

## Intellectual Suppression : India and the Third World

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**Political activities have suffered in all countries but repression of intellectuals has been particularly acute in the Third World in the post-independence period, since 1945. As the repression is directly an outcome of emerging new ruling forces—one party governments, military-industrial oligarchies and dynastic dictatorships—in predominantly feudal societies, it has been rather difficult for scientists and social scientists in India and other Third World nations to pay serious attention to the question of “intellectual repression” peculiar to political dynamics of the emerging states. These intellectual workers, even when critical of political systems and foreign intervention, have remained discreetly silent on the issues of intellectual freedom perhaps because in India and the Third World, no non-governmental resources available to the academics and the powers of reward and punishment in the hands of ruling elites have increased to unprecedented levels.**

Historically the individuals who have received formal education and acquired scientific knowledge have played important role in intellectual activities. The democratisation of knowledge is, therefore, essential for progressive social change in which the intellectuals are directly involved. But ruling elites and industrial vested interests inhibit the social change by supporting the status quo. They try to hold back the sources of information and keep the masses away from the scientific knowledge. It is due to this factor, that a forward looking society must first grant its members formal rights to know and ‘freedom of expression’.

In the earlier times when priests and kings were the sole arbiters of life and possession, they monopolised the right to acquisition interpretation and dissemination of knowledge. But in our times, knowledge and information technology must not be conceived as the property of select groups, nations or individuals. The question of intellectual freedom in India and other Third World states is directly linked with the question of dissemination and democratisation of knowledge. Today, only the rich and the politically powerful have the means of funding and controlling sources of information. Over the years, ordinary people thus have been denied their fundamental right to unfettered knowledge.

As we are approaching the end of the 20th Century, we are rudely reminded of repression of human dignity in India, Pakistan and other Third World states, where the power system has systematically crippled the masses in a manner that they have neither knowledge nor the power to demand their civil and constitutional rights.<sup>1</sup>

In 1986, the Supreme Court of India observed :

Nothing is more cowardly and unconscionable than a person in police custody being beaten up, and nothing inflicts a deeper wound on our constitutional culture than a state official running berserk regardless of human rights. Who will police the police ?

We are disturbed by the diabolical recurrence of police torture, resulting in a terrible scare in the minds of common citizens that their lives and liberty are under peril when the guardians of law gore human rights to death.

### **The Democratic Paradox of The Third World**

The paradox of the Third World is that through parliamentary system we have elected feudal-like lords to preside over our destiny. The messiahs of freedom of yesteryears have become usurpers of political powers and privileges. The trust the people gave to their 'nation builders' enabled them to subvert the very democratic institution which brought them to power. The rulers in most Third World states perpetuate repression and subjugation of their own people.

Nayantara Sahgal, a noted writer, once observed :

Labels often outlast their original meaning. The Third World so defined itself in order to remain an area of peace, non-aligned with reference to power blocks and the position is not as clear today. Political alignments bedevil it, wars have agitated its countries more than those of the aligned and no common approach to domestic politics binds them, unless it is the belief held by much of the Third World that its people are not ready to run their own affairs and must remain under military or other authoritarian tutelage .....

Ruling oligarchies have thus relegated their own people to an inferior, third-rate status, and arrogated to themselves an assumption of superiority matched only by the Empire in its heyday...

Third World representatives, who pour their wrathful eloquence against the sins of imperialism on to the floor of the United Nations and other assemblies, lose no sleep over forms of imperial rule, be it benevolent or be brute force, at home. It is not representative governments but dominating cliques that shape their people's future at international negotiating tables, and they cannot be challenged because in a burgeoning body of international laws there is no law that says : Thou shalt not hold thy own people in bondage.<sup>2</sup>

Take, for example, the case of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran and Pakistan. Admittedly there are many fine philosophical principles in the teachings of

Prophet Mohammed. But to force the Koranic rules upon the citizens of contemporary nations whose social aspirations belong to a different technological epoch, simply lead to de-humanization of culture. In these and other Islamic states, intellectual freedom has been denied and free debates and discussions have been suppressed ruthlessly and often inhumanely. Normal academic freedom and open public debates have been totally denied to the people of Islamic states under the orders of their own rulers and in the holy name of Islamic Shariat.

### **Professor Hassan Zafar Arif : A Concerned Philosopher Jailed in Pakistan**

Professor Hassan Zafar Arif of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Karachi, and President of the Karachi University Teachers' Society (KUTS), was arrested on 21 October, 1984. He was held under detention in Karachi Central Jail by the martial law authorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Prof. Arif is a Concerned Philosopher for Social Action and is a member of editorial advisory board of Philosophy & Social Action. It is learnt from reliable sources that Hassan Zafar has been detained in a class 'C' prison cell meant for common criminals. He was locked up from 6 PM to 6 AM in extremely unhygienic and inhospitable conditions without proper sanitation facilities.

According to the 'Show Cause' notice delivered to Dr. Arif on 26 September, 1984, he had 'indulged and to be indulging in 'agitational activities' which have or are likely to impair the normal functioning and efficiency of the university. But it is strange that according to the Governor and Martial Law Administrator of Sind Province, Lieutenant General Jehandad Khan, Dr. Arif was alleged to have 'agitated' in ten areas which included "taking part in politics and political activities, despite the prohibition for employees of the university, advocating activities that may be subversive to law and order; inciting students to oppose Islamic ways and imparting to students and others a pro-communist orientation." Prof. Arif in his reply had counter-charged the Pakistan authorities of "suppression of all classes and sections of population, labour, students, lawyers, teachers, doctors, journalists and women, and generally unscrupulous treatment of all dissent." This reply to the 'show cause' notice was dated 8 October, 1984, and Dr. Arif was arrested on 21 October, 1984. Dr. Arif, in his 40s, has taught at the University of Karachi since the mid 1970s when having obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Reading in the U.K. he returned to Pakistan. Although one of the founder members of the Teachers' Society at the university, he belongs to no political party but has been outspoken in his criticism of the martial law government of Pakistan. Amnesty International believes he has been arrested; because of his peaceful but forceful active opposition to Islamic military dictatorship. The martial law authorities in Pakistan have destroyed all academic freedom and political dissent in the higher educational institutions. A couple of

years ago three university teachers were arrested from the Qaid-i-Azam University, and many other university teachers have received 'show cause' notices. Many professors have been dismissed, arrested or have run away to the western countries. The KUTS expressed its solidarity with all the intellectuals who have faced repression and have demanded the immediate release of Dr. Arif and the others detained in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan<sup>3</sup>.

### **Suppression in Nepal:**

The Nepalese royal regime "has persistently violated the human rights of its citizens through political imprisonment and torture" reported Amnesty International in November 1987. It cited cases of teachers, journalists, trade unionists and students 'jailed solely for non-violently exercising their right to freedom of expression and association'. Though the Nepalese Kingdom solicits rich Christian tourists from advanced countries by offering commercial and consummate comforts including casinos, the Christian community has been persecuted under its stringent religious laws which state that 'no person shall propagate Christianity, Islam or any other faith... to disrupt the traditional religion of the Hindu (majority) community.....'. Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Italian (Catholic) wife Sonia was not allowed to enter Nepal's famous Pashupati Nath temple during their official visit to Nepal.

The list of cases of repression in Nepal include the arrest of Mr. Sita Ram Maskey, a member of the Nepal National Teachers' Association, in April 1987, for organising a boycott of the sale of milk powder received from European Economic Community, feared contaminated by radiation from Chernobyl nuclear disaster. He is still in detention without trial (November 1987).

Mr. Keshav Raj Pindali, a 70-year old editor, and Mr. Rup Chand Bista, a member of Parliament, were charged under the treason laws for a poem deemed critical of the King. The number of political prisoners in Nepal, according to Amnesty International, fluctuated but is believed to be at least 100 at any time and 'many of them are prisoners of conscience.' The report confirms that torture is routinely used to extract confessions from criminal suspects, and sometimes also from political prisoners. Mr. Sarbottam Dangol, another teacher, was arrested in May 1985, and detained for two years without charge or trial, including two months' incommunicado detention. He was hung upsidedown and beaten and left injured in a cell for four days. His leg was broken and had to be put in plaster but the authorities refused to let him be admitted to hospital although recommended to do so by doctors. Eventually he was released in early 1987.

### **Suppression in Kenya :**

The tragic dilemma is that Third World rulers themselves seek external assistance of the white nations to repress their own (black) citizens. As the former Vice-President of Kenya, Mr. Oginga Odinga now imprisoned for "treason", has rightly said, "through secret negotiations

between the ruling circles" the United States is actively promoting "economic, political and social imperialism" in Africa and the Third World. Mr. Odinga represents the aspirations of the whole people of the Third World in demanding "the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from Kenya and a halt in the installation of American military bases in Mombasa.

The intervention of the foreign troops supports forces of the status quo. And as it happened in Chile, Vietnam and Afghanistan, external intervention directly increases the repression against the popular and democratic aspirations of the people.

In most Third World countries, scientists, writers, poets, university teachers, editors of magazines and newspapers are arrested, imprisoned, expelled, transferred, demoted and harassed in many ways for taking up critical position vis-a-vis government public policies, especially if the criticism is directed at political repression and science and defence policies.

#### **Professor Maina-wa-Kinyatti Jailed in Kenya for Possessing "Seditious" Publication**

On October 18, 1982, Professor Maina-wa-Kinyatti, an authority on contemporary history of East African people and a member of the Advisory Editorial Board of PSA, was sentenced for six years for possessing a "seditious" revolutionary publication.

Immediately Professor Maina was led out of the court handcuffed to begin his long sentence, a group of women, some sobbing, were reported to be raising slogans : Maina Juu ! Maina Juu ! Long live Maina, Long live the Pambana. Chief magistrate Abdul Rauf, in his judgement, said that he found Maina guilty of possessing a document headed "Moi's Divisive Tactics Exposed", contrary to section 57 (2) of the Penal Code of Kenya. The learned Magistrate also observed that a student of political science who had recently appeared before him had lifted the theme, "if not the actual sentences from the judgement in a criminal case against another writer Mr. Wangonde-wa-Kariuki who had also been charged in the same court with possessing the seditious publication. The Chief Magistrate said the principal constituents of the charge were that the accused had possessed the document without lawful excuse and that the document was seditious.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1982, the Moi Government in Kenya has unleashed a rain of terror and hundreds of students and political opponents have been imprisoned. Mr. Wachira Waruru, a son of a former Nyeri M.P., and a third-year literature student, was arrested from the offices of *The Nairobi Times*, where he was working as a reporter. He was among 14 university students separately charged with taking part in a demonstration intended to incite "disaffection against the Government" of President Moi. There are now more than 100 students of Kenyatta University College charged with sedition. All educational institutions and the universities were closed for an indefinite period. More than 300 Air Force members have been sentenced to 5 to 20 years imprisonment. Most of the officers were in their early twenties.<sup>5</sup> In November 1987, once

again, the University of Nairobi has been closed for an indefinite period.

### **The Role of the Heretics**

Today's political systems require loyalty of the intellectual for 'war systems' which have emerged from research and developmental activities of big sciences and high technology. The destructive capability acquired through scientific progress is directed to upgrade the capability of political power. The scientists and academics are selected to support and to sustain anti-people and anti-life scientific and political systems as a price to their national honour and social privileges.

The problem of intellectual freedom belongs to the question of 'fundamental rights'. Dissemination of knowledge and examination of various theories, scientific or political, require that those who are engaged in such professions must be free to investigate without fear or favour. They must be free to travel to gather their data and have freedom to publish their findings without censorship. They must be free from fear of retribution in consequence of their conclusions that may not be in agreement with the powers of the day.<sup>6</sup>

Bertrand Russell said that if a community had to make progress "it needs exceptional individuals whose activities, though useful, are not of a sort that ought to be general." Heretics are precursors of meaningful change and progress in society. It is the heretics who become instrument of liberation of knowledge from the grips of the believers. The heretics are therefore regarded as "troublemakers" and as a rule are detested by all state powers and established orders. How to deal with the heretics ?

St. Thomas Aquinas (1250 A.D.) suggested a no-nonsense way of handling the infidel :

With regard to heretics... There is the sin, whereby they deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be shut off from the world by death. For it is a much more serious matter to corrupt faith, through which temporal life is supported. Hence if forgers of money or other malefactors are straightway justly put to death by secular princes, with much more justice can heretics, immediately upon conviction, be not only excommunicated but also put to death.

Between the heretics of St. Thomas and the Sakharovs of our times the fundamental problem of intellectual freedom remains the same despite the fact that they are separated in time by about 800 years. Some quantitative change has, however, appeared in the method of "shutting" off the heretics. Science and technological innovations have now provided small groups of state executives with enormous power to repress intellectual dissent. Under the prevailing forces of religious fundamentalism, tribal loyalties, narrow nationalism and ideological fanaticism, the application of science and technology has made oppression more effective, even if now there are human rights demands which have provided some respite. The ruling elites in the Third World, however, give little credibility to civil rights movements.

On 4 September, 1987, in a village of Rajasthan, just about 300 kms away from New Delhi, a young woman named Roop Kunwar, age 18, married only for eight months, was burned alive with the dead body of her husband, age 24, with full social and religious sanctity. On the 13th day after this incident, another ceremony was held to commemorate the incident as a great event of spiritual significance when about half-a-million people gathered with offerings to honour the goddess "sati" (Suttee) and glorify the medieval Hindu custom banned in the country a hundred years ago. The act was most uncivil and barbaric but no political party in India condemned the incident, except the Left-progressive parties. No Hindu religious leader opposed it and the Prime Minister of India (Mr. Rajiv Gandhi) took no immediate governmental action to stop the madness perpetrated in the name of Hindu faith. No-one wanted to invite the wrath of the majority voters who belonged to Hindu community. The country's academicians, as a community, expressed no public indignation against the crime. In such a milieu the heretics can play an indispensable role of questioning the established systems and procedures, and criticising institutional norms and social practices. The role of the heretics, thus, has enormous scope and potential, particularly in India and other Third World nations where the level of education is very low and traditional myths and ignorance still command a strong hold on the minds of the populace.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Truth Wins - Not Always**

As a rule all governments fabricate truth. The dictum that "truth always triumphs" is one of those pleasant fantasies which men repeat after one another till they become common parlance. But historical experiences do not support such assumption. Truth if not suppressed forever, it can be thrown back for centuries. As truth per se it has no inherent quality that can survive the advanced technological methods of suppressions, or 'disinformation'. But sustaining the truth all through the periods of suppressions which can last for years and centuries, is the historical task of the heretics or the creative intellectuals.

The tolerance a society or state may award to its heretics is the measure of its strength and self-confidence. The Soviet leader Gorbachev demonstrated strength and self-confidence when he restored freedom and honour to Sakharov. But the hundreds and thousands of intellectuals imprisoned in Latin America, Africa and in Asian prisons, in Turkey, Iran, India and Pakistan are evidently indicative of weakness of these governments and their political rulers. The Western powers have yet to fulfill their promise of freedom for Nelson Mandela who has been imprisoned for the last 23 years in South Africa. There is another intellectual who has been in jail for more than twenty years in Singapore : Mr. Chia Thye Poh, a University professor and editor of *Barisan Socialis*. Since 1966 he has been imprisoned without trial. Several hundreds are behind bars also in South and North Korea.<sup>8</sup>

There is no dearth of court-intellectuals and academic sycophants in any society. A big army of self-seekers is always ready to serve political

masters of any colour so long as they can be provided with big research grants, high promotions and undeserved positions. Most academics lack the courage and conviction, to oppose social injustice and political corruption prevailing in the Third World. They fail to hold sanctity of constitutions at the bidding of political rulers who control the financial resources of the state. In comparison to Western scholars, Third World intellectuals have suffered the worst because there are no non-governmental funds available to independent scholars. In India, for example, 90 per cent of research funds and educational institutions are under direct control of the government. The ruling elite over the years since independence has overawed the intellectuals. The heretics have been weeded out of all decision-making bodies. In a country of job scarcity it was made impossible for a dissenting scholar to secure a decent job. The Indian Council of Social Sciences Research and the Indian Science establishments have not encouraged research critical of the governmental policies and performance. Political patronage has thus destroyed the creative vitality of their intellectuals. Those who dared to dissent or criticise the policies of the ruling family of Jawaharlal Nehru, were sent into oblivion. No Indian scientist has, therefore, felt free to criticise, say, militarisation of the country's scientific research, wasteful expenditure on secret nuclear activities, or imbalances in the planning and performance of science policy. But those who publically hail the dynastic successions and perceive the divinity and destiny of India in dynastic rule are honoured as the champion of scientific advancement and honoured with awards by the government. What is expected of academic scholars is not critical assessment but unquestioned loyalty in a feudal manner towards the political elite.<sup>9</sup> In India, for example, even some Marxist academics have secured government patronage by remaining publically uncritical of the Nehru dynasty.

In due course the academic community responded to political overtures and helped the false glorification of petty political ambitions. In such a climate of repression, and rewards, the directors of national scientific institutions and advanced studies, the Vice-Chancellors of Universities and chairpersons of Atomic Energy Commission and University Grants Commission behave as loyal servants to political rulers. They do not act as autonomous, critical and creative intellectuals or educators of the society.

### **Conclusion :**

Disagreement and dissent are cardinal to academic activity and social progress. If intellectuals are harassed and arrested on the charges of "unhealthy politicization", as is the case with most Third World states, people of the developing countries will suffer long range set-back: Progress in social and political fields will become, by necessity, violent and destructive.

In the pursuit of truth we are intrinsically related to a vast canvas of human history and civilization. In order to be able to protect intellectual freedom and resist various types of political coercion we must reinforce in the academics intellectual courage, love of liberty and a sense of justice.



Such a code of behaviour grows best from an inner commitment to the welfare of the people.

About 2,300 years ago the Greek philosopher Democritus declared:

Poverty in a Democracy is as much to be preferred to what is called prosperity under despots, as freedom is to slavery.

But those academics who seek patronage of the dynastic despots and dictators in India and other Third World states, may find solace in the fact that Plato when defending oligarchy in *The Republic* had ordered burning of the writings of Democritus. □

### REFERENCES :

1. This paper is based on personal experience and involvement of the author with civil rights issues and problems of intellectual freedom in the U.S. and in India and on the detailed study of investigative reports published by Civil Rights Commissions, the People's Union of Democratic Rights (India), and by Amnesty International.
2. Nayantara Sahgal, "The World that rates itself Third", in *INDIAN EXPRESS*, Monday, 11 October, 1982.
3. See *PHILOSOPHY & SOCIAL ACTION (PSA)*, XI (1) 1985, p. 3 f.
4. See the editorial "Repression in the Third World", and "Political Unrest in Kenya", in *PSA*, IX (1) 1983.
5. For details, See *PSA*, VIII (4) 1982, "Document-2", p. 59.
6. See Dhirendra Sharma, "Decision-making in Science Policy" (in India), *SCIENCE TODAY*, July 1982.
7. See the editorial "Barbarous and primitive", *INDIAN EXPRESS*, September 14, 1987. Also a background report on the Sati burning in *THE TIMES OF INDIA*, September 22, 1987.
8. *PSA*, XII (4), 1986, 'Document—4', p. 62 on '20 Years' Detention Without Charge and Trial'. Also See, Ivan Fera, "Wait Until Dark", reproduced from *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, in *PSA*, XII (4) 1986, pp. 55ff. where the arrest and detention of Dr. K. Balagopal, general Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, in 1985 under the Anti-Terrorist Act, is detailed.
9. Perhaps the most infamous example is of a former Science Secretary of Government of India, who presided over almost all top scientific and high technological institutions in the country, and was the Principal Scientific Adviser to the dynastic Prime Ministers. His loyalty to the ruling family remained unwavering even in the dark days of Emergency. But for his loyalty he was given many improperly constituted rich awards. For the details of the latest case of such an award given, see, "Controversy over award resolved", *INDIAN EXPRESS*, October 13, 1987.

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### STRENGTH OF AN IDEA

NO ARMY CAN WITHSTAND THE STRENGTH OF AN IDEA  
WHOSE TIME HAS COME.

VICTOR HUGO

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