

# **Crisis in Culture, and Fascism**

*Cultural decadence, which is part of the general affliction of the world capitalist system, signifies its presence not only in the stench of depravity but in a neo-fascist mould as well. There is the greater danger. In this article Comrade Shibdas Ghosh traces out its roots, reveals its facades, points to fascism and existentialism as humanism's two opposite expressions in this era of moribund capitalism. He sheds clear light on how to grow, tend and strengthen proletarian cultural movement in order to stem the rot and fight the looming menace.*

The progressive and revolutionary cultural movement in our country is now facing a dual problem. On the one hand, the bourgeoisie with a view to perpetuating the capitalistic order are inculcating various 'theories of belief' opposed to scientific and rational thinking, and in the name of national freedom, national unity and national tradition, they are trying to permeate the mass-mind by propagating spiritualism, supernaturalism and similar revivalist doctrines; on the other hand, since the introduction of parliamentary democracy in our country a large section of the cadres of progressive cultural movement is being increasingly influenced by scepticism, indeterminism, fatalism, logical positivism and various other bourgeois ideologies in disguise, so much so that even a section of the people who call themselves Marxists is unknowingly falling victim to individualism and existentialism. So, the crisis in the field of ideological struggle is becoming more acute. In order to free the progressive cultural movement from the above crisis, it is necessary to correctly determine the character and content of the progressive culture in the context of the prevailing social and economic conditions.

To fulfil this difficult task, the cadres of the progressive and revolutionary cultural movement should first decide on the correct method of ascertaining truth. What should be their guiding philosophical outlook for the correct analysis of different phenomena – dialectical materialism or some idealistic philosophy? If it is agreed that as for the best way to arrive at truth, we should rely not on the personal realizations or beliefs of an individual, however great he may be, but on historical analysis and knowledge stemming from scientific experiments and experience derived from the objective world, then it has been proved beyond all doubt that dialectical materialism

alone has, for the first time, emerged as the only scientific tool in the hands of mankind with the help of which it is possible to make the correct scientific analysis of all phenomena.

The workers in the field of progressive cultural movement should always keep in mind that *the spiritual world of mankind has come into being, has developed and is continuing to develop through interactions between opposite forces within society and the incessant struggle of the whole human society with nature. Culture is nothing but the finest and most comprehensive manifestations of spiritual functions of man.* Art, literature, poetry, etc., are medium of propagation of this culture and it should not be forgotten even for a moment *that art and literature and such like are superstructure built on a definite economic basis of society.*

Every human is directly or indirectly connected with production and, therefore, the relation between individuals in the society is primarily production relation. In other words, man first entered into social relationship with one another out of the necessity for production involving continuous, new creation.

Whether we like it or not since our society is still class-divided – thought, idea and concept of every individual is bound to be linked up with this or that class-interest. In a class-divided society there cannot be any thinking, idea or conception independent of class. Any concept of culture independent of class is not only unrealistic and born of ignorance, but is also ill-conceived. A little scrutiny will reveal that those protagonists of culture who talk of culture irrespective of its temporal bearing and independent of its class basis are unknowingly translating into idea the class-thinking and class-philosophy serving the interests of a particular class in the form of the creative medium of art, literature and poetry. They may have this little consolation that they have not done so consciously, but they cannot at all claim that the culture they portray is independent of class basis, since idea or individual thinking is the personification of social thinking through an individual. In a class-divided society this social thinking represents nothing but the mutually conflicting class thinkings, class ideas and class conceptions. Under the circumstances, whether we like it or not, there is no logical ground to deny that every man, willingly or unwillingly, is bound to connect himself with the interests of one or the other of the classes existing in the society.

So, when there is no other alternative than to reflect, may be unknowingly, the class thinking and class-interest of any particular class through art, literature, etc., then in that case every person in the cultural sphere has the duty to ascertain what particular class interest must he serve

for promoting social progress and consciously reflecting the thinking, idea and interest of that particular class through art, literature, philosophy, etc. – of course, if he wants to reckon himself as honest and progressive.

While conducting the cultural movement, we should not forget for a moment that our society is also class-divided. On one side of it there exists the bourgeois class and defenders of political, economic and social order of the capitalist society, and on the other, the vast multitude of exploited people under the leadership of the working class. The interests of the bourgeois class and the working class stand antagonistic to each other. It is impossible to fulfill the interest of one class with the ideas, thinking and philosophy of the other. Thus, as the classes are struggling with each other in the political and economic field, similarly in the field of cultural movement also the thinking, ideas and values of one class are in perpetual struggle with those of the other class. We call that culture bourgeois or reactionary which upholds directly or indirectly the bourgeois class thinking, ideology and values as ideal and which actually helps to create the mental make-up in favour of the present parliamentary system. And we term that as proletarian or progressive culture through the activities of which attempts are being made to give shape to the new values, aspirations, thinking and philosophy of the working class and other exploited masses. Although the bourgeois culture has an edge over the proletarian culture in terms of its means of propagation and dissemination, the state power being in the hands of the bourgeoisie, but still, inasmuch as the proletarian culture is nobler, more progressive and more revolutionary than the bourgeois culture and has a universal appeal of social progress associated with it, it is not at all difficult to influence the life of the common people under oppression of the present exploiting social system with the force of progressive proletarian culture, provided we can conduct the revolutionary proletarian cultural movement in the right way. Unfortunately, when state monopoly capitalism is developing in our country at present and symptoms of fascism are becoming more and more pronounced in the state structure as well as in the economic field and even increasingly extending its influence over cultural movements, the big political parties which are known as leftist, socialist and even communist, and along with them most of the cadres of the progressive cultural movement, are turning a blind eye to these phenomena. Being enamoured of an imaginary hypothesis that ‘fascism cannot at all develop in an underdeveloped country like ours,’ on the plea of prevalence of the parliamentary democratic system and relative backwardness of Indian capitalism, they not only overlook these phenomena, but also actually

assist, without noticing it, in spreading the influence of the fascist outlook by trumpeting the slogans of national unity, national tradition, mechanical discipline and pacifism. Most of them lack the historical and scientific understanding of the real character of fascism which to them only means a barefaced dictatorship. They are unable to conceive that fascism can be established fully even under the cloak of parliamentary democracy. Otherwise they could easily comprehend that though the fascist states were defeated in the Second World War fascism is far from being dead and gone even today. As the inevitable result of the creation of a socialist market parallel to the world capitalist market, fascism has now-a-days become a characteristic feature of every capitalist state.

As National Socialism had developed in Germany through a social democratic economic planning, so also the present propagandists of Gandhism are engaged in building up a socialistic pattern of society in India through a social democratic economic planning, on the same line as of the attempts of the fascist economist Conze, “to introduce socialist planning with the consent of the big business.” The principal motive behind all these plans is to remove the relative backwardness of Indian capitalism obtaining now, to expand the productive forces so that it can compete in the world market. If the so-called progressive leftist parties had a proper understanding of fascism it would not have been difficult for them to realize that under suitable conditions, at any time, full-fledged fascism could rapidly develop from this type of social democratic planning.

Fascist culture conducive to the fascist economic structure developed in Germany also. In our country, in spite of the constant canting of democracy, signs of fascism are becoming more and more manifest in the state-structure and in the economic life. And even in the bourgeois culture of our country their reflections are assuming more and more naked forms day by day as a historical inevitability. On one side, it is loudly proclaimed that ‘India is a secular state’ and, on the other, the statesmen and the political leaders are patronizing directly or indirectly, all sorts of religious functions and customs, and in support of their behaviour, they are giving a novel interpretation of secularism. According to them, a secular state is one which is not based on any one particular religion, but provides equal encouragement and full support to flourish of all religions. What a peculiar interpretation! Every student of history and social science knows that the word secularism means; worldly and non-recognition of any supernatural entity.

Since the introduction of bourgeois democratic system in our country, cultivation of spiritualism and supernaturalism in various forms has been in full swing in all quarters. Every one has surely observed the increase and extensiveness of community worships, religious processions, religious meetings and discussions on the occasions of birth and death anniversaries of the Prophets. Though in the name of humanism and democratic reforms, the Hindu Code Bill, the Widow Marriage Bill, etc., have been enacted, yet at the same time knowing full well that the ancient times cannot be brought back, the old ideas of chastity and Hindu womanhood are being upheld as true ideals and support is being mustered around it. Where lies the difference between this call of becoming a superstitious “*ideal housewife*” and Hitler’s “*Go back to the kitchen and be a good mother?*” These attempts for combining religion with politics, while paying lip service to socialism, are helping the dissemination of spiritual beliefs and various supernatural ideas opposed to rationalism. Today the initiators of most of the religious festivals are no longer the priests and the clergy but the so-called political leaders of our country. And most surprisingly, not only the Congress leaders are taking initiative in linking such religious festivals with politics but also the so-called leftist and communist leaders are moving adrift in the mainstream by adopting this policy as a popular means.

On the one hand, because of the objective necessity for the growth of productive forces and military might of the capitalist society, the technological aspects of science are being cultivated, and, on the other hand, in the various fields of thoughts and ideas, supernaturalism, theism, dualism and various other idealistic philosophies opposed to rationalism and based on the ‘theory of belief’ are being fostered. The simultaneous application of science in the technological development and cultivation of spiritualism in every field of human thought, such as art, literature and values, etc., definitely carry indication of the growth of all-out fascism in our country. In my opinion, “*in the fields of philosophy and culture, fascism is a peculiar fusion of modern science and spiritualism.*”<sup>1</sup>

It has become the main characteristic feature of the neo-fascist culture in our country to go on spreading all bourgeois and petit-bourgeois evil ideas, like the theory of absolutism about the nature of the state, the principle of class-collaboration and cooperation between mutually conflicting classes instead of class struggle, virtual denial of the proletarian internationalism in the name of universal humanism, propagation of national chauvinism and above all cult of revivalism on the plea of national tradition. As they are fully aware of the dictum that “*the more*

*the blindness, the more the fanaticism*”, the bourgeoisie are trying their utmost through the cultural movements to build up the sense of blind submission and discipline in the name of restraint, peace and order.

Without these, the development of all-out fascism is impossible in any country. This is because blind obedience, sense of mechanical discipline and prejudices of all sorts are the foundation of fascism. In our country, the desire and mentality for free discussions, debates and exchange of views are fast disappearing from all walks of national life. In all controversial issues — either a boastful arrogance and big-power chauvinism or the same old theory of belief is being harped on. The leaders and the rank and file of the left political parties, especially of the big left parties, are also displaying notable lack of philosophical tolerance. The attitude for a patient appraisal of opposite views and criticisms is almost disappearing.

Blind party fanaticism and dogmatism are increasing day by day. It also appears that many of them do not even feel any prick of conscience in making continuous slanders and fabricating fanciful stories in order to vilify opponent parties. All these acts only remind us of Goebbels and Mussolini. They are perhaps not aware of the fact, that it is these attitudes which help in spreading fascist mental make-up in every field of national life.

The bourgeois humanist values, which helped to free the political and cultural workers from within the dark confines of the old environment in the era of anti-feudal, anti-imperialist national liberation struggle and which governed their ethical and moral outlook during the period of nationalist movement, have turned into a privilege for the exploiting class in the changed situation, that is, after the capture of power by the bourgeoisie and establishment of bourgeois rule in India.

In the specific situation obtaining now these humanist ideas, principles and values are encouraging the development of the fascistic psychological make-up in the national life. Though this may sound strange to many, I request the students of history and social science to try to understand the fact that in this specific situation of the twentieth century, fascism and Sartre’s existentialism are two particular and opposite expressions of the same humanism. Naturally, the humanist values in this age are completely unable to promote social progress and revolutionize the mental framework of the society, as in the past. But the new ethical and moral values based on the communist ideology, which are conducive to the requirements of this age, have not developed and spread out sufficiently in the social life as yet. This results chiefly from the

weakness in the communist ideological movement. Under these circumstances, the vacuum which has been created in the field of morality and values in our society is the main cause for the present-day crisis in culture.

*The essence of all religion is blind faith in personified or abstract supernatural forces exercising control over worldly things and events.* Since scientific reasoning strikes at the root of this blind faith, the bourgeoisie in our country like everywhere else have lost their past progressive role and have turned themselves into protagonists of spiritualism today.

The exploiters and the ruling class always conspire to dupe people with the opium of religion in order to prevent them from correctly diagnosing the cause of their present exploitation and becoming conscious of the laws of development and social progress. So, the fascists also have no other alternative than to preach spiritualism for keeping this blind faith in religion alive. *“Doctrine beautifully defined and carefully elucidated with headlines and paragraphs might be lacking but something was to take its place, something more decisive – Faith”* – which tone was reflected in these words of Mussolini is, in the main, also being echoed by the bourgeois leaders and cultural protagonists of our country. In India, Gandhism developed also on the basis of the ‘theory of belief’ and so spiritualism is the philosophical base of it too. And it is Gandhism which is the main prop of the fascist culture in India. Since it is not possible to go into a detailed analysis of Gandhism I am only quoting from one of my previous articles written long ago on Gandhism. *“Gandhism is a sublimatic transformation of bourgeois class instinct originated through the process of fusion between the sense of bourgeois humanist moral values and anti-working class fear-complex of revolution of Gandhiji.”*<sup>2</sup> In spite of its good intention in much, Gandhism has bitterly opposed and is even now opposing the revolutionary movement and class struggle by preaching prejudices, blind faith and ideas of class collaboration. It is being used as the main weapon in the sphere of ideological struggle, virtually in order to strengthen further the capitalist state and its economic system. The rule of the Gandhian Congress government has glaringly revealed how this philosophy of ‘belief’ upholding non-violence and humanism, with gain of adequate strength is transformed into a cult of violence to gag the voice of opposition and to preserve bourgeois class interests. In our country it is Gandhism which is the pillar of this neo-fascist culture. In this way, on the one hand, the influence of reactionary bourgeois culture is gaining ground in all spheres of national life, and, on the other, the progressive cultural movement is in a mess, being trapped by such various liberal bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ideas

like “*true democracy*”, “*national democracy*”, “*people’s democracy*”, etc., and is not able to come out by any means on the correct path. When the fascist culture is rapidly growing in order to preserve and strengthen the existing system of the exploiting class, it is impossible to build up the progressive revolutionary culture or rather the socialist culture, unless the main current in culture is freed from all the bourgeois liberal ideas, humanist values and the tendency to revivalism. Most of the communist and socialist parties in this country, though professing allegiance to the ideals of socialism and admitting inevitability of revolution in their words and writings, are in fact foundering in the morass of parliamentary democratic movements and bourgeois liberal ideas. For this reason the revolutionary movement of the exploited people under the leadership of the working class is suffering from a serious setback. In the place of revolutionary ideas of class struggles, influence of economism, liberalism and existentialism are increasing day by day in a subtle way in the progressive and revolutionary cultural movement. If cadres of cultural movements really want to build up the socialist culture they must realize the historical truth that it is impossible to establish socialism in its true sense without overthrowing the present capitalist and fascist system through revolution under the proletarian leadership. Those cadres of progressive cultural movement who believe that socialism is the only way for social progress and for people’s liberation today *must themselves imbibe the ideas of socialism based on dialectical materialism and must involve themselves intimately and directly in the democratic mass movements and day-to-day class struggles of the peasants and workers. Otherwise it is impossible for them to build up progressive cultural movement.*

*The primary condition in building up a progressive proletarian culture is that the cadres of the cultural movement must go to people, live among them and extend unstinted support and active help to every class struggle. Above all, they must acquire the mentality of learning from the life of the masses.* Moreover, if they can correctly analyse social problems with an outlook based on dialectical materialism, they will realize that social progress, liberation of people from all sorts of exploitation, emancipation of science, art and literature from the fetters of capitalist motive of production and expropriation – all these depend entirely on the success of proletarian socialist revolution.

This concept is to be made clear to the masses through continuous struggle in every sphere of cultural movement. Proletarian internationalism and the socialist ideology must never be isolated from each other. *The cadres of cultural movement should always remember that patriotism of the*



*masses is not really antagonistic to proletarian internationalism and to the ideals of socialist revolution. On the contrary, they are mutually conducive to each other.* The national chauvinism of the bourgeoisie is not only reactionary but is a great hindrance to real national interest and progress of entire human civilization. So, in order to foil the motivated propaganda and stratagem of the bourgeoisie, patriotism must never be separated from ideals of proletarian socialist revolution. In this context the cadres of the cultural movement must also keep in mind that the proletarian revolutionary culture, ethics, morality and aesthetics, etc., are in all respects at a higher level than those of the bourgeois culture. Hence, the cultural standard must not be allowed to go down in any way in the name of cultivation of proletarian culture. The reactionary role of those who want to put an end to mutual discussions and debates and seek to stifle opposition viewpoints by physical force, under whatever slogans and banners they may move, should be continually exposed to the people.

In this way if the cadres of the progressive cultural movement can keep themselves free from the influences of reactionary thoughts like bourgeois liberalism, humanism, revivalist tendencies, supra-class democracy, etc., and can expose to the people the real character of these thoughts, simultaneously concretizing the principles of class struggle and revolutionary ideas, only then will they be able to organize the cultural revolution by defeating the reactionary culture in our country.

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Bengali organ of the party. Revised  
and enlarged version published in  
Autumn Collection of *Darpan*, 1966.

## **Notes**

1. Quoted from a speech of the writer in 1949.
2. Written in 1948.