

**THE EXPERIMENT OF ELECTED  
COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS  
IN INDIA**

**E.M.S. NAMBOODIRIPAD'S PHILOSOPHICAL  
CONTRIBUTIONS**

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## PREFACE

There are two well-known quotations from the works of Karl Marx which synthesize his personal vision regarding religion and philosophy. The first one is taken from his *Introduction* to a work that was never written: *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843). It reads as follows: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. *It is the opium of the people.* The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness." The second one is a concise aphorism, the last of his famous *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845): "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."

The citations quoted above not only have an appealing poetic force that invite to immediate action but also express very well some of the conclusions of the Marxist materialistic view: all spiritual or intellectual realities are mere epiphenomena of the material conditions of human life. It is well known what Karl Marx proposes as the solution to human sufferance in society: elimination of private property through class struggle. As a result, he prophesies the disappearance of State and the advent on earth of the Proletarian Paradise. It will be the consequence of the triumph of the working class over the bourgeoisie and of the total elimination of capitalism and private property through the temporary dictatorship of the proletarians.

Marx's accusation and call to action was indeed legitimate. Ideas and good sentiments do not resolve real problems. The exploitation of industrial workers in the Nineteenth Century in Europe was a fact: low and unjust wages, exhausting work shifts, extreme

workplace conditions, etc. In the meantime, the situation of agricultural laborers was no better. Poverty and famine obliged millions of poor Europeans to migrate to North and South America. During the Twentieth Century, the worldwide diffusion of the Industrial Revolution was a “lights and shades” phenomenon. The so called “short century” has been witness to an incredible global economic development and wealth creation, unfortunately accompanied by this perverse schema of abuse and human exploitation.

Following Marxist doctrines, many attempts were made in Europe, Asia, America and Africa to create a communist society. Leninism, Trotskism, Stalinism, Maoism and other flavors of Marxism were active driving forces of revolution and world change. Nevertheless, at the end of the Eighties the Marxist movement was exhausted. The communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell in 1989, and the Soviet Union disintegrated. Communist governments in other Asian and African countries were toppled. The Communist Parties of China and Vietnam revised many key economic and social Marxist doctrines to adapt and keep the reins of power. At present, old style communist regimes survive mainly in two small countries: North Korea and Cuba.

In the meantime, there has been a serious effort to study the vicissitudes of this phenomenon. An academic work which sheds light on the many crimes committed by communist regimes was published in 1997: *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*<sup>1</sup>. Their scientifically documented conclusions are appalling. Scores of people died as a result of the effort to create the communist society. This gigantic social experiment caused millions of victims, but the Proletarian Paradise was nowhere to be seen. The cure was worse than the disease. However, the materialistic historical analysis developed by Marx hasn't lost all its appeal. For those who maintain a unswerving faith in it, the failure of communism to attain its objective has been caused by contingent human factors, or by the inability to adapt the Marxian doctrine to the changing social-historical circumstances.

Not everything was done with a malicious intent. Not all that which communist ideals produced was mere evil. In many countries the communist menace served as a deterrent for capitalist abuse and as a stimulus for bettering life conditions of the working class. Many intellectuals and ordinary people, deeply concerned about finding an effective solution to poverty and inequality, were enchanted by the Marxist ideals and promises. Nevertheless, after years of staunch activism, some of them experienced delusion and abandoned it, denouncing its inhuman and utopian character.

The causes of the bankruptcy of the communist system are complex, but its ultimate roots lie in the anthropological deficiencies of Marxist theory. Communism was doomed to unsuccess because its closed horizons cannot satisfy the higher aspirations of love, freedom and personal fulfillment of the human soul. Work and economy are indeed very important facets of culture and of personal life. Nevertheless, the needs and longings of the human person go beyond the material and biological aspects of life. Man is not only an *animal aeconomicum*, merely a *homo faber*. Religion is not a soothing remedy or a symptomatic cure for social and personal problems. In religious beliefs and practices one finds the highest dimension of human life. Therefore, to deny and combat the spiritual nature of the human person will have negative consequences for the individual and also for the whole social fabric.

Sadly, the triumph of liberalism over communism wasn't the end of history and the beginning of a new era of progress and prosperity, as Francis Fukuyama announced optimistically in the early Nineties<sup>2</sup>. The initial euphoria and enthusiasm was deceptive. The victorious liberal societies failed to address the inequalities caused by free unrestricted market. A deep global economic crisis began in 2008, and its solution is yet to be seen. There is a diffuse conviction that the lone globalization of free markets and commerce cannot create a fair and just society. Social unrest mounts in many countries.

The temptation to reenact Marxist social and economic strategies returns disguised under populist measures. But it will not work: democratically-elected communism, even if it rejects violent

class struggle and religious repression, cannot create integral human flourishing, both material and spiritual. As Sujan Amurutham shows in this serious and detailed research on E. M. S. Namboodiripad's social and philosophical thought, the singular experience of communism in the Indian State of Kerala can be of help to understand the impossibility of such an enterprise.

Democratically elected since 1957, the communist party has governed many times in this region of India — led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad until his death in 1998 — alternating power with other political parties. This farsighted politician was capable of adapting Marxist class struggle to the circumstances of his country and to establish strategies for a gradual implantation of communism, avoiding direct revolutionary violence and religious persecution. However, communist policies haven't produced social equality nor real distributed wealth. The inefficacy of communism lies, in Kerala as elsewhere, on the materialist view of Marxist-applied social and political solutions.

Whoever reads this book gets a clear warning of the illusions of "soft" communist rule. I hope that it will stimulate the new generations of Indian citizens to look for new ways to create wealth promoting an integral human flourishing of all society, instead of walking a trodden path which goes to nowhere.

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### End Notes

- 1 Stéphan e Courtois (ed.), Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press 1999.
- 2 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press 1992.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy in her novel 'God of Small Things' asks why the Communist Party was so much more successful in Kerala than it had been almost anywhere else in India, except perhaps in West Bengal<sup>1</sup>. The question is relevant since the Soviet Russia's experiment of Marxist-Leninist principles had already been failed in 1989, and since North Korea, Vietnam and particularly China, where Leninist principles are being tried, either undergo intense economic crisis or, as in the case of China, move towards capitalism at its full swing.

In Kerala, however, the Communist Party's presence is significant from its very inception in 1937. The Communist Party of India had the rare distinction of having been the first *democratically* elected in the world, to rule the Kerala State during 1957-1959, and it continues to win every alternative election to its State Assembly. Besides its rule in the States of Kerala, West Bengal (continuing from 1977, uninterrupted, to date) and Tripura in India since 2006 Assembly election, the Communist Party extended outside-support to the Congress Party-led Indian Government during 2004-2008. As a political party the communists are no longer anathema in Kerala. It was once anathema among some of the religious communities (Christian, Muslim and some of the Hindu caste communities); this