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Restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan **Common concern : How far will it be stable ?**

Pakistan, a strategically placed country in South Asia, stands at yet another threshold in its six decade-long turmoil-stricken existence. More than a year-long stubborn movement of people of that country could bring an end to the seven-year long tyrannical rule of Parvez Musharraf, the military dictator. This Musharraf-regime was marked on one side by so-called economic 'reforms' adopted at the behest of the US imperialism and the IMF-World Bank combine that produced record level foreign exchange reserves and rise in export earnings and growth rates, brought in huge foreign investments limited to non-employment generating sectors like real estate, telecommunications and the stock market and such other areas bearing typical symptoms of the ongoing imperialist design of globalization-liberaliza-

tion-privatization the world over. On the other side, the regime widened the yawning gap between the rich and the poor, brought in acute shortage of wheat and its flour for people of the country with a view to generating foreign exchange through wheat export, and made common poorer sections of people groan under abject poverty, unemployment, steep price-rise, crises of gas and electricity and dearth of minimum necessities of life, simply aggravating their plight they had been suffering through their days in independent Pakistan.

Naturally, resentments against the Musharraf-regime, rather the nexus of feudal lords-capitalists-imperialists particularly their US brand, soared up higher and higher. Rabid fundamentalists also took the troubled arena, to cash on the ever-

rising resentments of people. While their dictates, dictums and Fatwas could bring no relief to people, these simply added to their woes. At points of no return, people started bursting out in protests and demonstrations, facing brute suppression by the army under Musharraf, yet becoming more and more undaunted to clinch their goal. Even the Judiciary was not spared by the military dictator. Sixty judges along with the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan were sacked and put to house-arrest. Thousands of lawyers and political activists were arrested. 'Emergency' was clamped to silence opposition. Anti-US imperialist feelings was raging increasingly in the country. But in absence of any process and leadership to canalize them in the correct direction, the religious fundamentalist forces

ventilated them only to step up their reactionary influence upon the masses, spreading out their activities throughout the country and thereby causing serious damage to the unity of people and growth of democratic movements and inviting further repressive measures from Musharraf. But the more he became ruthless, the wider spread the people's movement, the deeper became the anti-US imperialist feelings among the masses. Defying all the draconian measures, students, youths, lawyers and common people took to the streets. Along with the Bar Associations of different provinces leading the fight for defence of the democratic rights of the judiciary, strong people's movements grew in different parts of the country. The 'Lal-Masjid' event even created fissure in the

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19th All India Conference of UTUC-Lenin Sarani was held with much enthusiasm at New Delhi from 27 to 29 March, 2008. Delegates from all over the country and fraternal delegates from abroad participated in this historic conference. We shall cover the news in details in our forthcoming issue. Here Comrade Krishna Chakraborty, President, UTUC-LS seen addressing the open session at Ramila Maidan on 27 March (left) and the leaders and distinguished guests on the dais (right). A part of the huge gathering is shown below.



History of Pakistan holds key to knowing why democracy still eludes the country

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army itself. The army finally bowed down. Even the US imperialism that has always tried to play the role of the mentor, rather master of the Pakistani rulers had to beat retreat, albeit temporarily. Ultimately Musharraf had to yield and put off his military uniform relinquishing the office of the army general and finally to declare the general election. He, however, continues to be in the chair of the President. Benazir Bhutto, a former Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Chairperson of the party, PPP, thrown out of the country to exile, came back to take part in the election. Reportedly, her return to the country was possible through mediation of the US-imperialists and after an understanding with President Musharraf was reached. However, before she could pick up any campaign Benazir was ghastly assassinated on 27th December 2007. Raging suspicions of the imperialist-Musharraf-or even Muslim fundamentalist clandestine hands being there behind the murder were very much afloat in the political ambience. Whatever it be, the event simply attested to the extremely volatile situation prevailing inside Pakistan that was beset with an atmosphere of uncertainty, mistrust among people, even enmity, amidst which the election was going to take place. Quite naturally the murder of Benazir also led the election to be postponed to 18th February 2008. But, apparently it also brought people to the limits of their patience. The anti-Musharraf wave surged higher and higher, which also compelled the hitherto arch-rival parties like Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif (PML-N), Awami National Party (ANP) to bury their hatchet to "sink the past and forget their bitterness" with a view to making a united breakthrough in the parliamentary election, held amidst state-terror and uncertainty of being rigged by the President Musharraf holding his office. People's vigilance and exuberance finally made the parties ultimately emerge thunderously victorious in the election. The 7 year-long military-rule of Pakistan came to an end giving way to a coalition government of the said parties along

with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, at least for the present. After much hobnobbing and string-pulling, the constituents of the coalition agreed to place Yusuf Raza Gilani of PPP as the Prime Minister. A government has no doubt been formed, but it can never be claimed, as reports pour in, that the coalition shows the fullest amity and fraternity among the constituent parties.

Neither the military rule nor a switch over to a parliamentary form of government were new to Pakistani people. During its 60 years of existence Pakistan had to bear 36 years of military rule with short-lived intermittent democracy, rather the parliamentary form of government. After the adoption of constitution in 1956 to end with the initial teething turbulence following independence, the first military take-over placed General Iskandar Mirza in the rein. Then, there came General Ayub Khan in 1958, with General Yahya Khan, General Zia-Ul-Hoque and General Pervez Musharraf successively appearing on the stage to promulgate military rule. These were interrupted by short-lived parliamentary democratic governments of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1973-'77), Benazir Bhutto (1988-'90 and 1994-'97) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-'93 and 1997-'99). It was Nawaz Sharif, whom Musharraf deposed from power in October 1999 coup.

Now the coalition government has been formed in Pakistan. But whether it will endure the test of time and give parliamentary democracy a breathing space is yet a baffling question. Fissures already abound. Over and above, the dominating role of the US imperialism in Pakistan politics is naked and menacing. It is also reflected in the post-election shoulder-rubbing of the political leaders of the country with the US-embassy in Pakistan, on the issue of forming the coalition government. What should be the attitude of the new government towards the Islamic Fundamentalist forces is also a disturbing question before the parties of the government with the US rulers exerting overt or covert pressures. So, the political observers could not but betray scepticism, when they commented, such as, " We cannot say that

democracy is flourishing here yet," (Pakistan Human Rights Commission).

Thus the questions that are obviously buoying up in democratic-minded people of not just Pakistan, but of the world, are : Will the present government be able to survive or will the military rule again make its comeback? How is it that the military regime is coming back in Pakistan repeatedly, almost as a rule? How is it that bourgeois parliamentary democracy that, with all its uncertainties and lapses, can be found in many neighbouring countries, could not drive its roots in the soil of Pakistan? Why even the bare minimum extent of such a democracy could not stabilize itself there? We think, to seek the answers correctly, it is required to delve into how the nation and the state of Pakistan came into being.

Pakistan was carved out of the then British India on the basis of religion, that is as a state for the Muslim religious minority of the then India. As it is also known that the anti-British imperialist independence movement of India took place in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution. By then, capitalism, as a world system, had lost its progressive role. The Indian bourgeoisie, too, that led the nation-building process, thus, lacked the revolutionary fervour of the days of the Renaissance and suffered from the fear-complex of working class revolution. They maintained a reformist oppositional, compromising role against both feudalism and British imperialism, the two forces they confronted and could not wage uncompromising struggle to uproot the seeds of division within the society, like religion, caste system, race etc. to unite people getting over these. As a result, even the fervent protagonists of anti-feudal, anti-imperialist struggles, largely hailing from the majority Hindu community could not free themselves of the influence of the Hindu religion. Thus, as Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, an eminent Marxist thinker of the present era pointed out, "Indian nationalism. was basically religion-oriented" manifesting itself "in the form of Hindu religious revivalism". As an outcome of this Hindu orientation in the nation-building

process and independence movement, there were no serious and pervasive efforts, on the part of the Indian bourgeoisie to win over the vast masses of religious minority, for instance the Muslims and draw them into the mainstream of the independence movement, knowing fully well that they lagged quite behind culturally and on questions of education and others. The British rulers, on the other hand, used this weakness of our nation-building process, to foment bitter communal hatred and enmity, while in reaction to this Hindu revivalist Indian nationalism, the non-Hindu masses, like the Muslims, rather kept themselves away from the national independence movement. (All the quotations and paraphrasing are from On Communal Problem by Shibdas Ghosh, 1964).

It was in this particular objective condition prevailing during the Indian independence movement that the Muslim fundamentalists, gathering under the leadership of the Muslim League, seized the opportunity of winning over at least a section of the Muslim masses and raised the slogan of seceding from India to make their own homeland Pakistan on the basis of the religion of Islam. Pakistan was born peculiarly holding together two widely separated geographic territories with Muslim majorities, lying at the two opposite ends of the vast geographic landmass of newly independent political India; one in the west called West Pakistan and comprising the provinces of Punjab, actually the western part of the undivided Punjab of the British India, Sind, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province and the other called East Pakistan, likewise including the eastern part of undivided Bengal. Like India, Pakistan also became a newly independent sovereign state, its state power, however, having been usurped by a peculiar combination of the Pakistani bourgeoisie and feudal lords and religious fundamentalists, represented by the Muslim League.

Thus, what emerged as the Pakistan nation lacked whatever extent of genuine anti-imperialist, anti-feudal attitudes and whatever

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Attacks on Taslima Nasreen and her expulsion : far-reaching consequences

Taslima Nasreen, the writer hailing from Bangladesh, made to lead a secluded life in Delhi for the last few months, ultimately had to leave India. She has left behind, however, a trail of questions for the right thinking people of the country, to ponder over on how do state and society stand vis-a vis writers' right to expression and such others. The following brief write-up presents a discussion laid down for consideration. To start that it may be worthwhile to recapitulate how Taslima took the stage in her present form.

The writer, Taslima Nasreen, earned notable popularity in her country and India as well as elsewhere, as a non-conformist writer upholding oppressed women's cause and secular values. She was born and brought up and took up her career in a country, that itself emerged in the seventies of the last century. Against virtual colonial oppression of the Islamic fundamentalist and despotic rulers of West Pakistan (now Pakistan), the country of Bangladesh was founded by the Bengali-speaking people of the then East Pakistan, through their liberation struggle with genuine nationalist and secular, democratic aspirations. But in absence of a genuine communist party strong enough to lead the liberation struggle there, the whole fruit of the struggle and sacrifice of people was usurped by the national bourgeoisie of that country, who took over the rein of power to establish the rule of capitalism. Since then, the rulers, be it elected and thus branded democratic, or dictatorial and autocratic, both thrived upon a society torn not only with intense class exploitation, but also with social discrimination and accompanying oppression and sustained upon their overt or covert connivance with the religious fundamentalists. Inevitably, in this era of acute crisis and recession of the world capitalist-imperialist order, the young capitalist state of Bangladesh was beset with economic-social-political crisis and turbulence right from its birth. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, subjugation to age-old superstitions and prejudices, not just plagued people's life; they went on spiraling with days of political and economic uncertainties. The further the crisis deepened, the more the rulers pounced upon democratic movements and rights of people to crush any voice of protest against the prevailing exploitation and injustice. At the same time, days on, they compromised more and more

with and fanned up fundamentalism with a view to duping people with religious bigotry and disuniting people on communal divides, engaging them in fratricidal clashes and thus distracting their vision from finding out the real cause of their miseries and plight. Oppression of women, carried over from the age-old feudal society, was an added burden on the womenfolk, that led them to virtual subhuman life.

On such a background, Taslima took up her literary pursuit with the secular, democratic aspirations of her people as the motive force for her to begin with. She came into focus particularly from her crusade against the unimaginable, inhuman atrocities of the clerics upon women, which they brought down upon the latter in the name of, rather on the plea of, enforcing the strictures of the Shariat and Hadith of the Islam religion. Her initial lucid, penetrative pen naturally drew attention and admiration of people of her own country and elsewhere and spoke of her identification with the cause she professed to uphold. Thus, as she expressed, she held : Women are oppressed in the east, in the west, in the south, in the north. Women are oppressed inside, outside home. Whether a woman is a believer or a non-believer, she is oppressed. Beautiful or ugly, oppressed. Crippled or not, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, oppressed. Covered or naked, she is oppressed. Dumb or not, cowardly or courageous, she is always oppressed. In course of this effort of hers against the tyranny of the clerics, she was naturally drawn towards the conclusion that since it was the religion of Islam that the clerics were falling upon to justify their attack on the womenfolk with sanctions from the religious scriptures namely the Koran Shareef, women were never going to be freed of this oppression until and unless the root is removed. This made Taslima take up cudgel against

religion, more so the Islam, its clerics and even its prophets. She wrote : "*I don't believe in God,.... The religion mongers segregate women from the human race , I too am divided.*"

Taslima took up a cause for her society, but left the fight directionless

In a crisis-ridden, exploitative and discriminating capitalist society, laden further heavily with the darkness of poverty, illiteracy and superstitions and tormented, above all these, by the relentless onslaught of the clerics and fundamentalists, the bold and courageous voice of Taslima came up as serving a much-desired historical necessity. Taslima's crusade provided the electrifying charge that the society made sluggish with inertia required. It decidedly and succinctly gave some exposure to a grave problem in the life of Bangladeshi people and thus added to the efforts towards releasing the secular, rational thinking in the Muslim community there. Quite understandably, her works found widespread support and appreciation from democratic-minded people, and particularly the oppressed womenfolk of different countries the world over. At this, it was not of prime importance if her works fulfilled the criteria of all niceties of literature, whether they reached the standard of best literature. Her purpose made her works significant at a historical juncture of her society. Understandably it invited wrath and antagonism from the reactionary fundamentalists of her country, not excluding those from even her nears and dears. They came down upon her in person. Finally around 1993, she had to quit her job as a medical professional in protest against government's policies. In sequel to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India in 1992 by the Hindutvawadi fundamentalists, there were attacks on Muslims and communal violence in different parts of India. In retaliation, the hooligans of Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh attacked Hindus there and demolished their temples and set fire to their houses. Taslima in her book *Lajja* (shame) registered her condemnation of these acts of the Muslim fundamentalists of her

country and the government's attitude and policies. The Bangladeshi government banned the book *Lajja*, confiscated the author's passport and asked her to stop writing. The Bangladeshi Muslim fundamentalists, in their turn, issued Fatwa and set price for Taslima's head. Cases were filed in Bangladesh court for 'blasphemy' against Taslima, one of these by the Government itself. Finally, Taslima had to flee and live in exile, yet to find any chance to return to her native land.

It must be pointed out that in history of different countries such instances of ostracizing or even exterminating on the charge of blasphemy or opposing the religious fundamentalists were never rare. Even in our country stalwarts of the Indian renaissance, like Rammohan Roy or Iswarchandra Vidyasagar had to face wrath from the religious society. For their desired social reforms aimed at democratization of society, establishing individual freedom and equal rights for men and women etc., they had to make their way through in a society of their respective times, where they were thrown outcast and severely harassed. Much later, the famous litterateur, Saratchandra also faced the wrath of the ruling British imperialists as they proscribed his well-known novel *Pather Dabi*, written on the background of the revolutionary activities and characters of the Indian independence struggle. But none of them did flinch from what they had taken up as their mission and thus served the historical necessity they themselves and their society faced. It was through their such uncompromising struggles, that they emerged as the respected doyens of Indian renaissance who laid the foundation of the modern Indian nation.

In years to follow, Taslima stuck to her literary activities and wrote prolific, effervescent with emotion. However, with time she betrayed a lack of commitment to any ideology and thus a lack in direction too. Her fight for oppressed women and her crusade against the Muslim religious fundamentalism missed one vital point all through them. Nowhere in her fight there was any indication

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Taslima's is not a solitary instance, it smacks of an ominous design of ruling capitalists

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that Taslima recognized that atrocities on women by the society and more particularly by the clerics and religious fundamentalists were age-old carried-overs which appeared since the private property was founded and based on that, society got class divided. Such atrocities made another particular manifestation of class exploitation and oppression, among so many others, that took women as good as private property of men. They assumed the most virulent form in the feudal society with religion, clergy and the feudal lords as their representatives playing supreme authority over the society and coming down heavily upon women. Renaissance that brought in the slogans of democracy and individual liberty, also invoked the idea of equal rights of women as those of men. But the capitalist society that was born out of this bourgeois democratic revolution was never freed from class division and concomitant class exploitation, nor from private property and the private property mental complex in the realm of thoughts and culture. Oppression on women by men survived in the capitalist society in spite of all talks of democracy, equal rights of women and women's liberation movement. The fight for women's emancipation was, and is still continuing to be, thus inextricably linked with the oppressed people's anti-capitalist revolutionary struggle for emancipation from all sorts of exploitation of man by man. Taslima's works did miss these understandings; they rather boiled down to mindless and cynically aggressive exposure of perversion and duplicity of male characters she came across in her life, celebrities or commoners notwithstanding, in vivid, often lurid language, obviously sensational and sensual as well. Her criticism of religion, religious fundamentalism and fundamentalists, the Islamic Mollatantra or clergy-system, as well as the rulers of her country that compromised and went hand-in-glove with them also appeared to transgress the limits of modesty and decency, such as those found in her proscribed book *Dwikhandita* (Bisected). Soon there was a raging controversy in which a substantial section of even her readers charged

her with obscenity and even with her being 'blasphemous'.

Class angularity is essential to judge any thought

Here we should take note of another vital point that since atrocities on women are rooted in class division, class exploitation and private property mental complex, the issue must be judged with a class angularity. Class angularity is also invariably required while judging thoughts and ideas of even a great man or any historical figure, including religious thinkers and prophets, on this or any other issue. Divorced from it, no individual therefore can be singly held responsible for such a situation that has befallen upon the womenfolk. Never can one also ignore the fact that all thoughts and ideas which came into existence and which are coming into existence are, in a class divided society, that is divided into exploiter and exploited classes, are nothing but personified expressions of this or that class. Then again, when a thought of the past is found to have its influence even on the present society and to be bringing in its wake a lot of damaging effects, extremely harmful consequences in social life, certainly it needs to be tackled and the society and its life be freed from its influence. But while doing that, it must be kept in mind that a thought of a particular age or time which enabled people of that time to overcome their extremely backward state of existence, cannot but be regarded to be a positive, progressive idea or thought relative to that time, although it is also true that the same thought becomes obsolete and redundant with fundamental changes in condition. Besides, because of the persistent efforts of the vested interests not only to cling to those obsolete ideas so as to serve their petty interests but to thrust these upon the people, these outdated and obsolete ideas and thoughts also assume an oppressive and reactionary character. It is therefore clear that knowingly or unknowingly, an individual thus bears and gives vent to one or the other class thoughts of his or her society, his or her thought process and even personal life being controlled by the conflicts and contradictions of classes within the then society and his or her thoughts

and ideas reflecting those class contradictions. Then again as explained above, a great man such as a prophet, who earned respect and reverence from people at large during his time or afterwards, must have played some progressive role in his society, must have surely helped people, in respect of the social conditions of that time, to overcome their backwardness, to get over their plight. Those who want to wage fight against any thoughts and ideas of such a personality of the past, or for that matter, of any individual for being reactionary and detrimental to people of the present, for being inadequate in meeting the necessities of the present society, must carry out that fight from an impersonal basis and standpoint.

Taslima miserably lacked in such an understanding. Rather the way she criticized the Islamic Mollatantra and even the prophet, Hazrat Muhammad, was deeply prejudicial that could only hurt the believers and could neither impress upon the non-believers too, and thus created hindrance in women's fight for emancipation, the cause the writer herself was standing for. To that extent, Taslima's intention notwithstanding, her doings became self-defeating. It was the fundamentalists themselves that gained benefit, being able to drive their hold further into the masses.

On the other hand, efforts or movements to point out the lapses and limitations of Taslima, could not be anything other than an ideological movement, intense polemics at the levels of ideology and philosophy, demanding patience and philosophical tolerance to sort out every details of confusions and controversies. How far the author could have accepted such polemics to look through her doings, depended entirely on her own struggles. But certainly such polemics would have left their imprints on her readers, admirers and even people in general. But where was such a movement that could have helped the writer in her cause?

Lack of philosophical tolerance leads only to fanaticism

On the contrary, Taslima was threatened for life and then curbed by administrative means and methods. The religious

fundamentalists pounced upon her in person and the governments surrendered to the fundamentalists abjectly. Even the intelligentsia, failed to rise up as thunderously as it was expected from them, to condemn this dangerous event of attacks on freedom of expressions or democratic rights of writers and artists. What else could be the outcome of all this, other than the tragic one Taslima had to face?

As mentioned earlier the fundamentalists of Bangladesh issued *Fatwa* and set price for Taslima's head. Even Bangladeshi Government banned her books, confiscated the author's passport and asked her to stop writing. Finally, Taslima had to flee her country. After having lived for quite some time in different countries of Europe and the United States, Taslima decided to get back to India, more so to Calcutta, which city she considered her second home and a safe abode to find an amiable refuge and an appreciative readership among the Bengali speaking population there. But she was greeted with a welcome that was anything other than cordial. Three MLAs of an Islamic fundamentalist outfit, Ittihadul Muslimin in Hyderabad of India gatecrashed into the book release function of the Telugu rendering of Taslima's book *Lajja*, banned in Bangladesh. They tried to assault the author physically, hurling at the same time volleys of unbecoming slogans at her. Finally, in Calcutta, Islamic fundamentalist counterparts sought for her expulsion from the city and even the state of West Bengal. CPI(M)-led government of that state, with leftist cloak and jargons, surrendered to this pressure and sent Taslima out. She tried for a refuge in Rajasthan under the apparently antipodal rightist BJP rule. On refusal there, she only took refuge in New Delhi, where the Congress-led UPA government quarantined her in a 'safe house', that only put the author to repressive mental strain and even allegedly, lack of proper medical attention. A Union minister even publicly pleaded her to leave the country. Cornered and isolated, she found no choice but to leave for Europe.

And here lies another grave danger that cannot but create worries in any right thinking person. It is not

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To fulfil democratic aspirations, Pakistani people face task of building massive sustained movement

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extent of oneness and unity of people based on the national feelings, that could be born in any newly emerging nationhood, such as in the then India, through the national independence struggle even when it was held under the compromising leadership of the national bourgeoisie and in this age of decadent capitalism. The movement that emerged on the strength of the rabid religious fundamentalist thoughts and attitudes of the Muslim League, was nowhere near a struggle built on the basis of ideology and culture of nationalism with a view to setting up a sovereign, independent bourgeois national state. Hence, since Pakistan was born based solely on religion, the Pakistan nationalism was really a misnomer, non-existent in essence. At the same time, as mentioned, the new state emerged with two parts that were geographically, culturally, ethnically widely separated, held together by the loose bonding of the commonness in their religious belief. This added further to the inherent weakness of the Pakistan state. In less than two and a half decade time, the distance changed into disparity and discrimination, the dominating Urdu-speaking Muslim rulers of the West Pakistan subjecting the Bengali-speaking Muslim people of the East Pakistan to a virtually colonial exploitation. It gave rise to another anti-colonial nationalist movement, this time within the geographical confines of the then East Pakistan which ultimately became victorious with the birth of the new nation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Economically, too, the situation was nothing different. The Indian capitalism that had started to grow under the domination and control of the British imperialism, soon gathered strength and consolidated itself to develop into a fairly advanced stage of monopoly capitalism even long before independence. The development was, however, uneven, within the present Indian territory. But it was much more uneven in areas that were included in Pakistan. Economy there was what could be termed in Karl Marx's words as "Asiatic mode of production"- an amalgamation of nomadic, ancient and feudal

economy. Feudalism was the dominant force and the emergence of capitalism and democratization of the society was rather imperceptible. To start with, independent Pakistan had only two textile mills and cement plants and virtually no 'real' industries. There was almost no development of national capital. Cotton of Punjab and Jute from Bengal were the only foreign-currency earners. Evidences of capitalism grown, were found only around Lahore in Punjab and around Karachi in the coastal fringes of Sind. The vast hinterlands of even Punjab, the most advanced province, were predominantly feudal.

As to social life, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province were controlled by village level 'Sardar' system and the grand-Sardars called 'Khans' of Kalat, a strong tribal confederation. Baluchistan moved with 'Independent Baluchistani' movement and joined Pakistan late, only in 1954. In the North-West Frontier Province Abdul Gaffar Khan, popularly known as the Frontier-Gandhi later, raised the 'independent Pakhtunistan' movement for the pakhtuns, the clan who formed the majority in Afghanistan and a large populace in Iran. In later years Abdul Gaffar Khan joined the Indian National movement and resented the 'Partition' of India on religious grounds. As to Sindh, it was under Bombay Presidency up to 1936 when following the movement of the Sindhi-speaking indigenous people, it was separated as "Sindhu Pradesh". Punjab and Bengal were parts of the two front-ranking provinces of the colonial days that undertook glorious fight against the British imperialists with the very Indian nationalist spirit. Bengal or East Pakistan, as mentioned, subsequently became an independent sovereign state of 'Bangladesh' in 1971, while Punjab with the influx of 'Mohajirs' became the dominant power in Pakistan.

Thus Pakistan came into existence with a very weak foundation for a modern nation, with nationhood and capitalism developed incipiently. The forces that rode to power included, no

doubt, the Pakistani bourgeoisie, accompanied by religious fundamentalism and feudalism exerting strong, even dominating influence. The weak national economy without industries and land reforms, and without perceptible development of national capital gasped for survival. It sought for subsistence from imperialist, particularly the US imperialist, aids. The relatively much more consolidated Indian capitalists with a stronger economic foundation ventured out to play upon the contradictions between the then two camps of world politics, namely the imperialist and the socialist camps and, for that purpose, took leading role in the 'non-aligned movement', plainly with a view to further strengthening their capitalist economy and to gaining political prestige as a leader of developing countries. On the other hand, the Pakistani national bourgeoisie gaining power in this era of decadent capitalism already bore the typical compromising character of the age. They were, at the same time, tied up with the extreme socio-economic backwardness of their country and were entangled in power sharing with religious fundamentalists and feudal forces. The Muslim League, the most influential party of Pakistan till the Coup De'Etat of 1958, was a party of the big landlords and the bourgeoisie. Jagirdars, Nawabs, Pirs and Mirs, Makhdooms and Khans retained its leadership. Even the bourgeois political parties formed newly around the time of independence could not pull themselves out of the inherent weaknesses of their country. Instead of taking up a relatively resolute independent role for national reconstruction, even in the bourgeois sense, they opted for compromises with imperialism and joined the Anglo-American imperialist camp to become members of their CENTO, SEATO and such other economic and military blocs set up by the imperialists. Thus compared with the countries like India, Indonesia and others, that were ruled by the respective national bourgeoisie, who took the advantage of the non-aligned movement to consolidate their capitalist economic base,

Pakistan remained backward and weakening wholly depending economically and thus also politically on the imperialists. Internally, since democratic values were not deeply ingrained in the society and thus also in the bourgeois political parties, they revealed their weaknesses miserably. They made shameless compromises with feudal, even fundamentalist forces for the sake of maintaining or increasing their vote-bank for petty parliamentary gains. Intense mutual bickering among those political parties, that often turned violent, lead to political instability now and then. The ruling class, the bourgeoisie, tried to place the army in power to maintain the governance. But the army, the mainstay of the ruling class in power, was also not freed from these vices. They, too, made compromise with, rather pampered religious fundamentalism, helped it thrive and persist with its menace.

Such stunted growth of capitalism with its naked compromise with backwardness, feudalism and religious fundamentalism could not but leave its impact on every aspect of socio-political domains. Politics was beset with uncertainties, violence including state-terrors, ghastly fratricidal riots and assassinations, coups, promulgation of draconian laws with minimum democratic rights being denied and such others; society was plagued with illiteracy, lack of modern education, superstitions, religious fanaticism, restlessness, turbulence, ruthless atrocities on women and children and so on. Divergent ethnic cultures and the weak nationalism based on religion with feudal mental makeup playing domineering role, and all in absence of a competent leadership, prevented democratization of the society, even to the extent that could have been possible under the folds of capitalism, in this era of imperialism. Domination of feudal oligarchy in the ruling elite thwarted the much-needed judicial, political, agricultural reforms of the country and led to the compromise with obscurantist ideas. Divisive traits such as those based on religious sects or communities, ethnicity,

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Taslima, a sad victim of repression and inertia

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just an attack on Taslima by the Muslim fundamentalists or the governments.. Basically, it represents lack of philosophical tolerance, a condition that is very much necessary in a society for correct and higher thoughts grow and develop among people. In fact such intolerance accompanied by fanaticism is menacingly growing in the country. In the recent past, the Indian people witnessed the rabid Hindu communal force of RSS- BJP combine, or in cases, forces like the *Shiv Sena* of Maharashtra, unleashing attacks on the minority community and their religious places, but more so, in this connection, coming down upon some artist on the plea of hurting Hindu religious sentiments, or some faculty member of a renowned University for not subscribing to their views. They prevented a film maker from attempting to make a film on the plight of Hindu windows at Brindaban, or even stopped screening of this or that film on this or that ground. Obviously these and such other acts were also dangerous instances of fundamentalist attack on persons of art-literature- education. Strikingly, none of the big parliamentary parties, national or

regional, seated in power took any positive step towards curbing these acts, nor released any ideological struggle clinching the fundamental questions involved. They did not reveal it to people such acts were nothing but a part of a broader design. In this period of decadent capitalism, the ruling capitalist class hinges more and more heavily on fomenting vicious traits like revivalism, obscurantism, fanaticism, superstitions and blind faith. With these, they strike at the root of the reasoning faculty of man, at the root of rational and scientific thinking and thereby promote blindness leading to helpless submission to the power that be. This way they create the ground of fascism to grow and thrive with a view to creating a stumbling block to the growth and spread of revolutionary thoughts and activities and thereby giving the tottering moribund capitalist rule a newer lease of life. All the big parliamentary parties in governmental power in states or Union playing subservient role towards the ruling class to remain in power, lend support, as much as possible, to give shape to this design of the ruling class. But not just that. By playing upon these heinous

fascistic designs, they try, as well to reap their harvest in using or increasing their vote-bank in their game of parliamentary politics. The situation has thus continuously been turning worse, with the ominous signs of sliding into such a condition when any fundamentalist force, with or without patronage from the government, may pounce upon any and every thought or idea, right or wrong whatsoever, if and when it is not to their liking. Naturally, these acts only incite fanaticism, where the attack does not care for any rational judgement of the victim or his creation. Obviously, as said above, these serve also the heinous design of the ruling class, that would create a situation where revolutionary thoughts and struggles, without which people can never attain their goal of freeing themselves from exploitation and oppression, will be the ultimate victims.

The chain of events centring round Taslima Nasreen has definitely stirred up questions among the democratic minded people. It smacks of ominous signs of violation and curbing of the minimum democratic right, the freedom of expression of an artist, a writer, a scientist or for that matter, anybody

going for any creative contribution in the fields of art and literature, whatever be the pretext. It is also shocking that leave aside the big parliamentary parties, even the compatriots of the victim, the members of the vast and acclaimed civil society of the country, the artistes, litterateurs, scientists, educationists and other sections of the intelligentsia failed to live up to their tasks, as much as it was expected of them.

However, in such a situation, it can be hoped that common, democratic-minded people of India will judge the event of Taslima Nasreen in its right perspective on the background of the danger looming large. They must judge between the good and the bad, the correct and the incorrect in proper scientific method on the anvil of history and rationality. At the same time they would raise their voice emphasizing that it is never desirable that there should exist unwarranted and illegitimate restrictions and curtailments on individual's right to enter and leave this country or to stay. At the same time, attempts to throttle views and voices by force, be it administrative, fundamentalist, physical or mental, must only be condemned and stopped.

AIDSO launches movement against atrocities on girl students

AIDSO has been conducting massive state-wide student movement against a gruesome gang rape case of a girl student of Sambalpur University on 23rd February last. The victim student was abducted outside the hostel and her tortured gang raped body was recovered from a place 15 kilometer away from the University in a critical condition. She was removed to a nearby hospital by the local people. The next day when the news spread, students of the University and Gangadhar Meher College

rushed to the hospital and protested against police inaction spontaneously blockading the National High No. 6. They boycotted classes and examination and sat in Dhama. The Sambalpur University students gheraoed the VC and hostel Superintendent who were unaware of the girl missing for last 12 hours. Under the pressure of movement the girl was shifted to Burla Medical College for proper treatment. At the initiative of the AIDSO the protest movement spread over other colleges in

adjacent districts. AIDSO, Orissa State Council called for a state-wide protest on 25th February against police inaction and the authorities' callousness. Massive student demonstration was held at Utkal University and Ravenshaw University. AIDSO also called an all Orissa protest day on 26th February in which the AIDYO and the AIMSS participated. 300 students were arrested on that day. 12-hour Sambalpur Bandh was observed. Under the pressure of the movement the Chief Minister

declared an RDC enquiry and four culprits were arrested.

Not only in Orissa, girl students nearly everywhere in the country are being victim of sexual torture and harassment. In PTC College in Gujrat, some teachers raped a girl student day after day threatening to penalize her in internal assesment AIDSO observed 8-14 March as Protest Week and sent memorandam signed by students all over the country to the President of India, demanding necessary steps against this growing evil.



AIDSO demonstrating at Utkal University on 25 February (Left) and in front of Orissa Assembly House on 26 February, 2008

World looks eagerly at Pakistan at threshold

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language and such others were fomented and fostered to the benefit of the ruling class, miserably telling upon people's unity and leading to regional or provincial parochialism, communalism, even fratricidal clashes. The only unifying string seemed to be lying at the hands of the military beating up national jingoism at times of acute crisis in governance. But even there corruption, privilege-seeking and alienation from the masses were the characteristics. Military officers from Punjab, who were the majority in the Army, came from feudal-lord and businessman-industrialist families, thus belonging to the privileged few of the society. Many military personnel shared ownership of heavy and basic industries, whatsoever of them were there in the country. The entire scenario looked bleak and dismal, which only made harvests for the ruling classes and their handful of henchmen.

This way Pakistan has developed a military-bureaucratic-feudal-industrialist complex in the echelon of the ruling elite. It has to accept ICS-bureaucrats, military officers, as well as feudal aristocracies as political heads. All of them together have reduced the country to a jumble of nothings in which neither the parliamentary system of governance, nor

democratization of society could find a minimum congeniality to thrive and grow. Even if people's aspirations for democratization in social-cultural-educational fields are growing fast, the process seems to elude them pathetically. The country simply appears to be caught in the vortex of fundamentalism, military dictatorial rules, violence and uncertainty. Naturally people are increasingly pushed to the limits of their patience. They cry for change, expecting the bourgeois parliamentary parties to bear the cudgel for them. But it also appears that they should realize the bitter fact that with the bourgeois parties in charge of their country, they cannot expect any significant change. For instance, even if the tyrannical rule of Musharraf has ended at the impact of the popular movement and a coalition government seems to have taken the charge, questions have already been raised how far will it go to solve people's problems.

Under the circumstances people of Pakistan must build up pressure on their government to give effect to maximum reforms possible for them with a view to solving, at least alleviating the burning problems of people's life and livelihood, and to that end the government must be compelled to develop job-generating

industries as much as possible even in the present set-up, to bring about desirable land-reforms striking at the roots of age-old system of land holdings by the feudal lords to vest the lands with the tillers, to introduce universal, scientific and secular education throughout the country, among others. Side by side people of Pakistan aspiring for democracy need to compel their government restore the democratic rights and institutions including freedom of expression, etc., and implement a unified modern legal system providing effective safeguards for democratic rights of people in general and women and children in particular, all this as part of the process of democratization of society, the extent and strength of which will only ensure that the ruling class does not have the chance of bringing the army back to power on the plea of political instability or any other flimsy grounds. At the same time, it will be a task for the Pakistani people also to force their government sever all deplorable ties with the imperialists and come out of their fold, with a view to enabling Pakistan to grow into a really independent sovereign state. Last, but not the least, people there must see that their government as well as the political parties do not make any kind of compromise with the religious fundamentalism, or parochialism to help them raise their

ugly head in peoples' life and activities. Obviously these can be accomplished only if there is a formidable, sustained and massive democratic movement of people throughout the country, forging iron-strong unity of working people of all sections of life, the vast peasantry, as well as the middle class and other sections of common toiling people, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, language and other differences. Along with this, we would like to point out that in this era of proletarian revolution, building up of such a protracted democratic movement resolutely directed to the desired goals of democratization, is sure to be hastened up if and when it develops under the leadership of a genuine revolutionary, working class party. Hence democratic-minded people of Pakistan must also see to it that the movement they strive to build up should create an ambience within their country, which must be conducive to ensuring the emergence and strengthening of the genuine revolutionary force in the Pakistan soil. With much hopes raised with the present change-over in Pakistan, democratic-minded people of the world will eagerly look ahead to the people of Pakistan continuing their struggle with a view to realizing these imminent tasks of theirs.

CPI(M) arrested Comrade Nanda Patra to break the morale of Nandigram people

While the Chief Minister of West Bengal and other top-ranking state leaders of CPI(M) claim that there has been a 'sunrise' in Nandigram, and there is no further need to keep the BUPC, the committee leading the peasants' movement there, active any more, while they ask the Nandigram people to forget the past, the inhuman ordeal they faced at the hands of the police and the CPI(M) goons, the Police of the CPI(M) led government arrested Comrade Nanda Patra, the Joint Secretary of the BUPC at the point of gun on 16 March 2008 and beat him up severely that required him to be hospitalized. How nakedly partisan was the police was evident from the fact that the charges of Comrade Patra being involved in an incident

of March 15 proved totally and palpably false since right at that time Comrade Patra had been in Calcutta, attending a programme of the Forum for Artistes, Cultural Activists and Intellectuals, where Medha Patkar, the well known social activist was handing over an amount of money to Comrade Patra, that Ms Patkar had collected for the Nandigram victims from all over India. Clearly, unnerved at the determination and resolve of the Nandigram people even after suffering inhuman torture, rape, killing throughout the year and unnerved also by the huge gathering of peasants there on March 14, on completion of a year of their sufferings, the CPI(M) leadership and the government led by it, decided to strike at the morale of the

peasants by arresting the leaders and organisers of their movement. Arrest of Comrade Patra, as also other leaders and activists of the BUPC during the recent days were meant for that.

The arrest however brought forth intense protest from all over the state. A platform of 74 mass organizations, including the Forum for Artistes, Cultural Activists and Intellectuals, formed for continuing the movement in the state, in support of Nandigram and other similar issues, protested the incident. A joint statement signed over by prominent personalities like Prof. Tarun Sanyal, Prof. Miratun Nahar, film director and artist Aparna Sen, drama personality Bibhas Chakraborty, artist Suvapasanna and others, demanded immediate release of

Comrade Patra. Medha Patkar, Prof. Sumit Sarkar, journalist Sumit Chakraborty and others raised the same demand from Delhi. Comrade Provas Ghosh, West Bengal State Secretary SUCI, demanded unconditional release of Comrade Patra. Mamata Banerjee, the Chairperson of Trinamul Congress expressed grave concern. And last, but not the least were, Nandigram people who rushed immediately after arrest in thousands to the Police station and demanded Comrade Patra to be admitted to the hospital and be released. There was a massive demonstration in protest in Calcutta on 17 March. In face of this irresistible pressure of fighting people, the government was compelled to release Comrade Nanda Patra on 17 March itself.

Black Day observed on 14 March

On completion of a year West Bengal recalled Nandigram carnage of 14 March 2007 amidst tears, condemnation and firm resolve, to continue the struggle against forcible acquisition of farm lands.

At the call of our party, the day was observed as Black Day throughout the state, offering floral tributes at the martyrs' columns erected in the memory of victims of genocide by the police and CPI(M) criminals. At 10.20 a.m. sharp, the exact time when the shooting had begun claiming lives of innocent unarmed farmers, homage was paid to them by observing one minute's silence.

At Nandigram itself, under the auspices of the BUPC (Bhumi Uchhed Protirodh Committee), thousands thronged at Bhangabera and Gokulnagar, the two spots which had witnessed the outset of the onslaughts. At Gokulnagar, among those who garlanded at the martyrs' column were the leaders of the BUPC Swadesh Das, Swadesh Das Adhikari, Sheikh Sufian, Abu Taher, Bhabani Prosad Das and members of families of the victims. Others paying homage to the martyrs were eminent social activist Medha Patkar, TMC leader Mamata Banerjee, SUCI leaders including Central Committee member and West Bengal State Secretary Comrade Pravash Ghosh, Central Staff Comrade Ranjit Dhar and member of the State Secretariat Comrade Soumen Bose, Jamayat-e-Ulema-e-Hind leader Siddiqullah Chowdhury, TMC district President Sisir Adhikari, MLA, South Contai and BUPC adviser Subhendu Adhikari and many others.

In her address to the gathering, Medha Patkar said the unity that had been forged out of the struggle at Nandigram should not be disrupted and united struggle should be continued. Mamata Banerjee demanded if the government fails to mete out justice it should step down from power.

Comrade Pravash Ghosh pointed out that people should know that the CPI(M) has pledged itself to implement all schemes designed by the national monopolists and foreign multinationals in the interest of capitalism-imperialism and would not allow movements to develop, since it has been guaranteed a safe stay in power by them. It is through

mass movements alone can such sinister plans be crushed and Nandigram movement has created a unique precedence in this respect. He also urged that the unity in movement should be protected at any cost.

At Bhangabera, one of the joint secretaries of the BUPC Comrade Nanda Patra along with Saiyam Kaji, and Midnapore District Secretary of SUCI Comrade Manab Bera and mothers of the martyrs offered garlands to the departed souls.

A central gathering was organised at Sonachura with two massive rallies converging from Bhangabera and Gokulnagar. Remarkable to note was that nearly half the mass of 25/30 thousand participants comprised women. As announced by Subhendu Adhikari, Comrade Pravash Ghosh, as the main speaker, hailed the valiant martyrs of Nandigram with the struggling masses, including the womenfolk, mothers and sisters of Nandigram and observed that their struggle would be always remembered with veneration not only in India, but throughout the world. The movement of Nandigram has been acting as an inspiration for subsequent movements to resist imperialist aggression, Chemical Hub and SEZ. This movement has at the same time, placed the CPI(M) at par with the Congress and BJP – since all of them enact the same sort of role in unleashing attacks on mass movements. Comrade Ghosh called upon the people to join the united movement which has been decided upon between the SUCI and the TMC, out of the historical necessity of giving defeat to such vicious forces.

In Calcutta, Black Day was observed by the District Committee with Comrade Manik Mukherjee, Calcutta District Secretary offering garland at the martyr's column and a minute's silence being observed, the venue being the historical Subodh Mallick Square. Similar observations were held at different street junctions and in different localities with clubs, mass organizations and distinguished individuals participating amidst public enthusiasm.

Also, Forum for Artistes, Cultural Activists and Intellectuals had its own programme of paying



Comrade Pravash Ghosh addressing at Nandigram on 14 March, 2008, while Ms Mamata Banerjee and other leaders are seen on the dais.

homage to the victims of state-engineered violence at Nandigram. A three day long programme was held between 14th and 16th March, including a massive rally on 16th March. All three days were marked by the presence and participation of leading intellectuals social-cultural activists and distinguished personalities including Medha

Patkar, Mamata Banerjee, Prof. Tarun Sanyal and others. Speeches of homage, emotional rendition of songs and dramas dedicated to the martyrs of Nandigram movement were attended by thousands of people from all walks of life sharing moments of sorrow and resolve to keep up the spirit of protest and struggle.

International Women's Day observed by AIMSS, West Bengal at Nandigram

This year, West Bengal State Committee, AIMSS observed International Women's Day through paying tributes to the victims of state engineered fascistic onslaught

acquisition of their hearth and home and land.

On this occasion a massive rally of women from all the 19 districts of West Bengal was organised at



Comrade Chhaya Mukherjee, President, AIMSS, addressing at Nandigram on 8th March

and gang rape by the CPI(M) front government police and CPI(M) hired goons perpetrated upon the farmers of Nandigram including the women folk who led a heroic and historic instance of indomitability of spirit and firmness of resolution in their fight under the leadership of Bhumi Uchhed Protirodh Committee (BUPC) against forcible

Mahespur ground, Nandigram which was chaired by Comrade Sadhana Choudhury, President, West Bengal State Committee, AIMSS. Floral tributes were paid at the martyrs column erected in memory of the victims of violence at Nandigram.

Comrade Krishna Sen, Treasurer, AIMSS and member, West Bengal State Committee handed over 50,000/- collected from the people of West Bengal to the BUPC leadership. Comrade Chhaya Mukherjee, President, AIMSS, addressed the gathering as the main speaker.

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