

Gramscian 'Counter hegemony' in Narendra Modi's New India Perspective

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In Gramscian terms, a thinking individual who is seen in action and is at the helm of the political will attempting fundamental transformation of society is an 'organic intellectual' (Gramsci, 1987: 161-323). Antonio Gramsci had viewed them as popular national leaders and organisers emerging from working class and other marginalised groups. This brand of organic grassroots persons unlike the status quo political leaders clearly define their roles and replace all existent conceptions of the world. These leaders refine and fine-tune the protagonists and party cadres and simultaneously help energise the existing folklore. They will shake, cleanse and perform such dialogues by which the historical inertia is routed. In Gramscian terms only the *chai wallah*, Mr. Modi fits the description as someone who brought honour and meaning to the poor and the marginalised people, who earn their bread mainly on daily wages. He added *swabhimaan* (self-respect) to their tenacity and elevated their hopes.

The counter hegemony that Mr. Modi offers, questions the existing conventional wisdom, dislodges its logical weakness and challenges the unsystematic and fragmentary understanding imposed by the dominant ideologues of the day (Gramsci, 1987:161-323). Since 2014, Mr. Modi has been hinting at several political and social actions that would bring about transformational changes in India.

In Gramscian terms, this is how new leadership and evocation comes into being and operates as counter hegemony, the characteristics of which would include a wide-ranging representation of 'the spontaneity of their

philosophy' (Gramsci, 1987: 344, Morton, 2007). Leaders that are able to display a clear grasp of politics from a subaltern or marginalised perspective and are able to see and understand every day sagas of common people seem to convey to their critical and discerning masses that they are clearly on the right track. This ability to know and feel the pulse of the low caste, the sub caste, and the minorities seems to be Mr. Modi's strength. The counter hegemony that Gramsci, (1987:344) talks about is about leaders and their understanding and how well they conceptualise the psychology of the masses. Counter hegemonies have transformative power and Modi continues to prove that.

Nothing seems to destabilise the capital driven economy of India. I suspect there are none who wish to see it go towards other directions. The strength with which all other political elites gave themselves permission to function, and perpetuate, create and justify institutional apparatus that preserved the status quo are now relegated and cocooned possibly until the next general elections. I do not expect that the counter hegemony of Modi will drastically transform things for the subaltern in the next three years. Nonetheless, it offers a new idiom without deploying variables such as caste, religion, the minority and the *garib* (the poor). Modi's counter hegemony in fact awakened the marginalised and the religious minorities' alike offering equality of opportunity and a promise of access and equity.

Reed (2012) argues that a new ideology does not develop *ex nihilo* (out of nothing); rather it develops in a dialectical relationship with various ideological orders, including common sense. Gramsci according to Reed (2012) elaborates on basic features of 'counter hegemony' and includes intellectual and moral reforms; linking with basic programme of economics and development of the nationwide collective will towards realisation of a superior form of modern civilisation.

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The above description seems heavily loaded and charged, but in reality, convictions and actions such as:

- Support to Muslim women against their *triple talaq*
- *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* (Clean India Campaign) that includes more importantly the basic toilet programme throughout the country (Bhattacharyya, 2014; 2016)
- Demonetisation to hit black money (Black Money, 2012), assist us in understating Modi’s counter hegemony as a clear demonstration of a process that challenges the normative and enlists the support and the consent of the masses (Gramsci, 1987: 132-133, Morton, 2007).

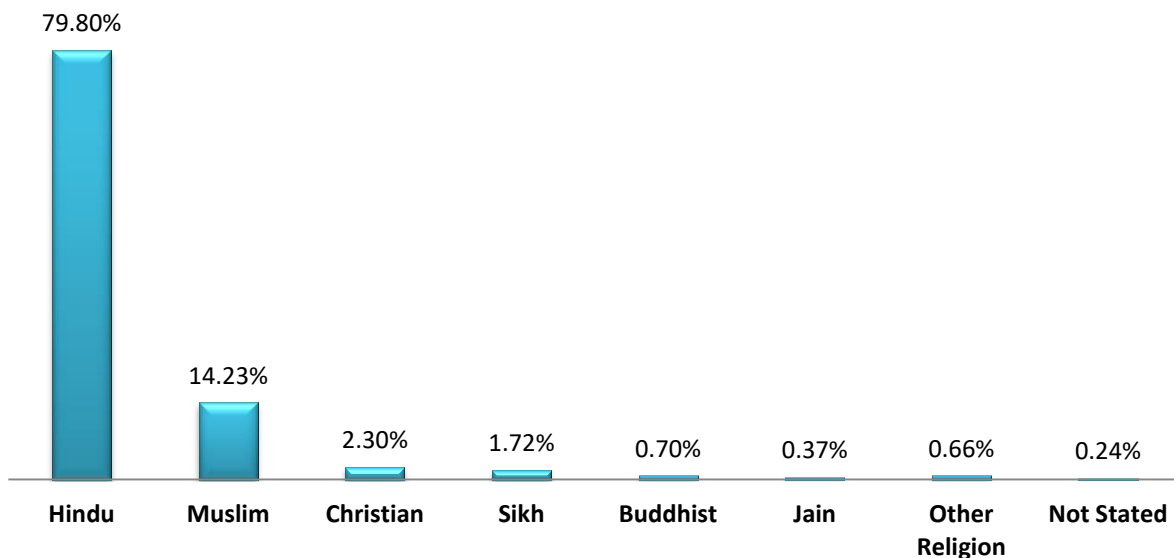
Milan Vaishnav (2017) comments about the most recent elections. He clearly sees an

erudite application of the ‘caste calculations, majoritarian sentiment, aspirational rhetoric, muscular nationalism, and charismatic leadership’.

Gramsci often uses ‘popular culture’, ‘the philosophy of the people’, ‘spontaneous philosophy’, and common sense interchangeably to refer to the varied forms the mentality of the masses manifests itself in social reality (Reed, 2012: 585)

Modi certainly demonstrates effective use of popular culture and responds to the emerging ethos of spontaneity that Reed (2012) writes about. Modi catered to the majority of the population in India, that is, nearly 80 percent of the Hindus (Census of India, 2011, please refer to Figure 1), while his rival political parties within Uttar Pradesh were busy massaging and appeasing the Muslims, but of course he does not ignore them.

Figure 1: Percentage of India's Population According to Religion
(Source: Census of India, 2011)



Addressing an election rally in Uttar Pradesh's Fatehpur, Mr. Modi said:

No government should discriminate the public on the lines of religion and caste. "Sabka saath, sabka vikas is our mantra", "Ramzan me bijli ati hai to Diwali me bhi ani chahiye; Bhedbhav nahi hona chahiye (If there is electricity during Ramadan then it must be available during Diwali too; there should not be any discrimination).

He further added:

Gaon me kabristan banta hai to shamshaan bhi banna chahiye (If there is a 'kabaristaan' (graveyard), there should be a 'shamshaan' (cremation ground) too."

Amidst Sceptics, Cynics and Optimists and History

Most discerning and concerned Indian diaspora across the world watches eagerly the everyday sagas in India. For some, it ends up as an opportunity to practice scepticism, while some others simply remain confused or conflated with the political changes in India. Analysts see that Modi's aspirational appeals have transcended plenty of parochial concerns and that he skilfully deployed all familiar euphemism but did so far more effectively than his rivals (Vaishnav, 2017) did. Where does this disenchantment with previous developmental dialogue emerge? Moreover, what has disillusioned people of India from considering the Congress and their allies?

For a significant period of time in Indian history, Mr Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Mrs Indira Gandhi ruled the country. Although there were other Prime Ministers in India such as 1966-67 (Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri) and 1977-79 (Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. Charan Singh), they did not have time to change the fundamental development dialogue and were happy for the Planning Commission and its pundits to dabble with India's economic development on what one would label as Nehruvian socialistic

pathway. Arvind Virmani (2013), the former Chief Economic Adviser to the Department of Finance argues 1979 as the cut-off date when Indira Gandhi returned as PM for a second tenure and in the subsequent year, she initiated a clear reversal of her own failed policies of the socialist era. Virmani, (2013) offers the following reasons to account for the ill-fated socialism of Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

- Nationalisation of large industry and financial institutions leading to monopolisation that routed healthy competition within the country;
- Ignoring all market-based models that have been popular in the rest of the world since the Second World War;
- Suppression of entrepreneurship through oppressive controls in all economic activity;
- Obsession with heavy industry leading to the neglect of both labour-intensive light industries – that were rendered uncompetitive through rigid labour laws;
- Limited interest in agriculture;
- A gross neglect of basic education and literacy;
- Creation of an unspecialised, overextended, and oppressive bureaucracy that mimicked colonial rule.

I would add to Virmani's list (2013), the policy of giving sops and appeasement in relation to all minorities' religion or caste based, which to an extent is an ongoing saga. In truth none of the other Prime Ministers, Lal Bahadur Sastri, Moraji Desai or Atal Bihari Vajpayee could ever give up the appeasement policies. Several approaches including re-nationalisation deregulation gradual abandonment of a socialistic model that seems to have allowed Indian growth accelerate and lead to reducing the welfare gap between Indians and the rest of the world.

Demonetisation and after

Consider for instance the latest attempt of Modi's government—the demonetisation people appear to have settled down with the aftermath of demonization (Pulla, 2016). I recall its effects in villages adjacent to Mysore. People queued up quite early before banks no less than what they do when they experience cooking gas or milk shortages. Certainly, those queues were dissimilar to the shop raids that occur when a cyclone or a flood warning is given in the western world. In rural India, people were calm and not outraged. They were listening to the radio, TV and even the Bankers. Where discomfort, distress, and despair were not visible, the news sleuths creatively fabricated their feeds by repeatedly suggesting to people in queues 'aren't you distressed'. Then wrote that people of Kilarihalli and or Hanganahalli were distraught. Such narratives were sewn and spoken from three franchised routes of caste, class and religion. It did not take long for the common man (*the Aam Aadmi*) in India to see the demonetisation move as a curbing measure for pervasive domestic corruption and a measure that would also put some impediment in terror financing from across the borders (Pulla, 2016).

I spoke to many people living in Bengaluru and Hyderabad that are rumoured to have more money for frequent partying on weekends. Many young Indians under 35 years hale, hearty and working did cooperate with the subsequent slow remonetisation, drawing less money from their banks, and having relatively less cash at disposal. People seem to have welcomed telephone banking and using of the new apps.

New entrepreneurs are born every day that look to make money in honest ways. **PayTM** founder Sharma fondly desires to even become 'the wealth manager of auto rickshaw drivers' (Laxmi, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, on 19 March 2017 a hardliner Hindu, Mr. Adityanath, a 44-year-old, saffron wearing Mathematics graduate takes reign in

Uttar Pradesh in an election with a *NO* to 'appeasement' politics.

The Nifty closes at high of 9,087 and Sensex surges to 1.7% on Tuesday the 14th March 2017 when I began writing this editorial. In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's victory in Uttar Pradesh, the investors see a validation of his economic reforms agenda. If this trend prevails in India of today and Prime Minister Modi is able to add transparency to governance processes and reduces corruption, the country will have great investor appeal from across the globe.

Prime Minister Modi is projected as the *messiah* (the saviour) of the poor by his political party. His counter hegemony remains pervasive, powerful and prevailing. There appears one ideology and one reality and a clear domination by 'consent', yet no sops for the poor. He talks of creating opportunities for progress. For many who are familiar with Gramsci's magnum opus, *Prison Notebooks*, a central proposition is the need to develop a referential and critical relationship between the philosophy of praxis and popular belief. Finally hegemony, Jean –Pierre Reed argues 'is a moral and intellectual leadership designed to gain the consent of the masses so that they be oriented into particular- economic ways of life' (Reed, 2012: 585). It highlights the reality that a particular way of life is in place because people have been persuaded to consent to it. Modi's hegemony argued against 'the dynasty, strongmen, identity politics, and other perceived infirmities of Indian democracy' (Vaishnav, 2017, March 15) has the aspirational appeal that transcended all narrow concerns. Schugurensky (2006) sees counter hegemony as a process that challenges the normative and the existing political and economic arrangements available to people. He skilfully deployed all familiar tactics to win an election far more superiorly and effectively than other 'dynastic' rivals that he was fighting, proving that his counter hegemony is based on his intrinsic moral and intellectual worth offered on a new platter to the people of India.

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Introduction to the Articles in the Current Issue

The current issue has articles by a number of authors. Under the special article section, there are two articles, first, a joint article by myself, Vinod Nayak and Keshav Walke and second one by Professor Hiranya Nath. The other four are research articles by Mr. Dhurjjati Sarma, Miss Alokanda Ghosh and Dr. Biswaranjan Mistri, Miss Riya Banerjee and Mr. Krishnendu Maji and Dr. Sumana Sarkar. I am personally grateful for their contributions.

In our joint article on *Contribution of Gandhian Thought to Corporate Responsibility*, trace Indian roots of corporate social responsibility (CSR) through their consideration of select archival materials on Gandhiji. We contend that Gandhiji's approach and involvement of contemporary businesses through their roles to steward social development in the country became the forerunner for the concept of trusteeship.

Professor Hiranya K. Nath in his article on *The Information Society*, briefly explains the conception of information society as a post-industrial society in which information plays a pivotal role. The definitions that have been proposed over the years highlight five underlying characterisations of an information society: technological, economic, sociological, spatial, and cultural. This article presents the above characteristics.

Mr. Dhurjjati Sarma in his article titled *Comparative Literary History in Assamese: Some Possibilities* deals with the efforts of Professor Satyendranath Sarma, a literary

historian of Assam. . The current article explores the possibilities of comparative literary history in Assamese—one that is not based on a linear narrative of succeeding generations of poets and writers recorded and documented under a progressive model of impact and response, but rather a history of literary reception with many complex and multidimensional narratives often at loggerheads with each other.

Miss Alokanda Ghosh and Dr. Biswaranjan Mistri in their paper titled *Obstacles in the Utilisation of Maternal Health Care Services* based on a study that they have been conducted in Birbhum District, West Bengal, India, emphatically drive home a point that maternal health is not a “women’s issue”. Clearly, access and equity in services differs in costs and strategic funds that need to come from the state and private investments. Investments into servicing rural India are dictated by infrastructural developments and transportation and other technological costs. As a result, a minimalist stance in investments underscores the quality of maternal health in rural areas with the poor and the marginalised bearing the brunt.

In her article, *Does Time Matter? – A Study of Participation of Women in Urban Governance* by Miss Riya Banerjee raises the issues related to management of time by the elected women in the urban governance of West Bengal. The municipal councillors’, their remuneration for their work and their work and personal life balance are highlighted through this research-based article.

Finally, Mr. Krishnendu Maji and Dr. Sumana Sarkar in their article on *Intra-District Disparities in Primary Education: A Case Study of Bankura District, West Bengal* examines the disparities in rural primary education. Their findings are interesting. Progress in literacy and education depends upon the propensity of children to go to school and to complete education at least up to the primary level. Enabling all children to obtain primary education are the key challenges in rural areas. It is also important to consider provisions of drinking water and toilets in schools. Problem of sanitation is a major reason for non-attendance of the girls in primary schools.

Rituparna Bhattacharyya as usual compiled select articles under *Publication Watch*. I commend readers to glance at this list and download where possible.