

# The Politics Of Statues

MONI GUHA

ON the university campus Sir Ashutosh was pushed down, in Gol Park the shining face of Swami Vivekananda was besmeared with coal tar, Vidyasagar and Sir Prafulla Chandra have been beheaded in College Square, Rabindranath Tagore, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose have also not been spared. Naturally the admirers are shocked. They say that the attacks on these statues of 'great and noble men' are attacks on whatever progressivism stands for. They also say that these attacks are cowardly.

This is only one side, miserable and pathetic, of the fate of the 'dead heroes' and their statues. There is also another side which is described as 'glorious' and 'befitting'. The Ochterlony Monument, a boastful and arrogant memorial to the hateful conquest by the colonisers, to the 'victorious' colonial march over Nepal in league with a section of Indian feudal chieftains, now stands as a venerable memorial to the freedom fighters who laid down their lives against that very colonial power and rule ! It was not razed to the ground in fury, nor was it kept as a historical witness for the future generation. Instead, it has been given the respect and dignity of a "Shaheed Minar". Overnight it became a 'national symbol' of great respect !

If one takes the trouble of rummaging the old files of the 'dailies' of the days when Nazimuddin was the Chief Minister of undivided Bengal and when Shri (he was not called 'Netaji' then) Subhas Chandra Bose launched a movement for the removal of the Holwell Monument, that hateful and repugnant memorial of the fake "Black hole tragedy", he will find that Nazimuddin proposed the renaming of the statues and symbols so that they "look" patriotic and not repugnant. The political leaders of those days, not excluding people who took the initiative in renaming and

refurbishing the repugnant and atrocious memories, drowned that 'hateful proposal' of Nazimuddin with much hatred and anger; the 'nationalist' papers denounced Nazimuddin as an "agent of imperialism". Strangely enough, the very same political leaders are now executing the very same proposal of the then "agent of imperialism", in the name of 'changed political conditions'. Thus the Ochterlony Monument becomes "Shaheed Minar" and Anderson House "Bhowani Bhavan." These acts concerning the statues are not considered 'cowardly acts of a few miscreants' or as an "attack against what progressivism stands for". Instead they are glorified as 'most befitting'. After a generation or two the hateful memories of Ochterlony and Anderson will be effaced and history will be written anew.

There is one more side. Lenin the revolutionary has been made Lenin the harmless humanist, though according to Lenin himself, there is nothing in common between bourgeois humanism, which is nothing but philistinism, and communism. Lenin, the Bolshevik, the 'promoter of class hatred', 'violence', 'armed revolution' 'usurper of democracy' and 'organiser of totalitarianism' has today become 'a great humanist' and 'a lover of mankind'! The statue of Lenin has been installed at Esplanade with much fanfare. This is not regarded as an act of "duping the people", an act of cowardly conspiracy of the political miscreants for the consolidation of the oppressed masses, emasculating revolutionary doctrine of its *content*, vulgarising it and blunting its revolutionary edge as Lenin said in his celebrated book *The State and Revolution*.

More. The attack on dead heroes and on their statues did not begin in West Bengal, nor was it initiated by the "anti-social Naxalites". The attack on dead heroes began from the very rostrum of the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The statues of Stalin were razed to the ground, demolished, defiled in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and the

USSR. The Stalin statues faced the same fate as those of Vidyasagar, Netaji and others. The bourgeois Press, at that time, reported gleefully that these events were the expression of the just and spontaneous hatred against the Stalinist totalitarianism. But now in West Bengal, statue breaking is the act of a "few vandals and miscreants" against progressivism!

### Lumped Together

The story does not end here. Raja Rammohun Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kali Sankar Ghosal, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dinabandho Mitra, the Reverend Lal Behari Ghosh, Harish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, Akshoy Kumar Maitreya and a host of others are lined up with Radha Kanta Deb, Ram Kamal Sen, Bankim Chandra, Ramakrishna, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Keshab Sen, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ranade, Annie Besant, Gandhi and a host of others. In the same breath both groups are painted as "progressives", "great and noble" and "awakeners of India". Both groups are haloed as national heroes and national leaders as if both Raja Rammohun Roy and Vivekananda stood for progressivism!

The great reformers were the products of Western ideas and ideologies. They received Western education and natural science readymade before the economic, social and political condition to which these were related had arisen. By dint of Western education they found that Hindu culture, especially Hindu religion, had suffocated the society and the individual in a network of patriarchal family and social obligations. The final result was passivity, stagnation and impotence. They found the manners and customs of Indian life unjust. They found the answer to this challenge only in the West and Western education and science. In the mean time, the colonisers introduced a few superstructural changes in the administrative, judicial and educational spheres and reformed a few glaring feudal-patriarchal social vices. The question of conquest of political power from the clutches of the

foreigners did not and could not arise in their minds as the social forces capable of effecting a political revolution, that is the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, did not exist then. As such they became rebels against all obsolete feudal-patriarchal social vices and traditions, became fervent Westernised modernists. This is what is glorified in Indian history as "the renaissance", "a great awakening". Undoubtedly they were progressives so far some of the super-structural spheres were concerned, but on no account were they political revolutionaries, as the question of political revolution did not arise at that time due to the historical absence of the necessary development of production and social forces. They had their historical limitations. The reformers rose to the occasion of their epoch and there lay their greatness. Nobody denies or should deny or denounce the heritage of the great reformers. But at the same time nobody should raise this heritage of an epoch of political and social unripeness to the epoch of political and social revolution. But the formal historians have avoided and still avoid this crying contradiction and the limitations of that epoch and show the "great reformers" as "great revolutionaries".

Curiously enough, the formal historians do not attribute greatness to the advocates of "the renaissance" only. As a reaction to this "renaissance" a seemingly patriotic movement arose with pronounced reactionary features and forms. The Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Theosophical Society etc. were born. These groups believed and preached the cult of the "special genius" of India and Hindu religion. Failing to understand the reasons for the deplorable stagnation of Indian life, they made a virtue of it. They began to idolise the past which had brought about the misery of India. The backwardness of India was a fact and it was not possible to remove it by glorifying its causes. The lingering faith in the infallibility and eternalness of ancient culture made India a baffling problem. In

contrast with this section the advocates of the renaissance were really big rebels and big reformers. But the formal historians and politicians, being afraid of the spectre of national inferiority, idolised anybody who upheld anything Indian and undermined Western ideas and ideologies. *As a whole*, the views, doctrines and activities of these schools were reactionary, though in some spheres and in some respects, certain individuals had contributed positively towards the development of language, literature or something else.

The "expert hand" on South African soil, Gandhi, appeared on the political stage of India. Gandhi and the Gandhi-led Congress did never carry forward the heritage of the great reformers. On the contrary Gandhi carried forward the heritage of the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Theosophical Society etc. It was Gandhi who canalised the whole national movement into the blind alley of religion and obscurantism, opposed Western science, industrialisation, industrial civilisation, modern science and culture for which the reformers fought.

The politicians of "left" and "right" of today are saying that the attacks on statues are attacks on whatever progressivism stands for. If the historians and politicians mix up the reformers with political reactionaries and try to use this adulterated commodity as an ideological weapon against the march of history, then it is very difficult for honest persons to blame the present-day "Luddites." Marx, in criticising Proudhon, said that theft was the first form of protest against property, though unconscious. The demolition of statues is undoubtedly a protest, though unconscious and primitive.

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