

# INTRODUCING GRAMSCIAN CONCEPTS.

## ***TOWARDS A RE-ANALYSIS OF BANGLADESH'S POLITICAL HISTORY***

### **1. After the Demise of Asian Revolutions**

In recent decades, interest in the theoretical ideas of the Italian revolutionary philosopher Antonio Gramsci has steadily grown in India and in Bangladesh. Along with the demise of the great 20th century proletarian revolutions in the Asian continent, a critical search has started. This search for renovation - almost inevitably it seems - leads us to Antonio Gramsci, who was incarcerated by Italy's fascist regime after having led his country's Communist Party for a brief period in the 1920s. Gramsci posed, and tried to overcome as no other theoretician, two central weaknesses in the Marxism of his days: the lack of a thorough understanding regarding the role of intellectuals in society, and the lack of a comprehensive theory covering society's superstructural relations. Thus, Gramsci sought to construct a theory of politics as an autonomous sphere in society, and to this end he devised a number of original concepts. In the below essay I will summarize the meaning of the Gramscian terms *civil society*, *ideological hegemony*, *passive revolution* and the *historical bloc*, and I will also briefly indicate what in my view is the significance of Gramsci's conceptualisation of the *role of intellectuals*.

A truthful review of the meaning of Gramscian ideas today has become imperative for more than one reason. On the one hand it is my conviction that one of the reasons for the demise of Asian revolutions is to be sought in the fact that these revolutions, by and large, failed to develop a dialectical understanding regarding the role of society's professional intellectuals. Policymakers in the Cambodian revolution, for instance, combined the peasantry's deep distrust of educated people with an orthodox Marxist view of the superiority of the manual over mental labour. This attitude resulted in murderous practices vis-a-vis society's professional intellectuals. Again, it appears to me that the lack of a sharp distinction between *recognized* and *non-recognized* intellectuals and the lack of a refined analysis regarding the various distinct layers and groups of intellectuals in society, are factors laying at the roots of the deformation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Hence, a study of Gramsci's theoretical approach which identifies politics as the job of intellectuals, appears to be crucial for any evaluation of what went wrong in China. Such a study, most likely, will also result in new insights into the process of political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, the adoption of a Gramscian theoretical approach has been complicated by the work of the so-called *Subaltern School*. Interest in Gramscian ideas, in the wake of the demise of Asian revolutions in the 1980s, was initially promoted by the Calcutta-based *Subaltern School*. This school of thought derived its very name from a term Gramsci employed in his writings to pinpoint the fact that the autonomous experience of society's oppressed is often skipped in academic writings on history. Yet while the *Subaltern School* for a while adopted certain Gramscian concepts, members of the *School* have evolved towards a profoundly anti-Marxian

position. Partha Chatterjee, for instance, whose analytical work on the history of India/Bengal has drawn much attention, has been criticised heavily for his interpretation of the history of Indian nationalism. In Chatterjee's interpretation, the notion of (religious) community reportedly replaces that of class. Though Chatterjee initially had advocated the application of typically Gramscian concepts to Indian history, - his more recent evolution in thought threatens to discredit any efforts to apply Gramscian concepts to political life in the subcontinent (1).

Hence, the urgent need for a truthful and integral presentation of Gramsci's theoretical ideas. Below, I will provide a summary, and no more than a brief summary, of the key concepts which Gramsci devised (or redefined, as in the case of the concept of *civil society*) (2). However, I would like to stress from the start that my advocacy of Gramscian concepts will not be an uncritical one. For instance, Gramsci's *categorisation* of intellectuals, no matter how profound if compared with the categorisations of intellectuals that have been offered by V.I.Lenin and Mao Tsetung, remains rudimentary: in order to formulate a credible Marxist policy on intellectuals we need to introduce further categorisations. Also, Gramsci nowhere discussed how the social division of labour between tasks that are predominantly mental and those that are mainly manual in nature, intersects with the *gender* division of labour. Hence, from a *feminist* perspective too, Gramsci's theoretical work was incomplete. Nevertheless, as I will seek to demonstrate in this two-part essay, the set of concepts proposed by Gramsci offers us a very powerful tool to understand the political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh in the 20th century. It helps us in one go evaluate the past, *and* advance an innovative Marxist politics for the future.

## **2. Distinct View Regarding the '*Superstructure*'**

The last decade of the 20th Century has heralded a new phase in the history of Marxism, - a period in which the ideology of 'marxism-leninism' that guided the first period in the building of socialist societies (1917-1989) will see a powerful transformation. The Marxism of future generations, I expect, will be qualitatively richer in content than the Marxism which previous generations of humanity have known. Further, in opting for and advocating the enrichment of philosophical Marxism, we need to give importance to the specific theoretical contribution that was made by the Italian socialist politician and thinker, Antonio Gramsci. While he was imprisoned under fascism, after having briefly led the Communist Party of his country as General Secretary, Gramsci performed a vast work of historical and theoretical investigation, resulting in a unique conceptualisation of political processes in class society. While defenders of Gramsci, in decades when orthodoxy held sway in the international workers' movement, have stressed his loyalty towards leading theoreticians such as Lenin, - Gramsci's originality in thought was really large.

First, as wellknown, Karl Marx taught that all class societies consist of a 'base' and a 'superstructure'. The *base* consists of production relations, i.e the economic relations between exploiting and exploited classes, which relations are determinant 'in the ultimate analysis.' The *superstructure* that arises on the basis of these economic relations consists in the state's legal and political apparatus. This is erected by society's dominant class in order to ensure its control over the entire social life, and in order to provide guarantees for the economic exploitation by this class. Antonio Gramsci agreed with and used the framework of analysis laid down by Karl Marx,

but he also carried Marx's work forward, by putting forward a distinct view regarding the superstructure of class societies. Here he emphasized the point that there exists an *intermediate sphere* between the state on the one hand, - and the economic base of society on the other. In Gramsci's view, the analysis of this *intermediate sphere* is essential, if we are to understand fully how class domination is maintained.

Now, in pursuing his analysis of the *intermediate sphere*, Gramsci employed two concepts which had been used by Marxist and non-Marxist teachers before him, but without the precise meaning which he attached to them. These two concepts are those of 'civil society' and of 'ideological hegemony'. Both concepts can be traced in classical Marxist literature, but it is nevertheless true that Gramsci employed them in a novel manner, - precisely in order to highlight the existence and functioning of an intermediate sphere in class society. Moreover, this intermediate level of society is not a vague or mystical entity, but is a sphere which is occupied by concrete human beings, i.e. by society's professional intellectuals. While Gramsci was aware of the fact that all intellectuals have a class position, that in one way or another they do form part and parcel of the economic base of society, he nevertheless insisted that intellectuals have a superstructural task: namely the building of consent, of public opinion among the diverse social classes and layers, in favour of society's dominant class. Hence, Gramsci taught us that (professional) intellectuals perform an *autonomous* social function, located between state repression - and the direct appropriation of labour's fruits by capitalist enterprises.

### **3. Gramsci's Use of the Term 'Civil Society'**

Let's now try to delineate the meaning of each of Gramsci's concepts separately. The term civil society can be traced to the great 19th Century German philosophers. It was used both by Marx and by Hegel, from whom Marx borrowed (a part of) his method of analysis. Hegel had used the term civil society to refer to all *pre-state* relations, i.e. to all relations beyond the immediate sphere of the state. Thus, for Hegel, the term civil society included all economic relations. Further, Marx too had employed the term civil society in his writings, but contrary to Hegel had restricted it to refer only to the *economic base* of society. It can be very confusing to compare the definitions given by various philosophers for the same concept. Nevertheless, for a proper understanding of Gramsci's system of thought it is necessary to know that the definition of the term civil society has historically evolved, and that Gramsci transformed the meaning of the term to suit his own theoretical ends (3).

To repeat for the sake of clarity, what has been briefly stated in the section above: Antonio Gramsci, contrary to Hegel and Marx, used the term civil society exclusively to describe and conceptualise the *superstructure*, and in particular those institutions of the superstructure which do not (or not officially) form a part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. They include church institutions; the educational establishments, ranging from primary schools to the academia; the media such as newspapers, journals and the radio; trade unions and political parties; and all other intermediate institutions that play a distinct role in the intellectual and moral life of society. In short, the term civil society covers *all the institutions located in the intermediate sphere of class society*. Gramsci realised perhaps more sharply than other theoreticians of the workers' movement in his time, that the 'weight', the influence, of these

institutions expands gradually as capitalist society evolves.

Further, there were concrete historic reasons impelling Gramsci to conceptualise capitalist society in the given manner. Gramsci believed that the failure to achieve a revolutionary transformation in countries of Western Europe after World War I needed a specific explanation. After all, the expectation of imminent revolution had been quite widespread, reflected for instance in the theory of more or less automatic 'breakdown' of capitalism. Gramsci from his side believed that (then) existing Marxist analyses of revolutionary transformation were onesidedly '*economistic*': they wrongly presumed that a crisis in production relations, in the base of society, would inevitably result in a revolutionary outburst, in the conquering by the working class of the institutions of the capitalist state. As Gramsci argued, Marxists had underestimated the influence which institutions belonging to civil society hold over the thought processes of subaltern classes. These institutions serve to ideologically re-inforce the subservience of society's oppressed.

In other words, Gramsci's theoretical ideas were grounded in his analysis of European history, and it would not be wrong to state that the '*Prison Notebooks*' which contain his mature theoretical ideas, are eurocentric in content. When comparing the political processes in France, Italy and other European countries, Gramsci primarily addressed the increasing complexity of superstructural institutions and relations in so-called 'advanced' capitalist societies. Yet, as we will see in the second part of this essay, the term civil society and other Gramscian concepts can very well be used to analyse the political evolution of East Bengal/Bangladesh during the twentieth century. Though most institutions belonging to the intermediate sphere were erected only in the later part of British colonial rule or more recently, - they have in course of the previous century come to exert a crucial influence upon the intellectual and moral life of East Bengal/Bangladesh.

Lastly, it is necessary to emphasize once again that Gramsci considered civil society to be an arena of class struggle. It is here that different classes compete for ideological hegemony in society, and their competition can take a variety of forms, including both non-violent and violent forms. In recent decades, the concept of civil society, while neglected by Marxist parties, has been much *abused* by reformist propagandists, who aim at mystifying social relations and at confusing the public. Non-governmental organisations, for instance, project civil society as their arena for participation in bourgeois politics. Yet for Gramsci, the use of the term civil society was closely related to his conceptualisation of class society. He used the term not to weaken or undermine, but precisely to strengthen the class struggles of the proletariat and other classes striving to achieve liberation from exploitation, from oppression and from ideological domination by the bourgeoisie.

#### **4. The Concept of Ideological Hegemony**

Gramsci's use of the term 'ideological hegemony' is closely related to his conceptualisation of civil society, and it too underlines the originality of his Marxism. First, the term is used with the specific purpose of highlighting the fact that a society's ruling class applies two methods to maintain, enforce, the loyalty of its citizens. On the one hand, the ruling class does not eschew the *use of physical force* to suppress dissent and impose obedience, but it generally tries to also build social consensus by applying non-violent means. While the state's apparatus of repression (the

police, the army) are entrusted with the task of applying force and coercion, - the institutions of civil society and the functionaries employed here undertake the task of *building consent*. Ideological hegemony, then, refers to the cultural and moral leadership exerted by the ruling class over society's citizens via the institutions of civil society, in order to ensure acceptance of the ruling class' policies.

Like the term civil society, the term (ideological) hegemony was not invented by Gramsci himself, but was derived by him from the writings of his Marxist precursors, more particularly from the writings of Lenin. As well known, Lenin's historic contribution towards the Marxism of his days was that he (re)asserted the primacy of political over economic struggles, and that he devised many ideas to advance the political struggles of the Russian proletariat. Previous to Gramsci, Lenin waged intense philosophical and political battles against the danger of 'economism'. Now, the concept of hegemony quite clearly was a part of the vocabulary of Lenin and of his party, the 'Social Democrats'. In Lenin's writings, the term referred to the role of leadership in a class alliance. Thus, he spoke of the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasantry, meaning the leading role of industrial workers over their rural allies in the democratic revolution. While this hegemonic role was based on the proletariat's central economic position, it according to Lenin had to be asserted politically. Hence, *hegemony* signified: the political leadership of the working class (4).

Gramsci did not copy Lenin's term, but re-adapted it to elaborate his theory of society's intermediate sphere. In employing the concept of ideological hegemony, he sought to develop an original, Marxist understanding of superstructural relations in class society. While Gramsci fully agreed with Lenin on the need for working class leadership, he laid great stress on the need for the proletariat to (also) assert its leadership culturally and ideologically. Just as the ruling class made sustained efforts to build consensus in favour of its policies *via* the school system, the media, etc., - the working class too should undertake sustained efforts, via all structures of civil society, to convince the various classes and layers of the oppressed that its policies were just. Otherwise, any working class power is bound to be short-lived, ephemeral, and the bourgeoisie will easily re-assert its predominance. In short, Gramsci's theoretical work was geared towards rethinking the preconditions that need to be fulfilled before the proletariat is ready to conquer state power. In putting forward his distinct concept of ideological hegemony he reformulated the nature of proletariat politics.

## **5. Intellectuals and Politics**

I now wish to discuss what is perhaps the most decisive contribution which Gramsci made towards Marxism, i.e. his conceptualisation of intellectuals. So far I have referred to two elements in Gramsci's analysis of the superstructure of class society: i.e. the intermediate sphere which he termed *civil society*, and the method of consensus building via the institutions of civil society, referred to as the construction of *ideological hegemony*. We now need to look at the strata which 'populate' these institutions, i.e. the strata that are entrusted by the ruling class with the task of consensus building. These strata are identified by Gramsci as the various layers of professional intellectuals. Although other Marxist theoreticians, such as Lenin and Mao Tsetung, discussed what contribution intellectuals can make to the emancipation of the oppressed, - Gramsci's views

on intellectuals to my knowledge are (comparatively) the most mature views on the issue of intellectuals in the history of Marxism (5).

First, Gramsci refused to consider intellectual activity as an exclusive activity, undertaken only by a very privileged layer in class society. Seeking to *democratise* the meaning of the term (which originally referred only to the very most prominent opinion-builders in society, such as famous philosophers and novelists), he insisted that human beings commonly engage in intellectual activity, since it is common for peasants and workers to think about the broader world, i.e. the world beyond the immediate sphere of their own production. Thus, Gramsci's thesis states that '*all human beings are intellectuals*'. Parallel to this, Gramsci also countered the mechanistic notion which counterposes 'physical' and 'mental labour' as two *disconnected* forms of labour. In Gramsci's view, purely 'physical labour' does not exist, for all productive labour involves the use of the human brain! Hence, Gramsci tried to re-instate a dialectical understanding regarding the character of human labour, and his conceptualisation is essential to an understanding of 20th century capitalist management methods, i.e. Fordism and Toyotism (6).

Returning now to our discussion on civil society, - it is nevertheless true that there is a section of the population in class society, which makes a living on specialised knowledge, i.e., society's *professional* intellectuals. Admitting this, Gramsci proceeds to identify a number of *categories* of intellectuals, which are unique categorisations. A distinction which is immediately relevant for the struggles of the oppressed, is his distinction between '*organic*' and '*traditional*' intellectuals. *Organic* intellectuals are those intellectuals who represent the interest of 'rising classes' under capitalism, i.e. either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. When representing the oppressed, such intellectuals directly hail from slaves, from feudal peasants, waged workers, etc., and they develop their own worldview primarily in course of their organisational work in the revolutionary movement (7). *Traditional* intellectuals, on the contrary, form an intrinsic part of the old class structure of society; their interests are tied up with the interests of the aristocracy and landlords, i.e. those classes which have a vested interest in opposing societal change.

While it is often presumed, by superficial 'post-modernist' readers of Gramsci's, that the distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals is the main line of distinction he draws between sections of intellectuals, this is far from true. Another key-line of demarcation which he draws is that between *urban* and *rural* intellectuals, and this distinction is equally important for a re-analysis of (East) Bengal's socio-political history. Like the former distinction, this distinction brings out the fact that there are a large number of intellectuals - such as school teachers, rural doctors, journalists, lawyers, etc. - who in view of their profession form a part of society's intellectual community, but whose labour is not recognized as intellectual labour by the dominant section of (urban based, comprador) intellectuals. *Rural intellectuals*, according to Gramsci, are closest to the peasantry, and they often mediate between the peasantry and the institutions of the state. While rural intellectuals include a traditional segment (for instance, religious preachers) and a non-traditional segment (eg. teachers in secular schools), - both categories lack social recognition for the intellectual work which they contribute to society.

Gramsci's above-summarized categorisation of professional intellectuals was rudimentary, and it can be refined on the basis of further social investigations. Nevertheless, it represents a

departure, an innovation, in the history of Marxism, for these categorisations were not put forward by any other Marxist philosopher. Moreover, Gramsci as no other Marxist theoretician argued that political work is the task of intellectuals: whether they be recognized or non-recognized, it is society's intellectuals who engage in the work of *opinion-building* on behalf of the various social classes aspiring to achieve or preserve hegemony. Hence, Gramsci also defined the work of building a political party as intellectual work, and argued that all those who participate in it are either already intellectuals, or, in the process of party-building, are bound to be transformed into intellectuals! This conclusion follows logically from his conceptualisation of civil society, and from his definitions of intellectuals and intellectual activity. Yet it surely constitutes a departure from the views that have held sway in 20th century peasant-based revolutions in Asia!

## 6. The Terms '*Passive Revolution*' and the '*Historical Bloc*'

Just like the terms *civil society* and *ideological hegemony*, the concept of *passive revolution* was not introduced by Gramsci himself; it was a borrowed term. As he himself admitted in his writing on the history of the Italian Risorgimento, i.e. on the process of the formation of the Italian unitary state, Gramsci took over the term from the historian Cuoco, and then re-interpreted it (8). He used it to designate a process whereby a new political formation comes to power, replacing an older one. Contrary to what happens in a real or active revolution, however, - in a passive revolution no fundamental restructuring of social relations takes place. Hence, the term *passive revolution* refers to a political process that is reformist in nature. Such a process according to Gramsci can either be steered by a liberal party, or by a fascist political force. Hence, Gramsci applies the term *inter alia* to explain the events that led to the victory of fascism in Europe, in the thirties of the last century.

Now, while Gramsci nowhere discussed the applicability of the concept of *passive revolution* to events elsewhere in the world, the term can well be used to characterise the process of political transformation that took place in East Bengal in the 1940s, i.e. the process whereby the Bengal Muslim League formed a political alliance and campaigned for construction of the state of Pakistan. In the given process, an indigenous ruling class replaced the former British colonial administrators, and it succeeded in achieving its aim via a transformative political program, targeting the 'decapitation' of the feudal economic order, i.e. dispossession of the absentee landlords, the *zamindars*. Yet the Muslim League, as we all know, did not aim at a fundamental restructuring of agrarian relations, and its Muslim-communalist orientation precisely served to redirect peasant energies away from the path of *active* revolution as propagated by the Left. Indeed, what the Muslim League accomplished can best be characterized as a *passive revolution* in Gramsci's theoretical sense.

Yet it would hardly help us re-analyse the political history of Bengal if we were to adopt Gramsci's term of passive revolution in isolation. What is required in the interest of a re-interpretation of history, is that the various terms which Gramsci proposed to facilitate the analysis of society's political domain, be applied in combination. Thus, the key question in relation to the Muslim League's project of a passive revolution, is how the party's leading politicians succeeded in building a *historical bloc* composed, first, of various groups of

intellectuals, who effectively convinced the peasant masses of East Bengal to opt for its project of a Muslim-separatist state. Adoption of the concept of passive revolution, in other words, should lead us to (re-)analyse the specific role of traditional intellectuals, of *maulanas* and *mullahs*, who enabled the Muslim League to gain ideological hegemony (9). For only a combined use of Gramscian terms serves to lay bare aspects of East Bengal's political history which are insufficiently brought out in a classical Marxist interpretation of history.

This means, in the context of the analysis of East Bengal's history, that we combine the concept of passive revolution, with Gramsci's original conceptualisation of the united front. This concept, in Marxist theory, refers to the building of a broad alliance, including all those classes whose labour is exploited, and a part of society's wealthier classes, such as rich peasants and the national bourgeoisie (10). In the 1940s, both the Communist Party and the Muslim League each sought to build a united front to gain political hegemony: hegemony for the working class in the case of the Communist Party, - for the petty landlords, *jotedars*, in the case of the Muslim League. In this competition for hegemony it is the Muslim League which gained the upper hand, and it is Gramsci's concept of the *historical bloc* that helps us best understand why. For in Gramsci's conceptualisation of the united front, the role of intellectuals is decisive, and in this respect the efforts at united front building of the two political forces contrasted sharply. For whereas the Communist Party could count on the cooperation of only a few traditional intellectuals, the Muslim League counted a very large number of Muslim religious preachers among its opinion-builders.

In conclusion: my plea is in favour of adoption of Gramscian concepts of analysis, but not in a piecemeal fashion. Too often, Marxist interpreters of Gramsci's theory have lifted out single concepts or theoretical parts from his *Prison Notebooks*, without taking due account of the structure of his thought, without taking account of the interconnectedness of these conceptual ideas. As I have just indicated briefly, and will seek to further illustrate in the second part of this essay, - a Gramscian interpretation of East Bengal's history can be extremely fruitful, since it helps reveal aspects in the country's political evolution which orthodox Marxists (including myself) for long have overlooked. Yet this exercise in Gramscian re-interpretation, to repeat, can only be effective, can only lead to a new conceptualisation of the politics of social transformation, if our approach is *integral*. We thus need to grasp and apply the full *set* of Gramsci's concepts, which as I have explained above centrally comprises: the concepts of *civil society* and of *ideological hegemony*; the concepts of *rural and organic intellectuals*; and those of *passive revolution* and the building of a *historical bloc*.

## **7. Feminism and Gramscian Thought**

Lastly, a brief note on some limitations in Gramsci's thought. I have already stated that Gramsci's categorisation of intellectuals is rudimentary, but this is not a major drawback in his theory. A more serious limitation, in my view, is the fact that Gramsci nowhere discussed how the structure and functioning of civil society helps to perpetuate patriarchy. Gramsci lived in an era in which feminist theory-building, the theory regarding the liberation of women, was still rather weak, and, perhaps understandably, Gramsci overlooked feminist issues in building his own theory of the superstructure. Yet feminism *is* relevant to Gramsci's theory of civil society.

For in all class societies, the rulers employ not just the legal, judicial and repressive organs of the state to (re-) enforce patriarchal relations, - but the institutions belonging to the intermediate sphere of society as well. Invariably, these institutions are used to propagate and strengthen male dominance over women.

A patriarchal policy is easily implemented, since the institutions of civil society are overwhelmingly 'populated' by men. The sexual division of labour that prevails in most societies, imposes, first, a double burden on (many) working class women. On the one hand, they are responsible for all domestic tasks, i.e. cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc. On the other hand, women of the labouring classes often are allotted, also, secondary tasks in agriculture and industry (11). But the sexual division of labour also intersects with a division between forms of labour that are predominantly manual, - and those that are predominantly mental in character, and relegates women to the first mentioned category. Hence, the sexual division of labour stretches from the domestic sphere, *via* the public economic sphere, and up to the intermediate sphere of civil society and the apparatus of the capitalist state. Both in the *base* and in the *superstructure*, women's position is subordinate to that of men.

Further, that women's labouring position is always secondary, is *particularly sharply* reflected in the intermediate sphere of society, where most functions are monopolised by men. On the whole, women tend to be excluded, or nearly excluded, from most job positions defined as 'intellectual professions', and the task of building a *historical bloc* that takes full account of the interests of all sections of the oppressed is complicated much by the fact that society's opinion builders are overwhelmingly male. Such a liberationist project can only succeed, if those who build mass organisations of the oppressed make special efforts to promote women labourers to the position of organic intellectuals; it can only succeed if organisations of rural and other non-recognised intellectuals recruit *female* professionals, such as female school teachers, on a priority base. If not, patriarchal views will easily regain the upper hand, even as the struggle for human liberation *appears to* gain ground.

In short, a *Marxist-feminist theory regarding the intermediate sphere of class society*, regarding civil society and the struggle for ideological hegemony, can take Gramsci's conceptualisation as its starting point, but cannot afford to accept his views uncritically. A Marxist-feminist theory needs to, first, amplify Gramsci's categorisation of intellectuals, and take account of new theories of public-opinion building which have been constructed in the US and elsewhere in the decades since Gramsci's incarceration and death. But it also needs to rethink and refine Gramsci's ideas in the light of feminist theory-building, which theory-building has advanced rapidly in the last quarter of the 20th century. For while Gramsci's concepts help us much to re-analyse the political history of East Bengal/Bangladesh, i.e. to understand the causes that led to the formation of Pakistan and to the founding of the independent state of Bangladesh, - they only partly suffice to reconstruct, re-launch, today's movement of the oppressed.

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## **References:**

(1) For a critical assessment of the evolution in thought of the *Subaltern School*, and of Partha Chatterjee's ideas in particular, see Himani Bannerji, 'Projects of Hegemony. Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' 'Resolution of the Women's Question' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, March 11, 2000, p.902); a brief critique of Partha Chatterjee's use of the concept of religious community is given in Kumkum Sangari, 'Politics of Diversity. Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, December 23, 1995, p.3300-3301);

(2) For summaries of Gramsci's basic concepts, see eg. David Forgacs (ed.), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935* (Schocken Books, New York, United States, 1988, p. 420); Carl Boggs, *Gramsci's Marxism* (Pluto Press Limited, London, United Kingdom, 1976); and Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, *Pour Gramsci* (in French: Editions du Seuil, Paris, France, p.74); for a summary of Gramsci's conceptualisation of cultural life, see Sabine Kebir, *Die Kulturkonzeption Antonio Gramscis. Auf dem Wege zur Antifaschistischen Volksfront* (in German: Akademie Verlag, Berlin, German Democratic Republic, 1980);

(3) The differences between Hegel's and Marx's usages of the term *civil society* on the one hand, and Gramsci's on the other, have been discussed in depth by Norberto Bobbio, *Gramsci e la Concezione della Societa Civile* (which essay appeared in a Dutch translation in the Dutch Marxist journal *Te Elfder Ure* No.28, January 1981, p.367); here Bobbio argued that the theory of Gramsci heralded a fundamental renovation vis-a-vis the whole Marxist tradition; as Bobbio stated: in Gramsci's conceptualisation 'civil society does not belong to the base but to the superstructure (p.378);

(4) Lenin primarily elaborated this theory of his in *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, People's Republic of China, 1970); for the meaning of hegemony in Gramsci's theory, see Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.422-424, and Boggs (1976), op.cit., p.36;

(5) See Gramsci's concise article 'The Intellectuals' (in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, United States, undated, p.3-23); also Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.300; Gramsci's original analysis of the role of intellectuals was already reflected in his essay 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', Forgacs (1988), op.cit., p.171; it should be kept in mind that while Gramsci's conceptualisation of the role of intellectuals represents a crucial advance in Marxist thinking, his conceptualisation remained rudimentary, and in my view *incomplete*;

(6) for Gramsci's analysis of Fordism, see eg. Peter Custers, *Capital Accumulation and Women's Labour in Asian Economies* (Zed Books, London, 1997, p.295); Gramsci's dialectic conception of manual/mental labour is reflected in his notion of the 'psycho-physical nexus' in the labour of professional industrial workers; see his essay 'Americanism and Fordism' (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, op.cit., p.279); the same thematic, but from the position of clerical workers, is discussed by Harry Braverman in his *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, New York, United States, 1974, p.293);

(7) a truly brilliant example of *organic intellectuals* who emerged from among colonial slaves is provided by C.L.R.James in his account of the slave revolt in San Domingo (Haiti); see C.L.R.James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Allison & Busby, London,

United Kingdom, 1980);

(8) for Gramsci's use of the term *passive revolution* in the context of the 19th century struggle for the unification of Italy, see David Forgacs (1988), *op.cit.*, p.250-251; as Forgacs stresses in his explanatory notes on Gramscian terminology, - contrary to the liberals of the Italian Risorgimento, for Gramsci the term *passive revolution* was merely an analytical tool, a 'criterion of interpretation', and not a programme - see Forgacs, *op.cit.*, p.428;

(9) some important sources on the role of traditional intellectuals in the political evolution of (East) Bengal are: A.T.M.Atikur Rahman, *Maulana Mohammed Akram Khan in the Politics of Bengal* (in Bangla: Bangla Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1995); Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906. A Quest for Identity* (Oxford University Press, Bombay/Calcutta/Madras, 1996); Taj Ul-Islam Hashmi, *Peasant Utopia. The Communalisation of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* (University Press Limited, Dhaka, 1994).

(10) a classical Marxist statement on united front work is Mao Tsetung's essay, 'On New Democracy' (Mao Tsetung, *Selected Works Vol.II*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, People's Republic of China, 1965, p.339); also: Truong-Chinh, 'The Party's Policy Concerning the National United Front' (Truong-Chinh, *Selected Writings*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1977, p.455); for a summary of Gramsci's views on the *historical bloc*, see Forgacs (1988), *op.cit.*, 424-425.

(11) see for details on the sexual division of labour, Peter Custers (1997), *op.cit.*; an author who was keenly aware of the fact that men monopolise intellectual labour, is for instance Clara Zetkin - see her 'Die Arbeiterinnen- und Frauenfrage der Gegenwart' (The Contemporary Question of Female Workers and the Women's Question), in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed.), *Frauenarbeit und Beruf* (Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1979).