

# Editorial

Friday January 4, 2019

## Of monologues and conveniences

The red carpet has been laid out and all stops has been pulled out, including deployment of security forces, cordoning of sensitive areas, search and verification operations to ensure that the visit of the Prime minister to the state can be passed off without any unwanted incident. The state government even issued an order for its employees to attend office and be present at Hapta Kangjeibung, the venue where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver his public speech. It would be an understatement to mention that even the staunchest critic would be impressed with the plethora of inaugurations and projects the visiting dignitary will unveil and initiate today. Whether these projects will see the light of day or achieve its intended targets is for time to tell. These projects and schemes are evidently aimed at speeding up progress in the state, and should be welcomed as such. At the risk of sounding pessimistic, it must be said that there is still a slip between the cup and the lip, and if the past is any indication, there has been more talk than the actual walk, or is it a case of too much talk without considering the limitations of time and resources? whatever the case may be, the continuing trend is something the present government should ponder upon so that their expressions of intent is not misinterpreted as empty promises to draw public attention and remain in the news. There is also a contradiction in the way the chief minister is trying to portray an image of a leader who is accessible and open to his people, and the manner in which every possible effort is being taken up to apparently shield the visiting prime minister from the general public except for the public speech which is nothing but a monologue in its truest sense. It would have been an epic moment had the chief minister planned an interactive session with representatives of civil societies even if for the shortest period to put their important social concerns and issues to the prime minister in person. Or would the outcome be too difficult and unbearable for the 'hyper-confident' prime minister? While the security concerns for such an important- perhaps the most important, and powerful person in office in the country is understandable, the fact that such diverse schemes and projects for different regions are initiated and unveiled for namesake from a place of their choice and convenience by the central and state authorities has not gone unnoticed by all and sundry. The pertinent questions arising out of all these hectic and often frenetic rush to present a semblance of control and normalcy in the state to impress a visiting dignitary is: what has the state really benefitted from the Prime Minister's hour long visit? Are the schemes, projects and inaugurations not possible to be carried out without the physical presence of the prime minister? If so, would it not be more convenient and certainly welcomed by the much harassed general public in the state, and even by a majority of the overworked security personnel if all such inaugurations, unveilings and foundation stone laying ceremonies are held at the safety and convenience of the Prime Minister's secure and comfortable official residence at the national capital which will also incidentally save a significant amount of public resources? It is the bounden task of the government to work for the progress and prosperity of the people who voted them to power. It is their responsibility to commit themselves to their tasks and use the resources at their disposal for public good. Such normal and expected duties from their ends should not be projected as a favour towards the public. Period.

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# CULTURE AND REVOLUTION

Courtesy - Beyond the Horizon  
By:- Prof. Jose Maria

In the long history of humanity, the French Revolution of 1789 was the first great revolution with worldwide effect. With its fundamental principles, objectives and new world view it reshaped the understanding of the state, political tendencies and popular demands, and was an inspiration not only in France but also everywhere its proclamation reached. It also affected the medium and long-term plans of the ruling classes, changed their ways of governance and at least paved the way to reformist initiatives. Being a bourgeois revolution it has given rise to projects such as "progress" and "modernisation" as well as lessons for the reactionary forces to renew themselves. Undoubtedly, there was a long period of bourgeois development prior to the Great French Revolution; the new ideas, philosophical and art schools, scientific developments and the transforming revolutionary thrust that sprang out of this process shadowed the actual-material causes of the revolution, and led to a great deal of mistaken evaluations of this subject. Despite material social conditions and profound class conflicts as its basis, it was claimed that the French Revolution was a product of the "ideas" that were visible on the surface, and this approach was widely recognised. This illusion is understandable and tolerable to an extent, as the French Revolution embodied the whole outcome of the 300-yearlong bourgeois development across Europe as its own reality; and it claimed as its own property all intellectual, scientific, cultural and artistic heritage that was progressive against the feudal aristocracy, church hegemony and scholastic world view, also succeeding to get an approval from a wide circle. There is an important aspect here that draws one's attention: every revolutionary theory, philosophical idea, artistic and literary work that was put forward in the long pre-revolutionary years, was now in a position to claim to have been proven by the revolution. It was generally overlooked that this was possible not because of their own forcefulness but through politics which took them out of their forgotten corners, museums and shelves and brought them into public life and the class struggle. In other words, the bourgeois political revolution was the ultimate manifestation of capitalism becoming a social lifestyle. Among all the factors that paved the way to the revolution, bourgeois cultural accumulation played a significant role, but it was not the only and decisive element in its materialisation. However, this example presents important information in terms of analysing the relation between political revolution and the cultural environment and accumulation. The relations between cultural elements and the political revolution are very complicated and cannot be expressed by direct and basic relations of cause and effect. Sometimes, historically longstanding approaches and at other times current requirements of politics and its future plans may necessitate this interaction.

It is not possible to talk about a rigid framework that explains why a certain philosophical view, artistic-literary school or scientific theory gains popularity in a revolution. When a prominent scientist, A.L. Lavoisier, who made a great contribution to scientific progress with his theories and inventions, was sent to the guillotine as an opponent of the revolution, the revolutionary judge said "The Great French Revolution does not need your theories". Yet, having to deal with some ridiculous practices that had to be abandoned later, such as the removal of Sundays from the calendar and reducing the week to six days in order to eliminate religious influence, the revolutionary regime needed the materialist views the most, such as Lavoisier's law of "conservation of mass"<sup>1</sup>. However, current tendencies, direct and immediate necessities may not always be in harmony with long-term basic needs, they may even seem to have contradictory characteristics. This is not an indicator of whether a decisive policy in that process was right or wrong. It only has a warning function in terms of the importance of being mindful of the conditions of the period when evaluating the solutions brought about by political action which contains various and sometimes contradictory elements to the problems of that particular historical scene. The proletarian socialist revolution has a significant aspect which distinguishes it from bourgeois political revolutions. The latter is completed with the seizure of political power at a particular level of capitalist economic and social development. Political power is the final destination following on a long process of developments. Before seizing political power the bourgeoisie became dominant economically and socially, founded cities to meet their needs, as well as an apparatus to govern them (municipalities), and took decisive steps in transport and architecture, building roads and ports. All this went along with developments in science, arts and philosophy. In this respect, the seizure of political power meant the completion of a social and economic evolutionary process with a political revolution, in other words, reaching the "ultimate goal" within capitalist development. However, as far as the proletariat and socialism is concerned, the seizure of power is in many ways just the beginning. Theoretically, what this means for the bourgeoisie is the continuation of its power by consolidating its own class hegemony, but for the proletariat political power aims to eradicate all class hegemonies, including its own. Yet, this important qualitative difference does not mean that there is no correlation between the cultural heritage of society and the socialist revolution. It just sets an important yardstick as to how to evaluate the form of the relation of socialist revolution proletarian culture. That is all nonsense". (Lenin, The Tasks of the Youth Leagues, speech at the Third Congress of the Youth League, October

1920) Later, in his draft resolution "On Proletarian Culture" Lenin wrote the following: "Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture. Only further work on this basis and in this direction, inspired by the practical experience of the proletarian dictatorship as the final stage in the struggle against every form of exploitation, can be recognised as the development of a genuine proletarian culture." Aware of the fact that the enthusiasm of the revolutionary period could give rise to such tendencies amongst the intellectuals, who were full of excitement "to create a new world and a new type of human being", Lenin observed the developments for some time and waited until those enthusiastic intellectuals realised how unfruitful their work was, how baseless their claims and how unrealistic their promises were. Pro-Proletcult intellectuals, who also included some of those who wanted to flee the USSR but could not, those who came close to the party and the revolution because of financial difficulties, adventurers, and untalented people who hoped their ideas would flourish in revolution, in short, the kind of people one could find in the intellectual strata of any country, all "disintegrated" later, together with their theory. Undoubtedly, the cultural work of the initial years of the revolution did not consist only of what the pro-Proletcult people did, or in fact could not do. The Soviets organised a great mobilisation to educate the youth, women and peasants, implemented an educational programme for workers in production with "Communist Saturdays" to overcome the disconnect between theory and practise, and aimed for a continuous and effective enlightenment through millions of new books, newspapers and pamphlets. With its strong roots, Russian art and literature were taken to the masses; in cinema and theatre prized productions were developed with form and content new not only for Russia but for the whole practise of art around the world. Moreover, great importance was attached to the development of the culture, art and literature of all the nations within the Soviet Union. Those nations who were left uneducated for centuries, many of whom had just recently began to use machines in production, began to understand the value of their historical accumulation and realised that they had things to say to the peoples of the Soviet Republic and to the whole world in their own languages and cultures. Millions of people who were engaged in nomadic life and feudal relations were now aware for the first time of their potential to work for a shared future with all people in the world with this heritage and in terms of the question of the organisation of society on a new and completely different

basis. In this respect, the ideas Lenin expressed when criticising the theory of "Proletcult", which became dominant for a short while following the October Revolution, have important lessons for the present as well. Those who brought forward the theory of Proletcult did in fact reach exaggerated conclusions on the basis of revolutionary developments in Russia. According to them, the culture of proletarian revolution was to be a totally new, distinctive culture, free of any connections with and in full contradiction to the old one. The art of past centuries had to be rejected completely. One of the leaders of this movement, Vladimir Krilov said in one of his poems: "Let's burn Raphael, for our future's sake! Let's destroy museums, and trample down the flowers of art..." They attached an exaggerated value to the artist's class identity, and believed that it was not possible for an artist to create significant works of art if they were not from within the working class. The subject and content of this new art, they thought, was to be based on the interests and aspirations of the international proletariat, and Proletcult authors and artists were to extol proletarian life. This movement had its brightest and most influential period from 1918-20; it was under the People's Commissariat of Education during the civil war, and even gained some kind of autonomy from Soviet power. In his draft resolution to the Proletcult Congress, Lenin stated his opposition to such tendencies and recommended that all Proletcult organisations should come under the People's Commissariat of Education and they should consider themselves as its auxiliary organs. Later in 1920, in his preface to the second edition of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin draws attention to serious problems created by this movement: disseminating bourgeois and reactionary views in the guise of "Proletcult culture". This warning served as the beginning of serious criticism, fully removing the autonomy of Proletcult. This ever weakening movement lost support and disintegrated entirely with the departure of Gorki, who began leading the "Socialist Realism" movement. The most significant outcome of the Proletcult experience was the rich lessons it brought as to how the socialist revolution should deal with the question of culture in terms of the concepts of "disengagement and continuity". In fact, Lenin did not have any hesitation on this matter, and he knew how infantile it was to try to create a new culture by disregarding the accumulated knowledge of thousands of years. For him, Marxism, for instance, had risen on "the entire development of mankind". Similarly, proletarian culture "...must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner and bureaucratic society". He also said that proletarian culture "is not clutched out of thin air; it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in world and began to take steps in this direction.