

AGAINST THE MIDDLE WAY

“The theory on which the fighters against absolutism have hitherto based themselves is evidently crumbling, and is destroying the conditions for solidarity and organization which are essential for the struggle. Well then, these “amalgamators” and “alliance advocates” would seem to think that the easiest way to create such a theory is to reduce it to a protest against absolutism and a demand for political liberty, while evading all other questions, socialist and non-socialist. It goes without saying that the bottom will inevitably be knocked out of this naïve fallacy at the very first attempts at such unity.”

—Lenin, “What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats.” 1894.

“Where there is danger/ There grows also redemption”

—Holderlin

The determinate form of protest which emerged at Jadavpur, FTII, Chennai, UGC, and Hyderabad among other places has now emerged at JNU with an unprecedented clarity. At first, the object-motives and the concrete particulars, distinctly endemic to each protest, might seem to render each as a separate phenomenal site, each as its own polysemic uniqueness. For clearly, the ruptural occurrences which determinately turned into widespread protests vary from protest to protest—the subjugation of women led to a direct confrontation with the university administration, as in #Hokkolorob at Jadavpur, the appointment of a sanghi as the chairman led to protests at FTII; the repressive measures undertaken by administration to thwart the radical dalit students attempting wider collectivization using a study circle as means led to protests, as it happened at IIT Chennai. Similarly, #occupyUGC emerged in response to government’s decision to drastically cut-back scholarships. In the wake of these, the suicide committed by radical dalit activist RohitVemula at Hyderabad University raised further questions and the agitation quickly took the shape of a movement. And now, as part of this movement, a meeting organized against the Indian occupation of Kashmir at JNU which led to the framing of sedition charges against the JNUSU president and his subsequent arrest, has sparked off the current movement. What seems to be common to all these instances has often been grasped in the rather populist, self-alienated register of the Indian media, the question it presently seems to be so fond of raising—“Why are university campuses quickly turning into political war zones?”

These movements must be understood as an outcry against the state of emergency which has come to mark the everyday lives of not only students but also those of the university workers. The determinate form taken by these movements is adialectical realization of the tendentious character of neoliberal capital, what we have come to experience as a normalization of the ubiquitous state of emergency. However, contrary to the classical-historical exegeses of Fascism, this state of emergency normalized does not belie any “real” emergency in the natural history of capital. On the other hand, the normalization of the state of emergency is necessary for producing conditions which shall render the permanent development of capital possible. It is no surprise then that the exploitative structures of social relations and their unequal categorical bearing out has already orientated in strategic accordance with the unmitigated profits promised by capital. The university not only preserves but also reinforces the very exploitative structures of social relations which facilitate gender and caste-based exploitation and discrimination at large within the university. The power operative in everyday relations, whether these relations be with fellow students within the classroom, with supervisors, or with teachers and administrative officials inside or outside the hostels, are doubly reinforced in the case of female and dalit students. Firstly, between students and teachers the teachers naturally wield power owing to objective conditions of hierarchy. Secondly, by virtue of being either dalit or being a woman, power comes to determine all their relations with male or non-dalit teachers. These power relations are operative in more or less all parts of daily life, whether it be one’s own house or locality, private and public institutions, or factories. Like other places, this power relation further regiments dalit and female students, making sure that their academic work is more monitored, more disciplined, and psychologically more distressing. Contrary to the widespread ideological perpetuation of the division between mental and physical labour, forced by capital in order to secure and further its own development, labour does not only mean the mechanical activities performed by the body. Materialists such as Marx and Dietzgen had not only been life-long opponents of this division but revealed, time and again, the reactionary and irrational social grounds on which this division was set up. As a materialist Ambedkar combatively opposed this division, inherent as it was to the socio-political structuration of Hinduism. Centuries ago, Siddha Sarhapa had himself proclaimed—“पंडित सअल तित्थ बखानई/ देहहि बुद्ध बसंत न जानई.” (The pandit might exegize the scripture-bulk but knows not the intellect which is his body.) Time and again, the dominant ideology has attempted to wrest the actual domain of knowledge production— what is, in effect, man’s willful activity which produces knowledge by consuming his own potential skills with regards to an extant state of affairs while simultaneously producing a change in the very state of affairs— and always tried to institutionalize it. In the present world of capitalism, the history of this institutionalization is the history of modern university.

The actuality of the modern university, what had thus far been expressed in a rather sophisticated, haloed register of “intellect” or “knowledge,” has, in the neoliberal era, revealed itself with the full force of its internal contradictions. In other words, the model of modern university has long begun formalizing itself as the now ubiquitous model of social factory. This university-factory functionalizes itself as total exploitation of the physical and mental labour expended by its workers, reproducing itself by way of profits amassed thereof. Rather than sabotaging the capitalist structures, the modes of corporal and cognitive untouchability as well as specifically gendered divisions of labour can consummate their particular, seemingly pre-modern oppressive stratagems only in an overall reinforcement of capitalist relations. In this way, the neoliberal capital’s state of emergency normalized ensures that the everyday violence to which students from Kashmir and North-East, along with the dalits and women, are subjected to, can be repeated in all its banality. The neoliberal capital ensures the same by maintaining and simultaneously reproducing the oppressive status quo of relations between students, teachers, workers, daily wage labourers, relations as both internal to each segment and also cutting across them.

The question which the militant martyrdom of RohitVemula poses to society in general and to the institution of university in particular has two aspects. Firstly, it makes manifest the brutal and violent perpetuation of the caste-divide within the university, and secondly, it makes manifest not only a politics which seeks emancipation from this seemingly eternal caste-violence but as what radically presents itself as the limit of the attempted organization of this emancipatory drive. In other words, it makes manifest the emancipatory politics which seeks the destruction *in actu* of the seemingly eternal caste-violence and simultaneously the question of organizing this politics *in actu*. Years ago, Dalit Panthers, by proposing a revolutionary transformation of all social relations, formulated this very question and a response to it in their manifesto, marked as it then was by its internationalist vision. For RohitVemula too, thinking of revolution meant thinking politics and thinking organization in their dialectical tandem. Now, we will do well to remember that circa 1924, as witnessed by Antonio Gramsci, the alternating regimes of social democracy and fascism still had a longer time interval between them. In other words, the division of labour between social democracy and fascism was not as

uncertain or as unstable as it is in our own experience of neoliberal structures, where this alternation has accelerated to such an extent that the interval has been reduced to a bare minimum. Gramsci had then written:

“How is the vicious circle to be broken? Solving this problem means solving, in practice, the problem of revolution. There is only one way: to succeed in reorganizing the great mass of workers during the very development of the bourgeois political crisis, and not by concession of the bourgeois, but through the initiative of a revolutionary minority and around the latter. The Communist Party, from the day in which the fascist regime went into crisis, has not set itself any other task than this. Is it a task of an "organizational" nature in the narrow sense of the word, or is it a "political" task? What we have said above serves to show that only insofar as the Communist Party succeeds in solving it will it succeed in modifying the terms of the real situation. “Reorganizing” the working class, in this case, means in practice creating “a new force and causing it to intervene on the political scene: a force which today is not being taken into account, as if it no longer existed. Organization and politics are thus converted one into the other.”

Thus, the reorganization of the working class can avail of no middle way. In relation to the issue of dalit emancipation, the same has been made clear by the Dalit Panthers’ manifesto, by Rohit Vemula, and by the legacy of several revolutionary martyrs. The ones who have secured the middle way now speak of struggle merely intend to condemn the dalit-oppression and the exploitation of the working class at large to further unending nights of counter-revolution. It is no coincidence that not only dalit martyr Rohit Vemula but every person who fights against the Kashmiri occupation is a traitor.

The forced occupation of Kashmir by Indian army has, on the one hand, turned Kashmir into a vast labour reserve, while on the other hand, the ideology of nationalist and patriotic fervour continues to regiment and discipline this labour-power, all the while alienating this labour-power from the other sections of the working class. In the name of patriotism and love for one's country, the ideology of nationalism severely suppresses Kashmir's right to self-determination in the popular imagination, regiments the cheap labour power which is available in the form of Kashmiri populace, and subverts the unity of the working class at large. If we begin to understand "nation-state" as a specific organization of social relations, it becomes clear how capital, in the moment of its own crisis, resorts to a reproduction of seemingly older forms of social relations for the sake of capital's own promulgation. Similarly, casteism and patriarchy is reproduced in social relations as governed by capital. Like Muslim youth in general, the migrant Kashmiri youth is repeatedly discriminated against at places of work and recreation. Unable to get even houses on rent, they naturally begin to congregate and, now ghettoed up, thrive in select localities. Several state-sponsored acts of violence, such as Batla House encounter, then continue to regiment this particular section of labour-power. Now, living it up on the rents extorted from those working in JNU and neighbouring areas, the land-owners of Munirka-village and their spoilt brats seem especially miffed with the acts of treason committed by the university erected on the land of their very own village! These landlords and their rather self-indulgent progeny believe that only because they pay their taxes the world can function, and only so. So, it seems only natural that the world must function unto them, unto their rules! If the workers who live on rents stopped giving their rents the theatrical farce of their patriotism would disappear into thin air, vanishing no sooner than the horns of jackass! Organizing the residents of Munirka-village against the students is the manifestation of the very doublespeak our dictatorial government specializes in. While the law and the police is arresting students on charges of sedition, the ideological state apparatuses seem to be bent upon creating a majoritarian consensus which justifies protests, sloganeering against and physical assaults on students at large. This is no mere coincidence that the death knell which sounded the beginning of a movement emerging determinately from Rohit Vemula's suicide was heard simultaneously at the Ambedkar Park located in Buddh-Vihar, Munirka and at JNU. Even the khap leaders seemed to fear this death knell. The traitors had infiltrated their very village! One has to curb their increasing advance! The very media industry, which is used to extorting the daily wages of journalists-workers alike, which forces workers to work for 10-15 hours every day in exchange of Rs. 10-15,000 per month, has suddenly realized its civilized status of a taxpayer! In the guise of performing one's civic duties as a taxpayer, the country's biggest frauds, the ones who are the biggest swindlers of taxes are suddenly beginning to advise the students to keep quiet, to maintain the decorum which behooves university spaces, all this in the guise of continued expropriation and regimentation of the labour of students-workers. For are we not able to study because of their remittances, and if it is so, what rights do we have to speak! But what if we turn back and say, "To hell with your money. . . the university functions because of our labour, your media houses function because of our labour!" And then we will be touted as anarchic! The entire business of renting houses, what the whole Munirka village thrives on, is a functionalization of the problem of housing in the university, and housing in general. And it is in this way that the university-state administration secures the right-wing lumpen tendencies in the service of the nation-state. It is the patriotic and nationalist fervour of the university administration, the contractors and landowners of Munirka village, and, not to forget, the Arnab Goswamis, which has ideologically demystified the extant political circumstance.

With the demand of the unconditional release of the president of JNU Students’ union, three aspects of the movement, all of which are interlinked and thus condition the movement's radical promise, are clear. Firstly, the solidarity of dalit-radical movement and the movement supporting Kashmir's inalienable right to self-determination. Secondly, a process of organization of workers into separate councils and committees which cut across the extant segmentation of workers into students, teachers, karmcharis, daily wage workers, both within JNU and outside, in Munirka at large, and which shall aim, on the one hand, at seizing a generalized university strike and transform it into a complete take-over of the university, whereby the administration can be locked down and the actual implementation of the autonomy of the university is rendered possible. On the other hand, the attempts of students-workers-tenants at self-organizing themselves must culminate in a rent strike. Thirdly, an outright rejection of all nationalisms, whether be it cultural/Hindu nationalism, or narodnikor progressive nationalism. What we are longing for, what believe we have lost, that is a certain well-ordered, rational status quo, a democratic campus, was never there to begin with. To seek to negotiate a return to an older order would only imply further regimentation, direct police interventions, a dictatorial university administration, and lastly, restoration of all those utterly oppressive older forms of social relations. It would only imply a taming of the excess that this movement is, politics in actu. To merely shut JNU down would lead to a liquidation of the possibility of redemption which is held by the case of present emergency. What really needs to be done is to convert this state of emergency into a "real" emergency for capital. In this process, "war of position" and "war of movement" are not two separate teleological locations, but rather they simultaneously become as the same dialectical process. There is no middle way possible. And even if it is possible, it is far removed from the real objectives of working-class politics and organization. And not only is it far removed but it is diametrically opposed to it. For—

“The society cannot presently go on/ The capitalist heart cannot turn/ The valley of an individual's freedom/ cannot deceive the soul of liberation/the people” -Muktibodh

ZEROHISTORY