states. This committee too, by lamenting ‘unity’, ‘national defence’, ‘economic development’ etc., opposed the formation of linguistic states. But this committee also kept open the path of making linguistic states wherever masses were more insistent.

After the J.V.P. report came out, once again mass movements arose for setting up of linguistic states. In some regions these movements were stronger, in others, weaker. These movements continue till the latter half of 1960s.

The struggle for a separate Andhra state for Telugu speaking people was relatively stronger. From the last half a century this demand had carved a place in people’s hearts and almost all the political parties were in its favour. On 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1950, the popular freedom fighter, Patti Siramalu, started a hunger strike unto death for the demand of Andhra state. After 58 days of the hunger strike Patti Siramalu died. A tempest of strikes, demonstrations erupted in Andhra after the death of Patti Siramalu. The central government quickly bowed down before the

mass movement and agreed to a separate Andhra state. The state of Andhra came into existence in October 1953. With this, Tamil Nadu state for the Tamil people also came into existence.

The coming into existence of the linguistic states, Andhra and Tamil Nadu, also encouraged other nations to accelerate their struggle for linguistic states. Under the pressure of mass movements for the demand of linguistic states, the central government had to set up States Reorganisation Commission. This commission came into existence on 29 December 1953. This commission had to give recommendations regarding the criteria for deciding the boundaries of the states. In October 1955, after 18 months, the commission handed over its report. This commission recognised “linguistic homogeneity as an important factor conducive to administrative convenience and efficiency.” But simultaneously it also reasoned against it by saying “not to consider it as an exclusive and binding principle, over-riding all other considerations.” Other considerations included “unity of the country”, “defence” etc. The commission recommended setting up 16 states and 3 union territories but the centre did not accept these recommendations as it is. It gave its approval to 14 states and 6 union territories under the States reorganisation act of 1956. The states were, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, while the Union Territories were Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Minicoy and Amindivi islands, Manipur and Tripura. The yielding of the central government to the demand of forming linguistic states was a victory, albeit only a partial one, for the democratic demands of the people of various nations. The people had to struggle even more for linguistic states, against centre’s policy of fragmentation of nations and this struggle continues even today.

To unite the Maratha speaking regions in one state a struggle commenced in the latter half of 1950s (1956-1960). This struggle is known as the Greater Maharashtra movement. Its demand was that a new state be made out of the state of Bombay for the Maratha speaking population whose capital would be Bombay. The Greater Maharashtra

movement also known as Samiti, was inaugurated on 6 February 1956 in Pune. Its leaders included the well-known leaders of the Communist Party of India (which had by then adopted the Parliamentary path) like Dange, Shridhar Mahadev Joshi etc. Due to the struggle of the Maratha people for a linguistic state, Bombay was divided into two regions in 1960. One of its parts became the state of Maharashtra and the other Gujarat. In the struggle for the Maharashtra state, 106 people sacrificed their lives. It is worth mentioning that the working class too participated considerably in the Greater Maharashtra movement. In the strike that occurred on 21 November 1955 for the demand of the state of Maharashtra, 4 lakh workers participated.

Though the rulers of the centre, yielding to the struggle of the Marathas agreed to make the state of Maharashtra, yet they tried to separate Bombay from it. Behind this, was the big bourgeoisie of India, especially the Gujarati, the main centre of whose business activities was Bombay. Bombay citizens' committee was set up. This committee included well-known industrialists such as Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J.R.D. Tata etc. The one point programme of this committee was to keep Bombay out of the state of Maharashtra. The prime minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru was also in favour of keeping Bombay out of the state of Maharashtra. The head of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Madhavrao Sadashiv Rao Golwalkar despite being a Maratha was in the favour of separating Bombay from Maharashtra. The so called secular Nehru and the communal fascist Golwalkar were of one mind on that the formation of linguistic states would give rise to bitterness and secessionist tendencies which would prove to be a threat to the country's security. But the Greater Maharashtra movement was so popular among the Marathas that the R.S.S. cadre abandoned its leader on this issue. At last the Marathas were victorious in their struggle. On 1 May 1960 the state of Maharashtra came into existence whose capital was Bombay.

The demand for the Punjabi linguistic state began to arise from 1947 itself. The struggle which commenced for the Punjabi linguistic state culminated on 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1966 with coming into existence of Punjab state. But the Punjabi speaking regions could not be unified.

Due to the conspiracies of the centre and the Akalis, who wanted a Sikh majority region, a vast Punjabi speaking territory was left out of Punjab. The national question of Punjab is in itself a subject for a separate article. In the article to be written on this topic, we would further discuss the ‘Punjabi Suba Movement’.

In India, the process of setting up newer and newer states has continued. The task of the formation of linguistic states in India is yet incomplete, due to which in one region or the other struggles continue for linguistic states. The discussion of all these struggles is neither possible nor necessary here. Our purpose was to depict a prominent trend, the struggle for linguistic states, of the ongoing national struggles in India. That is why, here, a brief discussion of the trend is sufficient.

### **The controversies that surfaced on the question of language in Independent India**

Language has the most important place in the formation of any nation. In the definition given by Stalin of a nation, of a nation’s characteristics, language occupies the foremost position. It is language which primarily separates one nation from the another. The question of language is also a part of the national question. In multi-national India conflicts have always arisen and are arising on this question. The Fascist Bhartiya Janata Party after coming to power in the centre in 2014 has accelerated its efforts in imposing Hindi all over the nation, which is being sharply opposed by various nations. On the occasion of ‘Hindi Diwas’ on 4 September 2019 the home minister of the country, Amit Shah repeated the fascist RSS’ slogan of ‘One nation, one language’. This faced enormous backlash throughout the country. In Punjab, too, the people opposed this statement of Amit Shah by rising above caste, religion. It was maybe for the first time in the history of Punjab that people expressed their love for the Punjabi language in this manner. On seeing the tremendous opposition of the Sangh Parivar’s attempt of imposing Hindi in the country, Amit Shah retracted his statement. But this was merely a retraction of the statement, the policy and intention of the rulers did not change. The Fascist rulers of the country via various

loopholes are busy in imposing Hindi on the entire nation.

The lunacy of the rulers of the centre of creating one language of the entire country is part of the repressive steps undertaken for trampling rather than developing the language, culture of various nations of the country to accomplish the impossible task of making India a single nation.

India is a multi-national country. Herein reside hundreds of nations. Stalin had said that 800 nations reside in India. At that time Bangladesh and Pakistan too were a part of India. It is difficult to know the exact number of nations residing in present-day India because statistics regarding language are not collected properly by the rulers of India. Many languages are forcibly declared as the dialects/sub-languages of Hindi.

The rulers of India and Hindu communalists have always been on their toes to impose one language, especially Hindi on a country with diverse languages. The efforts to make Hindi into the sole language of India had started before independence. In 1905, the Congress leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak advocated that Hindi written in Devnagri script should be the official language of Congress party. In its Karachi session of 1925, Congress decided that Hindustani should be the common language (Lingna Franca) of multi-national India. A little while after, Hindi literary summit took place in Nagpur. In the presence of Mahatma Gandhi this summit passed the resolution of making Hindi-Hindustani the common language of India.

In 1918, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Annie Besant, Southern India Hindi propaganda association was set up. The sole purpose of this was to propagate Hindi in South India.

During the drafting of the constitution of India, the question of India's official language came up in the constitution assembly. This question severely divided the constitution assembly.

Mahatma Gandhi held that there should be one "national" language due to which distinct "national" identity should arise. Several members of the constitutional assembly, following Gandhi, started advocating Hindi to be made the official or national language of India.

But several members of the constitutional assembly were against this.

Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Raj Gopalachari, Subhash Chandra Bose, Vallabhai Patel demanded that Hindi be used in the entire country, as it would promote “national” unity. In this issue, Dr Ambedkar agreed with these leaders.

When the constitutional assembly was terribly divided on the question of official language, then this situation was resolved using the Munshi-Ayyangar formula. This solution was a temporary compromise between those favouring and those opposing Hindi. The compromise was that in the next 15 years Hindi alongside English will be the official language of India. The rulers who ascended state power in 1947 defended the legacy of the British colonialists in trampling the linguistic diversity of India. In this context, Sadhna Saxena in her article ‘Language and the nationality question’ writes,

“India is called a linguistic giant. We should all be familiar with a few facts about our linguistic diversity and about the constitutional process which has taken place to tame this giant. — The 1961 Census recorded 1,652 mother tongues in India. At least 2(X) of these had 10,000 or more speakers each. Tribal languages constituted a quarter of the 1,652 mother tongues, and some of them such as Santhali, Gondi and Khasi could be counted as major languages [Krishna 1991:11]. — The corresponding 1971 and 1981 Census figures for mother tongues are 221 and 106, respectively. The variation in figures is indeed puzzling. It is found that from the 1971 Census onwards, the census commissioner was advised to drop listing all languages with less than 10,000speakers [Krishnamurthi Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal 1995:151. Sumi Krishna throws some light on this: “1981 Census figures were released to the general public early in 1988. Conducted in all states and union territories (except Assam), the latest enumeration is on the basis of main language spoken in the household, and not the mother tongue. On this basis and by grouping the languages together under a dominant language, a total of 106 languages have been separately recognised. However, the statistical reduction achieved in this Census- as many as 48 languages are grouped under Hindi – does not reflect the extent of the prevailing

diversity on the ground” [Krishna 1991: 11; emphasis mine]. The extent of distortion caused by such statistical manipulations is important to appreciate. While the broad national picture is one of sustained diversity, some minority groups – and their languages – give way before the powerful hegemonic tendencies of dominant groups. This can happen either by conscious planning or by an inexorable process of progression. In the first case, there is deliberate attempt to underplay diversities. The clearest example of this is the manner of enumeration of languages in the census as stated above. The 1961 Census, recognising diversity down the line, listed all mother tongues {1,652} found among the people. Yet the 1981 Census recognised only a few of these. Hindi speakers accounted for 30.37 per cent of the total population in 1961, declined slightly to 29.67 percent in 1971, but apparently rose dramatically in the next decade. In 1981, the Hindi umbrella extended over 39.94 per cent of the total population as a result of clubbing so-called related languages together. Similarly, in 1961 there were about 15 million Oriya speakers, while two decades later the number had doubled to an estimated 30 million. In the same state, speakers of the tribal languages, Kharia and Bhumji, recorded in 1961 and 1971. were reduced from 1.4 lakh and 91,000 to 49,000 and 28,208, respectively (Krishna 1991: 29 and 34]. — The real linguistic diversity is obviously not reflected in the original Eighth Schedule (ES), our constitutional dispensation. It listed only 14 languages (Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Sanskrit). — In 1967 Sindhi, and in the late 1980s Nepali, Konkani and Manipuri were also incorporated, bringing the number of ES languages to 18. Given the status of National Official Language (NOL) in 1950, Hindi in Devanagiri script was to be the language of the union and of the centre-state exchanges. It was provided that the states would be free to use any of the other languages listed in the ES for administrative purposes, along with Hindi, Though English was not listed.

in the ES, it would continue in use along with Hindi as an associate official language for a period of 15 years, up to the year 1965. This deadline has since been postponed sine die. As NOL Hindi was to

be developed by assimilating elements of all other official Indian languages including Sanskrit, and it was to take over all functions that a national language is expected to perform [Gupta Abbi, and Aggarwal 1995:2]. So our multilingual country with hundreds of spoken languages has only 18 official and constitutional languages and a single 'national' language which continue to operate at tenuous 'parity' with English. A few more facts: — Sanskrit, claimed as mother tongue by only a few hundred people, is included in the ES. —None of the tribal mother tongue languages such as Santhali (36 lakhs), Bhili (12.5 lakhs), Lammi (12 lakhs), etc, find mention in the ES, while Kashmiri (24 lakhs) and Sindhi (12 lakhs) are constitutionally recognised (figures from 1981 Census). — The 1981 Census lists Hindi speakers at around 26 crores. This subsumes a large number of mother tongue languages including tribal languages grouped under Hindi. It gives rise to a fake impression that all these 26- crore people speak constitutionally recognised 'Khari Boli', hence the myth of 'the Hindi belt'. According to the 1981 Census figures we are supposed to believe that 90 per cent of the Indian population mainly use one or other scheduled language [Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal 1995:5], which is not a fact. The ES has given rise to new hierarchical ordering of languages. There is English which is not even listed in the ES, which is above ES and may be termed supra ES language, ranking higher than any Indian Language. Then there are languages of the ES with an inbuilt cleavage between Hindi and other languages. Within the ES, but ranked a rung lower than Hindi are these other 17 languages (the regional languages) with their allotted states and territories or zones of power and influence. The rest of the languages are what might be termed as infra-ES languages. There is further division. While some languages are patronised by such agencies as the Sahitya Akademi which recognises 21 Indian languages and English, some other languages are co-opted as languages of education at primary and middle school levels (the number used to be 67). Finally, at the lowest level there are languages such as Bagri, Harauti, Bhojpuri, etc, which are called dialects of the languages of the ES or the tribal languages such as Khattra, Ho, Tangkhul Naga, Gondi, Korku, etc [Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal 1995:6]. Clearly

the ideology of assimilation permeates the ES. A look at the constituent assembly debates (CAD) of 1949 and the report of the Official Language Commission [GOI1957] helps us to understand the politics underlying the Eighth Schedule. We are at a loss to find any demographic, cultural or linguistic criteria for inclusion or non-inclusion. For example, a number of languages with developed literary traditions and large numbers of speakers do not find any place in the ES. Language policy having been inherently ambiguous, inclusion in the ES has evidently depended largely on the ability of a language group to influence the political process. “Perhaps the languages that found strong and articulated support in the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD in 1949) plus the ‘mother’ (not in the sense of genetic affiliation) of most Indian languages viz Sanskrit, got included in the ES, while the others were left out [Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal 1995: 3]. In 1956 reorganisation of the states took place on the basis of the languages listed in the ES. One important anomaly in the process was that Urdu was decided as the state language of Kashmir instead of Kashmiri, the ES language universally spoken and used in the state. The ES takes no cognisance of various languages. Empowering a few has impoverished and marginalised others by exclusion. Consequently, the ES languages have gained power, recognition and prestige as ‘mainstream’ or ‘standard’ languages. The others have been left to languish with demeaning labels such as “dialects’, ‘minor languages’, ‘tribal languages’ and so on. Education, the judiciary, administration, mainstream trade and commerce, national communication networks and media, even most non-government organisations – all use the ES languages, totally ignoring the vast majority of Indian mother tongues. Ironically, a foreign language not listed in the ES enjoys maximum prestige. “Clearly, there is no equality – either intended or actual” [Gupta, Abbi and Aggarwal, 1995:4].” (Sadhna Saxena, Language and the Nationality Question, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol 32 (6), p 269-270)

The efforts of the Indian rulers in crushing various national languages under the chariot of Hindi continues unabated. Before the expiration of the above mentioned Munshi-Ayyanagar formula, ‘The

Official Languages Act 1963' was made, in which arrangements were made to continue the use of English alongside Hindi as official language.

After Nehru, his heir Lal Bahadur Shastri continued the policy of imposing Hindi on the various nations of India. He permitted examination for Public Services in Hindi alongside English but did not grant this right in other languages.

In 1967, Indira Gandhi amended the Official Languages Act and allowed the use of English, alongside Hindi, as an official language for an indefinite time period.

The special importance given to Hindi by the rulers of the centre in multi-national India can be seen from Article 351 of the Indian constitution in which it has been stated that it is the duty of the Union to work for spreading and developing Hindi so that it may become a medium of manifesting all the elements of the "common" culture of India. This roundabout language actually is a constitutional path to impose Hindi on the various nations of India whose language is not Hindi.

Since 2014, after the formation of the government in the centre by BJP, the political wing of the fascist RSS, the efforts of the rulers in imposing Hindi on the various nations of India have gained steam. This is a part of the RSS' agenda of 'Hindi (one language), Hindu (one religion), Hindustan (one nation). Since its foundation in 1925 the Sangh (and its other branches) dream of turning India into a Hindu nation. Since ascending the Delhi throne on 2014 it envisions its dream as being fulfilled.

Immediately after coming into power in 2014, the Modi government asked all the officials of the central ministries, departments, corporations and banks to give preference to Hindi in its social media accounts. Then it asked ministers, governors and other distinguished persons to give their speeches in Hindi. At this time, the BJP leader Venkaiah Naidu had given a statement that "Hindi is our national language". There cannot be one language of multi-national India. But such statements of BJP leaders show their antagonistic attitude towards the national diversity of India. The Modi government in its first stint (2014-2019) tried to convert the milestones on the highways from English to Hindi in

Tamil Nadu. In its second innings the Modi government – through the ‘three-language formula’ of the New Education Policy – is trying to impose Hindi on various nations. The attempts of the Fascists to forcibly convert India into a single nation, to impose Hindi are continuing as usual and will continue in the future. The Fascists never derail from their intentions. It is necessary that the toilers, fair-minded people of the various nations of India oppose the policies of national oppression of the rulers of India and these policies are being opposed.

### **The phenomenon of the so-called Regional parties**

Usually, in India, the bourgeois political parties are divided into two categories, national and regional parties. Here “national” parties are those that express the interests of the big monopoly bourgeoisie of India and regional parties are those which express the interests of the bourgeoisie of various nations. Earlier, for a long period Congress was the most trusted party of the big (monopoly) bourgeoisie of India but with the intensification of crisis of the Indian capitalist system the Congress could not be its trouble shooter. In 2014 the big (monopoly) bourgeoisie of India brought forth the Fascist BJP. The Congress from a long period of time, especially since 2014 has been declining. The phenomenon of the so-called regional parties in India emerged after independence. These parties, representing the interests of the bourgeoisie of various nations, continually strengthened. While the so-called national parties were continually weakening at the level of various states. Many a times the state units of the so-called national parties behave as regional parties. Sometimes the acts passed by the central government are refused to be implemented by the state governments of the very same party. Like, recently the Motor Vehicle Act and the proposed Electricity Act etc., being passed by the central government of BJP, was refused to be implemented by various state governments which also included BJP governments.

After independence the formation of linguistic states began and new and newer states were formed. But this did not result in any change in the structure of division of power between centre and states given in

1950 in the constitution. With the passage of time the centre continuously usurped the rights that remained with the states. The basic rights which the states enjoy are of little use to the local bourgeoisie. By usurping the remainder of the rights, remaining after the allocation of states' rights, division of powers between centre and states as imagined in the Cabinet Mission Plan, the dominant position of the big bourgeoisie continued everywhere. Likewise, the regional bourgeoisie started investing in the regional parties and started gaining state power in the states from 1967. The role of regional parties in states continuously increased. As mentioned earlier, in some states the state units of so-called national parties themselves started fulfilling the role of regional parties. Like the role being played by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala today. In Karnataka, the state units of both Congress and BJP have been fulfilling this role. In Punjab, the Congress government of Captain Amarinder Singh has today and even before kept in foreground the local interests.

With time the so-called regional parties have strengthened and there has been an increase in their numbers. Today there are 28 states in India. BJP rules in 8 of these without an alliance. In another 9 states, BJP is in power in an alliance with one or more than one regional party. Out of these 9 states, the BJP plays a leading role in the alliance in 5 states while in the remainder 4, the regional parties are in the leading position. In 2 states, Congress rules without an alliance while in 4 states it holds power as part of an alliance out of which only in 1 state does it have a leading role in the alliance. The so-called regional parties hold power in 5 states without an alliance with either BJP or Congress while in 13 states they hold power as part of an alliance with Congress or BJP and in 7 out of these 13 states, regional parties play the dominant role in the alliance.

The present situation is such that so-called national party BJP governs in the centre while there is no "national" party as its opposition. The Congress is quite weak. In centre the main opposition parties of the so-called national party are so-called regional parties.

After 1947, due to mass movements, the formation of linguistic states began though this task is yet incomplete. Even in the linguistic

states which were formed, the unification of various nations could not take place. But even then, the nations gained limited autonomy. The capitalist development that took place in India after 1947 and the limited autonomy of the various nations (not all nations) in the form of states helped the nations to consolidate. This is the reason that after 1947 the situation of the so-called national parties has deteriorated while the “regional” parties have continuously strengthened. This phenomenon shows that the contradiction between the big monopoly bourgeoisie of India and various nations has sharpened day by day instead of resolving. As Comrade Stalin had remarked that on the basis of Capitalist production relations this contradiction cannot be resolved. More the attempts are made to solve this, the more it sharpens.

## **The national liberation movements of Kashmir and North-East**

Kashmir and several nations of North-East have been struggling for their independence for nearly last 75 years. To continue their occupation of these nations, the Indian rulers have made them the target of brutal repression. The major portion of the India army is stationed in these areas. In Kashmir and North-East (Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some areas of Meghalaya) since a long time one of the most brutal laws of the Indian rulers, Armed Forces and Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been in force. In a way the Indian rulers have handed over this area to the army.

From time to time we have written on the national question of Kashmir. The previous editions of ‘Pratibadh’ can be consulted for the same. Here we will discuss it in brief.

India and Pakistan, both formed in 1947, tried to merge Kashmir with itself. Pakistan attacked Kashmir. It occupied a part of its region. At this time, the king of Kashmir, Hari Singh decided to merge the rest of Kashmir with India. On 26 August 1946 Hari Singh signed the agreement on the merger of Kashmir with India. Thus, the Kashmiri nation was split into two parts. But the desire of the Kashmiris for the unification and freedom of their nation lived on.

In May of 1977 at Birmingham, England Amanullah Khan and Maqbool Butt founded the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. It was a secular, national organisation of Kashmiris. The aim of this organisation is set up a free Kashmiri country by liberating Kashmir from both Pakistan and India. In the 1980s under the leadership of J.K.L.F a massive national movement was created in both Pakistan and India occupied Kashmir. This faced brutal repression by rulers of both countries, India and Pakistan. This movement was crushed due to internal weaknesses, errors in strategy and tactics and due to the brutal repression of India-Pakistan rulers. But the aspiration of the Kashmiris to liberate their nation still lives on. Even today, the people of Kashmir are fighting the Indo-Pak rulers for their freedom.

The north-east is home to numerous big and small, developed and developing nations. The national question is more complicated here. To cover all aspects of this question is not possible in this article. This calls for a separate article. In the future we will try to write in detail on this question in a separate article. Here only a brief discussion is possible.

“India’s” north-east is divided into 8 states. It shares a 4500 km border with five countries, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Nepal. It is linked with India only through a pass 22 kilometre wide.

This region is a bastion of movements for regional autonomy and complete independence from India. Many armed groups are active here which have been generally fighting against the Indian state and sometimes amongst themselves due to the fiendish ‘divide and rule’ plans of the Indian rulers. The most prominent national liberation movements of this region (with all its Chauvinist deviations) have been those in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Assam. Going through numerous ups and downs, enduring the brutal repression of Indian rulers, these movements continue today in one form or the other.

## **The Big Monopoly Bourgeoisie of Multi-national India**

The big monopoly bourgeoisie that emerged in India after 1947, though emerged from more than one nation, still the Gujaratis and Marwaris dominate in this. Traditionally (even before 1947) the Gujaratis and Marwaris dominated in bourgeoisie of India and this dominance continues even today. In 2020, among the top 10 billionaires of India, 5 were Gujaratis. On the next page is given a list of the biggest capitalists of India in 2020, their wealth and their national origin. In it can be seen the proportion of capitalists that emerged from various nations among the big monopoly bourgeoisie of India.

In the list mentioned top 50 richest persons in India, the total of Gujaratis (18) and Marwaris (13) is more than half, i.e., 62%. Out of the total wealth of these 50 super-rich i.e., 492.55 billion US\$ the share of Gujaratis and Marwaris is 367.7 billion US\$. This is about 74.65% of the total wealth of the 50 super-rich of the country.

According to Ajit Rai's estimate, in the list prepared by the Monopolies Inquiries Commission about the 75 monopoly houses of India in 1967, 62% were Gujarati and Marwari. (See, Amalendu Guha, *The Indian National Question: a conceptual framework*) What is meant to be said is that before independence, in the initial years after independence and even today the dominance of the Marwaris and Gujaratis continues over the Indian economy.

In the list of the country's 50 super-rich, 4 are Punjabis, 4 Telugu, 3 Malayali and 1 Tamil. The total wealth of the 4 Punjabi super-rich is 32.5 billion US\$, that of Telugu's 17.75, of Malayali's 12.55 and that of Tamil's 22.6 billion US\$.

The share of Punjabi's, Telugu's, Malayali's and Tamil's in the total wealth of the country's 50 super-rich is 6.59%, 3.60%, 2.54% and 4.5% respectively.

The intent of showing these facts is not that we mean to say that the capitalists whose wealth is "less" should be increased. The interests of the working class cannot be in increasing the wealth of any of the factions of the bourgeoisie. The interest lies in appropriating the wealth and means of production of all capitalists.

Our purpose is to show the unevenness of capitalist development

Sr no.	Name of Capitalist	Net Worth (in million US\$)	National root
1.	Mukesh Ambani	73.8	Gujarati
2.	Gautam Adani	60.7	Gujarati
3.	Shiv Nadar	22.6	Tamil
4.	Lakshmi Mittal	19.1	Marwari
5.	Pallonji Mistry	15.2	Gujarati
6.	Radhakishnan Damani	14.4	Marwari
7.	Hinduja family	12.8	Sindhi
8.	Cyrus Poonawala	13.3	Gujarati
9.	Savitri Jindal	14.6	Marwari
10.	Uday Kotak	14.4	Gujarati
11.	K.M. Birla	13.3	Marwari
12.	Dilip Sanghvi	12.5	Gujarati
13.	Godrej family	11	Gujarati
14.	Sunil Mittal	11	Punjabi
15.	Burman family	9.2	Punjabi
16.	Azim Premji	9	Gujarati
17.	Kuldip Singh and Gurbachan Singh Dhingra	8.6	Punjabi
18.	Benu Gopal Bangur	8.3	Marwari
19.	Murali Divi	7.9	Telugu
20.	Bajaj Family	7.4	Marwari
21.	Madhukar Parekh	7.2	Gujarati
22.	Pankaj Patel	7.1	Gujarati
23.	Kushal Pal Singh	6.9	Uttar Pradesh
24.	Ashwin Dani	6.7	Gujarati
25.	Sudhir and Samir Mehta	5.9	Gujarati
26.	Hasmukh Chudgar	5.8	Gujarati
27.	Mahendra Choksi	5.4	Gujarati
28.	Kapil and Rahul Bhatia	5.1	
29.	Rajendra garwal, & Banwari Lal Bawri	5	Marwari
30.	Abhay Vakil	4.9	Marwari

31.	Vikram Lal	4.8	Delhi
32.	M.G. George Muthoot	4.8	Malayali
33.	M.A. Yusuff Ali	4.7	Malayali
34.	Anil Aggarwal	4.5	Marwari
35.	Singh family	4.35	Bihar
36.	Kiran Mazumdar Shaw	3.9	Gujarati
37.	Karsanbhai Patel	3.8	Gujarati
38.	Nusli Wadia	3.7	Gujarati
39.	Pawan Munjal	3.7	Punjabi
40.	Ajay Pirmal	3.7	Marwari
41.	Vinod and Anil Rai Gupta	3.6	Marwari
42.	P.V. Reddy	3.5	Telugu
43.	Leena Tewari	3.4	
44.	Shyam and Hari Bhatia	3.4	Marwari
45.	Reddy family	3.25	Telugu
46.	Gupta family	3.2	Marwari
47.	P.P. Reddy	3.1	Telugu
48.	Byju Raveendran and Divya Gokulnath	3.05	Malayali
49.	Harish Mariwala	2.9	Gujarati
50.	Yusuf Hamied	2.1	Born in Poland
<b>Total Wealth</b>	<b>492.55</b>		

(This list of country's super rich and their wealth has been taken from Startup Talky (<https://startuptalky.com/richest-person-india-list/>) and their national roots have been traced down by us.)

in India via these facts. In a multi-national country this unevenness also expresses itself in the progress and regression of some nations. This is one of the reasons of national conflicts in a multi-national country.

Revisionist historians like Amalendu Guha and their followers assert that the bourgeoisie of India has emerged from various nations. That it has mingled up to such an extent, that it is dependent on the technology of western multinational corporations and foreign markets to such an extent that it has become impossible to distinguish between the bourgeoisie of this or that nation. On this basis they refuse to acknowledge the national question in India and the right of nations to self-determination. In this process, they go to the extent of revising the theory of Lenin and Stalin regarding the national question. (See, Amalendu Guha, *ibid*) (We will write a detailed criticism of these revisionist trends in the coming editions of 'Pratibadh'.) But actual facts fly in the face of these revisionists.

In the light of above facts, we have seen that the dominance of Gujarati and Marwari bourgeoisie continues over the Indian economy. Theirs is the major share in the country's super-rich. A small share is that of the Tamil, Punjab, Telugu and Malayalis. Although India is home to hundreds of nations. The majority of these nations have no share in the big monopoly bourgeoisie of India. This unevenness has bred national conflicts in India and will continue to do so in the future. These conflicts act as barrier in the advancement of the working-class struggle for socialism. This should not be taken to mean that we should refuse to accept the existence of national question in India rather the working class should suggest a democratic, logical solution for the national question in India. It should convince the various nations of India as to how the working-class state would solve the national question in India.

## **2014 and after**

The year 2014 is an important turning point in the history of India. In this year, with the backing of India's big monopoly bourgeoisie a fascist party, BJP came to power in the centre with a huge majority. We have already somewhat discussed the extent to which national

oppression in India has increased with the coming into power of fascist RSS' political wing, BJP.

The Sanghi Fascists are born enemies not only of India's toiling masses, dalits, women but also of the various nations residing here. The current head of the RSS, Mohan Bhagwat, in a statement on 13 December 2009 had said that RSS had favoured administrative expediency in the formation of new states and had opposed the linguistic basis for new states. The size of the state, big or small, does not matter just administrative expediency must be kept in mind.

The RSS, has been expressing its hostility time and again towards the distinct identity of the various nations dwelling in India, towards their democratic rights which includes the formation of linguistic states. In the ideas of Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, their most prominent theoretician, can be seen the reflection of their hostile attitude towards the various nations populating India. In 1952, an anti-federalism conference was held at Bombay. Addressing this conference, Golwalkar had demanded that, "India should have Central Rule and from administrative point of view states should be administered territories." (The reference given by Shamsul Islam in his article 'How the RSS betrayed India: excerpts from its own documents will shock you).

In the constitution of India, made in 1950, the scant rights that the states received, those too were a thorn in the side of the Sanghi Fascists. In the communication which he sent to the first session of the 'National Integration Council' in 1961 Golwalkar says, "Today's federal form of government not only gives birth but also nourishes the feelings of separatism, in a way refuses to recognize the fact of one nation and destroys it. It must be completely uprooted, constitution purified and unitary form of government be established." (ibid)

In Golwalkar's famous book 'Bunch of thoughts', a whole chapter opposes the rights of the nations in India. The name of this chapter is 'Wanted a unitary state'. In this Golwalkar writes, "The most important and effective step will be to bury deep for good all talk of a federal structure of our country's Constitution, to sweep away the existence of all 'autonomous' or semi-autonomous 'states' within the

one state viz., Bharat and proclaim ‘One Country, One State, One Legislature, One Executive’ with no trace of fragmentational, regional, sectarian, linguistic or other types of pride being given a scope for playing havoc with our integrated harmony. Let the Constitution be re-examined and re-drafted, so as to establish this Unitary form of Government.” (ibid)

The BJP after ascending to power in the centre in 2014 has been trying to fulfil this dream of their guru since. The most prominent example of this is when on 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2019 the special status of Jammu-Kashmir was rescinded by removing article 370 and 35A from the Indian constitution.

We will further discuss the enmity of the BJP, which is in power in the centre, with the various nations dwelling in India.

## National Question in present-day India

The three prominent forms of the national question, national movements or conflicts in present-day India are as follows:-

### 1. *National liberation movements*

In India, after 1947, armed national liberation movements arose in Kashmir and North-East. Amongst them, the movements of Kashmir and Nagaland continue even today. The national liberation movements of Mizoram, Manipur have had to face setbacks. But here too the fire kindles.

### 2. *Struggle for new linguistic states*

The struggle of various nations for linguistic states continues even today, like the struggle for Gorkhaland state. In several other regions of India, the demand for new states continue to arise and have been arising. This needs further study so as to know the extent of the legitimacy of these demands.

### 3. *The protection of the autonomy of the states and*

## ***struggle for greater rights to the states***

In the extremely centralised state system of India the minimal autonomy that had to be given to the various nations of India, in the constitution of 1950, has always seemed to the big bourgeoisie of India as a thorn in its flesh. That is why the representatives of the big bourgeoisie of India, the Congress and now the Fascist BJP have always been grabbing at the rights of the states. Before, education was the right of the states. But during Emergency in 1976 via the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment of the constitution the central rulers transferred it into the concurrent list, the common list of the centre and the states, the subjects included in which can be legislated upon by both the centre and the states. But it is the concurrent list only in name. In content it is centre's list. The list of centre's plunder of state's rights is quite long. The most recent illustrations of these is the removal of article 370 and article 35A from Jammu-Kashmir, the new farm laws of the centre, proposed electricity bill etc. Farming and electricity both are state subjects. According to the constitution the centre cannot make laws on this.

The centre is continuously robbing the states of their rights. In this context the conflict of the centre and the state has sharpened on the following issues and in the future these disputes are expected to intensify-  
:

### **a) The strife over G.S.T**

Presently, increasing national conflicts can be seen in many issues. The first issue is that of Goods and Services Tax (GST). While putting GST into force on 1 July 2017, the states were taken into confidence and promised that this would increase states' revenues. It was estimated that the revenue of states would increase by 14% annually. In case that the revenue of any state does not fulfil this target then for their compensation, GST compensation cess was set up so as to cover their deficit. But this promise has not been kept. The central government has been stopping the states' rightful share of the GST and they are not being compensated via the GST compensation cess. According to CAG's report, in 2018-19, out of the 95,028 crores collected under the head of GST compensation cess, 40,806 crores far from being given to the

states have not even been kept in the GST compensation account and instead have been placed in the centre's 'Consolidated Fund of India' (CFI). In the current fiscal year 2020-21 the difference between the states' expected and actual revenue from GST is 3 lakh crores. Under the head of GST compensation cess only 65,000 crores have been collected and right now it is a matter of great dispute as to from where would the remaining 2.35 lakh crores be arranged. After GST due to the decline in states' revenues, the centre-state squabbles have been increasing. The states are feeling helpless. In fact, under the guise of GST the centre has increased its revenues and shrank those of the states.

This is not merely the case with GST rather the central government is using the entire tax system under the policy of economic centralisation which is increasing resentment among the states. In the tax collected under the central tax system there is fixed share of centre and states. Additionally, there are cess and surcharges which are collected so as to be spent on a definite purpose and therefore, the states have no share in these. The Central government is collecting revenues via cess and surcharge and instead of spending these on the decided purpose is itself utilizing these. During 2018-19 under various cess 2.74 lakh crore was collected but only 1.64 lakh crore were disbursed under the decided heads, the rest was kept by the central government. According to CAG's report the centre instead of transferring the 94,306 crores collected under education cess to the education budget is keeping the money with itself.

### **b) The dispute over the distribution of central funds**

In addition to this, disagreements arise over the distribution between centre and the states of the amounts of the central funds. Presently, the centre's share stands at 58% and that of states at 42%. The demand for increasing this share crops up from time to time. The central government has demanded from the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission to decrease the states' share below 42%. It does not seem that these disputes between centre and states regarding revenues would be resolved any time soon. The impact of economic recession and fall in the economy

due to Corona lockdowns has adversely affected the government's revenues due to which these disputes have further intensified.

### **C) The dispute over distribution of Lok Sabha seats**

According to article 81 of the Indian constitution each state is awarded seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the parliament, in proportion to its population, and these are further divided on a rough estimate into constituencies of a similar size. The above mentioned article of the constitution does not hold in the Union territories. Most of the Union territories are actually regions of various nations usurped by the centre. According to the 31<sup>st</sup> amendment of the Indian constitution, made in 1973, the parliament can decide the number of Lok Sabha seats of those Union territories whose population is less than 60 lakhs. In this way the centre can arbitrarily increase or decrease the seats of union territories.

There are 545 Lok Sabha seats at the moment. For the proportional distribution of these seats, article 82 of the constitution calls for the redistribution of seats on the basis of the new population count after every census (that is after every 10 years). But during the Emergency in 1976, the Indira government had postponed the reorganisation of the seats till the census of 2001 via the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment of the constitution. But in 2002 the redistribution of Lok Sabha seats was again deferred till 2026 via the 44<sup>th</sup> amendment. In the last 70 years the growth in population of South India (especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu) has decreased while the population of North India especially Uttar Pradesh and Bihar has increased. Now if the Lok Sabha seats are distributed in accordance with the population then the Lok Sabha seats of South India (especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu) will decrease and that of North India (especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) would increase. Now if the reorganisation of Lok Sabha seats takes place then the Southern states feel wronged and if the reorganisation does not take place then the northern states feel wronged. The rulers of India are stuck in this maze, the exit from which they cannot yet find.

## The standpoint of the working class for the solution of national question in India

Marxists view/understand the national question from the working-class perspective. They understand and chart out their tasks in national conflicts not from the standpoint of nations but rather from that of classes. To deviate from the working class standpoint in understanding the national question and in suggesting its solution is to fall in the quagmire of nationalism. The national question in India can only be understood in the light of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and other Marxist intellectuals guide us to understand the national question in India. The manner in which the Bolsheviks resolved the national question after the Great October Socialist Revolution (1917) acts as our guiding light.

On the basis of the discussion undertaken above in understanding the national question in India, the concrete tasks that face us for the solution of this issue are:-

(1) The languages of all the nations inhabiting India should be given equal status. No single language should have a special position. The rulers of India have been trying since 1947 to make Hindi, India's national and official language. These steps of linguistic (national) oppression of the rulers should be opposed.

The rulers of India reject its multi-national character. To call India a multi-national country amounts to sedition in the eyes of the rulers of India. That is why the rulers of India wrongly dub the language of various nations as regional rather than national languages. The 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution, prepared by them, is a betrayal of the various nations. The languages of hundreds of nations are not a part of this schedule.

In the various national regions of the nations dwelling in India, their languages should be recognised as national language. Additionally, legal arrangements should be made for the protection of languages and culture of national minorities inhabiting these national regions.

In a multi-national country, a link language is required. But to

prefer one language for this (as preference is being given to Hindi in India) and to impose it is an injustice to other nations. Lenin has written that in a multi-national country, one language naturally becomes a link language due to the requirements of economic exchange.

(2) The demand for forming linguistic administrative units/states had already escalated in India before independence. After 1947 the rulers were forced to create linguistic states. But even today several nations are struggling for forming their separate state. Even after 75 years of independence the process of formation of linguistic states is incomplete.

Even the states which were created after 1947, the central rulers fragmented those. For instance, in 1966 Punjab state was based on the basis of Punjabi language. But in present day Jammu, Himachal, Haryana and Himachal a large Punjabi-speaking region has been kept out of Punjab. The central rulers themselves usurped Chandigarh, a part of Punjab. Such is the plight of several other states.

One of the important tasks in the resolution of the national question in India is the reconstruction of linguistic states in India. In this context the ideas of the great teachers of working class especially Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin guide us. After the 1917 socialist revolution, the Soviet Union taking as basis the language of various nations formed socialist republics, autonomous republics and autonomous regions. This experience too shines our path. (To know the ideas of the above mentioned teachers of the working class in this context and the Soviet experiment see, 'Pratibadh' Bulletin 33, Page 58-65 and 81-106.)

(3) The next step towards the resolution of national question in India is the protection of the autonomy of nations/states (though not all states are a single nation here) and to demand greater rights for the states.

Comrade Stalin considers autonomy as an essential step in the direction of the resolution of national question in a multi-national country. He has written,

“What, then, is the way out?

The only correct solution is *regional* autonomy, autonomy for such crystallized units as Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Caucasus, etc.

The advantage of regional autonomy consists, first of all, in the fact that it does not deal with a fiction bereft of territory, but with a definite population inhabiting a definite territory. Next, it does not divide people according to nations, it does not strengthen national barriers; on the contrary, it breaks down these barriers and unites the population in such a manner as to open the way for division of a different kind, division according to classes. Finally; it makes it possible to utilize the natural wealth of the region and to develop its productive forces in the best possible way without awaiting the decisions of a common centre – functions which are not inherent features of cultural-national autonomy.

Thus, *regional autonomy is an essential element in the solution of the national question.*”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National Question).*

Comrade Lenin writes that autonomy is a step in the direction of the complete freedom of nations (towards the right to self-determination). He says,

“Incidentally, autonomy, as a reform, differs in principle from freedom to Recede, as a revolutionary measure. This is unquestionable. Bat as everyone knows, in practice a reform is often merely a step towards revolution. It is autonomy that enables a nation forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state to crystallize into a nation, to gather, assess and organise its forces, and to select the most opportune moment for a declaration ... in the “Norwegian” spirit: We, the autonomous diet of such-and-such a nation, or of such-and-such a territory, declare that the Emperor of all the Russias has ceased to be King of Poland, etc.”(Lenin, The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up, LCW Vol. 22, p 344-345)

**(4)** The most important step in the resolution of national question in India is to demand for all the nations inhabiting India, the right to self-determination meaning the right to form its independent state.

The constitution of India says that India is a union of states. The

constitution does not accept it as the union of various nations. The whatsoever union of states that exists in India, is not a voluntary union of the various nations of India. This unions rests on force, repression. No nation of India has the right to secede from it. The rulers of the country are ever ready to drown every such demand in blood and tears.

Not just India, such is the case of almost all the multi-national countries of the world. Because multinational capitalist state cannot be a voluntary union of nations. This can only be a centralised, unitary state. This is one of the characteristics of national oppression in a multi-national country.

Only socialist multi-national India can be a voluntary union of nations. Where every nation would have the right to secede from this union. In India national oppression can be eliminated and a voluntary union of various nations set up through the unity of the toiling masses of all nations, by overthrowing the oppressive capitalist state of India, by establishing socialism. Additionally, we should move forward keeping in mind the possibility that in special circumstances, some nations may be able to separate from the present capitalist India. This so-called 'union of states', which hinges on repression, can disintegrate. But the first possibility (establishment of Socialist India) is primary here while the second possibility (the disintegration of India) is secondary. That is why the working class must emphasise the first possibility.

(5) The next step in the solution of national question in India is the formation of Federal India. But only the voluntary union of nations can be federal. Like the Socialist Soviet Union was. The pre requisite of the formation of federal structure in India is the construction of socialism here.

Here we have pointed out some immediate and some distant tasks for the resolution of national question in India. Besides these there are several possible tasks in this direction. But the discussion of all such tasks in not possible here.

## Conclusion

We have seen that in India's colonial era itself national struggles (the struggle of the various nations of India for their rights) had begun. In 75 years after independence these struggles continued in various forms and continue even today.

The 'unity and indivisibly' of India is like a holy religious mantra for the rulers of India, which they are continually enchanting. The 'unity and indivisibility' of India is actually the 'unity and indivisibility' of India's big market one on which the big bourgeoisie of India wishes to continue its control. Imperialism also favours such a 'unity and indivisibility' of India.

But the rulers of India always live in the mortal fear of the disintegration of this 'unity and indivisibility'. That is why they are ever busy in eroding the distinct identity of various nations of India and making it into a single nation.

But can India become a nation? The turning of India into a single nation would mean the eradication of the different nations and their merging into a single nation. In the capitalist period of human history, this is impossible. Some small nations, whose members migrate on a large scale and after a while are absorbed into other nations, can cease to exist and do cease to exist. But this does not apply to big, stable nations. If we survey the last 150 years of India's history, a clear trend of continuous development and consolidation of nations emerges. In human history, though nations arose a lot afterwards than the birth of classes yet they will cease to exist with the disappearance of classes.

Now if India cannot become a nation, then what is its future? In capitalist multi-national India there are two strong possibilities in the future. One is that a voluntary union of nations is established here via the socialist revolution. Second possibility is that of its integration. If we look at the history of the world from the onset of the capitalist period and after, then a clear trend can be observed regarding the continuous coming into existence of national states. The continuous trend of the disintegration of multi-national states is seen. The multi-national states that remain are the remnants of the past. With the exception of Switzerland, almost all the

rest of multi-national countries are embroiled in national conflicts. In capitalist era, the disintegration of multi-national states is their inevitable fate. Today or later comes the day of their disintegration. This is what Comrade Stalin said about the fate of multi-national states,

“In national states like France and Italy, which at first relied mainly on their own national forces, there was, generally speaking, no national oppression. In contrast to that, the multi-national states that are based on the domination of one nation—more exactly, of the ruling class of that nation—over the other nations are the original home and chief arena of national oppression and of national movements. **The contradictions between the interests of the dominant nation and those of the subject nations are contradictions which, unless they are resolved, make the stable existence of a multi-national state impossible. The tragedy of the multi-national bourgeois state lies in that it cannot resolve these contradictions, that every attempt on its part to “equalize” the nations and to “protect” the national minorities, while preserving private property and class inequality, usually ends in another failure, in a further aggravation of national conflicts.**”

*(Stalin, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question, p 100, emphasis ours.)*

Only the construction of socialism in India, via the unity of toiling masses in the leadership of the working class, via the socialist revolution, can guarantee the eradication of national oppression from India. The working class of India would have to convince the various nations dwelling here regarding this, they would have to win their confidence. The advancement of working class movement in India is impossible without tackling the caste question, woman question and national question in India. Only by tackling these questions, by constructing a correct program on these and by implementing it in practice can the working class movement in India progress and be successful in establishing Socialism by overthrowing the Capitalist system.

**Translated from Punjabi by Navjot Navi**

# NATIONAL QUESTION OF PUNJAB

The beautiful and fertile land of five rivers, Punjab, is spread over North West India and Pakistan. Five rivers – Jhelum, Chenab, Raavi, Beas and Satluj - originating from the snow-capped peaks of Himalayas irrigate the land of Punjab and make it fertile. Often they are also the agency of destruction. Passing through the land of Punjab, these rivers converge into the Satluj River which ultimately flows into the Indus River. The Himalayas which are situated in the North East and North West of Punjab are akin to its crown. It halts the monsoon winds due to which the land of Punjab is irrigated via rainfall.

Harappa, an important town of one of the oldest civilizations of the world, Indus valley civilisation (beginning around 4000-3000 B.C.), was situated on this very land. Due to its being the entry door to the Indian Subcontinent, Punjab had to continuously face foreign invasions. Struggling against the internal rulers and external invaders for centuries, Punjab became a land of warriors.

Invaders such as The Greeks, Turks, Persians, Afghans, Mongols etc., used to enter the Indian Subcontinent via Punjab and used to loot Punjab and other regions of India. Some invaders used to go back while others settled here. With the passage of a number of centuries, they intermingled with the local population. The attack on Punjab undertaken by the English after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 proved to be the deadliest one for Punjab. The English occupied Punjab on 29 March 1849. This annexation halted the natural development of Punjabi nation. It created and strengthened communal divisions in Punjab. The English also strengthened the caste system in Punjab as in other regions of India. In Punjab and India, many communal clashes took place or were instigated by the English. Thousands of

people died in these clashes. Punjab was partitioned along communal lines on 14-15 August 1947 and so was Bengal. The communal killings that took place in Punjab as a result of the seeds of communalism sown by the English resulted in the death of almost 10 lakh Punjabis. More than one crore Punjabis were uprooted and displaced. After the killing of Jews by the Nazis, this was the second largest killing and displacement that took place. The wounds of the partition of Punjab are still fresh and painful.

The Punjab that remained with India after 1947 was further divided by the rulers. The Congress government and its leader Jawaharlal Nehru, who had ascended the central state power, had been making promises regarding the formation of linguistic states in independent India. The big bourgeoisie of India wished for the 'unity and integrity' of India, i.e., it wanted to hold sway over its big market and thus, its representative party, Congress, retracted from its promise of forming linguistic states after 1947. Afterwards, when popular movements for the formation of linguistic states gained steam in Southern India, Congress had to bow down before them. Many linguistic states came into being such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh in the south, Maharashtra, Gujarat in south-west etc. Though disputes regarding their boundaries continued till much later, still to a large extent they became linguistic states. But such a state of affairs could not be achieved in Punjab. Due to the active communal forces in Punjab like the Arya Samajis, Jansanghis, Akalis etc., and the conspiracies of the Congress government in the centre, Punjab was further fragmented. Though Punjabi state was formed yet a large chunk of Punjabi speaking region was subsumed in Jammu, Himachal, Haryana and Rajasthan. Chandigarh, Punjab's capital city, which was constructed on Punjab's land, was declared a Union Territory by the Central government which assumed its control. Therefore, today we have eight fragments of Punjab. Six of these are in India and the remaining in Pakistan. The total population of Eastern and Western Punjab is approximately 14 crores (the population of Indian Punjab was approximately 3 crores in 2020 and that of Pakistani Punjab, approximately 11 crore in 2021). This does not include the population

of those Punjabi speaking regions that have been separated from the Indian Punjab. In the Punjab located in India, the rulers are always trying to wipe out the mother tongue of the population, via establishing the hegemony of Hindi, English and the population of the Punjabi speaking regions outside Punjab have been completely cut-off from their mother tongue.

When we address the national question of Punjab, we have before us the Punjab, which has been divided into eight fragments. The religious divisions constructed by the English in Punjab, the extent to which caste divisions were strengthened, the malady of communalism and caste system still plagues the Punjabi nation. These communal and caste divisions have perverted the features of Punjabi nation. All this factors together render quite complex the national question of Punjab.

To understand today's Punjab, it is necessary to understand its history. In this article we would attempt to understand the national question of Punjab in its historical context. But the objective of this article isn't the writing of Punjab's history. It is necessary to discuss it to the extent that has relevance for the understanding of Punjab's national question. In the case of historiography of Punjab, such are its main limitations:-

1) It is unable to determine the boundaries of Punjab. Sometimes the historians of Punjab make Punjab synonymous with the Five Doabs, sometimes with the Lahore state under Mughals, at other times with the empire of Ranjit Singh and sometimes with Britain's colony Punjab.

2) Some historians turn the history of Punjab into that of the history of Sikhs. This is the trend of communalising history.

3) Some historians declare even the non-Punjabi areas to be Punjab (Kashmir, Regions of Haryana [Delhi, Rohtak etc.]). This is the chauvinist trend in historiography of Punjab.

4) Most of the historiography of Punjab is non-scientific. It is merely a description of events. The cause-effect relation is missing. The book 'Guru Nanak' written by Russian

historians can be said to be an exception. Besides this, Marxist historians like D.D. Kosambi, Ram Sharan Sharma, Irfan Habib etc., have dealt with Punjab in history of India itself. In their historiography the distinct identity of Punjab does not come forth. Some articles written by them are exceptions to this, such as Irfan Habib's article 'Punjab and the Jats of Sindh' etc.

Even then, to understand the history of Punjab, we will have to depend on these very sources. We will have to distil the history of Punjab from these sources itself. In this article we would concentrate more on understanding the national question of Indian Punjab in its historical context and proposing its Marxist-Leninist solution.

## The Origin and Development of Punjabi Nation

The origin and development of nations is closely associated with capitalist development. Nations come into existence at a certain stage, capitalist stage, of human history. But its embryo starts coming into existence in the feudal period. Nation is a historically constituted stable community of people which emerges on the basis of a common language, common region, common economic life and common psychological make-up which manifests itself in common culture. Nations cannot come into existence before capitalism. Feudal disintegration is an obstacle to the formation of politically united regions whose population speaks a common language. For the complete victory of commodity production, for the control over the home market, capitalism unites people speaking a single language (and its sub-languages) into politically united regions and thus does away with feudal disintegration. Lenin says that in the entire world, the period of final victory of capitalism over feudalism is related with the period of national movements. National movement tends towards the establishment of nation state, under which the needs of present-day capitalism can be best fulfilled.

Though nations come into existence in the capitalist period but its organic elements start coming into being in the pre-capitalist period itself. In the words of Comrade Stalin, “Of course, the elements of nationhood—language, territory, common culture, etc.—did not fall from the skies, but were being formed gradually, even in the pre-capitalist period. But these elements were in a rudimentary state and, at best, were only a potentiality, that is, they constituted the possibility of the formation of a nation in the future, given certain favourable conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

Above, we have given a very brief Marxist description regarding the origin and development of nations. In its light, we would try to understand the origin and development of Punjabi nation.

Punjabi nation is a stable community of 14-15 crore people spread over both sides of Wagah. It developed over many centuries. Friedrich Engels writes, “Big and viable nations’ ..... real natural frontiers are determined by language and fellow-feeling” .<sup>2</sup> Like all large and viable nations, the natural frontiers of Punjabi nation too should be determined by ‘language and fellow-feeling’.

The to and fro movement of people in this land of five rivers, Punjab, is occurring since centuries. Those who have settled here have been assimilated into the Punjabi nation. This process continues till date. Migration from Punjab has also taken place and is taking place and the Punjabis who migrated from Punjab and settled in other countries have been assimilated in other nations. Despite all these arrivals and departures, Punjabi nation’s existence as a ‘big viable nation’ is intact. Punjabi nation basically resides in four Doabs (Bist, Baari, Rachna, Chajj). Besides these, Punjabis also reside in the south of Satluj and to the west of Indus river as well. But the frontiers of Punjabi nation cannot be determined by rivers, doabs etc., rather its natural frontiers should be determined from language and fellow-feeling by taking the village as a unit.

In 1849, Punjab became a colony of the English. Limited capitalist development took place here as a by-product of the exploitation of natural resources of Punjab by the Colonial British rulers. As a result of this limited, distorted capitalist development, Punjabi nation began to

emerge. But the embryo of its organic elements had started to come into existence before this. To understand this process of origin and development of Punjabi nation, we would have to look into the ancient and medieval history of Punjab. In this part of the article, we would look into the history of Punjab from ancient times to the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when the features of Punjabi nation had emerged to a large extent.

## PUNJAB'S ANCIENT PAST

A historian from Western Punjab, Manzur Aijaz<sub>3</sub> writes that due to ancient and new discoveries, it is a widely accepted fact that a higher form of civilization in India emerged firstly in Punjab, Sindh and its neighbouring states. This too is widely accepted that an advanced Harappa civilization existed from 4000-3000 B.C. There are many prevalent theories about the collapse of Harappa civilization. A contemporary notion holds that the Harappa civilization collapsed around 1900 B.C. This period is before that of the arrival of Aryans into Punjab. According to the latest discoveries in Ecology, due to vast climatic changes, rainfall due to monsoons stopped, the rivers dried down. Due to fall in agricultural production, cities were ruined. Due to such difficult conditions, people were forced to migrate to the South.

No one can deny the fact that the first book of Indian subcontinent, Rig Veda, was written in Punjab between 1700-1000 B.C. The tale of Mahabharata begins from 1200 B.C. Most of its major characters were related with Punjab. Considering the name Punjab, in Rigveda, this region has been termed "Saptasindhu" meaning the land of seven rivers. These seven rivers were Sindhu, Vitasta (Jhelum), Askini (Chenab), Prasuni or Aaimvati (Ravi), Vipas (Beas), Sutudari (Satluj) and Saraswati. Punjab has been called as "Arata" in Mahabharata and its people "Balika". The great grammar of Sanskrit, Shastri Panini (fourth century B.C.) terms Punjab as Maadr country Maadra and Greeks have named it "PentaPotamia" (Five Rivers).

According to Mushtaq Soofi, "Historically the word Punjab as the name of our region appears for the first time in the travelogue of

Muslim traveller Ibne-Batuta who came to India in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It's literally Panjnad rephrased. Panj means five and Nad means river i.e. the land of five rivers. Both the rivers are indigenous. Panj means five and Aab (in Persian) means rivers. It is a compound made of a Punjabi and a Persian word.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Dr Manzur Aijaz, it is a general consensus between geneticists, historians and related fields that Aryans entered Punjab between 2000-1500 B.C. They took centuries to settle down here. The settling of Aryans in Punjab would not have been peaceful. Local populace would have opposed them at every step.

Ram Sharan Sharma<sup>5</sup>, a famous historian of India, has written that the Aryan influx took place in many waves. Aryans had to face two types of opposition. First they had to face opposition from local population (pre-aryans) and second they clashed among themselves, i.e., between different Aryan tribes. Aryans were divided into five tribes which were called Panchjana. Rig-Vedic people (Aryans) had a good knowledge about agriculture. They were familiar with handicrafts up to a large extent.

Aryans treated the local people, over which they had triumphed, as slaves and Shudras. They were labelled as Das or Dasyus. The victory of Aryans over the local population played the greatest role of creating social divisions in society during that time. With time, the tribal society was divided into occupational groups; warriors, priests and common people. Near the end of Rig Vedic period, the fourth division arose in the form of Shudras.

Aryans spread over the entire Western Uttar Pradesh from Punjab. By the end of later Vedic period they had also settled down in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Northern Bihar. Around 1000 B.C. the use of iron began in Punjab. Iron tools made it easier to clear forests from the Upper Ganga valley. This region experienced plenty of rainfall (35 cm – 65 cm). In the later Vedic period, the main method of subsistence was agriculture.

Post Vedic society was clearly divided in four varnas: Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaish, and Shudras. Each varna had well-defined work. Naturally, there would have existed internal conflicts in a society divided

into varnas. We have no sources to know the reactions of Vaish and Shudras. But Kshatriyas, who were rulers protested strongly against the domination of Brahmins in ritualistic matters. This reaction of Kshatriyas against the domination of Brahmins was one of the reasons behind the origin of new religions. These religions were, Jainism, which was founded by VardhmanMahavir, and Buddhism, whose founder was Gautama Buddha. But the fundamental reason for the emergence of new religions was the expansion of new agricultural economy over North-East India. The clearing of forests in the mid-Ganga plains in 600-500 B.C. with the use of iron implements, increased the possibilities of agriculture and larger human settlements. Due to rainfall being aplenty, the conditions for agriculture were more conducive. Agricultural economy based on the iron plough, required greater number of oxen. Without animal husbandry, agriculture could not flourish. But due to Vedic rituals of animal sacrifice, animal killings took place at a vast scale. These rituals were an obstacle in the development of agriculture. Jainism and Buddhism preached non-violence due to which they became popular with the farmers. These religions quickly spread in Punjab as well.

Due to the increased use of iron after 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., conditions emerged in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Western Bihar for the formation of big territorial states. Some Janpads (territorial states) had emerged at the end of Vedic period. But due to the development of agriculture and settlements, these became commonplace by 500 B.C. Panini mentions around 40 Janpads around 40 B.C. this includes Afghanistan as well as the South-East Asian region. According to Pali sources, Janpads developed into Mahajanpads meaning big states or countries. These sources mention 16 Mahajanpads. In Buddha's period too, we find 16 large states which were called Mahajanpads. Most of these were located in the mid-Ganga plains, which includes Ganga-Yamuna doab and their tributaries. Gandhar was one such Mahajanpad, located in Punjab and some regions of Afghanistan.

In north-east India, small states and republics slowly were subsumed into the Magadha empire. In Punjab and rest of North-West, the situation was different in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Several small kingdoms

like Kamboj, Gandhar, Madra were in conflict with each other. In this region, there was no such powerful state like that of Magadha. This region was fertile, had plenty of natural resources, which attracted the attention of its neighbours. Achaemenian ruler of Iran took the advantage of political split of this region. Iranian emperor, Darius entered this region in 516 B.C. and occupied Punjab and Sindh. Sindh and a part of Punjab was made the 20<sup>th</sup> province of Iranian Satrap. This region was the most fertile and populated region of Iranian empire. This is one of the reasons why Iranian invaders occupied this region. Ram Sharan Sharma estimates that this region was part of the Iranian empire until Alexander's invasion.

In 326 B.C., Alexander's army entered Punjab via the Khyber Pass and the Greeks occupied Punjab. But the Greek occupation over Punjab could not last long. In 322-321 B.C., rebellions broke out against the Greeks in the leadership of Chandragupta Maurya. By 315 B.C., the Greek rule in Punjab came to an end and Chandragupta Maurya's rule began. Not all Greeks went back. Some settled down here itself. The successor of Chandragupta Maurya was Bindusara, who was succeeded by Ashoka. Ashoka died in 231 B.C. After around 50 years of his death, Mauryan rule came to an end in Punjab. The last Mauryan king was Brihadratha. He was killed by his commander Pushyamitra Shunga in 185 B.C., who ruled over this region for many years.

After the collapse of Mauryan Empire, attacks on Punjab began anew. Greek ruler of Balkh, Demetrius, attacked Punjab in 165 B.C. The major credit of making Takshila and Sialkot into major cities belongs to Demetrius. He was killed by his grandson Eucratides. Eucratides ruled over this region till 156 B.C. Many Greek princes started dividing Punjab among themselves during the reign of Eucratides. Very scanty information is available regarding them. There were around 40 such princes who ruled over Punjab and Sindh. But only Shah Maninder and Milind became prominent kings. Maninder in an attempt to expand his kingdom to the historical levels of Ashoka, attacked other regions of India. He reached Patliputra (Patna) but could not occupy this old capital of Ashokan empire. He had to revert back from Patna because Sakas had attacked his region. Sakas (Scythians) were a central Asian tribe. In 80 B.C., they occupied

Gandhar and Takshila and later they also occupied other regions of Punjab. Sakas strengthened their occupation over Punjab under the leadership of King Azes in 55 B.C. Not many years before Christ, Sakas lost their kingdom after the death of Azes. Their place was taken up by Kushanas. Even after Kushanas occupation, Sakas had many small kingdoms in Punjab. This continued in many regions of Punjab until 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Around 25 B.C. Kushana tribe (Chinese from its origin) occupied Kabul and continued its forward march. Rajakanishk, who was born and died in Peshawar, ascended the throne in 127 A.D. Peshawar was his capital in Gandhar and his kingdom was spread over several areas of China till Patna. Kanishk ruled until his death, i.e., 150 A.D. Even after his death Kushana kings continued to rule over Punjab. In 458 A.D., White Huns (Central Asian by origin) attacked from the North and occupied Kashmir, Punjab etc. At that time there was meagre presence of Guptas in Punjab. White Hun king Mihir Kala defeated the Guptas in 515 A.D., made Sialkot the centre of his government and started his reign. He died in Kashmir in 542 A.D.

During these very times, Gupta kingdom emerged in 319 A.D. and continued till 543 A.D. Punjab had little to do with this reign. There were many small kingdoms in Punjab which also included those which as of then practiced tribal democracy. In 606 A.D., the rule of Harshavardhan was set up over Punjab. He integrated many small kingdoms of Punjab, all of them accepted his as the Maharaja. His rule continued for 41 years.

Muhammad Bin Qasim (Arab) attacked Sindh in 711 A.D. After the annexation of Sindh, he annexed Multan (Punjab). The Arbandi rule continued over Multan till the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In 1005, Mahmud Ghaznavi (A Turk, born on 2 Nov 971 in the city Ghazni of Afghanistan) annexed Multan. Multan remained under Muslim rule from 8<sup>th</sup> century till the time of Ranjit Singh.

## Punjab in the Feudal Period

Ram Sharan Sharma writes that the factor which played the central role in the transformation of India from the ancient to feudal

society (Ram Sharan Sharma discusses primarily northern India. It is clear that the same process would have occurred in Punjab) was the practice of land grants. How did this practice begin on a large scale? From the charters, we come to know that kings, who were grantees of land, wanted religious virtue and the major receivers of land were monks and priests, who required these lands to undertake religious rituals. But its actual reason was the serious crisis facing the ancient social system. Varna society was based on the productive activities of farmers, who were called Shudras. The salaries of soldiers and officials, grants given to priests and the goods upon which the luxury of kings were based were paid out of tax appropriated by royal officials from Shudras, Vaish. But in 3<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., this system fell into a deep crisis. Varnas or social classes abandoned their allocated tasks. Labouring classes began refusing to accept the oppression of the rulers. They refused to perform begar (i.e., working without any compensation – translator) and give taxes. This gave birth to Varnasamkara or the mixing of social classes. Labouring masses attacked the Varna restrictions because they were being crushed under the burden of taxes and the kings had refused to protect them.

Many steps were undertaken to emerge from this crisis. A nearly comparative work, Law of Manu advises that the Shudras and Vaishs should not be allowed to drift away from their obligations. This should be stopped forcefully. But the step of more importance to tackle this situation was that of giving lands to priests and officials rather than wages and salaries.

With this the responsibility of collecting taxes and dealing with the rebellious peasants fell on the shoulders of one who had been granted land. Also, new land came under the plough as well. More than this, with establishing Brahmins in the tribal areas, the tribal people could be taught Brahminist way of life, obeying the king's orders and payment of taxes.

By 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. land grants had become commonplace. In accordance to this, Brahmins were given villages. These villages were free of taxes imposed by the king. Those persons who were granted

villages were also allowed to rule over the villagers. Government functionaries were not allowed to enter these villages. Till 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the rulers had the right to punish thieves etc., but afterwards the right to punish all types of criminals was handed over to the village owners. Thus, not only did the Brahmins collect taxes from peasants, they also had the right to maintain law and order in the villages. In this manner the power of the king was greatly eroded from the end of Gupta period onwards. In the Mauryan period, the taxes were calculated and collected by the king's agents, theirs was the responsibility of maintaining law and order as well. In the beginning, land grants reflected the growing powers of the king. In the Vedic period, the king was called the owner of the cattle or Gopati but in the Gupta period, he came to be known as the owner of the land or Bhupati. But, moving on the land grants eroded the king's power and areas liberated from royal control began to increase.

The royal control was further eroded by the granting of lands instead of salaries to royal functionaries. In the Mauryan period all the lower and higher authorities of the king were paid in cash. This practice continued in the Kushana as well as the Gupta period. But it seems that the situation altered from 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards. In this century's law books, it is recommended that services be paid in the form of land. Accordingly, in Harshvardhan's rule governmental functionaries' salaries were paid in the form of land revenue. Land was given to governors, ministers, judges and officers. This created local interests at the expense of royal power. Till 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., central state power was eroded and feudalism clearly emerged. Punjab (and in the other regions of India) the emergence of feudal relations began from the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. By 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., these relations were consolidated. Thus, the feudal relations established in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in Punjab, though underwent minor changes in various periods (especially after becoming England's colony) but primarily they remained intact till 1947. As a result of the process of capitalist development that took place in India, after it became independent from the English, capitalist production relations were established in Punjab like other regions of India. The process of capitalist development can be broadly said to have been completed in Punjab by

1970. From 1970, capitalist production relations became predominant in Punjab.

Here we again turn towards the political history of Punjab. We have discussed before, the capture of Multan by Mahmud Ghazni in 1005 A.D. The period of 1000 to 1526 A.D. (till the end of Delhi Sultanate) was a period of continuous foreign invasions of Punjab. The residents of Punjab, especially those inhabiting the plains, very rarely saw peaceful times. Peaceful times, for these foreign residents of Punjab, depended on route adopted by the invaders coming from North-West. If their region was part of the invaders' route, then they had to face terrible loot, massacre. Often, the invaders used to alter their route. No one had an accurate idea as to what would be the invader's route. That is why the life of Punjab's people always remained uncertain. In this 500-year long period, only the Punjabis of Kangra, Mandi and Chamba and the Punjabis who had migrated here for various reasons were relatively safe.

Alpatigin and Subuktigin were Turk kings of Ghazni, Afghanistan. At the end of 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D., they began skirmishes at the borders against the Hindu kings of Punjab. Afterwards, the son of Subuktigin, Mahmud, intensified the attacks on Punjab. During his reign (998-1030 A.D.) he attacked Punjab 17 times. Most of these attacks were confined till Punjab. When he went past Punjab, into India, then too he had to pass through Punjab. Due to which Punjab had to face terrible destruction.

By 1021 A.D., a large part of Punjab had come under the direct domination of the Turks. At that time, Punjab had become a military and convenient highway for foreign invasions past the river Yamuna. After the death of Mahmud Ghazni in 1030 A.D., Punjab got a short respite from foreign invasions. But towards the end of next century, invasions by Ghor (an Afghan province) Turks began. They annihilated the Ghaznis. Their leader was Shihab-Ud-Din. He wanted to establish Turk Sultanate in India and was successful in it. As a result, the grip of Turks on Punjab tightened. In 1206 A.D., Shihab-Ud-Din was killed by a Punjabi Gakhar. Qutub-Ud-Din Aibak became the successor of Shihab-Ud-Din.

He was the ruler of Northern India. With his reign, began the reign of Mamluk Sultans, which continued till 1290. The Mongol invasions began from 1221, in the leadership of Chengiz Khan. In the next 2 and a half to three centuries, India and especially Punjab had to face loot, destruction and massacre. The local Kings-Lords of Punjab fought against the foreign invaders but could not hold their ground against them. In 1526, A.D., the Mughal Sultanate was set up by overthrowing the Delhi Sultanate. Delhi Sultanate survived for 320 years (1206-1526). In this period, Punjab remained under the Delhi Sultanate.

Let us take a look at Punjab's economic development in the Sultanate period. In this period, the main industries (handicrafts) in Punjab were those of clothes, weapons, paper, wooden objects, rugs, carpets etc. Various types of clothes, carpets etc., were made in Sultanpur near Kapurthala, Sialkot, Multan and Gujrat (a city in present day Western Punjab). Though every city had its own speciality, Sultanpur and Multan were famous for manufacturing Chintz (printed multi-coloured cotton fabric used for curtains etc.), Sialkot and Gujrat for Chiffon (light, transparent cloth made from silk). Embroidered rugs and woollen carpets were also made in Multan. In Bajwara, near Hoshiarpur, turbans, waist bands and other cloths were made.

Multan and Lahore were the main centres of trade with Afghanistan and Iran. Lahore was the trade route to Kashmir. Trade with Central Asia and Tibet took place via Rvalsar, Mandi and Bajwara.

Agriculture was the main occupation of the people of Punjab. Feudal relations were the predominant ones in agriculture. Peasantry was crushed beneath the burden of feudal rent. Agriculture was quite backward. For irrigation, it was mainly dependent on agriculture. There were wells in some places. Their water was used for irrigation. Water was drawn via rope and a Dhengli (a big wooden utensil). In some places water was drawn using oxen, charrs and boka. In some places, raht or hult were also used. Firoz-Shah-Tughlaq got 5 canals dug for the supply of drinking water. But these were also used for irrigation. Majority part of these were in present-day Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. Sirhind and Sunam regions in Punjab also received water from

canals.

At the time, Lahore and Multan were the most important cities of Punjab. These were big trading centres. In addition to these, Sirhind, Dyalpur, Pakpattan, Khushab, Jhang, Bhera, Abohar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Machhiwara, Bajwara, Sultanpur, Batala, Kangra, Nagarkot, Guler, Sialkot, Behlolpur, Wajirabad, Bilaspur, Kiratpur, Ropar, Jhelum, Mirpur, Mamdod etc., were prominent cities of Punjab.

Pausing this discussion regarding the history of Punjab for the time being, let's turn towards the developmental journey of Punjabi language and literature.

## DEVELOPMENT OF PUNJABI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Dr Manzoor Aijaz holds that Punjabi language has not originated from Sanskrit or Dravid. Punjabi language has originated from the Harappan language Meluha.

Language is the collective creation of people. Its roots lie in the productive activity of humans. The rhythms of productive activity, every day events are recreated in people's language. The modern Punjabi language, in its present form, can be said to have become an independent language via its development from 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. to 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>6</sup> The roots of Punjabi literature go way back into its ancient past. The facts gathered from various excavations confirm that here existed rich culture and a high level of art. E.g., the remains of Gandhara art of first century A.D. not only display and extol physical beauty but there can be seen a deep understanding of human expressions. The beginnings of Punjabi literature are related to quite ancient times. Not only did Punjabi literature keep alive the plots and imagery of distant past, rather, it also reflects the attitude of the people towards historical events and personalities. The earliest documents of Punjabi literature include the mythical tale of King Rasalu.<sup>7</sup> The stories of King Rasalu revolve around the events of 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In its entire history, Punjabi literature has its living source in folk tales. This source turns literature into a creation of the masses. People attempt to protect their motherland,

praise, try to make it fertile with their efforts, undertake constructions. In this practice, poetic language is born. To represent physical and mental beauty and strength of humans, people borrow imagery from nature. To live, man has to continuously struggle against nature. 12 months of the year are filled with different tasks and are reflected in poetry. Hence, the elements of melody (sarodikav) were born which were called Baranmah (or 12 months). For a long time, Punjabi poets used to write in this manner.<sup>8</sup>

After the collapse of the kingdom of Harsh, i.e., in the middle of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Punjab as a basic political organisation began to disintegrate into feudal states. Establishment of new production relations gave rise to new class contradictions. Caste system was consolidated. Society was divided into many professional groups known as castes. Social contradictions further sharpened due to caste and religion.

Extreme exploitation and mental oppression gave rise to spontaneous outrage among the toiling masses. Traditional tribal democracy often clashed with feudalism in Punjab. Many tribes had maintained their autonomous existence to some extent. In Northern India, along with Punjab, the make-up of nations was affected by the continuous advent of new tribes, tribes which were fighting for their economic and cultural independence. These tribes always clashed with those feudal lords who wanted to subordinate them for feudal exploitation.<sup>10</sup> Sabriakov writes what these tribes weren't subsumed completely before 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (But the process of absorption of tribes into Punjabi nation continued not only until 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. but rather until the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The primary reason for this was the colonialization of India, which shut the door onto the prospect of natural fast paced capitalist development here due to which the process of make-up of Punjabi nation remained slow and distorted.)

Social upheavals arising from the working of feudalism deeply affected Punjab, like other regions of India and it was manifested in literature as well. Literature related with Naath movement occupies an important place in the literary works available till 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Meaning of Naath is "protector". He (Naath) used to be the head of

Hindu or Buddhist sect. In the sermons of Naaths we find signs of Brahmanism, philosophical sermons of Buddhist belief, especially the interpretation of teachings of Shiva. The uniqueness of Naaths lay in the fact that they believed in the power of rationality to some extent. E.g., they believed that chemical discoveries can succeed in finding such matter which could prevent humans from ageing and would prolong their lives. They burst the bubble of Brahmanism, caste system and the moral and mental depravation of the ruling class. Naath movement was an open expression of social dissent. This was the reason of its popularity.

Its founder was Gorakhnath (809 ?). According to several tales, Gorakhnath was a weaver or teli (a professional caste whose job was to crush and sell oil), but there is no solid evidence regarding this.<sup>11</sup>

The ideas of Naaths were reflected in Punjabi folktales, literature and creative works of some Naaths. They created literature in Saadhu language, which was the literary language of that time. Saadhu language was proximate to the language then spoken in Punjab. This literature is actually the very first literary writing in Punjabi language. Among the Naath poets, this crown of honour goes to CharpatNaath (880-990 A.D.).<sup>12</sup>

JalandhariNaath and ChaurangiNaath are other prominent names among Naath poets. Only a little of their poetry is available. In the radical poetry of CharpatNaath and other Naath poets, the sentiments of traders, artisans and peasants are reflected. Due to this they gained wide acceptance among the masses.

Punjabi Naath poets turned towards dialect of the people. The subject-matter and imagery of their poems were taken from the life of masses. Besides this, they described burning social issues and this determined their importance in Punjabi literature.

Along with Naath's poetry, in 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Vaars or the poetry of bravery was also created in Punjabi literature. If the Naath's raised the voice of toiling masses, then in the Vaars was adopted the direction of literature of the nobility or the wealthy ruling class. These Vaars revolved mainly around Kings, feudal lords. The poets of Vaars

remained anonymous.<sup>13</sup> Their poetry is deeply embedded in folk tales and a web of mythology is woven around them. The impact of folk tales is apparent in the ‘Vaar of Tunde Asraj’.

Vaars were created during the Arab invasions. The Arabs occupied Sindh in 712 A.D. and then approached Punjab. In 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., they captured Multan.

The Kings-rulers of Punjab tried fighting the Muslim invaders but were unsuccessful. Their attempt to protect their motherland, in which they failed, is beautifully depicted in the Vaars. Many feudal lords also allied with the invaders. But this does not reduce the importance of Vaars. These are important writings of Punjabi literature. They substantially impacted the further development of Punjabi literature. Whereas Naath poetry enriched Punjabi literature with Sarodi expression, Vaars founded the Veer Kaav. They introduced the idea of love for one’s country and also used new forms of poetry. Like they used Panjmatri poetic metre which Punjabi poets called Pauri. Vaar remained one of the main poetic forms of Punjabi poetry till the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

Muslim invaders brought new culture from Arab, Iran, Tajikistan and Turkey to Punjab (as well as in Rest of India). This culture was created by gentlemen such as RudkiBruni and Firdaus, scientists and talented poets. This impact gave rise to such a culture in Punjab (and Rest of India) that was later known as the combination of Hindu-Muslim culture.

The Delhi Sultanate had come into existence by 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. as a result of the occupation of Muslim rulers over the North-Western India. Punjab was now subordinate to this Sultanate. Punjab was a continuous battleground. 13<sup>th</sup> century was terrible for Punjab due to internal conflicts and foreign invasions. In 1236 Mongols (Mughals) attacked Punjab. In 1241-1242, they plundered Lahore. They repeatedly attacked Multan, looted it, committed massacre and in 1328-29 Mongols again attacked Punjab. Under the leadership of Taimur, Mongols attacked Punjab again in 1397-98.

Despite these difficult conditions, the people of Punjab did not accept defeat or subjugation. Revolts repeatedly broke out in several

places in Punjab, the purpose of these were to root out the domination of Sultans of Delhi or Hindu kings. When these revolts were crushed, the dissent began to be manifested in mystical teachings. It searched for the path of religious freedom in revolt against religious orthodoxy. These revolts occurred in both Hindu and Muslim religions. This dissent can be seen in the then prevailing religious ideology of Hindu-Muslim fusion. The first expression of the fusion of Hindu-Muslim cultural tradition is found in Ratan Naath's (1000-1120) poetry, in which he was following the Naath tradition.<sup>15</sup>

The most important expression in literature of the Hindu-Muslim fusion is found in Sheikh Farid Shakarganj's (1173-1266) poetry. Farid was born into a rich family and he had received traditional Islamic education. He spent most of his life in Multan. Multan was at that time a famous cultural centre. Qarmatian sect still had influence in this area. Qarmatian sect was an offshoot of Islam. Its followers Muslims did not believe in God and were labelled infidels. Qarmatian had spread in Arab in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> century as an anti-feudal ideology. Qarmatians had rejected many rituals of official Islam. Its followers settled in Multan in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> century and quickly they became popular in North-Western India. They were supporters of Human equality. This attracted the people of all religions, castes.

In Punjab, during the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century, vigorous propaganda of Sufi belief began. In the 30s of this decade Sheikh Farid Ud-Di Shakarganj was appointed Sheikh in Delhi. He left the capital and settled in Pakpattan (Ajodhan), Punjab. Here he established his khangaah (can be loosely translated to hermitage – translator) "Jmaatkhana". Here every needy person could get residence and food. Everyone who lived here used to labour. Food was equally distributed among everyone. No one enjoyed any privileges. Sufis swore to stay away from worldly pleasures and to live in poverty (fakar). The idea of Fakar was actually a way, an inactive way, of protesting against inequality, social lack of rights.

Sufis and the propagandists of Muslims of different sects used regional languages so that they could reach a greater number of people.

They gained a deep understanding of the epics and works of folk literature of this area as well as religious principles and various philosophical schools. In their speeches they widely utilised such imagery and traditions of folk culture which people readily understood. Sufis translated several works of Arabian and Persian into Punjabi and other Indian languages. Sheikh Farid is one of the founders of Punjabi literature. We could only retrieve 123 shloks of Farid's poetry. His poetry is written in Multani dialect. Multani, at that time was the literary dialect of Punjab.

From the discussion regarding Punjabi language, literature let's move towards the emergence of Sikh belief. We will further discuss the development of Punjabi language, literature a little later.

## EMERGENCE OF SIKH BELIEF

The emergence of Sikh belief, Sikh movement, is a glorious chapter in the history of Punjab. Sikh gurus raised their voices against the social evils of the time, caste system, and social situation of Women. They raised their voice against the exploitation of the toiling masses by the then ruling class and fought against it. Sikh gurus played an important role in the development of Punjabi language and literature. The Sikh movement furthered the process of constitution of developing Punjabi nation.

To understand the emergence and development of Sikh belief, it is necessary to understand its background. It is important to investigate the social, economic, political conditions of Punjab during the emergence of Sikh belief and the fundamental reasons for its emergence. Only thus can its historical importance be understood.

The time period of the emergence of Sikh belief can be said to be that of last decades of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Guru Nanak was the founder of this belief (1469-1539). This (15<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of 16<sup>th</sup> century) was the period of anti-feudal struggles in Punjab (and in other regions of India as well).<sup>16</sup> Peasantry, artisans and traders were involved in this struggle. This struggle of the people against feudalism was finding expression in various forms. The fleeing of rebel peasants from the villages, armed rebellions, the worshipping, in secret, by people of such

beliefs which were declared illegal by the rulers etc., were such forms in which this struggle continued.

Before the birth of Baba Nanak, Punjab was grips of a tremendous peasant movement. In 1419, Sarang led the people's anti feudal rebellion. The rulers of Sirhind failed to crush this rebellion and then the Sultan of Delhi himself led the army in crushing this rebellion. Sarang was martyred in this battle. The rebellion was crushed. In the middle of 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the cities of Punjab, the task of crushing stormy events (rebellions – translator) was done in the leadership of Wazir's assistant Muhammed Ibn-Njaab. In this time, Punjab was also prey to disputes among the rulers and external attacks.

As has been mentioned before, Punjab was under the Delhi Sultanate (or under rulers installed by it) for 300 years. In 1525, Babur, the founder of Mughal empire, occupied Punjab. In the battles fought between Babur's sons on one side and Sher Shah Suri and his successors on the other during 1530-1555, Punjab, like other regions of Northern India, was a scene of war activity and in 1555, after the victory of Babur's son, Humayun over the armies of Sikander Shah Suri Punjab became a part of Mughal Sultanate.

14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries were centuries of calamity for Punjab. These were the centuries of political instability, exploitation, slaughter. Despite all this, Punjab's economic development advanced. We have discussed it briefly before. Here further discussion is necessary. In 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, the basis of Punjab's economy, agriculture, made decent progress. The development of productive forces in agriculture was a special characteristic before capitalist development in agriculture. This development was more due to the expansion of area under agriculture rather than the development of working tools. Sugarcane, Cotton were the major commercial crops in 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Punjab. The development of agriculture also stimulated the development of trade and artisans. This led to the blossoming of Punjab's cities. We have already discussed this.

Sufi belief spread in Punjab during the first half of 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the end and beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century respectively, many

religious reform teaching originated in various parts of India. These are known by the name of Bhakti. The ideology of Bhakti gave expression the interests of Hindu population and the poor section of Muslim urban population against social and religious bondage. Despite its religious-mystical form, various trends and genres of Bhakti movement were anti-feudal. Especially in Northern India, the Bhakti ideology was the ideology of artisans and trading community. It expressed the dissent of urban traders, artisans and to some extent, that of the peasants against the feudal exploitation and oppression.

Sikh belief, founder of which was Guru Nanak, was one of many religious-reform movements of Bhakti during 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> century. The teachings of Guru Nanak were religious in form and were a complex fusion of Hindu belief and Islam, or to be more accurate, that of various mystical trends, Vedanta and Sufi belief. Inclusion of the works of Kabir, Sheikh Farid and other Bhakts in Guru Granth Sahib is a testament to this. Guru Nanak stressed in his teachings human equality, repudiation of discrimination on basis of caste. His teachings attracted a large part of Punjabi masses. The custom of Langar, where people sit together and eat without caste discrimination, had started during his lifetime.

The initial social basis of Sikh sect was in trader-banker (moneylender) community. These communities were not staunchly anti-feudal. That is why the beginning of this movement was peaceful and it rejected violent forms of struggle. At that time, dissent against feudalism was expressed in it uncertainly and unclearly.<sup>17</sup> Afterwards, teachings of Guru Nanak spread in artisans and other toiling masses.

Guru Angad became the guru of Sikh Panth after Guru Nanak. He remained guru of Sikh Panth from 1519-1552. He prepared the Gurmukhi script for writing Punjabi language. This hurt the clout of Hindu priest community which was egoistic due to its knowledge of Sanskrit. The reach of knowledge, teachings of Gurus in the language of masses increased. Fourth guru of Sikh Panth, Guru Ram Das founded the city of Amritsar. The youngest son of Guru Ram Das, Arjun Dev, became the 5<sup>th</sup> guru of Sikh Panth. He had the Guru Granth Sahib edited. He had the Harmandir Sahib constructed in Amritsar. He had the

foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib laid by Sufi saint Mian Mir. There were four entry gates to Harmandir Sahib. This was symbolic of the fact that the gates of Harmandir Sahib were open to people of all four Varnas. Till this time, the power of Sikhs had increased in Punjab to quite some extent and their conflict with Delhi Darbar began. Mughal emperor Jahangir arrested and tortured Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan became the first martyr of Sikh Panth.

Hargobind (1595-1644) son of Guru Arjan Dev became the 6<sup>th</sup> guru (1606-1644) of Sikh Panth. He broke away from the peaceful traditions of Sikh Panth. He called upon the masses to arm themselves against the Mughal rules and maintain horses. By this time the social base of Sikh Panth had expanded quite a bit. Majha was the region of activity of 5 gurus after Guru Nanak Dev. The teachings of Sikh Gurus which stressed equality, greatly attracted the Jatt peasantry of Majha towards Sikhism. Sikh Gurus commissioned many towns and gurudawars to be constructed as pilgrimage centres. These cities developed as centres of trade. The development of these trading centres increased the reach of Sikh religion among trading communities of Punjab. That is why Sikh Gurus are known as the harbingers of the emergence of local trading bourgeoisie of Punjab.<sup>18</sup>

Another important event in the history of Sikh movement is the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, the 9<sup>th</sup> guru of Sikhs. In 1675, Guru Teg Bahadur and his five companions were martyred on the orders of Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. Many reasons are advanced as the cause of his Martyrdom. Tenth Sikh guru, son of Guru Teg Bahadur, Gobind Singh has said that the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur took place due to his protecting the religious belief of Kashmiri Brahmins.

By the mid of 17<sup>th</sup> century, the ruination of peasantry hastened due to feudal exploitation and oppression. Thousands of ruined peasants and artisans of Punjab joined the Sikhs. The forces antagonistic towards the Mughals were uniting day-by-day in the Sikhs. In the wide anti-Mughal movement, peasants represented the anti-feudal class. Often, peasants tormented by feudal lords would seek refuge with Guru Teg Bahadur, who used to help them.<sup>19</sup>

During the almost entire 17<sup>th</sup> century, Mughals conducted tyrannical campaigns against the Sikhs. These campaigns would sometimes take the form of long drawn out, bloody battles.<sup>20</sup>

Guru Hargobind Singh called upon the Sikhs to be armed. But at this time Sikhs had no permanent military organisation. Also socially the Sikhs weren't of one caste. The upper section of Sikhs, who had become feudal lords, had different interests than that of common Sikh masses. The anti-feudal inclination of the common members of Sikh community wasn't always in line with the prosperous Sikh community.

The democratisation of Sikh sect, new situation and new forms of struggle, new tasks demanded new organisational forms. The beginning of deep change in Sikh sect was initiated by Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708).

Guru Gobind Singh was born in 1666. He became the 10<sup>th</sup> and last guru of Sikhs in 1675, after the martyrdom of his father Guru Teg Bahadur. When he was the guru of Sikhs, Jatt peasantry started becoming the majority in Sikh community. In its character, Sikh community more and more turned into a peasant-artisan community day-by-day. With this change in its class basis Sikhism started assuming an active, militant character. From 1687, Guru Gobind Singh recommenced active struggles against the Mughals. These struggles weren't against Muslims rather they were against Muslim feudal lords, who were numerous in Punjab, and against the Mughal State. In Guru Gobind Singh's army there were numerous Muslims and Hindus. On the other hand, Hindu kings were the allies of Mughals. Guru Gobind Singh had many Muslim friends who saved his life on many occasions. On the day of Baisakhi, 13 April 1699, Guru Gobind Singh laid the foundation of KhalsaPanth. Out of the "Five Pyaares" adorned by him on this occasion only one was a Khatri while all the other four were of Shudra castes. In this manner, Sikhism once again attacked the caste system. The creation of KhalsaPanth was the next step in the military preparations of Sikhs against Mughal rule.

In Khalsa, everyone had equal rights and equal duties. Khalsa's general assembly was mandated to meet twice every year. This assembly

deliberated upon all important political and military matters and decisions were taken by a majority. The general assembly of the Khalsa was the highest institution of Sikh community. Every Sikh had the right to vote during the decision on any question. Local matters were decided in local assemblies and here too the decision was taken on a majority basis. Thus, did Guru Gobind Singh advance towards the democratisation of Khalsa.

Along with opposing caste system, Guru Gobind Singh also criticised several wrong religious rites of Hindus, Muslims. Similar to Guru Nanak, he did not encourage pilgrimages and ascetic life. He declared men and women as equal and prohibited the practice of sati.

Fighting tirelessly, incessantly his entire life against caste system, religious hypocrisy, feudal lords, Mughal empire, Guru Gobind Singh bade this world goodbye in 1708. Even after him the anti-feudal mass movement that had arisen in Punjab did not wane. This movement stormed forward in the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur. We shall discuss this later on.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF SIKH GURUS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUNJABI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Sikh Gurus advanced the development of Punjabi language and literature. Before them, Naaths, Jogis and Sufis had developed Punjabi language and literature to certain extent. This literature became the basis of literature of Guru Nanak's period. The vocabulary of Naaths and Jogis were used by saints, bhagats of Guru Nanak's period to express their ideas. From the standpoint of Linguistics two forms of Punjabi Language, poorbi (eastern) and lehndi (western) can be observed before Guru Nanak in Naath poetry and Baani of Sheikh Farid respectively. The Gurus wrote sloks and created baani in both lehndi and poorbi.<sup>21</sup>

In mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the title of Guru was with Guru Arjun Dev (1567-1606). He was the spokesperson of the Sikhs in both poetic and

political matters.

Guru Arjun considered the teachings of Guru Nanak as highest and important, he thus compiled his works. Thus was created the AadiGranth (Guru Granth Sahib). He handed over the work of editing the AadiGranth to his talented follower, Bhai Gurdas. In this was included not only the works in Punjabi language but also that of Saadhu, Brij and Awadhi languages.

Guru Granth Sahib includes the works of Punjabi poets such as Sheikh Farid, Guru Nanak, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjun Dev, SataBalwant and Sunder etc.

The accomplishment of editing of AadiGranth is an important event in the development of Punjabi literature. It is also important in the sense that it preserved a very valuable treasure. With this begins a new stage of development of Punjabi literature.

Other important contribution in the development of Punjabi literature from amongst the Sikh gurus is that of Guru Gobind Singh. All his works, his letters and hukamnamas, are glorious chapters in Punjabi literature, both in the sense of form and subject matter. His works are collected in the DasamGranth.

DasamGranth is an important milestone in the development of Punjabi literature. With this begins an era when literature becomes an important means of social consciousness. Besides this, it also confirms the fact that the process of development of Punjabi language, which posits it as the national language, had been completed.<sup>22</sup> Historians hold that the DasamGranth is not only the work of Guru Gobind Singh, rather it contains the works of 52 poets which were his courtiers in the court of Anandpur Sahib.<sup>23</sup>

## **BANDA SINGH BAHADUR AND HIS TIMES**

After Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh Bahadur led a huge peasant movement in Punjab. This movement not only shook the roots of feudal system in Punjab but also played a role in eroding the Mughal sultanate.

Banda was born in 1670 A.D. to Rajput parents at Rajori

(Punch). His childhood name was Lachman Das. He joined the sect of Bairagis at a tender age and took upon the name Madho Das. He established his dera at Nanded. Here he met Guru Gobind Singh. He had lived there for 15 years before the meeting.<sup>24</sup> Madho became Banda Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh sent him to Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh handed Banda Bahadur the responsibility of punishing those who had tortured the Sikhs and martyred his children. Banda went northwards with a small group. He received tremendous response from the peasantry oppressed terribly under the yoke of feudal exploitation in the north and especially Punjab. On 26 November 1709, he attacked the city of Kaithal. On 24 May 1710, he occupied Sirhind. The Yamnua-Satluj Doab was now under the occupation of Banda Bahadur. By the autumn of 1710, the peasant army of Banda Bahadur had liberated the entire Jalandhar doab. After this the peasant rebellion, in the leadership of Banda Bahadur, spread past the Satluj, in Majha region. They occupied the region between Satluj-Ravi. Entire Punjab became a sea of independent peasants and in it only two islands of Mughal rule remained, one was the Mughal capital, Lahore and second was the city of Afghans, Kasur.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of 1715, the peasant army of Banda Bahadur was surrounded by Mughal army in GurdasNangal. Banda Bahadur was arrested along with hundreds of Sikhs and taken to Delhi. 700 companions of Banda Bahadur were martyred by Mughal empire. Banda was martyred on 19 June, 1716. “Although Banda’s success was short-lived, it proved that the peasants were discontented and that the administration had become feeble. In seven stormy years Banda changed the class structure of landholdings in the southern half of the state by liquidating many of the big Muslim zamindar (land-owning) families of Malwa and Jullundur Doab. Large estates were first broken up into smaller holdings in the hands of Sikh or Hindu peasants.”<sup>26</sup> Khushwant Singh further wrote that Banda Bahadur confiscated the lands of feudal lords and distributed them among the peasants but “With the rise of Sikh power (the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh – author) these holdings were once again grouped together to form large estates, but in the hands of Sikh chieftains”<sup>27</sup> This statement of Khushwant Singh does not seem

to be true because during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the vast majority amongst peasantry was that of self-cultivators.<sup>28</sup> This was the contribution of Banda Bahadur to Punjab.

Another important achievement of Banda Bahadur was that the peasant rebellion in his leadership, “shook the roots of one of the most powerful empires (Mughal Empire – author) with such violence that it was unable to ever again establish its control.”<sup>29</sup>

Historians hold that in the military campaigns of Banda Bahadur the general Muslim population (i.e., the masses – translator) was also at the receiving end of persecution. Regarding the siege of Kaithal, which was the city of executor of his two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Khushwant Singh writes, “It is unnecessary to state the particulars of this memorable invasion, which from all accounts, appears to have been one of the severest scourges with which a country has been ever afflicted. Every excess that the most wanton barbarity could commit, every cruelty that an unappeased appetite of revenge could suggest, was inflicted upon the miserable inhabitants of the provinces through which they passed. Life was only granted to those who confirmed to the religion and adopted the habits and dress of the Sikhs. (Sir J. Malcolm, Sketch of the Sikhs). The tales of atrocities are supported by Sikh Historians, Gyan Singh in ‘Shamshir Khalsa’ and Ratan Singh Bhangu in ‘Prachin Panth Prakash’.”<sup>30</sup>

Khushwant Singh writes, “The movement to infuse the sentiment of Punjabi nationalism in the masses received a setback with Banda. The wanton destruction of life and property of Mughal officials and landowners alienated the sympathies of great number of Muslims who began to look upon the Khalsa as the enemies of Islam.”<sup>31</sup>

This conclusion of Khushwant Singh seems to be exaggerated because till the time of Banda Bahadur, no such thing as Punjabi Nationalism had originated. The phenomenon of nationalism is related to the origin of modern capitalism. There was no ground for Punjabi nationalism to arise at that time.

18<sup>th</sup> century was the century of decline of Mughal Sultanate. The emergence of Marathas and Sikhs hastened the decline of Mughals.

The oppression by the Mughal rule continued in Punjab after the martyrdom of Banda Bahadur. During this time Punjab also had to face invasions from Nadar Shah (Iranian) and Ahmad Shah Abdali (Afghan). Fighting them, the entire Punjab became independent by the end of 1767. Now Punjab was under 12 Sikh Misls. After a century of bloodbath, wars, external aggression, the rule of Ranjit Singh, head of ShukarchakiyaMisl, was established in 1799. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the English occupied Punjab in 1849.

## ECONOMY OF PUNJAB UNDER THE RULE OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

A detailed study regarding Maharaja Ranjit Singh's sultanate can be undertaken from the numerous books written on the history of Punjab. We shall not delve into its detail. We will limit ourselves to Punjab's economy and economic development during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule.

Like many feudal empires during that time the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, too was a feudal empire. It was based on the exploitation of peasants, artisans and other toiling masses. But during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Punjab progressed in various sectors. Its economy advanced further. An important reason for this was that with the establishment of a centralised state system in Punjab, political instability came to an end. From 1799 (the time when Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule was established) till 1845 (till the attack on Punjab by the English), Punjab had gained respite from battles-wars after a very long time. Though, this period was not long.

While discussing Punjab's economy during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, let us first discuss agriculture.

In Ranjit Singh's rule, the entire land under cultivation was private property. Land was in the hands of big feudal lords and also small peasants. Feudal lords did not themselves cultivate the land. Historian Jageet Singh Grewal (J.S. Grewal) terms them non cultivating owners.<sup>32</sup> They were the owners of vast amount of lands, sometimes

amounting that of the entire village or several villages. They had the land cultivated by tenants and appropriated rent from them. Some owners of small pieces of land also had it cultivated by tenants on sharecropping basis. But large majority was of those peasants that cultivated their own land. J.S. Grewal terms them peasant-owners.<sup>33</sup>

There was another type of ownership right which was not the ownership of land. This was limited to a portion of crop or rent. At the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century this right was called Talukdari. A person could be the owner of one village and talukdar of other. It seems the number of Talukdari villages increased at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was only due to curtailing the position of non-cultivator owners to talukdars. In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule the collective number and proportion of Talukdars and non-cultivator owners was meagre.<sup>34</sup>

Small owners, cultivating farmers were the majority in total number of farmers. In the upper Bari (Beas-Ravi) doab, 96000 owners were peasant-owners. They owned an average of 10 acres of land. This cultivated 72% of the total land under cultivation. Out of the 7 lakh rupee rent paid in Rawalpindi, 6 lakh rupees were paid by peasant-owners. In the former state of Mughal rule, Lahore, tenants numbered half that of peasant-owners and only cultivated 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the total land. In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire, among the tenants, hereditary ones were proportionately more than non-hereditary ones. Those farmers who brought new land under cultivation were given ownership rights. This encouraged cultivation. Artificial means of irrigation like wells, canals etc played an important role in expanding agriculture and increasing agricultural production. In Punjab, the rent appropriated from the peasant ranged from 1/6<sup>th</sup> to half of the total crop. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom appropriated half of the crop's produce as rent from the peasant in Kashmir. The rate of rent was less in Punjab on commercial crops such as cotton, sugarcane, indigo, tobacco etc. The state of Ranjit Singh appropriated 2.5 crore rupees as rent from the farmers of Punjab and Kashmir.

Agriculture was extended and agricultural production increased during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This was not due to an

improvement in agricultural technology. The tools used in agriculture were traditional though not primitive. Peasant-owners especially used organic fertilisers on a large scale.

In Mughal Empire, at the time of Sikh-Afghan wars, urban centres in north-west of the empire had declined. Due to political stability achieved in the rule of Ranjit Singh, old cities started to prosper again. Cities like Gujrat, Sialkot, Wazirabad, Lahore, Batala, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala etc., developed. Artisans were leaving villages and instead taking up residence in cities. Cities and towns, alongside being administrative and religious centres were also the centres of handicrafts. Lahore was the centre of producing metal products and textiles, which included that of silk, cotton and woollen clothes. Multan became the centre for industry of producing woollen carpets, utensils, cotton and silk clothes, and enamelling silver. Amritsar had a special place in industry and trade. There were 2 thousand industries making shawls here during the rule of Ranjit Singh. 1600 workers were employed in the industry producing silk clothes alone. In addition to the aforementioned Dera Baba Nanak, Sultanpur, Batala, Kasoor, Bajwara, KotliLuharan, Sahiwal, Kotla, Hasilanwala, Gujrat etc., were industrial centres. In this time the trade of Punjab flourished too. In 1838, traders in Punjab had started peddling their wares to Bombay via Sindh. Wheat, Rice, Sugar, Indigo, Poppy, Black Pepper etc., were exported to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Internal trade was more important than external trade. Cities like Amritsar, Lahore, Srinagar, Multan, Peshawar etc., were connected by roads. The modes of transport were traditional like donkeys, asses, camels, bullock-carts, boats etc. There was not a uniform currency in the rule of Ranjit Singh. But Nanakshai rupee was the standard. Though regional differences were small but there were no standard weights and measures.

From the condition of agriculture (especially the existence of large majority of owner peasants), industry (handicrafts) and trade during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh it can be easily inferred that the ground for capitalist development in Punjab was being prepared. If Punjab would not have been colonised in 1849, then the process of economic

development would have advanced naturally. But the colonisation of Punjab aborted the natural capitalist development here, as it did in rest of India. This hindered and distorted the natural development of Punjabi nation. We shall discuss it a little later.

## THE EMERGING CONTOURS OF PUNJABI NATION

Historian Ram Sharan Sharma writes that in India around the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century, distinct cultural units had started forming. These later came to be known as Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu (To these can be added Punjab. because Punjab was also part of these processes taking place in northern India. – Author). The identity of different cultural groups was accepted in both Indian and foreign sources. Jain writings, at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century, discuss 18 major groups or “nationalities” and physical characteristics of 16 groups. Writer Vishakhadatta, around 9<sup>th</sup> century wrote that in different regions people of different languages, wear and traditions reside.<sup>35</sup>

Today’s Punjab (if we take Punjabi language to be Punjabi nation’s natural boundary) has never been part of a single administrative unit.

When Punjab was under Delhi Sultanate it was divided into the administrative units of Multan, Dipalpur, Lahore, Jalandhar, Sirhind and Samana. During Mughal sultanate, Akbar divided his empire into 12 provinces. The major part of Punjab was included in the Lahore province. But Multan was not part of it. On the other hand, a large part of today’s Haryana was part of it.

The English occupied Punjab in 1849. In 1858, Punjabi province was formed under British rule. Princely states (Punjab) of Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha, Faridkot, Malerkotla, Kalsia, Nalagarh etc., weren’t part of this. On the other hand, present day Haryana and Delhi etc., had been forcibly attached to Punjab. In ‘Pratibadh’, Bulletin – 35 we have written in detail about this that neither the formation of linguistic states or unification of nations was the intention or policy of British rule. (See ‘National Question in India’, Pratibadh Bulletin 35). The condition of

Punjab in independent India is for all to see. We shall discuss it a little later. Concerning the fragmentation of Punjab under Delhi and Mughal sultanate, this was natural to a large extent. The time of feudal production relations is not the time of nations coming into existence (only the embryo of nations is formed at that time) or the time of their unification. Nations come into existence in capitalist epoch. The historical role in nation's unification is played by the bourgeoisie or the proletariat (as it can be seen from the experience of the Socialist Soviet Union. To delve into further detail regarding this, See 'National Question and Marxism', Pratibadh 33)

As it generally happens in the case of nations, the consciousness of Punjabi identity among the residents of Punjab arose in a long historical process. Punjabi language and Punjabi literature played an important role in giving rise to Punjabi identity among the residents of Punjab.

The formation of making Punjab a political-administrative unit (Lahore state) by Akbar during the Mughal rule was a necessary factor of Punjabi identity but this factor wasn't enough.<sup>36</sup> Though a substantial part of Punjab was outside Lahore state but a large part of Punjab was included in it. The identity that Akbar imparted to a political-administrative unit gave rise to the possibility that people attach their identity with this unit. An interesting example regarding this is that Shah Jahan's famous minister Saadulla was recognised as a Punjabi. Actually the greater possibility is that members of the Mughal ruling class due to their long affiliation with Lahore state had started identifying themselves with this region and had become Punjabis. In this way the spoken and written language of the large majority of people of Lahore state came to be known as 'Punjabi'. But this language was also spoken outside the boundaries of Lahore state. This created the possibility for the Punjabi speakers residing outside the boundaries of Lahore state to easily identify themselves with Punjabi identity.

For the 17<sup>th</sup> century till the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of Punjabi literature played an important role in making Punjabi people conscious of their cultural affinity. With the collection of JanamSakhis, Punjabi prose became a trend of large magnitude. A major

work of religious-neutral poetry was Damodar's, a contemporary or near contemporary of Akbar, Heer. The narrative poetry which was made popular by Damodar was taken to its zenith in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Waris Shah's Heer. Many predecessors and successors of Waris Shah and many others, wrote tales about love, the emergence of religious-neutral literature furthered the trend among authors to label themselves as Punjabi despite being of various different religions and castes. The authors also began to express pride regarding Punjabi language in their writings to a certain extent. This pride also began to be expressed for their land and then in Punjabi identity. E.g., Waris Shah metaphorically regards Punjab as an adornment on Hind's forehead. Ahmed Yaar directly expressed pride in Punjabi and Punjab.<sup>37</sup> The first major quality of religious-neutral literature was that it was created in abundance. Secondly, it was created by the people of three major religious communities of Punjab (Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs).<sup>38</sup>

An intense awareness regarding Punjab's geography can be seen in Punjabi literature created during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (at the start of 19<sup>th</sup> century). During this time, the consciousness of Punjabi identity among Punjabi's arose on a large scale. This consciousness was reflected in prose and poetry of this time. Shah Muhammed's Vaar can be seen in this context. In this, Shah Muhammed labels the war between the English and Sikhs as a war between 'Hind', which was under English empire and 'Punjab' which was the kingdom of Punjabis. In Shah Muhammed's work, 'Punjabi Nationalism' gains expansion.

## PUNJAB'S COLONIAL PERIOD

The English had already occupied the region south-west of Satluj river. The princely states of this region had already surrendered before the English. Satluj river was the boundary between the region of British rule and that of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule. While Maharaja Ranjit Singh was alive, the English did not dare to attack his territory. Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on 27 June 1839. After his death, the English attacked Ranjit Singh's kingdom in December of 1845. The English emerged victorious in several intense battles. At last, the English occupied the

entire Punjab on 29 March 1849 (along with the non-Punjabi regions of Ranjit Singh's kingdom like Kashmir).

Due to being the gateway of invaders to the Indian subcontinent, Punjab was rarely able to enjoy a sigh of relief, but with English occupation of Punjab, like the rest of India, began the darkest period in Punjab's history. Punjab is still tormented by this dark period. Here we cannot go into detail regarding whole of economic, social and political effects of colonialism in Punjab. This requires a separate article. We will briefly discuss here the three processes that took place in English colony, Punjab. First is Punjab's economic development. Second is the consolidation of communal divisions in India, which obstructed the natural development of Punjabi nation. Third is the anti-colonial movement of people of Punjab, which was pushing into the background caste, religious divisions and was advancing the development of Punjabi nation. These processes were taking place, in one form or another, in other regions of India as well. Or it can be said that the processes taking place in Punjab were a part of them.

The mutiny of 1857 had uprooted the English from a large part of India. Not only did Punjab remain peaceful at that time but Punjabi soldiers helped the English to reconsolidate in Delhi and other places. This heightened Punjab's strategic importance in the eyes of English. They increased the number of Punjabi soldiers in their army. The Punjabis of English army started in 1870s. Not only were the Punjabis considered more equipped in fighting in adverse conditions, they also proved to be cheap to the English. The allowances which had to be given to soldiers from far-off places for foreign duty did not have to be given to Punjabi soldiers. By 1875, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> recruitment in English Indian army was from Punjab. This proportion increased to 60% in 1914 despite the share of Punjabi population being merely 10% in English India. This military recruitment from Punjab was from amongst Muslims, Rajputs, Hindu Dogras and Jatt Sikhs. In order to cajole them, English named them "Martial Castes".

This recruitment in the army of English was mainly from the peasantry. It was necessary for them to appease the peasantry. Peasantry

of Punjab, alongside providing soldiers to English army was also a major source of land rents. Muslim feudal lords of Western Punjab were also military contractors of the English.

This required agricultural development. From 1885 the English started constructing canals for agricultural irrigation in Punjab (especially in Western Punjab). They spent 3 crore 83 lakh rupees on irrigation project of Punjab from 1885-1896. By 1920, Punjab produced 10% of total cotton and 33% of total wheat of English India. In the period 1891-1921, per capita crop production of Punjab increased 45%.

With the development of agriculture, the problem of farmer indebtedness also increased. The land of peasants started passing into the hands of non-cultivating moneylenders (who were majorly urban Hindus). This resulted in discontent among the peasants. To avoid this, the English introduced the 'Alienation to Land Act' in 1900. This law prohibited non-cultivators from purchasing land.

Like the rest of India, in Punjab too limited, distorted capitalist development took place as the by-product of the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labour. In many ways, this development (especially Punjab's industrial development) was far behind that of other states of India, especially coastal regions. After becoming a colony, on the one hand the domestic industry (handicrafts) of Punjab were ruined due to the cheap industrial goods, made by modern machinery, of England, on the other hand some modern industry was also set up here. In the last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, modern industry (meaning driven by steam power) began being set up in Punjab. Dhariwal woollen mill was set up in 1882. In 1885, first cotton ginning mill was set up in Multan. These mills numbered 23 in 1902. In 1892, a factory for the production of glass bottles was set up at Jhelum. There were 152 factories driven by steam power in Punjab by 1901. At this time 461,825 workers worked in the factories of Punjab. Some of these factories were in non-Punjabi areas such as Delhi. As a result of this limited industrial development in Punjab, two modern classes came into existence – industrial proletariat and industrial bourgeoisie.

With the emergence of modern bourgeoisie in Punjab, the basis

for further development of Punjabi nation was prepared (though there were limitations to this development under the colonial system) but this development was arrested by communalism. The poisonous seeds of communalism in India were sown by the English. This was mainly a part of the English policy of 'Divide and Rule'. With the help of this, the English wanted to set up a strong barricade in the path of India's independence struggle and they were successful in this to a large extent. The result of the communal poison spread by the English under its policy of 'Divide and Rule' was the partition of Punjab and Bengal in 1947 on communal basis. Even today, not only Punjab but other regions of India too are suffering from the communalism created by the English.

By communalism is meant that one religious sect holds that its identity, existence and interests are necessarily in opposition to another religious sect. Communalism teaches one religious sect to oppose another. It teaches that Hindu is not a Hindu if he/she is not anti-Muslim and a Muslim is not a Muslim if he/she is not anti-Hindu. Communalism as an ideology and practice in India, historically developed towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup>

Before becoming a colony religious communities did not exist as large unified institutions in India (alongside Punjab). In different regions of India, though people believed in religions but they did not see themselves in their daily social life as separate communities, based on special religious beliefs. After occupying entire India, to prevent the development of independence movement, it was the need of the English to consolidate religious identity. And pit them against each other in which they were successful to a large extent.

The most important step taken by the English towards the consolidation of religious identities was in the process of census, to which was added the column of religion. Kenneth Jones says that these censuses in India proved important in defining religious communities as distinct social-religious identities.<sup>43</sup>

First such census took place in 1853 in North-Western province. In Punjab, the first such census took place in 1855. These censuses strengthened religious divisions amongst people, stabilised their religious

identities, created the majority-minority rift by enumerating people of every religious community.

Like the whole of India, communal organisations started forming in Punjab as well like Arya Smaj, Brahmo Smaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Singh Sabha, Anzuman-e-Islamian etc. In Kaadian, the Ahmadiya sect of Muslims came into existence.

The leadership of these sects was in the hands of middle-class aristocrats who had emerged (due to capitalist development) from the womb of colonialism. They organised the toiling masses of their sects on religious basis for obtaining more facilities from the English state and for their narrow interests they plunged the general toiling masses in the fire of communal riots.

The English state encouraged sometimes this and then that religious sect. It instigated one sect against another, and used reservation in municipal committees, jobs as the means to encourage religious hatred. From 1920s onwards, religious riots started occurring regularly in Punjab.

In Punjab, the English used language as well to sow religious divisions. Hindi was made the language of Hindus, Urdu that of Muslims and Punjabi that of Sikhs. Religion based divisions widened in Punjabi nation. Religious divisions became dominant over the language and culture based national affinity of Punjabi nation. This divisions, communal divisions played a major role in the partition of Punjab on religious basis and the killings of lakhs of people in 1947.

Despite the 'Divide and rule' policy of the English state, indiscriminate use of lathis and bullets, hanging of patriots, punishments of KaalaPani, India's independence struggle advanced forward. In Punjab too, anti-colonial movement gained in strength. The hatred of Punjab's masses towards the colonial system was expressed in many mass movements such as Pagari Sambhal Jatta movement, Ghadar movement, Babbar Akali movement, mass movement against the Rowlatt Act (The English had tried to suppress this movement via the killings in Jallianwallah Bagh [Amritsar]), Praja Mandal movement, Pepsu mujahra movement etc.

Under the influence of Great October Socialist Revolution in

Russia, communist organisations, groups too began to be formed in India. First such group came into existence in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Its leader was M.N. Roy. This group was named 'Communist Party of India'. Separately, various communist groups came into existence in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur and Lahore. They merged to become a party via a conference in 1925. This party was named 'Communist Party of India'. The party formed in the leadership of M.N. Roy became the foreign department of the 'Communist Party of India' formed in 1925 (in Kanpur). This process of party formation had several shortcomings, the detail of which we cannot enter into here. In 1933, central committee of 'Communist Party of India' was elected. The two biggest forces in the independence struggle of India were – Congress party, representative of the bourgeoisie of India and Communist Party of India, the representative of the working class of India. Towards imperialist occupation, Congress' attitude was one of compromise-pressure-compromise. It was terrified of mass movements. The leadership of this party wanted to keep the anti-colonial movement within certain limits. It did not want that the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal mass movement of the people of India should advance towards socialism.

On the other hand, the communist party, whose aim was to advance towards socialism via complete liberation from imperialism-feudalism, was ideologically very weak. This party did not have a comprehensive understanding about Indian society, strategy and tactics of revolution here. In the colonial period the features of many nations had started emerging. India was a multi-national country. But the Communist Party of India had no understanding of the national question. It gave religious sects the misnomer of nations. From incorrect understanding of national question, this party advocated for religion based partition of Punjab. The party said that Punjab should be divided into Muslim majority region, Hindu majority region and Sikh majority region (Sikh homeland). Due to this ideological pauperism, Communist party of India could not lead the freedom struggle of India. As a result, when India became independent of English imperialism in 1947, the big bourgeoisie of India ascended to power. Punjab and Bengal were

partitioned on basis of religion. Lakhs of people were killed and displaced. Punjab had to bear the greatest burden of partition. Around 10 lakh Punjabis were killed in communal killings. Around 1.5 crore were displaced.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR PUNJABI LINGUISTIC STATE IN INDIAN PUNJAB AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Punjab was fragmented into two in 1947. The major portion of Punjab went to the newly formed country on the basis of religion, Pakistan where Punjabis haven't got the right to their language till today. Here Pakistani rulers are hell bent on destroying Punjabi language via Urdu. We shall not discuss Western Punjab much here. Here we shall focus on selected sequence of events of Indian Punjab after 1947.

The reign of the country after 1947 was in the hands of Congress party. This party was, for long, the first preference of the big bourgeoisie (later it turned into monopoly bourgeoisie). In 1920 this party had accepted the principle of forming linguistic states in Independent India. National aspirations arising in the various regions of the country had forced the Congress to accept this principle. One of the most challenging tasks facing the big bourgeoisie, that had ascended to power in India in 1947, was that of preserving the "Unity and Integrity" of India, which was actually the unity and integrity of India's big market. It did not want any nation to secede from India. Out of this fear, Congress party turned back on their promise of forming linguistic states. But after independence, the pressure of mass movements on central government for forming linguistic states was continuously increasing. That is why Congress had to backtrack regarding its stubbornness of not forming linguistic states. After a long struggle of Telugu people, Andhra Pradesh state was formed in October 1953. This state was formed by separating it from Madras presidency. In 1953, central government was forced to set up The States Reorganisation Commission. After this many linguistic states came into existence. But for this various

nations were forced to conduct struggles which included sacrifices. Even while forming these states, the central rulers tried that no single nation should be completely able to unite in a state.

In Indian Punjab, the demand for linguistic state was taken up mainly by Akalai Dal and the struggle for this demand was also led by Akali Dal. At that time Punjab had not fully recovered from its past. Meaning there was still a large impact of communal poison spread by the English in Punjab. For the Hindu community of Punjab, there was the stench of Sikh Homeland in the demand for Punjabi state. A large part of Hindu community, under the influence of Arya Samaj and Jan Sangh, opposed the demand of Punjabi state and in the census of 1951 (and later that of 1981) recorded Hindi as their mother tongue. Central government delayed acting on the demand of Punjabi state for one and a half decade. During this time communal divide between Punjab's Sikhs and Hindus increased continuously. In 1965, centre accepted the demand for Punjabi state. In 1966, the Punjabi nation came into existence. But it was a mutilated and crippled Punjab. Due to Punjabi language not being accepted as the natural boundary of Punjabi nation, a substantial Punjabi speaking region remained in Himachal, Haryana, and Rajasthan. Jammu was already separate from Punjab. Chandigarh was separated from Punjab by making it a Union Territory. Akali Dal required a Sikh majority region, where it could rule. Thus from its communal calculations, it agreed to a mutilated and crippled Punjab.

Thus, first the British rulers in 1947 and then central rulers of Independent India in 1966 fragmented Punjab into bits and pieces.

## THE PERIOD OF KHALISTANI MOVEMENT

From the end of 1970s began another dark chapter in the history of Indian Punjab, which is known as the period of Khalistani movement. This dark period of Indian Punjab can be said to have begun in 1978 though preparations for it had started before. On 13 April, 1978 a clash occurred in Amritsar between the followers of Bhindranwale and Nirankaris. In this, 12 followers of Bhindranwale and 3 Nirankaris were killed. The dark period that started from here plunged Indian Punjab in

the fire of communal massacre for one and a half decades. Indian Punjab was victim to governmental and Khalistani terrorism for almost one and a half decades.

There were many economic, political and social factors responsible for the rise of Khalistani movement. We cannot go into the detail of all these here. We can discuss, only briefly, some factors here.

One, this movement should be seen in continuity of Punjab's bygone times. This means that the Khalistani movement was the continuity of communalism, communal seeds of which were sown by the English.

Huge changes occurred in the economy of Indian Punjab after 1947. Capitalist production relations started replacing feudal production relations in agriculture here. Towards the end of 1960s, capitalist development was hastened in the agrarian economy of Indian Punjab by the so-called green revolution. With this, capitalist relations became the dominant ones in agriculture here. Agrarian bourgeoisie emerged which had control over the large part of cultivable land. On the other hand, a class of landless workers emerged. A part of these landless workers had come from poor peasantry. Gopal Singh explains the changes that took place in agrarian sector of Punjab after green revolution as follows, "The green revolution has resulted in an uneven development not only in different regions of the State but also for the population within the region. This unevenness has resulted in a growing pauperisation of marginal and poor peasants.... The number of the landless have doubled and those of the marginal peasants has increased three times in the past ten years (1974-1984 – author) or so. With capital intensive agriculture the ratio of landless workers in the total agricultural workforce rose from 17.3 per cent in 1961 to 32.1 per cent in 1971 and the figure is around 40 per cent now (1984 – author). According to a study, 24 per cent of the small peasants and 31 per cent of the marginal peasants in Punjab live below the poverty line.

The inequalities in land distribution have also accentuated considerably. While the percentage of small holdings is the lowest in Punjab, the percentage of large holdings is the highest. The fruits of the Green Revolution appear to have been grabbed by just 20 per cent of Jat

landlords who own more than 60 per cent of the total land.”<sup>44</sup>

Due to green revolution or rapid capitalist development that took place in Punjab’s agriculture, the small and marginal farmers that had become landless had few employment opportunities. In industrial sector, salary was meagre and living conditions were very difficult. This sector had no attraction for the peasantry of Punjab that had become landless. Substantial amount of employment in this sector was taken up by migrant workers who had come from even more backward living conditions. In service sector, employment was very uncertain and informal, wages were less. Jatt mentality was also a barrier in them working as workers in the village. In such a situation, this part of Punjab’s peasantry (Poor peasants and those peasants who had become landless) especially its youth were easily influenced by communal propaganda.

Dr. Sucha Singh Gill discussing the economic basis of Punjab’s crisis during Khalistani movement writes that, “Punjab is one of the most developed states of the Indian union.... The Punjab model (the model of capitalist development – author) has generated contradictions at two levels: first, within the state itself and secondly between the regional dominant class of Punjab and the dominant class at the all India level.”

“Capitalist development (in Punjab – author) has brought about a greater integration of agriculture into the market network. There is a greater degree of specialisation in production... Farmers mainly grow wheat in the rabi season and paddy, cotton and sugarcane in the kharif season. Farmers of different layers have become commodity producers who sell a major part of their output in the market. There is a considerable increase in the inputs like high yielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilisers, insecticides, weedicides, pumpsets, electric motors, threshers, tractors, etc. Farmers sell a major part of their output and buy all the modern inputs and a considerable part of consumer goods from the market. Market operations have an important effect on the income and life of the farmers. Therefore, the price issue and smooth market operations are of direct relevance for the peasantry. In the market, farmers come in direct contact with traders. Traders/commission agents are

responsible for unloading and bagging the produce, preparing it for sale, providing display space, finding buyers and making sale, stitching the bags, weighing them, collecting payments from buyers and making them available to the farmers after making the necessary deductions for various intermediary charges and taxes. They also provide a considerable amount of credit to the farmers both in cash and in the form of inputs on deferred payments. In the process, there is predominance of commission agents who exploit the farmers through various malpractices and usurious interest rates. Farmers buy various inputs and consumer goods from the traders in the market places of urban areas where they are overcharged. This establishes a contradiction between the farming community and the trading community. Farmers are suspicious of traders and consider them cunning exploiters and traders look at farmers as rustic, rash, uneducated and easy to cheat. In fact, the peasantry nourishes a grudge against urban centres where apart from traders, government officials, who harass and oppress them, also reside.

The class contradiction is reinforced by the communal division in the society. A study based on the 1971 census data shows that 69.37 per cent of the Sikhs in Punjab are concentrated in the rural areas and are mainly cultivators, and 66.39 per cent of the Hindus live in urban areas and specialise in non-agricultural occupations such as trade, industry, services, etc. In the urban-based occupations Hindus are over-represented and the Sikhs under-represented. - Entry of the Sikhs in these occupations on a significant scale creates communal polarisation. This explains contradiction between Hindu and Sikh traders and growing communalism among educated people. There is a second set of contradictions between Punjab and the centre. With capitalist development in agriculture, the class of capitalist farmers have come to dominate rural life, wield a decisive influence over the political process and power in the state. The institutions of panchayati raj, network of co-operative institutions and state legislative assembly are controlled by people from this class. This class is using the government machinery at the state level to promote its interests. While using the government machinery at the state level it comes into conflict with the class in

control of the government machinery at the central level. This class, which is increasingly asserting its interests, finds powers of administration at the state level being continuously eroded by the central government.”<sup>45</sup>

Besides these fundamental reasons, the fight for power between Congress and Akalis was also responsible for Punjab Crisis. To undermine the influence of Akalis in Punjab, Congress promoted Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as a Sikh leader parallel to them. Later, Bhindranwala broke free from Congress. But Khalistanis had the support and asylum from Punjabi Congressmen till the end of this movement.

Gopal Singh brings to our attention another factor in the spread of communal Khalistani movement. That is the migration of Punjabis, especially Sikhs, towards England, U.S.A., Australia and Canada. This migration took place towards Arab countries as well. Overseas, these young Sikh boys and girls came under the influence of western culture. They adopted modern thinking, values. Many of these boys had their haircut and became clean-shaven. Under their influence the youngsters of the villages of Punjab too followed in their footsteps. Sikh fundamentalism also arose as a reaction to this.<sup>46</sup>

In February 1992, Congress government in Punjab was formed under the leadership of Beant Singh. In just an year, the Khalistan movement was finished off. The ease with which this movement was suppressed shows that it was not a mass movement (because it was not pro-people) and nor it did have any base in the masses.

Punjab has treaded a long journey from 1993 (the end of Khalistan movement) till now. During this time too, the communal forces have tried to disturb the brotherhood of Punjab but they have not been successful. It seems that Punjab has emerged out of the communal poison that was spread by the English at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, no hatred can be observed between Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab. Similar is the case of other religious minorities of India, Muslims and Christians.

Above, we have discussed the two contradictions of Punjab with the reference of DR. Sucha Singh Gill. The first is the contradiction between Hindu and Sikh bourgeoisie in Punjab, and second was the

contradiction between the then dominant of over Punjab, Agrarian bourgeoisie and India's monopoly bourgeoisie, which controls central state power. The first contradiction out of these seems to have resolved to a large extent. Its reflection can be seen in the recently concluded struggle against central government. The leadership of this struggle in Punjab was in the hands of agrarian bourgeoisie and it had the support of urban masses, urban bourgeoisie. This fact also shows that in the contradictions mentioned above, the form of the latter one has also changed. This contradiction is now not that of between Punjabi agrarian bourgeoisie and India's monopoly bourgeoisie, which controls central state power but has become that of between Punjab's bourgeoisie (and the entire masses) and monopoly bourgeoisie.

Punjab's Hindu population, instigated by communalists of Arya Samaj and Jansangh, had their mother tongue recorded as Hindi after independence. But afterwards, Punjab's Hindu population abandoned their communal standpoint towards language. In 2011, 89.92% of Punjab's population had their mother tongue recorded as Punjabi.

From all these factors it can be seen why communal forces aren't able to get a stronghold in Punjab. But communal forces are active in Punjab. The danger of communalism hasn't completely vanished yet.

## TASKS REGARDING NATIONAL QUESTION IN PRESENT-DAY INDIAN PUNJAB

Today Punjab is divided among two countries. Its bigger part is in Pakistan. In India, Punjab is divided in today's Punjab, Jammu, Himachal, Haryana, Rajasthan and Chandigarh. Entire Punjab (Punjab spread in Pakistan and India, whose natural boundary is Punjabi language) should be unified on linguistic basis. It will eventually happen. After the advent of Internet, Social media, the mutual association in entire Punjab is increasing. The role which was played by Punjabi literature in the medieval period of promoting common identity in Punjabis is being played by social media today. It is increasing mutual association between

Punjabis, who are fragmented in 8 pieces (Western Punjab, Hindco (Punjabi dialect) region of Khyber Pakhtunva, Eastern Punjab, Punjabi speaking regions of Jammu, Himachal, Haryana, Rajasthan and Chandigarh. Without a doubt, Punjabi literature still has its place. Social media has hastened the pace of its propagation as well. The unification of two fragments of Punjab, on the side of Pakistan and India, is a long-term task. When, how and in what conditions would be take place, this cannot be ascertained now.

Regarding national question in Indian Punjab, these are our tasks-  
:

- 1) Unification of Punjab**

Taking village as a unit, Indian Punjab should be unified on linguistic basis. The Punjabi speaking regions of Jammu, Himachal, Haryana and Rajasthan should be included in Punjab. The unification of nations, setting up administrative units by taking language to be the natural boundary is an established Marxist-Leninist policy. To know in detail, the Marxist-Leninist policy regarding this, readers can read the article 'National Question and Marxism', published in Pratibadh, Bulletin 33.

- 2) Chandigarh should be handed over to Punjab**

After independence, Chandigarh was formed as the capital of India by displacing 29 villages of Punjab. But afterwards the central rules separated it from Punjab and turned it into a Union territory. In India, many states have been divided. But from no state has such a city been snatched away. This injustice has only been dealt to Punjab.

In capitalist system, the urban population is mixed. This happened due to migration from villages to cities. It can also be possible that in a city of a state, the number of native residents is lower than that of migrants as is currently the case of Mumbai where Marathas are in minority. But on this basis a city cannot be snatched away from a nation.

Marxist-Leninist policy regarding this is that the city belongs to that nation whose populace resides around it, which is economically dependent on this city. In accordance with this policy, after the October revolution, city of Tblisi (Tiflis) was handed over to Georgia, though Armenian population was in majority.

- 3) The matter of Punjab's waters** should be solved in

accordance with the globally acknowledged Riparian law. According to this law, the right over river waters belongs to those nations, in whose geographical region lays the natural flow of these rivers. According to this law, the right over rivers flowing through Punjab lies with Jammu-Kashmir, Himachal, Eastern and Western Punjab. According to riparian law these states can use water of these rivers but cannot alter their natural course. Indian government itself accepts this law in water agreements with other countries as well as division of water in states of Southern India. Only in the case of Punjab's waters does it refuse to accept the Riparian law.

#### **4) Oppose imposition of Hindi in Punjab**

The rulers of India have been forcibly trying to turn India into a nation since 1947. This is only possible if languages and cultures, especially languages of various nations residing in India are crushed. Since 1947, the rulers of India have been imposing Hindi on various nations in various ways. From 2014, after the ascension to central state power of Fascist BJP, the attempts to impose Hindi over the entire country have intensified.

In Punjab, the vast majority of residents are Punjabis. In addition to them various national minorities too reside here. Every child in Punjab should receive education in his mother tongue. No language should be made compulsory. In Punjab, Hindi is taught as a compulsory subject. This should be opposed. Similarly, the teaching of English as a compulsory subject should also be opposed.

Punjab's national language will definitely be Punjabi. But this should not be imposed over national minorities. All governmental, court, administrative work should be made available in the languages of the national minorities of Punjab.

#### **5) Protecting the autonomy of Punjab**

There is a centralised bourgeois state system in India. This is a multi-national country but it is not a voluntary union of nations. When India became independent in 1947, then against the wishes of Indian rulers, big bourgeoisie of India, various nations residing here got limited autonomy which the centre has regularly tried to take away. The curtailing of the rights of states by the centre should be opposed.

## **6) Punjab should have the right to self-determination**

We demand the right to self-determination for all nations of India, including Punjab. By self-determination is meant that every nation that resides in India, including Punjab, should have the right to form their independent nation state. India should be a voluntary union of various nations, a federal republic based on the right to self-determination.

**Translated from Punjabi by Navjot Navi**

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# **VARIOUS UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA – A CRITICAL REVIEW**

By the various understandings of the National Question in India we mean the understanding of the Communist revolutionary groups, the revisionist parties and the intellectuals who identify as Marxists. Right from the beginning (since the 1930s) the communist movement of India has been grappling with the problem of understanding the reality of multi-national India and solution of the national question here. And like many other issues, on this issue too, a situation of ignorance or incorrect, partial understanding has persisted in the communist movement and continues to persist in some form or another till date.

Understanding the character of Indian society, identifying its dominant production relations, understanding its class structure, correct recognition of the ally and enemy classes for the fulfilment of the task of fundamentally changing the Indian society, in accordance with this constructing the strategy and tactics of revolution, is vital for any successful revolution here.

Alongside this, no revolutionary change can take place without adopting a correct Marxist approach towards other forms of oppression like the Woman question, Caste question and the National question. Out of the three forms of oppression listed above, the National question is the most important. This question renders more challenging the construction of nationwide working-class party in India and also the unity of the working class and other toilers in the country.

Whether it is the question of understanding the socio-economic structure of India or the question of adopting a correct approach regarding other forms of oppression like Woman question, Caste question

and the National question, the communist movement of India has been in the main, unsuccessful.

Even today, major part of the communist revolutionary movement of India label India as a semi-feudal semi-colonial country and are hell bent or adamant on new democratic revolution in the Chinese manner. They refuse to see the changes that have occurred here in the last three-quarters of a century, i.e., the capitalist development that has taken place. In quest of its common front of four classes, for the success of its imaginary new democratic revolution, they have been tailing the blood-suckers of the workers of India, the rich peasantry or rural bourgeoisie and other bourgeois classes. Ideological weakness is a disease that afflicts the communist movement of India ever since its birth. This ideological weakness makes difficult the formulation of a correct programme, strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution. This weakness also makes it difficult to understand the multi-national India as well the task of discovering the correct solution of the National question here.

In this article we will undertake an appraisal of the views regarding the national question of the groups mentioned above. Whatever literature we have been able to acquire regarding the national question by three main revisionist parties of India, Communist Party of India (CPI) (We will discuss the views of the party on the national question when its character was still revolutionary), the party that is revisionist from its birth Communist party Marxist (CPM) and the party that has betrayed the heritage of the Great Naxalbari movement, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation will be the basis on which we will analyse their views on the National question. We will also appraise the views of the historian Amalendu Guha who has an association with these parties, a close one especially with the CPM. Amongst the revolutionary groups we have been able to acquire literature regarding the national question of Comrade D.V. Rao, All India People's Resistance Forum (AIPRF) and Re Organising Committee, Communist League of India (ML). We will review their views in this article.

## **Vacillations of the Communist Party of India on the National question in India and the turn towards revisionism**

The Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia of 1917 also impacted backward countries like India. The fighters struggling for the independence of India saw a new path of liberation in Marxism, Socialist system. Various Communist groups came into existence at various places in India. Here we will not discuss the CPI that was formed in 1920 in Tashkent in the leadership of M.N. Roy. In 1925, Satyabhagat called forth a conference in Kanpur of the various communist groups. In this conference, which took place on 26-28 December, 1925, the Communist Party of India came into being. This conference chose as its leading body not Central Committee but rather the Central Executive Committee. But this conference, in reality, could not establish a party structure based on Leninist principles. Different groups continued to exist separately.

8 years after the Kanpur conference, the Kolkata conference of the party took place in December 1933. In this conference a provisional Central Committee was elected, draft constitution and draft political thesis was adopted. Gangadhar Adhikari was chosen as the Secretary of the Party. The First Congress of the Party took place from 23 May to 1 June 1943 in Mumbai after the Party had been declared legal. But even after this the party could not free itself from internal factionalism. Due to ideological weakness plaguing it since its conception, it could never construct a Leninist structure based on democratic centralism, and kept oscillating continuously between right and left deviations. Till 1951, when the party embarked on the path of revisionism, it had neither a document of the programme of Indian revolution nor a profound understanding of the strategy and tactics of revolution.

In all the aforementioned issues, the ideological weakness of the party that came forth, the same weakness came forth in its understanding of the National question. The understanding of the

Communist party of India (when its character was revolutionary) on the National question in India can be discerned from the book edited by T.G. Jacob 'National Question in India, Communist Party of India Documents 1942-47' (Studera Press, New Delhi 2018). In 1849 the whole of India (including the present day Pakistan and Bangladesh) became colony of the British. Colonialism obstructed the natural development of India. The embryo of capitalist development that existed here was destroyed. In the colonial period, limited capitalist development took place as a by-product of colonial exploitation. But in the agrarian sector of India feudal relations continued to be predominant. English colonialism used feudalism as its social prop.

But whereas the limited capitalist development in colonial India gave birth to a country wide anti-colonial consciousness, alongside this a process of people of various languages consolidating into various nations in different regions of India also started. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, arising of different nations and national consciousness began to emerge in India. (To understand this process in detail see "National Question in India" Pratibadh, Bulletin 35). By the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the demand for creating states on the linguistic (national) basis had become so powerful that Congress party in its Nagpur Session of 1920 had to give acceptance to the principle of linguistic states. This party, committed to the interests of the big bourgeoisie, though never remained faithful to its promise of linguistic states.

During the time when in India alongside the anti-colonial movement the movement of various nations were gathering steam, the Communist Party of India failed to understand this reality and determine important tasks for the same. When the features of various nations in India were becoming well-defined and the movements for establishing their own homes (national regions) were gaining steam, at that time the Communist Party of India like the Congress party considered India to be a single nation. On 19 September 1942 in a resolution passed in the party's extended plenum, the party made self-criticism and accepted that "In 1938, we were yet wrapped up in the theory, like the rest of the

nationalists, that India was one nation”. (See the book edited by T.G. Jacob, page 44)

When the Communist Party of India left its incorrect position ‘India is a nation’, its pendulum swung to the other extreme and it started mislabelling religious sects as nations and started supporting the communal reactionary demands of religion based states. Out of this incorrect understanding it also supported the demand for Pakistan on the basis of ‘Self-determination of nations’.

## **THE DEVIATION OF TAKING RELIGIOUS SECTS TO BE NATIONS**

The reference that is given above of the self-criticism made by CPI of taking India to be a nation, this self-criticism itself was made on an incorrect basis. This self-criticism was made in the context that the Party was taking Muslims to be a religious cultural minority and was not able to identify the rights of “Muslim nationalities”. It was the party’s understanding that, “In 1938, we did not understand the real nature the communal problem which was becoming clear in the process of national, political and economic development. We were groping towards it. It became crystal clear to us when in March 1940, the Muslim League adopted the Pakistan Resolution. In 1938, we were yet wrapped up in the theory, like the rest of the nationalists, that India was one nation and that the Muslims were just a religious cultural minority and that Congress-League united front could be forged by conceding “protection of cultural and religious rights and demands.” We stood on the same basis as the Congress leadership, and were guilty of the charge of denying the people of the Muslim nationalities their just right to autonomy in free India”. (See, T.G. Jacob, *ibid*)

In the article ‘National Unity Now’ published in *People’s War* on 8 August 1942, where the party correctly identifies the different nations such as Sindhi, Baloch, Pathan etc and correctly advocates for the right of self-determination (including secession) of nations, it also divides the Punjabi nation on the basis of religion and gives Punjabi

Muslims the status of a separate nation. (see, *ibid*, page 25). In this case the party further proclaims, “In the Punjab, the Muslims of Western Punjab (beyond the River Sutlej) bear the distinct impress of a nationality with a contiguous territory, language, culture, economic life and psychological make-up. These Western districts have a Muslim population of over 60 per cent on an average, in many cases this percentage exceeds 70 to 80. But the question is not one of religion or of numerical preponderance. The dominant impress of the particular nationality is there on the life of this whole region.” (See, *ibid*, page 57)

Here the party is silent on this that besides the statistics given above about the Muslim population in the various regions of Punjab, is the population (primarily Hindu and Sikh) that resides in these areas a part of Punjabi nation or not? But further the Party leaves no trace of doubt on this as well when it proclaims Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs as different nations as well. In the resolution ‘Pakistan and National Unity’ passed in the extended plenum of the central committee of the party on 19 September 1942 there is a sub-heading ‘Marxist-Leninist teaching on the National question’ (See, *ibid* page 44) Even though the Marxist-Leninist teaching on the national question is given very briefly here, its explanation is largely correct. In it the party has also given the world renowned definition of nation of Comrade Stalin in which language occupies the first and foremost place in the make-up of a nation. Despite this, CPI instead of identifying the Punjabi nation, takes the three major religious sects of Punjab to be different nations and justifies the religion based division of Punjabi nation by English colonialists.

Gangadhar Adhikari prepared a document for the CPI election forum in Punjab whose heading was ‘Sikh homeland, through Hindu-Muslim-Sikh Unity’, this document was published in the form of a pamphlet on 1 December 1945. In this document, CPI advocates the division of Punjab on a communal basis, “The plan which the Communist Party is putting forward is based on justice and self-determination and freedom for the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus in their respective regions. If the Congress, the League and the Sikhs unite on its basis they can contribute to the building up of a united front for Indian freedom

and thus pave the way for a new Punjab in which the different national groups will live and work as good neighbours and build a happy common life. The outlines of this plan are:

Firstly, the separation of the Hindustani-speaking zone of the Punjab consisting of the Himalayan States and Ambala division with the necessary adjustments. The separation will be just because it will enable these people to reunite with their own with and kin who speak the same language, possess the same culture, occupy a contiguous area. No one can object to this change.

Secondly, the creation of the Punjabi-speaking Central Punjab State as detailed above with Amritsar as its capital. The Sikhs and the Hindus together make up 65 per cent of the population in this area which will include the main Sikh homelands and the bulk of the total Sikh population in the Punjab (70%). It will give the Sikhs an autonomous province in which they can have an effective share in the administration, together with the Hindus and the Muslims, and can have full freedom for their Gurdwaras, language and culture.

Thirdly, the demarcation of the western Punjab with all the Muslim-majority districts and with Lahore as their capital. This will guarantee self-determination to the Muslims of Western Punjab, without cutting across the similar right of the Sikhs and the Hindus. Seventy-six per cent of the population of this zone is Muslim and Punjabi speaking. 82 per cent of the total Muslim population of the Punjab (including the Native States) lives in this part.

This zone would be culturally homogeneous. Its language would be Punjabi, written in Persian characters. With the development of new irrigation and hydroelectric projects, Western Punjab would be able to develop agriculture and industries, even more than Central Punjab.

Our plan of demarcation of the Punjabi-speaking Punjab with its States into two zones as above with two separate Constituent Assemblies to decide their constitution etc. will offer a just and democratic solution on the basis to equality and end the age-old friction between the two zones.

In the period of Ranjit Singh, the Sikh-Hindu Central Punjab

dominated the Muslim Western Punjab. In the present period, the British imperialists have tried and are still trying to play off the landlord ridden politically backward Western Punjab against the politically advanced Central Punjab.

The backward Muslim majority fear the economic domination of the industrially and commercially more powerful Sikh and Hindu minority, while the latter fear the political domination of the numerically greater Muslim majority. The imperialists of course want to play upon these differences and fears to keep the “sword arm” of India safe and under their thumb.

If the Congress, the League and the Akalis remain at loggerheads as at present, the British plan will succeed and the Punjab will remain slave in a slave India. But if the parties agree to put the issue to the common people on the basis of self-determination for both the zones of the Punjab, then a vexed problem, on the continued existence of which the imperialists fix their hope, will have been solved.

The Muslims on the one hand and the Sikhs and Hindus on the other would be able to settle the relations between their respective zones on the basis of equality. This will ensure good neighbourliness and co-operation for mutual benefit and thus pave the way for a real unification of the Punjab on the basis of equality and self-determination.

Finally, our plan will enable the Sikhs to gain all their demands. The Communist Party is demanding Constituent Assemblies for the States as well. This opens the prospect of bringing the Sikh States of the Central Punjab in line with the contiguous districts and will do away with the artificial barriers that the “Native States” have created between parts of the Sikh homelands.

For the first time the, Sikhs will have an autonomous State in which their main homelands are unified and in which they have an effective voice.

For the first time, the Sikhs will have a province in which Punjabi, written both in Gurmukhi and Urdu scripts would be the state language.

Sikh-Hindu-Muslim unity and good neighbourly relations between the two autonomous zones in the Punjab will ensure that Sikh,

Muslim and Hindu minorities in both the States will get a fair deal.” (See, *ibid* page 111-113)

On the one hand the party mislabels the religious sects of Punjab as nation but it does not do so in the case of Sindhis. The party adopts the correct in the case of Sindh, “Take Sind next. The question here arises: Do the Sindhi Muslims form a nationality or do the Sindhis as a whole form a nationality? This question, of course, has to be answered not by a priori arguments but by actually examining the life and consciousness of the people in Sind itself. And judged by this criterion, I think that the Sindhis as a whole form a distinct nationality. Granting the Sindhis the right of self-determination would, of course, satisfy the national aspirations of the Sindhi Muslims who form part of the Sindhi nationality.” (See *ibid*, page 57).

In the above mentioned resolution ‘Pakistan and National Unity, the party self-applauds and says that it began seeing the communal problem in India as a national problem, “Since 1940, the Party began to see that the so-called communal problem – especially Hindu-Muslim problem in India was really a problem of growing nationalities and that it could only be solved on the basis of the recognition of the right of self-determination, to the point of political secession, of the Muslim nationalities, as in fact of all nationalities which have India as their common motherland. In these days many comrades were shocked by the formulation that India was not one nation and its development was in the direction of a multinationality. Some of these doubts were cleared in the Party Letter of May 1941.” (See *ibid*, page 44).

## **SUPPORT BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA OF THE CREATION OF PAKISTAN**

Communalism in India is a modern phenomenon. Primarily it is the outcome of ‘Divide and Rule’ policy of the English colonialists. In the independence struggle of India, communalism emerged as a big challenge. During the independence of India-Pakistan in 1947 it became a major factor in the partition of two nations, Punjab and Bengal.

When communalism emerged as a big threat to the independence struggle of India, when the English (on India level) were successful on dividing the people on the lines of Hindus and Muslims on a large scale, at that time the party kept envisaging Hindu-Muslim unity in the form of Congress-Muslim League unity. It regularly appealed to the leaders of the Congress and Muslim League for unity. The party did not understand that the communal unity of the people of India could only be achieved by advancing the freedom struggle on revolutionary lines, by having a future roadmap of new-democratic and socialist India. But the CPI was unsuccessful in this. Due to a lack of scientific understanding of the national question it went to the extent of supporting the creation of Pakistan on a communal basis. The party suggesting the path for the unity of Congress and Muslim league says, “Such a declaration of rights in as much as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims wherever ‘they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire. In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region in the state of Bengal or may form a separate state. Such a declaration, therefore, concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.” (see, *ibid*, page 30).

CPI refuses that the basis for the demand of Pakistan by the Muslim league is communal. It declares the demand for Pakistan to be a democratic demand. The party says, “Such a declaration of rights in as much as it concedes to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the

Muslims wherever ‘they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire. In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region in the state of Bengal or may form a separate state. Such a declaration, therefore, concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.’ (See, *ibid*, page 43)

The party further says in this context that, “The programme of Pakistan is the subject of sharp and bitter controversy in India. There is no doubt room for valid criticism of the programme of Pakistan. The unity of India is desirable from a progressive point of view, and partition would be a reactionary step. The demand to base nationality on religion encourages communal antagonism, and is doubtful from a practical point of view, since the Hindus and Muslims are in reality inter-mingled all over India. The refusal to accept the democratic principle of self-determination, that the people in the areas concerned should decide for themselves, is indefensible (though it should be noted that the Congress has also shown reluctance to accept fully the principle of national self-determination within India, with the right of secession).

But the considerable mass support for the slogan of Pakistan revealed the development of a new factor in Indian political life.

This new factor which now comes to the political surface is the multi national character of the Indian people. The unity of the Indian people in the struggle against imperialism, or the possible unity of a future free India, does not mean that the Indian people are all of one uniform national character any more than the Soviet people are of one uniform national character. There are great differences between a Pathan, a Sikh and a Bengali and a Tamil. They have different national cultures, languages and traditions. There have been estimated to be some seventeen nationalities (the Congress has recognised them as linguistic-cultural groups) in India. In the early stage of national movement, these

differences were less important. But as the national movement has extended to wider masses, who are newly awakening to political consciousness, these differences become important. Within the common movement, they demand national self-expression. Stalin foresaw this when he wrote in 1912:

In the case of India, too, it will probably be found that innumerable nationalities, till then lying dormant, would come to life with the further course of bourgeois development.

The slogan of Pakistan does not directly express this rising national consciousness: for the programme of Pakistan proposes not national self-determination, but a Muslim State. But the support for it in Muslim-majority areas clearly reflects, although in a distorted form, some elements of this developing national consciousness.” (See, *ibid*, page 152).

Due to the perception of the religious sects as nations/nationalities the party also supported the communal demands such as that of Sikh Homeland. Party says that, “The Communist plan for a free India based on the principle of self-determination accepts what is just and right in the claims of both the Congress and the League. Not merely this. It does justice to every single people in India, and in particular, it does justice to the national demands of the Sikh people, without doing any injustice to the Muslims and Hindus.

The Sikhs, who number 51 lakhs in the whole of the Punjab, are nowhere in an absolute majority, except in a small contiguous patch of Ferozepur and Ludhiana districts together with Faridkot State and a part of Patiala State; this area, however, includes only about eight lakhs of Sikhs.

The bulk of the Sikh population, i.e. about 35 lakhs out of 51 lakhs is dispersed in the Central Punjab, a contiguous territory made up of the districts of Amritsar, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur with parts of Ferozepur, Lahore and Gurdaspur, Kangra, Hissar and Ambala and with the States of Patiala, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Nabha, and Jind.

This consolidated land block of the Central Punjab is bordered

in the east by the Ambala division, 76 per cent of whose population is Hindu and Hindispeaking, and on the west by the western districts of the Punjab, 74 per cent of whose population is Muslim and Punjabi-speaking.

....

According to our plan, this area of the Central Punjab will have a separate Constituent Assembly. If the Constituent Assemblies of Sind, Baluchistan, Pathanland, and Western Punjab decide to form themselves into a separate Pakistan Federation, the Central Punjab would be free to decide whether it becomes an autonomous unit of the Pakistan Federation or of the Hindustan Union.

The claim of the Muslim League is that all Punjabi-speaking Punjab should remain united and be included in the Pakistan Federation and that no part thereof be granted self-determination. This denial of a basic right would be manifestly unjust.

The historical development in the Central Punjab has stamped the bulk of the people with an entirely different cultural impress and the unity of the Punjab will be possible only on the basis of recognising it and granting it full scope for self-development.” (See, *ibid*, page 107-108).

## **RETREAT OF CPI FROM ADVOCATING ‘RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION OF NATIONS’**

Addressing the period of 1935-39, CPI identifies the national awakening of various nations due to the spread of the independence movement of the country. The party says that, “The problem of achieving national unity in this period becomes complex. It becomes a problem of achieving multi-national unity. In other words, in order to unite the entire people of India for the common task of achieving independence, the democracy, it becomes necessary to take into account the pride and love the different sections of the people have for their own language and their own homeland, to take into account their aspiration to build

and live their own free life in their own homeland. To ignore this pride and love, this aspiration, of the various sections of our people, to brush them aside saying these are provincial prejudices or communal demands, is to ignore a growing reality. To ignore these sentiments is to repudiate the task of building National Unity.

These sentiments about a homeland and about language – these aspirations, are not reactionary. They are not, they need not be, in conflict with the sentiments of the All-India National Movement. On the other hand, the growth of these sentiments and aspirations of the people belonging to different nationalities has followed in the wake of the spread of the anti-imperialist consciousness among the masses. In actual fact, as we have seen, this takes place as the anti-imperialist, i.e., nationalist movement spreads and penetrates deep into the peasant masses.

This shows the real maturity of the national movement, the real maturity of this multi-national consciousness. It is this same maturity which brings out into the forefront the fact that the problem is no more a mere problem of cultural separation and cultural freedom. The real basis is the full-throated urge of every nationality within this multi-national pattern for its fullest and freest development, free from all oppression and hindrances. The demand is for full and unfettered political and economic existence, as the only, way of full and free development under the new conditions. The demand for freedom from British imperialism gets crystallised in the case of each waking nationality. In this demand for full and unfettered political and economic existence, the former problem cannot be solved separate from, in. opposition to, the latter. It can only be solved through the latter.

This is the demand which we call: the demand of every nationality for self-determination. This demand becomes the progressive lever by means of which alone the various nationalities can be rallied and mobilised to fight shoulder to shoulder, for India's freedom. This demand becomes the progressive lever for the richest and the highest flowering and development of every individual nationality itself. Diversity becomes the lever for strengthening unity, for enriching and developing that very unity.” (See, *ibid*, page 41-42).

In 1946 in a resolution introduced by CPI's member of the constitutional assembly, Somnath Lehri, it was advocated to organise the different nations of India into national units of linguistically and culturally homogeneous people and giving these national units the right to self-determination. In the resolution it is stated that, "Differences between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, on the question of Indian unity and Pakistan, should be resolved by the vote of the people through the democratic application of the principle of national self-determination in the following manner:

i. The setting up of a Boundary Commission which proceeds immediately to re-demarcate the existing provinces and States, so that each such re-demarcated unit, together with the contiguous States or parts of States, forms the unified homeland of a linguistically and culturally homogeneous people, and India is regrouped in national units such as Kerala, Karnatak, Andhradesha, Tamilnad, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Hindustan, Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab, Pathanland and Kashmir.

ii. The recognition of the right of self-determination for provinces redistributed as new national units by the Boundary Commission. The people of each such unit (and to begin with, the people of the re-demarcated provincial part thereof) will have the unfettered right of self-determination, i.e., the right to decide by the plebiscite of the entire adult population, whether they will join the Indian Union or form a separate state. Such plebiscites will be taken, wherever demanded, before a Union Constitution is actually framed.

The endeavour of the Sovereign Constituent Assembly should be to create a free Indian Union of national democratic republics – in which each constituent national republic will be free, equal and sovereign, and will have the right to secede." (See, *ibid*, page 183).

At the end of 1946, general secretary of CPI, P.C. Joshi wrote a document titled 'For the final bid for power! The Communist plan explained'. In this document though the party has advocated for the self-determination of nations but the party can be seen withdrawing from this principle. P.C. Joshi giving a revisionist explanation of the

self-determination of nations writes that, “Differences between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, on the question of Indian unity and Pakistan, should be resolved by the vote of the people through the democratic application of the principle of national self-determination in the following manner:

i. The setting up of a Boundary Commission which proceeds immediately to re-demarcate the existing provinces and States, so that each such re-demarcated unit, together with the contiguous States or parts of States, forms the unified homeland of a linguistically and culturally homogeneous people, and India is regrouped in national units such as Kerala, Karnatak, Andhradesha, Tamilnad, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Hindustan, Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab, Pathanland and Kashmir.

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The endeavour of the Sovereign Constituent Assembly should be to create a free Indian Union of national democratic republics – in which each constituent national republic will be free, equal and sovereign, and will have the right to secede.”. (See, *ibid*, page 241).

Joshi forgets that in Lenin’s words ‘self-determination of nations’ means only one thing and that is the setting up of a nation state. This concept fully developed only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this manner CPI and its general secretary embarked on the path of revising the Marxist-Leninist principle of ‘Self-determination of nations’. In June 1947, central committee of the CPI issued a political resolution. In this the Congress Party, representative of the big bourgeoisie of India, has been lauded as the main democratic organisation and it has been said that CPI would fully cooperate with the national leadership (i.e. Congress – author) on

‘paving the path for India’s unity’ in the construction of ‘Indian republic on democratic foundations’. It mentions the Self-determination of nations but only for preparing the basis of the unity of India. The right of the nations to secede from the Indian Union finds no mention here.

In 1951 CPI went over to the side of revisionism. Then on the national question it too, like the big bourgeoisie of India and its political representatives Congress and other, started harping on the dissonant melody of the unity and integrity of India. Now the introduction to the constitution of the Party states that, “The Communist Party of India shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India....and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.”

## **COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST) AND NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA**

Communist Party of India (Marxist) came into being in 1964 as a result of the split in the Communist Party of India. Till then CPI had traversed 13 years on the path of revisionism. The leaders of CPI who split and formed CPM [Communist Party of India (Marxist)] had no fundamental ideological, political difference with the CPI. Only the yearning after power among both the factions was the main cause of the split. Both factions were deeply enmeshed in the mires of revisionism. CPM, which came into being in 1964, was by birth a revisionist party. This party, when it came into being, gave some fiery slogans to mislead the revolutionary ranks but soon its true character was laid bare. In 1967 it formed government in Bengal along with Bengal Congress and CPI. This government mercilessly repressed the Naxalbari rebellion. The understanding of CPM on National Question does not differ fundamentally from that of CPI.

We have available to us two articles of renowned theoretician of CPM Prakash Karat, who has been the General Secretary of the Party, on the National question. These are ‘Theoretical Aspects of the National Question’ (Social Scientist, Vol. 4, No. 1, August 1975) and

‘Problems of National Unity: Historical and Economic Roots of Regionalism’ (Social Scientist, Vol. 12, No. 9, September 1984).

In his article ‘Theoretical Aspects of the National question’, Prakash Karat expounding the programme of this party CPM states that India is still in the stage of democratic revolution. Programme has no meaning for the revisionists, that is why even though the stage of revolution may have changed to socialist, the revisionists have no concern with this because revolution is not on their agenda. But many revolutionary groups of India still take the stage of revolution in India to be democratic and that is why we have had to refute this incorrect understanding of the Indian revolution, but we have refuted this earlier and will not repeat it here. (Interested readers can see the previous editions of ‘Pratibadh’ for the same)

Prakash Karat says that in the democratic revolution of India alongside anti-Imperialist, anti-Monopoly (!) and anti-feudal tasks, national question too would be tackled. He says that in the era of Imperialism, bourgeoisie cannot solve this problem and it can only be solved via the anti-Imperialism-Feudalismstruggle fought in an alliance with the peasantry in the leadership of the working class.

This is correct that presently in the Imperialist-Capitalist system the national question cannot be resolved completely. But in the National question, ‘right to self-determination of nations’ meaning ‘formation of an independent national state’ occupies the central position. In the present system the possibility that a nation can be successful in setting up an independent state cannot be fundamentally discarded. Lenin had refuted such theories which proclaimed that ‘right to self-determination of nations’ under Imperialism is impractical or a chimera. Lenin says that only one example, that of Norway’s secession from Sweden, is enough to refute the impracticability of the self-determination of nations. (See, Pratibadh, Bulletin 33, Page 73). We have tackled this question in detail in Bulletin 33 of ‘Pratibadh’. Interested readers can look up the sub-heading ‘Is self-determination of nations possible in the capitalist system’ (page 73) under the article ‘National Question and Marxism’.

Prakash Karat accepts that, “The multi-nationality of India is a

historical reality. It is totally unscientific and a-historical to term India as a nation.” He says that there are 12 major nations in India and many other minority nationalities such as Manipuri, Tripuri, Naga, Garo and Santhals. He gives no scientific basis for the division into major nations and minority nationalities. Does the latter, whom he terms minority nationalities, not fulfil the definition of a nation as given by Comrade Stalin. Do these “minority nationalities” not have a common language, common territory, common economy and common culture? As these “minority nationalities” contain all the above features of a nation, why should they not be termed as nations? In our view the division enacted by Prakash Karat is unscientific. Prakash Karat, in his article, emphasises on the All-India character of the Indian bourgeoisie. For this he puts forth as facts the analysis done by Ajit Roy of the 75 monopoly houses listed by the Monopoly Enquiry Commissions Report (1967). But these facts go against Prakash Karat’s intention of proving an All-Indian character of the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie. In the factual data given by Prakash Karat, out of the total assets, 25% are owned by the Marwaris and 37% by the Gujaratis and Parsis (these too are Gujaratis). Hindustani houses own 8%, South Indians (especially Tamils) less than 8%, Bengalis and Punjabis 6% and Marathas less than 1%. Foreign monopolists (all British bar one) own 13.5%. If we leave aside the foreign (Imperialist) monopolists, the monopoly houses of India are related to only 7 nations. Does India house only 7 nations? The Gujaratis and Marwaris have historically been dominant in the Indian bourgeoisie and this dominance persists till day. In the article ‘National Question in India’ published in ‘Pratibadh’ Bulletin 35, we had given facts relating to the make-up of the monopoly bourgeoisie of India in 2020. The situation was similar to that of 1967.

Prakash Karat holds that though the character of India’s bourgeoisie is multi-national but this cannot put an end to tensions and skirmishes. These tensions exist in the first place between the big bourgeoisie and the non-big bourgeoisie of the different nations and in the second place amongst the non-big bourgeoisie of different nations. He says that both contradiction and collusion exists between the all-

India (?) bourgeoisie and the nationality based non-bourgeoisie. This is due to uneven development.

From the above description, Prakash Karat correctly identifies the contradictions between the multi-national big bourgeoisie and non-big bourgeoisie of the different nationalities and does not infer any correct task from it, about which we will discuss further on.

Prakash Karat criticizes CPI on the point that it considers India to be a nation. He labels it 'right communist programme'. He is correct in saying that to take India to be nation is the violation of basic principles of the Marxist-Leninist standpoint. But even though he takes India to multi-national, though he sees the contradictions between the big bourgeoisie of India and the non-big bourgeoisie of different nations he does not chart out any Marxist-Leninist task. He says that the character of the demand for the development and use of various national languages and that of the demand for state autonomy is democratic. He restricts the "Working-class approach" for the solution of national question in India to these two demands. He does not mention the demand for the 'Self-determination of nations'. The above two demands are definitely democratic but in the context of the national question they are merely immediate and partial demands. For the resolution of the national question, the long-term and most important demand is the demand for 'Self-determination of nations', which is completely forsaken by the devotees of the unity and integrity of India, i.e., Prakash Karat and his party CPM.

He begins his second article 'Problems of National Unity: Historical and Economic Roots of Regionalism', by mentioning the problems facing the 'unity and integrity' of India and also by worrying over the preservation of "national unity". In his article he talks about the "Working-class approach" on preserving the 'unity and integrity' of India, which is the slogan of big bourgeoisie of India. The revisionists perform even such mischiefs in the name of the working-class.

In this article the basic positions of the previous article are repeated. Taking India to be multi-national, he charts out the following tasks in context of the national question -:

1. Lending principled support to the legitimate aspirations of the nationalities for equality and balanced economic development, championing of states' autonomy and restructuring Centre-state relations under the Constitution.

2. Championing the cause of people of all nationalities who are exploited by the bourgeois-landlord classes.

3. Safeguarding linguistic-cultural aspirations.

4. Fighting for the equality of all languages and against the imposition of English or Hindi, etc.

Far from defending the Right of 'Self-determination of nations', this article openly condemns it. The revolutionary groups who uphold the 'Right to Self-Determination' of nations have been denounced as secessionist. Prakash Karat's party CPM, in its 9<sup>th</sup> congress (1972) had formally renounced the demand of 'Self-determination of nations'. Criticising the revolutionary groups who uphold the 'right of nations to self-determination' in India, Prakash Karat writes, "The right of self-determination is upheld as a permanent and abstract principle quoting the authority of Lenin. This was a right advocated by Lenin in the context of Russia and similar situations where minority nationalities faced the national oppression of a major nationality or group of nationalities. This form of national oppression does not exist in independent India." From this Prakash Karat infers that the slogan of 'Self-determination of nations' is irrelevant in India. "This leads to division of the workers and peasants on sectarian lines.... The advocacy of the right of secession is helping today all the forces of regional chauvinism."

In this manner Prakash Karat revises Marxism regarding the national question. For Tsarist Russia, it is true that Russian nation oppressed other nations. But this wasn't the case in Austro-Hungary. It had no national centre. It had no such oppressor nation. But did the national question not exist there? Stalin had said that in Russia the agrarian question is primary but in Austria Hungary, the national question is primary. These national contradictions were the primary reason due to which the Austro-Hungary empire disintegrated in 1918.

Actually, either the likes of Prakash Karat are unfit in

understanding the national question, Marxist writings on it or they are being deliberately mischievous. Lenin had said that, “National state is typical and normal, that the most profound economic factors drive towards this goal that **the national state is the rule and the “norm” of capitalism.**”(See, ‘Pratibadh’ Bulletin 33, page 31, emphasis ours).

In India the biggest obstacle in the setting up of independent national states by various nations is the Indian state. This is national oppression. This state is in the interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie of India. To call this monopoly bourgeoisie Pan-Indian is a white lie. Yes, it could be labelled multi-national as half a dozen, out of hundreds of nationalities of India, are represented in it. Today nations in Kashmir and North-East are struggling to set up independent national states. In rest of India too, sooner or later such movements will rise up which would take the Indian Union towards disintegration. Comrade Stalin had said that the multinational capitalist state is incapable to, within its bounds, resolve the contradictions between nations. The Indian state too would not prove capable on this count. The working-class of India should along with the immediate and partial tasks of eliminating national oppression, like championing the equality of all the languages of India, supporting the setting up of linguistic states, safeguarding the autonomy of states and opposing centre’s encroachment on it, should also strongly stand for the ‘Right of nations to self-determination’. It should, in a vigorous manner, present the future roadmap of voluntary socialist union of various nations in India, to the toiling masses of India. Only thus can India’s unity be protected.

## **THE VIEWS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST-LENINIST) LIBERATION ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA – SPEAKING WITH A FORKED TONGUE**

This party’s background can be traced back to the Naxalbari

rebellion. Liberation was born out of the splits in the CPI (M.L.) which was founded by Comrade Charu Mazumdar and four other comrades on 22 April 1969. Whereas Comrade Charu Mazumdar had played an important role in divorcing from the revisionism and neo-revisionism of CPI and CPM, he had also taken the left adventurist line to its ugliest extreme. Slogans such as “The annihilation of class enemy is the highest form of class struggle”, “China’s path is our path”, “China’s chairman is our chairman” etc. are Charu’s contributions. The latter two slogans were severely objected to by the Communist Party of China itself.

As a result of the chain of splits in the CPI (M.L.), the faction of CPI (M.L.) whose leadership was assumed by Comrade Johar came to be popularly known as CPI (M.L.) Liberation. In the leadership of Comrade Johar this party for a long time continued implementing Charu’s left adventurist line. After Comrade Johar was martyred, Vinod Mishra assumed command of the party. In Vinod Mishra’s leadership the party made such a right turn from the left deviation that it fell directly in the mires of parliamentarism. This party joined once more the queue of CPI, CPM. The line of difference that Naxalbari had drawn from revisionism, neo-revisionism was rubbed clear by it.

Concerning the views of the party regarding the national question, we have available the article of renowned theoretician of the party, B. Sivaraman. This article ‘Nationality Question in India, New Issues and New Movements’ has been published on 4 April 2015 on the website of the party.

Above we have criticised the views of CPI and CPM on the national question in India, the position of CPI (M.L.) on national question is not fundamentally different from the aforementioned parties.

In his article though B. Sivaraman accepts the capitalist development to an extent that has taken place here but still like CPI, CPM he proclaims India to be in the stage of democratic revolution.

Sivaraman says, “Our programme (meaning CPI (M.L.)’s programme – author) recognises the right of the nationalities for self-determination including the right to secede.” But in the very next line he says, “It also calls for national unification and visualises a federal India

with maximum possible autonomy for states.” Sivaraman has added the latter line to retract from the proclamation in the former line (right of self-determination of nations including secession). It is crystal clear that Communists are in favour of large states but this should be voluntary on the part of nations and not forcible. The voluntary union of nations that will form large states, will only be possible in socialism. Federal structure too is possible only in the voluntary union of nations. According to Sivaraman, the programme of his party calls for “national unification”. As India is not a nation the question of national unification does not arise. If he means the integration of different nations residing in India, then that is impossible in the existing conditions. This requires forcible measures which the Indian state is already practicing. Actually this amounts to upholding, in a veiled manner, the Indian rulers’ programme of ‘unity and integrity’ of India.

As it has been mentioned above that Sivaraman has added the latter line to retract from the proclamation in the first line, this can be seen from the full article. The author has cooked up a lot of things in order to falsify the fact that the national question exists in India.

Sivaraman mentions three periods of national question, these are, the period of pre-capitalist feudal empires, colonial period and post-colonial period. (These periods too are original concoction of the author, whereas the periods of national question given by Comrade Stalin are different from this). About the present period meaning the post-colonial period, the author says, “In the post-colonial period, under the newly emerged nations with a multi-national(ity) state where the economic foundations for capitalist development have been laid and the preconditions for a modern nationhood are basically fulfilled, the nationality question is a question of general democracy, that of equality of nationalities and their self-determination.” He does not forget to add in the very next line, “It is obvious that the Marxist views and experiences of each epoch cannot be mechanically applied to another.” Either this is muddled thinking of Sivaraman or revisionist distortion on the national question. A reading of the entire article leads to the latter conclusion.

The author is correct that in the post-colonial period, in present

day's multi-national states which were earlier colonies, capitalist development has taken place and nations have emerged forth. Further, he says that now the national question is a question of general democracy, a question of equality of nations and self-determination. In the previous periods especially in the colonial period and the first period of national question i.e., in the period of nascent capitalism, was not this question in this very form? Then too it was in this form. Further the author advises not to mechanically apply the Marxist views and experiences of various epochs on other epochs. This advice too, actually is an attempt to escape implementing the correct Marxist-Leninist approach on national question.

Going on the author says, "In the infancy of capitalism, the complete victory of commodity production, establishing a home-market and economic sovereignty were crucial conditions for a national formation. In the modern world these conditions can be stretched to include a centralised monetary system, regulations over foreign trade, a unified system of economic administration based on national economic policies, necessary infrastructure and a certain autonomy vis-a-vis the world economy etc.

In the later stages of capitalism when such economic foundations were laid for several nationalities collectively in a larger framework the tendency for every nationality to have 'its own' home-market and 'its own' nation-state was substantially weakened."

We have mentioned before that what the author is stating about national unification in context of India and advising against the mechanical application of Marxist views, experiences, is being done to disprove the national question in India and other such countries. The above quote should make this clear.

In the quote given above the author refers to the weakening tendency among the various nations in multi-national countries towards separate nation states and 'own' home-market as a result of "economic unification". But we see that in the countries of the Western Europe, the original land of nation states, like United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium etc., and Canada etc., despite a lot more "economic unification" than the

countries of the third world in various nations of these countries, like Catalan and others in Spain, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland in United Kingdom, Quebec in Canada etc., the tendency towards separate nation states and through this, capture of 'own' home-market has not weakened. This is the author's subjective, revisionist inference. The purpose of the author is the denial of the existence of national question in India and sounding the trumpet of country's 'unity and integrity' for the monopoly bourgeoisie of India.

In the next line after the above quoted reference, the author writes that, "But the whole national question cannot be reduced that of its economic foundation and the formal, politico-cultural side can also be equally powerful in constituting the national question." Here the author is again stating incorrectly. Formal, Politico-cultural aspect cannot play a role equal to that of the economic foundation. In multi-national countries, the competition between the bourgeoisie of different nations for capturing the market is the foundation of the national question. If this competition ceases to exist (which in the capitalist epoch is not possible in the multi-national countries) then no national question would remain. In the capitalist epoch it is this competition that leads the different nations towards setting up their nation states. The other aspects enumerated by the author play their part by linking with this economic basis.

For the revision of Marxism regarding the national question, Sivaraman erects a false distinction between nation and nationality. He says that formation of nation-states based on a single nationality was a general rule in Western Europe. But in countries like India multi nationality based nation states were formed. This nation state fulfils for all these nationalities the needs of modern capitalism on a large scale, that is why for these nationalities national question has been fundamentally resolved. In this manner he finishes off the national question in countries like India. He states that amongst the nationalities residing in these multi-national states no continuous tendency towards separation germinates. This occurs only as an exception. Thus, he negates the objective reality of today's world. Whereas presently there are 19 active national

movements in Europe alone. Some of these are centred on secession, demand for independent nation state. In Asia and Africa this is akin to a Gordian knot. In India in Kashmir, North East there are numerous national liberation movements. Sometimes these movements ebb due to repression by the rulers; but they do not end. In Pakistan, Kashmir and Baloch are struggling for their liberation. In Sri Lanka, though the rulers have been momentarily successful in suppressing the liberation movement of the Tamils in the leadership of LTTE but the aspiration of Tamil people for freedom live on.

Sivaraman says that, “There is no use in arguing that they were only nation-states (i.e., multi-national country or multi-national state – author) and not nations. There was no Chinese Wall between the two in many cases. The idea that nations pre-existed the state was a myth; rather, the states were formed first, based on nationalities in some cases, and they constituted the nation subsequently through a process of national unification and nation-building.” Here he makes the whole process of formation of nations stand on its head and distorts the Marxist understanding on it. He also does this by adding words such as ‘many cases’ and ‘some cases’ etc., in his position. So that he wouldn’t have to list the cases. Actually nations come into existence before nation states. Currently, the term nation state is also used for country. But by nation state, we mean that state where one nation resides. Like Germany, Sweden, Norway etc etc. And it could come to pass that though nations have come into existence but their nation states have not and such is the scenario in the world today on a large scale. In India the examples of this are Bengali, Oriya, Tamil, Maratha, Punjabi and other nations. For Sivaraman, these are nationalities which have merged to form a nation named India. To reach this very conclusion, he erects a false distinction between nation and nationalities. Sivaraman, on the basis of such mischief conducted under the guise of Marxism, proclaims that,

“Except in the case of some confederations, (There are no such confederations existing in the world – author) many of the so-called multi-national states, (These are not so-called multi-nations but actually existing multi-national states – author) whether they are

federations (In the present capitalist imperialist period there are no federations – author) or unions in their state structures, like USA and India, for instance, constitute a single nation for all practical purposes.”

Thus, the cat is finally out of the bag. The above web of phrases was woven by Sivaraman to reach the conclusion that India is a nation. These Liberationites are the most treacherous type of revisionists amongst the revisionists of India.

Further, Sivaraman also abandons the world famous classical definition of nation given by Stalin. He says that for the formation of modern nations a single language is not a necessary condition. He given no concrete argument to back this up. It is language that primarily differentiates the different nations residing in India. Now, if you don't consider language to be a necessary part of a nation then India has become a nation. This makes it easy to trumpet India's 'unity and integrity'. This is what Sivaraman and Liberationist revisionists (more artfully) and revisionists of CPI, CPM do.

Sivaraman in sub-heading 'On the Right of Self-Determination' in his article, despite giving references of Lenin regarding Self-determination rejects the right of nations to self-determination under various pretexts. He mislabels it as Balkanisation. He says that in the epoch of Imperialism secession means the replacement of one form of national suppression by another. Thus, implying that nations should cast aside their aspirations, struggle for independence. He states that, "Under conditions of imperialism (!), strong national unity, i.e., unity of all nationalities and a strong centre, even if there is some degree of internal imbalance, (Here, the treacherous wording of the writer means that even though different nations the country are being oppressed, it is justifiable) are inevitable for a Third World country to stand up to imperialism." Sivaraman, by making principal the contradiction of India with imperialism, asserts a strong centre (this can be done only by robbing the states of their rights, increasing emphasis on militarisation) and national oppression to be inevitable and tolerable. Firstly, India is a backward capitalist country which is politically independent from Imperialism. India does not fit into the definition of colony, semi-colony

and neo-colony etc. The principal contradiction of India is the contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The contradiction of the people of India with imperialism is a fundamental contradiction of Indian society but this contradiction is not the principal contradiction of today. Comrade Mao has said that the contradiction with imperialism becomes principal when Imperialists attack/invoke a country. Right now there is no such situation here.

Moving forward, Sivaraman further discusses the national question in India's context. He claims that here the case of any nation separating from India is weakening. He says that, "In the colonial period, the 'victory of commodity production', though not complete, had taken place overwhelmingly and a unified home-market was established for the whole of India. A native bourgeoisie emerged. Thus the material basis for the emergence of the Indian nation was laid." Sivaraman means to say that due to the above mentioned reasons in the colonial period itself the material basis for the emergence of India as a nation was prepared. After 1947, with the elimination of feudal production relations, with the furtherance of commodity production, with the extension of home-market, India has now become a nation. He claims that whatever movements for liberation (statehood) arose in India were, except that of the Tamils, all communal or religious [Sikh and Muslim Communalism (!)]. This is another plain lie uttered by the writer. Out of the movements seeking secession from India only the Khalistani movement that arose in Punjab in the 1970s was communal. The liberation movements of nations such as Kashmir (in the leadership of Jammu and Kashmir liberation front), Naga, Mizo, Manipur etc., cannot be called communal. Despite many sentiments in the Assam movement, it still cannot be categorised as a communal movement. The writer has concocted this bunch of lies to defame the erstwhile/present national movements in India.

Further, he has repeated the falsehood about the all-India character of the Indian bourgeoisie which have been oft-repeated by the CPM revisionists. This we have already refuted.

Going on Sivaraman emphasises that the disintegration of India,

like Soviet Union, is not inevitable. According to him, the people who stress the inevitable disintegration of multinational state, they take this state, even socialistic, to be indicative of backwardness. That the internal make up of multi-national capitalist countries is backward, was originally the statement of Karl Kautsky (when he was a Marxist) (He too saw Switzerland and Belgium as exceptions in this phenomenon) and Comrade Lenin too espoused this statement of Kautsky. But this conception is not about Socialist countries. As the Socialist multi-national countries are based on the voluntariness of the nations, it is free of national oppression and all types of exploitation, oppression, that is why the question of their internal structure being backward does not arise. Certainly, if socialism comes into being in a backward multi-national capitalist country then the backwardness of such countries would be a temporary thing. Because Socialism develops the productive forces much quicker than capitalism therefore a socialist country quickly resurfaces from its backwardness. This is clear from the examples of Socialist Soviet Union (till 1956) and Socialist China (till 1976) whereas such a thing is not possible in capitalist multi-national countries (with a few exceptions). This can be seen from the examples of multi-national countries such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and others.

Sivaraman writes that according to some people, “with the development of productive forces, whether under capitalism or socialism, it will inevitably break up, for nation state is the norm of developed capitalism.” Firstly, there is no basis for the disintegration of a socialist multi-national state (and neither is there any such example) because they are free of national oppression. But this certainly applies to Capitalist multi-national states. We have laid this out in Pratibadh, Bulletin 33 with references of Comrade Lenin and Comrade Stalin. Sivaraman illogically states that the collapse of Soviet Union is collapse of a system, the problem of nationality had no role in this. Now, from 1956 to 1991 the system in Soviet Union was capitalist. Did capitalism collapse in Soviet Union in 1991? But the Liberationist revisionists consider Social Imperialist Soviet Union (1956-1991) to be socialist. The sort of system that collapsed in the Soviet Union in 1991, the same system collapsed in

the single nation countries of Eastern Europe like Hungary, Poland etc., then why didn't they disintegrate?

Sivaraman says, "Of course, if the Indian state continues to remain so centralised and if nationalities in India continue to face the kind of discrimination and oppression that they face at present, certain nationalities in India too might go to a point of no return in their alienation and at an opportune moment might break away from India." Firstly, when Sivaraman has already declared India to be a nation then whose oppression and discrimination, do the "nationalities" of India face? Secondly, capitalist system can only be centralised, this too is an important factor in its inevitable disintegration.

Until now, we have criticised the views of three main revisionist trends of India, CPI, CPM and CPI (M.L.) Liberation, regarding national question in general and national question in India. Here we have discussed the main errors of these trends, their marked distortions of Marxism-Leninism. Their articles, which have been criticised above contain numerous other errors but to discuss all these errors is neither possible nor necessary. Let's end the discussion about these revisionists, these traitors of the working-class here and move forward.

## **VIEWS OF THE HISTORIAN AMALENDU GUHA ON NATIONAL QUESTION**

The views of Amalendu Guha on national question in general and on national question in India come forth in a concentrated form in the article 'The Indian National Question: A Conceptual Frame' (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 17, No. 31 [July 31, 1982]). In his article he has given a very convincing explanation of the historical origin of nations/nationalities. In the case of the national question in India and the matter of its resolution, his position is proximate to that of CPM's. The criticism that we have made of CPM on the national question, to a great extent also applies to the views of Amalendu Guha. Still, some points of his article demands attention.

He begins his article by rejecting Comrade Stalin's definition of a nation. He says that the definition of nation as given by Stalin is not satisfactory. According to him the important factors that go on to form a nation do not always remain the same. Neither can they be listed in the manner Stalin has. In this way, though he rejects the definition of nation as given by Stalin, he himself avoids giving a definition of a nation. For him, a nation is a mystery and he intends to let it remain so.

In the context of rejecting Comrade Stalin's definition of a nation he says that, "The Swiss nation is multi-lingual, but not the German." He forgets that there is no such thing as the Swiss nation in the whole wide world. Switzerland is a multi-national country where primarily German, French and Italian nations reside. Similarly, to refute the second part of Stalin's definition of nation, i.e., 'common territory' he says that Jewish nationalism has no territorial foothold. Amalendu Guha again forgets that Jews are not a nation but a religious sect. Jews are part of various nations.

Amalendu Guha has dedicated a large portion of his article on proving that India is a nation. To show the All-India intermingled character of the monopoly bourgeoisie of India he has presented the very same facts by Ajit Roy which were presented by Prakash Karat. This has already been discussed. He says that, "there is no harm in saying that India's several nationalities together form or tend to form the Indian nation in the making." He too, like Liberation's B. Sivaraman tries to erect a false, baseless distinction between nation and nationalities. But he himself is befuddled over this distinction. He says that, "Incidentally, the distinction made between the categories, 'nation' and 'nationality', continues to remain vague in contemporary political science in India and elsewhere. Marxists (maybe he is referring to the revisionists of India – author) do make a distinction between these two categories but how it is made is not clear." Actually, there exists no distinction between nation and nationality in Marxism. In the works of Marxist teachers both of the above terms are used interchangeably.

According to Amalendu Guha, India has become a nation even though it is not in a mature condition. That is why he is not in the

favour of right to self-determination for any nation in India, be it Kashmir or any other. He rejects the right of self-determination of Kashmir and nations in North-East also on the grounds that their population is quite low. But he does not state that what should be the minimum population for the right to self-determination.

Not only for small nations, Amalendu Guha, in “different world” conditions, is generally against the Right to ‘Self-determination of nations’. He says that, “Rosa Luxemburg’s arguments against the recognition of the right to self-determination (secession) of nationalities by ‘the working class of a centralised State, where a possible hegemonic role for itself was already within its sight, were not acceptable to Lenin in 1913-16 on quite valid grounds. But we live in a different world today. More than a third of the human society having meanwhile become socialist, (!) national democratic movements are now a part of the global struggle for socialism. Hence, some of the old arguments of Rosa Luxemburg appear to have acquired fresh relevance in the present situation.”

Firstly, the countries which were called as socialist by Amalendu Guha in 1982 were socialist only in name, actually capitalist restoration had taken place there quite some time back. Secondly, even if these countries were socialist the denial of the right to self-determination of nations for the oppressed nations goes against Marxism-Leninism. Further he talks about the democratic movements becoming a part of the world-wide struggle for socialism. Before the second-world war and near about there were such movements in the colonial, semi-colonial countries of the third world. But these movements were first and foremost movements for national liberation (self-determination). This could only tend towards socialism after liberating from Imperialism and finishing off feudalism. That is why despite these movements being a part of the world-socialist movement it does not alter their fight for self-determination. That is why there is nothing in Amalendu Guha’s changed world due to which Marxists-Leninists should deny ‘The right of nations to self-determination’.

Amalendu Guha’s article has many other fallacies but we have

limited ourselves to some prominent errors so as to avoid too much detail.

Now we turn towards the understanding of the revolutionary groups of India on the national question.

## **COMRADE D.V. RAO'S VIEWS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA**

Comrade D.V. Rao was one of the prominent leaders of the Communist movement of India especially the Naxalbari movement. He wrote on the national question in India in 1971 in the form of court statements. His views have been published under the heading 'Problem of Nationalities in India: D.V. Rao's Views' (Countercurrents.org, 11-07-2019).

His views on the character of Indian society, stage of revolution in India, Imperialism etc., are incorrect but commenting on them is not the subject of our article. Concerning the national question in India, despite his article being brief and national question being discussed very shortly, he primarily assumes a correct position.

He considers India to be a multi-national country. Referring to the linguistic survey he says that India is abode to 723 languages, i.e., nations or nationalities. The linguistic states that have been formed here are also multi-lingual (Though this is not correct for all the states). The demand for unification of regions on the basis of language is termed as democratic by him. He says that linguistic states have not solved the problem of nationalities. Mentioning the movements for self-determination of Kashmir, Mizoram, Nagaland, he also discusses and stands in favour of the movements (weak) for greater rights to states.

He says that linguistic areas of Hindi are not homogeneous. People of different dialects (His understanding regarding dialects or sub-languages is not lucid, he terms less developed languages as dialects) have their own literature and culture, and have enough characteristics to develop into separate nations. According to him, Rajasthan is already developing in this direction. It is possible that others too, develop similarly.

He sees the solution of the problem of nationalities in India as a part of the people's democratic revolution. The period of any type of democratic revolution in India has passed. Now India is in the stage of socialist revolution. In India the national question will also be solved as part of the socialist revolution.

He says that in India no nationality except Kashmir, Naga, Mizo areas, has a movement to secede from India. He says that this does not mean that such a movement cannot develop. He is correct in stating that such movements can develop elsewhere too but he says that in India such a movement can develop as a result of intrusion in India by one or other Imperialist power, by taking into its influence one or more states. He sees the source of national movements arising in India outside and not inside India, i.e., not in the contradiction between the big bourgeoisie of India and bourgeoisie of different nations. The incorrect understanding of the structure of Indian society and incorrect identification of the stage of revolution (people's democratic) prevents him from delving deeper into the national question.

## **THE VIEWS OF ALL INDIA PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE FORUM (AIPRF) ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA**

In 1996 (16-19 February) All India People's Resistance Forum (hereon, Resistance Forum) organised an international seminar on the question of nationality in New Delhi. Resistance Forum presented a paper in this seminar on the topic 'National Question in India'. (See the publication by Resistance Forum, 'Symphony of Freedom, Papers on Nationality Question', First Edition, September 1996). In this paper they have put forth their understanding on the national question in India. No fundamental change has occurred in the understanding of these comrades since 1996.

Resistance Forum's understanding of socio-economic structure, stage of revolution in India etc., has become outdated and cannot be agreed with. According to the Resistance Forum, India is a semi feudal

– semi colonial country which is in the stage of new democratic revolution. This understanding is not in keeping with the ground realities of India. In this very framework of understanding of the Indian society, the Resistance Forum attempts to understand the national question of India.

Resistance Forum's explanation in its paper about the origin of nations in India cannot be agreed with. According to the Resistance Forum, nations had arisen here before the occupation of India by the British. It has been said in the paper that, "Indeed the period preceding the British conquest India saw the growth of nations such as the Bengalis, Oriyas, Telugus, Tamil, Malayalis, Kannadigas and Punjabi."

This is not the correct explanation of the origin of nations in India. Historians like Irfan Habib and Amalendu Guha etc., have refuted this thinking. Before the British occupation, in the Indian sub-continent there were embryos of the development of future nations but the characteristics of these as nations hadn't clearly come forth. This wasn't possible in the feudal production relations. If Indian subcontinent would not have become a colony of the British then India would have progressed with its natural, internal motion. Here development of modern capitalism (on the lines of Machine based production) would have taken place and various nations and nation states would have developed. But colonialism finished off the germs of capitalist development in the Indian sub-continent. The natural motion of India's development was severed. As a result, here nations did not have a healthy natural development. Till today, India is suffering from the heritage of colonialism.

On one hand whereas British colonialism retarded the natural motion of India, destroyed the embryo of capitalist development here, on the other hand limited modern capitalist development took place as a by-product of colonial exploitation. Resultantly, nations started to originate in India. Because this capitalist development was extremely uneven, the development of nations too was uneven. Resistance Forum, in its paper, has correctly identified that in India, unlike Tsarist Russia or Sri Lanka or Turkey or Palestine, there is no single oppressor nation. It is the centralised state that oppresses all the nations. But the views of

the comrades of Resistance Forum about the character of this centralised state are incorrect. According to these comrades, the centralised state of India represents the interests of the Imperialists, comprador big bourgeoisie and feudal landlord classes. This understanding about the Indian state is incorrect. The Indian state serves the interests of the big monopoly bourgeoisie of India. Nothing further on this here.

In the paper three forms of national movement in India have been correctly mentioned, movements for liberation from India, movements for greater rights to states and formation of linguistic states. It has also been stated in the paper that to limit national question to formation of linguistic states and greater rights to states is a reformist position. The paper is also correct in stating that linguistic states have only partially solved the national question in India.

It has been mentioned in the paper that Kashmir, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and other nationalities of north east are areas that have been annexed by the Indian state. That historically they have never been part of India. According to us this division of India into annexed and non-annexed territories is incorrect. Before the British occupation of the Indian sub-continent the whole of Indian sub-continent had never been under the control of one state. Surely, big feudal empires had been set up here and had also disintegrated but the entire Indian sub-continent was never under one single feudal empire. It was under British occupation that the entire Indian sub-continent came under a single empire. The comrades of Resistance Forum have themselves accepted in the paper that in the British period the entire North-East was under a singular administrative region.

Comrades of Resistance Forum consider the Sikhs, a religious sect, to be separate nationality. On this basis they label the reactionary communal movement of Khalistan as a movement for national liberation. There is no scientific basis for considering Sikhs as a separate nation/nationality. According to Stalin's definition of a nation, Hindu, Sikhs and other religious sects are a part of Punjabi nation. It was the British colonialists that divided Punjabis on a communal basis. To consider Sikhs as a nation/nationality means giving accreditation to the above

conspiracy of the British colonialists. If according to the comrades of Resistance Forum the Sikhs of Punjab are a separate nation, then the Hindus and Muslims of Punjab are also separate nations. Such an understanding of nations positions the comrades of Resistance Forum on the side of communalism.

## **THE VIEWS OF RE ORGANISING COMMITTEE, COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF INDIA (M.L.) ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN INDIA**

This organisation has published an article ‘Some views on the question of nationality in India’ in the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of their mouthpiece ‘Lal Salaam’ (Hindi).

Comrades of ‘Lal Salaam’ consider India to be politically independent from imperialism and a backward capitalist country. The stage of revolution here is socialist. These Comrades hold that the question of nationalities becoming free of oppression in India is connected with the proletarian revolution – socialist revolution. The power of the class that oppresses the nationalities in India can be overthrown via proletarian revolution only and it is this revolution that can end the oppression of nationalities. We are basically in agreement with the above conclusions of ‘Lal Salaam’.

Concerning ‘National question in India’, despite our agreement with the abovementioned basic position of these comrades, their explanation, of the national question in India and our tasks in relation to it, is quite immature. These comrades say that, “India is a multi-national country. All the nations of India are on different levels of development. Among the nationalities occupying different levels of historical development several nations are oppressed.”

These comrades are correct in stating that India is a multi-national country. But in the case of oppressed nations, they hold that several nationalities of India are oppressed. They do not mention which nations are oppressed and which are not. Neither do they apprise us of

their criteria of oppressed nation.

These comrades correctly state that, “It is a trait of the national problem of India that here there is no such nation that oppresses other nationalities. The capitalist class performs this task through the Indian state. .... There is a contradiction of the Indian state with the oppressed nationalities. This contradiction is amongst the fundamental contradictions of India.”

Further these comrades sat that, “Indian capitalist class has All-India character and it has a Pan-India basis. The Indian capitalist class has been formed from different nationalities. The Indian state is the state of the capitalist class of an All-India character rather than being the state of the capitalist class of one nationality. .... Due to capitalist development, class stratification has also taken place as result of which capitalist class has come into existence in the oppressed nationalities, which have been assimilated by the Indian capitalist class.”

Firstly, we want to make it clear that the Indian state serves the big monopoly bourgeoisie which has been formed from about half a dozen nations out of the hundreds of nations of India (According to Comrade D.V. Rao this count is 723). Even amongst these monopolists of India from half a dozen nations, the main share of the primary assets is that of the Gujaratis and Marwaris. That is why there is no such thing as the state of an all-India character. The comrades of ‘Lal Salaam’ claim that the capitalist class of oppressed nations has been assimilated by the capitalist class of India. If this is so, then what is the basis for the national question, national oppression in India. In capitalism the struggle between oppressor and oppressed nations or in a multi-national country like India the struggle between big monopoly bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie of different nations for the capture of home-market and for this the struggle for nation state is the basis of the national question. If capitalist of all nations coalesce, the struggle for capture of their own markets vanishes then no national question would remain. Only some cultural problems, some discriminations due to past remnants would remain and these too will end with the passage of time. But the comrades of ‘Lal Salaam’ are claiming that the capitalist class of different nations

has assimilated into the capitalist class of India, this is impossible in capitalist society.

Comrades of 'Lal Salaam' divide the various nationalities of India into four categories depending on the level of development, relation with the Indian state, position of the economy.

In the first category they include the properly developed and consolidated nationalities. These nationalities demand greater freedom or rights in the centre-state relations. Nationalities like Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Malayali, Oriya etc., have been included in this category. Concerning Punjabi nation, it is incorrect to consider it as properly developed and consolidated. The communal divisions that had been created by the British Colonialists are quite strong even today. As to the question of consolidation, Punjabi nation is divided into 7 fragments. These fragments are – Western Punjab (in Pakistan; also known as the Punjab of setting sun – Translator), Eastern Punjab (in India; also known as the Punjab of rising sun – translator), and on the side of India Jammu, Punjabi speaking regions of Haryana and Rajasthan. Besides this, Chandigarh has also been separated by the central rulers from Punjab. Similarly, the Bengali nation is divided into East Bengal (Bangladesh) and West Bengal.

In the second category, these comrades have included those nationalities which are developed but face brute oppression of the Indian state. These include Kashmiri, Naga, Manipuri, Assamese, Mizo, Tripuri etc.

In the third category are the nationalities which face the dual oppression of the Indian state and the State governments. These include Bodo, Kamtapuri, Gorkha, Kuki etc.

In the fourth category they have kept the Hindi linguistic area. It has been divided by these comrades into two sub-groups. Out of the areas included in the first group except Haryana others are in no way a part of the Hindi linguistic group. If we take the case of Himachal, here the large majority in the regions bordering Punjab is that of Punjabis. In addition to this there are 20 other language groups in Himachal, the population of each being quite meagre.

According to 'Lal Salaam' the second sub-group of the Hindi belt is basically linguistic sub-group. This includes Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Bundelkhandi etc. According to them, in this sub group, large presence is there of those speaking dialects/sub languages (like Bhojpuri, Awadhi).

These comrades are in quite some confusion over the matter of language and dialects or sub languages. On one hand they term Awadhi, Bhojpuri as languages and in the very next line they declare them to be dialects.

According to Rahul Sankritayan, the root language of Hindi is Kaurvi or Khadi dialect or Hindustani. Its region is that of Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, Western Haryana and the Bhartpur district of Rajasthan etc. Hindi, Urdu are the developed forms of Kaurvi. Brij, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani (This too is being labelled as Hindi's dialect by these comrades whereas there is little to no dispute of it being an independent language) etc., are independent languages. (See 'Rahul Nibandhavli' published by Rahul Foundation)

Though 'Lal Salaam' constructed different categories for the nationalities of India, they did not chart out any tasks for them. Concerning the question of tasks regarding the above categorisation, these are the tasks for Communists.

In the first category, where there is conflict between centre and states, and the question is that of greater rights of states, then the demand for greater rights to states is a democratic demand. Communists should support it.

The nationalities of second category are struggling for the right to self-determination. We should also support this.

The nationalities of the third category are struggling for separate states (the meaning of states as in states of India such as Punjab, Maharashtra etc., and not capitalist state, working-class state – translator). This is a democratic demand and we should stand in their favour.

Concerning the question of the so-called Hindi belt, the central rulers have passed a death sentence on many of the languages here by labelling them as dialects of Hindi. Our task is to secure the status of

independent languages for these languages, the formation of linguistic states and autonomous regions etc. In these areas, presently such demands are being raised in a subdued tone but in the future they will be raised in a powerful manner.

In the last part of the article, 'Lal Salaam' has raised the question as to what should be the policy of the working-class on the question of nationality in India. In reply to this, after repeating some general Marxist-Leninist formulations straightway a one-point program has been given, which is socialist revolution. It has been recounted as to how national question will be resolved in socialism. These comrades have no task to offer in context of national question today. Neither do these comrades stand in favour of the demand of greater rights to states, nor in favour of the movements of national liberation, nor in favour of linguistic states, nor in favour of the equality of languages (especially in the so-called Hindi belt). Actually, these comrades unconsciously stand in favour of the policy of national oppression of the central rulers in today's capitalist India when they say, "Marxism always favours large states. Capitalism, during its development, constructs such states. These large states present the possibility of bourgeoisie and proletariat uniting in large territories by breaking the oldmedieval, local, national, religious and other fetters. If capitalism forms such large states, then it opens the possibility of the development of productive forces. Capitalism forms large and centralised states. Such states prepare the material grounds for the construction of socialism and unity of the working-class. Working-class welcomes such large states and would oppose the decentralisation of such states."

Marxism is in favour of large states but is not in the favour of large centralised states resting on coercion, national oppression. Lenin has made this clear. Concerning the question of development of productive forces in large states, Karl Kautsky and Comrade Lenin has made it clear that barring some exceptions multinational capitalist states are indicative of backwardness. In today's world there are many small single-nation capitalist states which are much more developed than multi-national capitalist states. (To know about this in detail, see 'National Question and Marxism, Pratibadh 33).

It is the claim, absolutely fallacious claim, of these comrades that, “Marxism is opposed to any type of federalism or decentralisation.” This claim of these comrades is in violation of the Marxist-Leninist position on the Federal structure. (To know in detail see, *ibid*)

Today these comrades are against the Federal structure but they assert that the state of the working-class will be federal. It is correct that in multi-national India, the working-class state that would be formed via the proletarian revolution will be Federal. It will be a voluntary federation of different nations. All national republics would have the right to secede from it. But this future roadmap will have to be presented to the various nations now itself, only then will the working-class be able to win the confidence of the toilers of the oppressed nations.

These comrades place on equal footing the nationalism of oppressor and oppressed nations and in Lenin’s name call on to oppose both. Whereas Lenin had himself said that the nationalism of oppressed nations contains a democratic element, one which we should unconditionally support. Indeed, if the oppressed nations express national chauvinism, we should definitely oppose it.

Lal Salaam’s article ends with this incorrect claim that, “The working-class state would oppose any tendency of secession among the people of those states (the meaning of states as in states of India such as Punjab, Maharashtra etc., and not capitalist state, working-class state – translator) whose mutual unification has already taken place in the current state.” Comrades have given no explanation of this position of theirs. The Marxist position regarding this is that the unification of nations is not possible in capitalist society. The capitalist and even socialist period of human history is the period of the origin, development of nations. In the next epoch of human history when classes will cease to exist, then nations too would depart from the theatre of history. Nations, though they come into existence after the origin of classes but their termination is linked up with the termination of classes. It is naïve to dream about the unification of different nations in capitalist society.

**Translated from Punjabi by Navjot Navi**

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