

In Memory of Justice O.Chinnappa Reddy :

Intellectual And The Revivalist Veil

- Justice O.Chinnappa Reddy

Speech delivered by Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy at the 2nd Bertrand Russell's Memorial Lecture, New Delhi on 26 August 1983.

The vast majority of intellectuals, instead of being the brave torch bearers of scientific knowledge, act as defenders of tradition and superstition, says Justice O Chinnappa Reddy, the people's judge. He says that the ruling class uses revivalism to strengthen this in equal social and economic system and irrationality, to perpetuate mental slavery of the masses. It is therefore impossible to delink the War against revivalism and irrationality from the inevitable class struggle of the oppressed masses. He further says that the capitalism of under development that is capitalism in countries like India is distinct from classical capitalism, but it is nonetheless capitalism. So, the situation cannot be altered within the capitalist framework. It can only be transcended by a radical transformation of the very social structure which has generated it.

Justice Chinnappa Reddy worked as a lawyer and as a judge in various High Courts and the Supreme Court. He had been the voice of the working people in the courts of our country for decades. He wrote commentaries on the legal systems around the world from the perspective of the working class. He gave many historical judgments and wrote annotations for many judgments. He believed that Marxism was the highest form of humanism. On many occasions he along with other judges expressed the desire to achieve socialism in the country. This year is the birth centenary (25.9.1922-13.4.2013) as well as tenth death anniversary of Justice Chinnappa Reddy.

This article explains how the ruling class, irrespective of their party names, distracts the masses from their exploitative policies. In the context of discussions over the looming danger of fascists and fascist-style governance policies, we are publishing this article for study.

I am indeed very grateful to the New Delhi Chapter of the Bertrand, Russell Study Forum for inviting me to deliver the Second Bertrand Russell Memorial Lecture. I consider it a great privilege to do so though, I feel encumbered by the consciousness of my own inadequacy and tenuity.

Bertrand Russell was a brilliant mathematician, scientist philosopher, poet, rationalist, humanist and all his life, a true seeker after truth, love and peace. He was a natural rebel and protest was the focus of his life. His Nobel Prize citation described him as 'brilliant spokesman

of rationality and humanity' and fearless champion of free thought and free speech. I think it is nothing short of impertinence on my part to presume to tell you admirers of Bertrand Russell, about Bertrand Russell. I will refrain from doing so. The address which I propose to deliver is but my humble homage to the great free thinker and free speaker.

The subject which I have chosen for the day's lecture has little to do with my occupational pursuit. I have taken the liberty of venturing into dense and unfamiliar thickets but then I think that a lecture in memory of Bertrand Russell ought to be an exercise in free thinking. Therefore, if I say some unpleasant things, I request you not to be annoyed but to bear with me and perhaps to remember what another great philosopher Wittgenstein once told Bertrand Russell "... Don't suppose that everything that you won't be able to understand is a piece of stupidity". But I will indeed be very happy if a little of what I say touches the chords in some of you and evokes a response.

The India scene, economic, political and cultural can scarcely be described as heartwarming. One has only to look around even casually, to notice the heart breaking standard of living of the masses, the violent contrasts of poverty and plenty, the dismal illiteracy and lack of educational opportunity, the grievous technical backwardness, the regional and linguistic chauvinism the wretched communal fanaticism, selfish casteism, the mutilated, inhibited and imposed cultural forms, the limited development of productive' forces, the distortions, and disequilibrium, both domestic and external of the national economy, the structural dependence on imperialism at all levels, the chronic waste and depletion of national wealth and growth potential.

Underdevelopment is not an isolated fact, nor is it recent or accidental. It is a situation arising from the long historical process of capitalist development.

It is undeniably related to the social system. True, the capitalism of under development is distinct from classical capitalism, but it is nonetheless capitalism, a dependent capitalism in which productive forces develop slowly and unequally with marked ups and downs. Obviously, the situation cannot be altered within the capitalist framework. Obstacles to development are structural and therefore they can only be transcended by a radical transformation of the very social structure which has generated them.

Science, art and literature play their part in the historical process and contribute to the incessant economic and political struggles. History is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, each of which has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. There are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant in the historical event. There is a constant interaction between the economic situation which is the basis and the various elements of the super structure and it is as a result of the interaction of these forces that the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessity. That is why it is said, the history of all existing society is the history of class struggle. The present epoch is the epoch of struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The effect of the class struggle, sometimes apparent, often concealed, is all pervasive, touching as it does every aspect of human life, individual, as well as collective. So it is that, a militant struggle against imperialist forces within each country is necessary in order to conquer poverty and underdevelopment, ignorance,

prejudice and superstition and to affirm the values of a truly national culture, a culture which makes it possible for the people to move towards scientific progress and the enjoyment of the arts.

Here it is necessary to realize and understand and this unfortunately, the bourgeois rationalists fail to grasp - that irrationality, has always been and is a powerful aid to exploitation and an effective ideological weapon to perpetuate the mental slavery of the masses and it is therefore impossible to delink the War against irrationality from the inevitable class struggle of the oppressed masses. In the ultimate analysis the war against irrationality is part of a historic ideological struggle, a struggle against all systems of thought which either make the working people, victims of narrow prejudices and irrational passions or condemn the People as passive onlookers of their destiny'. The war against irrationality is finally won when the class battle is won. The failure of the bourgeois rationalists to recognise the true character of the struggle against irrationality as part of the capitalist system has led them to become mere propagandists of atheism, with nothing positive to be, achieved towards changing society.

Intellectuals - and by intellectuals I do not mean the 'intellectual, as defined by Paul Baran, that is, one who not only works with his brain rather than with his brawn but in addition gets so deeply concerned with the historical process that it permeates his thought and significantly affects his work; I simply mean intellectuals in the broadest Gramscian sense: poets, professors and physicist, dramatists, actors and doctors, engineers and economists, journalists, writers, white collar workers, students and of course lawyers and judges. Intellectuals must recognize the true nature of the struggle and once they do so, they will see for themselves that an obvious role for them in the struggle is to prepare and equip the people to take their place in an egalitarian scientifically progressive and genuinely cultured society by relentlessly exposing the exploitative nature of the system, the false conservative obscurantist mystical and misleading philosophies and ideologies espoused by the system and by cultivating a wider perspective, a new vision and a new sense of commitment towards the great ideals of egalitarianism, scientific progress and true culture. The bourgeoisie ruling class is adept at making a skilful use of the various facets of the super structure. Religion and superstition have a powerful sway on the 'minds of a substantial section of the people of India, the great bulk-of whom still vegetate in a pre scientific age. They are a sad and long suffering people, the victims of an unjust and irrational social system in which a few flourish at the cost of many, a system which despite being inequitable, if not inhuman, has been sustained throughout the centuries by the genius of the pernicious philosophy of 'karma, a very convenient philosophy, indeed, to make the miserable masses of the country accept with resignation, and without protest every kind of inequality, exploitation, degradation and misery inflicted on them. An unjust social system is sought to be rationalized by the philosophy of karma and generation after generation, the people of India have been so indoctrinated by, the inexorable philosophy of karma that it has become part of their blood. Spiritualism and the Karma-culture have so emasculated the Indian masses and made them so resigned to what they described as their fate that they view their poverty and their misery as but the just and inevitable reward, of misdeeds of a past, that is, a 'purva janma' and not the product of a totally unjust and cruel social system. Faced, with every kind of exploitation in their everyday life, with no hope of any change for the better in their life time, the Indian masses have dangled before them the theory of karma and they feed upon

its dead flesh to sustain themselves. To these sections of the people, religion is not only a ritual but also a serious commitment. He doses or dopes himself with all manner of beliefs based on so called tradition. A man can withdraw himself into his religious shell to perform innumerable ritual and religious functions and there is a plenitude of Yogis, Swamis and Acharyas to sustain him in that attempt. Karma is his defence mechanism, in the absence of an alternative to this self-defeating defence mechanism, the mechanism will continue to flourish and we have no dearth of pseudo intellectuals ready to feed the credulity of the exploited masses. The ruling bourgeoisie is very cunning. It has not merely an army of pseudo intellectuals to do its bidding, but it makes skilful use of the mass media to influence the masses and to earn legitimacy for itself and the destructive doctrines propagated by it. I do not have to tell you how the All India Radio begins the day with 'Suprabhatam' and how the Doordarshan publicises Yoga and how the two of them together project the decadent revivalist philosophy of the pseudo intellectuals.

The vast majority of the intellectuals in India drawn from and constitute the category of the petty bourgeoisie, instinctively sharing the attitude of that class towards capitalism and revolution. They are the products of an inherited system of education which is saturated with bourgeoisie ideology and a mass of reactionary idea, prejudices, and superstitious beliefs also inherited from the past. The effect of modernisation on those who are the products of this system of education has been what the sociologists term as 'Sanskritisation' in the realm of culture and revivalism in the realm of ideology. They become the apostles and the minstrels of revivalism, to sing and to chant the glories of our great, ancient culture and heritage. Evidence is discovered by them from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana to prove that our ancients possessed scientific knowledge rivaling and indeed more advanced than our own and that aero planes and even nuclear weapons were known to the Rishis of the Vedic age. The credulity and chauvinism of these people is astounding. They are unable to grasp the elementary processes of history and sociology that a highly developed technology could not have possibly existed in a pre-industrial society merely because some Rishis so willed it. You cannot conceive of the most intelligent prehistoric human being producing the little sophisticated electronic gadgets of today or performing so aesthetically perfect a dance as Balasaraswathi Bharatanatya. Instead of being the brave torch bearers of scientific knowledge, they act as defenders of tradition and superstition. Foundation stones of steel plants, nuclear stations and space laboratories are laid to the chanting of 'mantras' by Brahmin priests and to the breaking of coconuts at the precise moments chosen and declared as auspicious by Pandits and Astrologers. Swamijis, Babas, Bhagwans, Maharshis, Yogis and various other vice-regents of God abound and are sought after. Literate and illiterate, rich and poor, ministers, judges, politicians, bureaucrats, professors, and even so called scientists throng for their Darshan, prostrate themselves at their feet and receive 'Vibhuti' and other token gifts from them to be worn and carried by them as blessed charms and talismans to protect them against evil and to advance their cause in mere worldly matters. Panchangams, Palmists, Astrologers, Occultists and Diviners are consulted as much by the elitist section of the people as by the illiterate. There is a great rush to visit temples and other centres of pilgrimage to please, propitiate and offer worship and worldly goods to several major and minor gods and goddesses. If you want to win an election, if you want to become a minister, if you want success in your black market enterprises, if you want to win a case in court, if you want a son-in-law for your daughter, you

rush to Tirupati; you offer untaxed money to obtain tax free benefits. Almost all the national newspapers will perhaps, the solitary and honourable exception of the Hindu of Madras carry a Sunday feature on "what the stars foretell this week". The Hindu makes up for it by a daily religious discourse on the last page. In the name of Indian culture (Bharatiya Sanskriti), there is an incessant talk of Yoga, Vedanta, Geethopadesa, Advaita, Transcendentalism and so on. You visit the nearest book shop; you will find it full of books on Yoga, Vedanta, etc. side by side with books on astrology, palmistry and of course, sex, marriage, Kamasutra and Harold Robbins. There is even a demand to make Sanskrit an official language of the country and to establish Sanskrit universities. These chauvinists have already secured a point and Sanskrit is one of the languages in which the news is broadcast everyday by the All India Radio. All these are manifestations of revivalism which has so closely attached itself to the educated and the elite of the country.

A few months back, I was amused to read in one of the respectable daily newspapers that 'Pranamudra' was a cure for heart trouble and that all you had to do was to hold your fingers in a particular way and it would act sure like a tablet of Sorbitrate, even better, because the cure, it seems, would be permanent and not temporary. How I wish it could be so, I wouldn't have undergone a bypass operation. Again we often read in the weekly and monthly magazines, pathetic articles by so-called intellectuals who have discovered evidence of every modern scientific device in the Vedas and more exciting evidence of space travel by our ancestors. Quite absurd researches are undertaken to discover "Ancient insights into modern discoveries". I remember reading years ago a book aimed at showing that the Mayan civilization of Central America was Hindu in origin. All this may be amusing to read, but not quite so amusing if we realise that those who finance these projects aim at the creation of a false, irrational consciousness in the minds of the people weaning them away from real and rational consciousness. Without drawing parallels one is reminded of Nazi medical scientists of Hitler's Germany, who tried to prove the superiority of the Aryan to the Jewish race and the innate physical diseases which no Jew could escape.

Revivalism has made the Indian bourgeoisie and in particular the Indian intellectuals great hypocrites. They talk glibly of the great and ancient philosophy inherited by them and profess a detachment from all worldly and mundane matters, but in practice, they are greedy position-possession-power-grabbers. They will talk of things spiritual and indulge in things most material. From them have risen many sanctimonious humbugs, masquerading as spiritual leaders. They have so perverted the entire scale of values that even begging is glorified. Copious tears are shed at the sufferings of the Sita of the puranas while they are oblivious to the existence and the sufferings of the millions of living Sitas of today's Ramayanas. As if to applaud Sita's ordeal by fire, brides are burnt for dowry. Late Shri M.N. Roy pointed out in one of his books that we are such great hypocrites that even 'the delightful sexual lyrics of Vidyapati, Chandidas and Jayadev are interpreted as mystic accounts of spiritual elevation of an exotic communion with the impersonal God; Legendary tales of the philandering of a youthful cowherd and the delicious abandon of the milk-maids, jolted out of inhibitions by the flood of tropical springs are given a dull scriptural value and even philosophical content is read into them - mutual attraction between 'jeevatma and paramatma'.

Perhaps, some of you may be impressed if I quote late Shri Radha Krishnan, Philosopher President. You may raise your eye-brows and say jubilantly "here is the devil quoting the scripture". This is what he says:

"Many of the fundamental evils of Indian Society can be traced to two important factors, namely, irresponsible wealth and religious bigotry. While economic injustices are not peculiar to our country alone, religious bigotry, which treats millions of our countrymen in a shameless inhuman way, and imposes senseless disabilities and inconvenience on the woman-hood of the country, is a standing danger. It is the corruption of the spirit in the guise, of superstition. These who impose those disabilities on other human beings, are themselves victims of ignorance and superstition. There is such a thing as degeneration of accepted ideas. Many of them are kept going artificially even after life has left them. We must liberate ourselves from the tyranny of the dark past, from the oppression of the specters and ghosts, from falsehood and deceit. There are millions today whose life has been rendered meaningless by social maladjustments which are sanctified by religion and they may be pardoned if they dismiss religion as a luxury which they cannot afford..... It is the duty of every patriotic person to resist economic and religious tyranny".

To go back to what I was saying, leaving alone Dr. Radhakrishnan's thoughts on Religion, I wish to emphasize to you that revivalism is not an accident; it is part of the historical counter revolutionary process. It is fostered to blur the revolutionary vision and counter the growth of the revolutionary consciousness of the people. In any pre-Socialist society, the ruling class is necessarily in a minority and is, therefore, apprehensive that if the masses rationally recognise their own interests and organise themselves to change the existing social structure, they are bound to succeed, in the long run, in any conflict between the classes, by the very reason of their numbers. The ruling class has, therefore, a stake in offering diversions and substituting irrational consciousness for rational or class consciousness. Revivalism and its products - prejudice, superstition communalism, regionalism, casteism, etc. -are used to strengthen and fortify the existing economic and social structure rather than for the improvement or betterment of the community or the nation as such. While this is the true character of revivalism it is often attempted to be projected under banners meant to give it a rational appearance. The process started in the days of our colonial rulers. The Englishman, Colebrooks and the German Max Mueller, who are thought to have rediscovered the philosophy of Vedanta for the modern world, thereby did such signal service to the British imperialist interests in India that the then Secretary of State in India handsomely acknowledged their service by saying "Colebrooke and Max Mueller rendered a service to the Government of India more valuable than several regiments of the Army". There are many living Colebrookes and Max Muellers today and one may well say that today's revivalists serve the ruling classes of India more valuable than several regiments of soldiers. Some of the Swamijis and the Godmen to whom I made a reference earlier and who are the eloquent apostles of revivalism may be quite sincere and sensitive people, who disturbed by the spectacle of the inequities of the world preach Karma and prema in a naive effort to abate these inequities but rest assured, they are permitted to do so as part of the 'cultural' activity of the shopkeepers of the world in an endeavor to appease the people who may otherwise rebel against their poverty, tyranny and oppression.

I said: Revivalism often is hidden and is projected under banners of attractive and appealing colours. One must be careful and perceive revivalism for what it is. In Andhra we want to revive the glorious days of the Kakatiya and Vijaynagar empires. Two of our universities are called Kaktiya and Krishnadevaraya Universities. In Tamil Nadu the Transport Services are named after the Pandya, Chola and Chera empires. In Maharashtra Sivaji is the idol and the ideal. Today in Punjab, the warrior Sikhs want to revive the glorious days of Ranjit Singh. Even our hoteliers call their hotels after Ashoka, Kanishka, Maurya, Akbar. Sure, there is nothing wrong in being proud of our past. But pride in the past should be accompanied by an understanding of history. Otherwise, disastrous results may follow.

Therefore it has become necessary to wage a war against revivalism, religion and superstition. But it is foolish to suppose that revivalism, religion and superstition can be isolated from the economic base and fought on an intellectual basis. This is the error of the bourgeois rationalists who are naturally inhibited by their own class limitations. Lenin wrote,

“It would be stupid to think that in a society based on the endless oppression and coarsening of the worker masses, religious prejudices could be dispelled by purely propaganda methods. It would be bourgeois narrow mindedness to forget that the yoke of religion that weighs upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society. No number of pamphlets and no amount of preaching can enlighten the proletariat, if it is not enlightened by its own struggle against the forces of capitalism.”

Therefore, remembering that the ideological roots of revivalism, religion and superstition are embedded in the class nature of society, they have to be fought not merely by exposing their irrationality through rationalist propaganda, literature, arts and the media, but also by making it part of the revolutionary class struggle.

Friends, I have finished. I make my appeal to all of you, the intellectuals of the country, to join the oppressed classes of the country and wage a war against superstition, against prejudice, against every form of irrationalism, to adopt and practice a scientific and a rational approach to life and its problems, to preach and inculcate the scientific approach in your writings, in your speeches and by your action and thus, to participate in the relentless revolutionary class struggle.

Let the people of India move towards a better future and a greater humanism “where a man has emerged from the archaic ties of blood and soil, and feels himself to be the son of man, a citizen of the world, whose loyalty is to the human race and to life rather than any exclusive part of it, a man who loves his country because he loves mankind and whose judgment is not warped by tribal loyalties”. “Let the new man, the new citizen of India emancipate the toiling masses from the ancient superstitions and prejudices of race, nation, class, religion, and create a universal fraternal society, every member of which will work according to his ability and receive according to his need.”