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## Governmentality or Class Politics: The Path Ahead for Indian Communists

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### ABSTRACT

Considering the June 2024 general parliamentary election results in India, this article undertakes a broad discursive analysis of the parliamentary Communists, tracing their trajectory from the inception of independent India to the present day. It argues that the Communists have continued to oscillate between liberal and neo-liberal notions of “governmentality,” constrained by its perpetuation of “capitalo-parliamentarian” hegemony. Drawing parallels with B.R. Ambedkar’s dichotomies on liberal democracy, the article highlights that the shifts in capital–labour dynamics have further deepened this ideological vacillation of the Communists. The article suggests that to move forward, Indian Communists must choose between constitutional governmentality and extra-parliamentary interventions rooted in transformative class politics.

### KEY WORDS

class politics; communism in India; constitutionalism; governmentality; liberal democracy

In its first statement about participating in parliamentary elections in post-independence India, the unified Communist Party of India (CPI 1951), at its all-India party congress held in October 1951, criticised the Indian constitution, adopted in January 1950, and parliamentarism as hinderances to fundamental democratic transformation of the society. It viewed elections as a tactical move by the ruling classes to mobilise and educate the larger section of masses and to work as a force to defend their interests. It was argued that liberal democracy would neither resolve the social reproduction crises of labouring people nor ensure freedom from systemic injustice. B.R. Ambedkar, the main architect of the constitution held a somewhat similar position about elections. In a 1953 BBC interview, when asked about the prospects of parliamentary democracy in India, he remarked “... who really cares for this election business? People want food; people want their material needs to be satisfied” (Round Table India 2023).

However, the evolution of the Indian polity has proven that people do indeed care about elections for the very reasons the Communists and Ambedkar pointed out: elections have continued to be a means for people to assert their basic needs. The 2024 parliamentary election results once again highlight this reality: constitutional democracy is not

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merely a grand, pedantic liberal structure based on abstract citizenship, but rather a system shaped through continuous contestation and negotiation with the state, driven by the pragmatic concerns of the people. Although the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed a government with support from its alliance partners, its loss of absolute majority has dented its image of infallibility and undermined its ability to bulldoze policy decisions in parliament. Many opponents of the BJP view this result as a popular mandate against its perceived fascistic tendencies, interpreting it as a rejection of the BJP and its ideological core, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) efforts to alter India's secular republican democracy into a majoritarian Hindu state.

While this perspective holds true for some sections of the electorate, particularly liberal democrats, it overlooks the potent reaction of the broader populace to ongoing social reproduction crises, exacerbated during the BJP regime. These crises are evident in rising employment precarity, increasing household indebtedness, and stagnation in household consumption expenditure. In a highly unequal society like India, the concentration of power within one political party restricts the space for public contestation over basic needs. As observed in the election results, the tendency to reject the BJP, especially among historically deprived lower castes and Muslims, groups that constitute a significant portion of the labouring classes, broadly reflects a resistance to the over-centralisation of power and an effort to maintain a thriving space for contestation over means of subsistence.

But this resistance is fundamentally existential, a survival strategy for the powerless, which may not effectively challenge the political hegemony of the present regime. The BJP's national vote share remained essentially stable at 37.37% in 2024, compared to 37.34% in 2019, and even in West Bengal – a bastion of liberal politics – the BJP's vote share has consistently ranged from 37% to 40% since 2016. The BJP fell short of a majority by 32 seats in 2024. This can largely be attributed to strategic seat-sharing arrangements among opposition parties, which consolidated a significant anti-BJP vote in some states. However, the RSS-BJP's dominance over discursive politics has largely remained unchallenged, with the election result acting merely as a temporary impediment to its majoritarian agenda.

This situation prompts a critical examination of the Communists' narrative, particularly of the parliamentary Communist parties which include the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M), and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. After gaining unprecedented electoral strength in the 2004 parliamentary elections, the Communists have rapidly declined to a marginal position among opposition parties over the last decade. However, this time they increased their seat share from five in 2019 to eight in 2024 as opposition votes coalesced. Interestingly during this election, all these parliamentary Communist parties focused on preserving the constitutional liberal democratic framework with slogans like "Save Democracy, Save Constitution." It seems that from once being critical of parliamentary democracy, the Communists have reoriented themselves. The CPI(M) (2024a), holding the most seats among these parties, has interpreted the 2024 election verdict as "... remarkable for the assertion by the people that they value democracy and the constitution."

This shift spans a long period, making it impossible to capture every aspect. However, this article will attempt to highlight key dichotomies in the Communist views on constitutional democracy while drawing parallels with Ambedkar's perspective. The non-parliamentary Communists are beyond this discussion's scope because the parliamentary Communists are at least working within electoral democracy to navigate its inherent

status quo while advocating for the labouring classes. This path is tortuous and uneven which requires constant course correction and strategic alignment.

### **Ambedkar and the Communists**

In 1948, the then united CPI, in its famous “Calcutta Thesis” presented at its 2nd Congress in Calcutta, vehemently disapproved of the constitutional framing. The thesis differentiated between liberal democracy and what they termed “true democracy,” envisioning a radical transformation: People’s Democratic Revolution (CPI 1948). According to the thesis, the Communists viewed the entire exercise of the Constituent Assembly as an attempt to suppress freedom and democracy by formulating an authoritarian constitution. This constitution, as per their critique, aimed to perpetuate the rule of upper-class elites aligned with the Anglo-American bloc of imperialist powers. The Communists argued that while the working class and Indian people would have the right to vote at long intervals, they would not gain substantial rights. The primary task of the Communists, as outlined in the Calcutta Thesis, was to undertake a People’s Democratic Revolution to fundamentally change the political and social structures, replacing the existing state with a republic of workers, peasants, and oppressed middle classes. Because the thesis criticised the constitution for favouring the interests of the landed elite and capitalist classes by not including rights such as the right to work, a living wage, and equal pay for equal work as fundamental, thus perpetuating the oppression of the working class. For both Ambedkar and the Communists, this critical contention persisted even after the adoption of the constitution.

Ambedkar’s last speech during the Constituent Assembly of India Debates (1949) on November 25, 1949 was ridden with dichotomies, reflective of his internal struggle to reconcile his understanding of Indian society as highly hierarchical, with the top-down installation of liberal democracy through the adoption of the constitution. He posited social democracy as the principal pre-condition for political democracy and warned that the newborn democracy could plausibly be transformed into a dictatorship if the contradiction of a hierarchical society and the liberal constitutional framework was not resolved.

During his last speech to the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar said:

The condemnation of the Constitution largely comes from two quarters, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party ... The Communist Party want a Constitution based upon the principle of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They condemn the Constitution because it is based upon parliamentary democracy ... I do not say that the principle of parliamentary democracy is the only ideal form of political democracy. I do not say that the principle of no acquisition of private property without compensation is so sacrosanct that there can be no departure from it. I do not say that Fundamental Rights can never be absolute, and the limitations set upon them can never be lifted. What I do say is that the principles embodied in the Constitution are the views of the present generation or if you think this to be an over-statement, I say they are the views of the members of the Constituent Assembly (Constituent Assembly of India 1949, 975–976).

He was evidently wary about the composition of the Constituent Assembly because its members were drawn from the provincial legislative assemblies of British India under 1935 Government of India Act which had a limited franchise of about 11.5% of the people who were primarily landed elites and nominees of princely states (Ghosh 2001, 8). He saw the nation and its democratic structure as reflective of the people’s political consciousness of a certain epoch, with the constitution’s provisional nature anticipating that future generations would attempt to change it.

In the Constituent Assembly debate on the Interim Report on Fundamental Rights on April 29, 1947, Somnath Lahiri, the Communists’ sole representative, presented three

principal arguments criticising the constitutional framework. First, he argued against the arbitrariness of defining fundamental rights and their limitations as framed in the constitution stating: "... many of these fundamental rights have been framed from the point of view of a police constable, and many such provisions have been incorporated. Why? Because you will find that very minimum rights have been conceded, and those too very grudgingly, and these so-called rights are almost invariably followed by a proviso" (Constituent Assembly of India 1947, 404). Second, Lahiri spoke against granting limited freedom of expression in the constitution and highlighted the inherent contradiction between true democracy and a state's tendency to centralise power by curtailing opposition's right to criticise the government stating: "Why should my right [to free speech] ... be curtailed, and at the same time, we should assume that political opposition will grow and democracy will develop? It cannot; it will have to depend on the sweet will and the tender mercies of the party in power or the executive in power. That is not the basis of democracy" (Constituent Assembly of India 1947, 405). Although Lahiri's third argument favoured Article 15 of the constitution which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, he insisted on including "political creed" within the clause. By this, Lahiri was anticipating that, as the newly independent state matured, political differences might emerge, potentially leading the state and its institutions to discriminate based on their party allegiance, political ideology, or beliefs. In contemporary India, the widespread incarceration of numerous activists and intellectuals, solely due to their political ideologies, serves as evidence supporting Lahiri's assumption.

In his renowned article "A Constitution of Myths and Denials," originally published in the *Indian Law Review* in January 1950, Sarat Bose (1968, 333), a stalwart of Indian Radical Socialist leadership labelled the constitution "the Magna Charta of our slavery." His primary criticisms of the constitution were that it granted absolute power to the state over the people by limiting freedom of dissent, and that federalism was a roadmap to despotic centralisation of power in the hands of a few. Bose saw capitalism and democracy as antithetical and categorised the constitution as a tool to prevent any present and future criticism of the regime while establishing absolute capitalist dictatorship. Bose (1968, 336) stated: "... in a capitalist state and in a capitalist society, inspired by acquisitive motives, equality before law is a fine yarn woven by constitutional myth-makers." His indignation was such that he hoped the people would revolt against the constitution. His position was not unique.

In his final speech at the Constituent Assembly, driven by his liberal democratic beliefs, Ambedkar, stressed the need to adhere to constitutional means to achieve India's social and economic goals and advocated for the abandonment of violent revolutionary methods (Constituent Assembly of India 1949). But he warned that if the constitutional framework failed to break the elite monopoly on power and neglected the majority down-trodden, it could lead to a class struggle or even a class war. However, by the time of his 1953 BBC interview, echoing Sarat Bose's sentiments, Ambedkar appeared disillusioned with the ability of liberal democracy to address India's challenges. His belief was that democracy in India would not succeed due to the country's social structure, which he deemed fundamentally incompatible with parliamentary democracy because it was built on inequality. He also observed that constitutional liberal democracy had failed to resolve the social reproduction crisis faced by the labouring classes while the alternative for him was some form of communism. In this interview, Ambedkar also seemed to contradict his earlier stance when questioned about the potential for a violent overthrow of the state by the Communists, he responded: "That doesn't matter to my mind ... We have to do that sort of thing you know ... I mean in war you kill people, don't you ...?" (Round Table

India 2023). While this statement was likely not meant literally, it underscored his disappointment with the failure of parliamentary democracy to effect meaningful change in Indian society. Ambedkar's dichotomies regarding liberal democracy and his predictions about its shortcomings were becoming increasingly apparent to him.

Meanwhile, Indian Communists grappled with persistent internal conflicts, culminating in the split of the CPI in 1964 and the formation of the CPI(M). Central to this conflict was the interpretation of the state, the character of the bourgeoisie and its relationship with foreign finance capital (see Karat 2016). The CPI viewed the democratic structure as representing the rule of independent national capitalists, whom it considered progressive compared to the feudal landlord class. It saw these national capitalists as potential allies in a national progressive front, opposing foreign finance capital and monopolies. In contrast, the CPI(M) characterised the state as a hegemony of capitalist landlords, heavily influenced by a big bourgeoisie collaborating closely with finance capital. They viewed both capitalist and landlord classes as reactionary forces aligned with foreign finance capital.

This divergence was foundational: the CPI believed the constitutional framework had progressive elements, leading to a more accommodating stance towards ruling classes. In contrast, the CPI(M) viewed existing democracy as a mechanism to uphold bourgeois-landlord hegemony and advocated for its replacement with a people's democracy. Instead of the CPI's national democratic front, the CPI(M) aimed to build a class-based people's democratic front involving the rural and urban proletariat, peasantry, revolutionary sections of the middle class, and segments of the middle and small bourgeoisie. They adopted a more dialectical approach towards elections, viewing them as tools of class struggle to expand negotiation space in favour of labouring classes. Concurrently, they aimed to provide temporary relief from social reproduction crises and consolidate support through advocacy of class politics.

It has been 60 years since then, but the Communists still struggle to maintain a consistent stance. In a pre-election statement titled "It is All About the Constitution," the CPI(M) identified safeguarding the constitution as a pivotal issue in parliamentary elections, citing the BJP's actions subverting and endangering the constitution (CPI(M) 2024b). The CPI(M) underscored the defence of the constitution as a central theme, claiming resonance with a broad spectrum of Indians. In another communication on August 4, 2022, the CPI(M) (2022a) accused the BJP and the RSS of mounting an unprecedented attack on the constitution, undermining the fragile democratic structure by usurping central powers. On the 74th Republic Day, CPI(M) Party General Secretary Sitaram Yechury reiterated that the primary imperative is "to rise to defend our Constitution ...," which, for him, is the true symbol of patriotism (*The Hindu*, January 26, 2023).

In 1949, Ambedkar had observed the Communists to be one of the prime forces contending the constitutional liberal democratic structure while his own reading of Indian society resonated with the material basis of this contestation. However, the instances mentioned above, where the Communists have taken sharp turns to adopt positions that contradict those Ambedkar attributed to them in the first place, shows the internal struggle and dichotomies within the parliamentary Communists. There are even instances when the Communists have attempted to resist their tendency towards parliamentarism and of getting drawn into liberal politics. One significant instance was the CPI(M)'s Central Committee meeting in Hyderabad in 2015, where a self-critical review report on the party's Political Tactical Line was presented. The report identified parliamentarism as a reformist outlook that limits the party's interventions within constitutional contours,

undermining the importance of organising mass movements and engaging in ideological struggle while prioritising electoral victories (CPI(M) 2015). In fact, the CPI(M)'s programme still outlines one of its major tasks as being the establishment of "People's Democracy," which is qualitatively different from liberal democracy. The fact that the party is determined to establish People's Democracy implies that the Communists must be critical of the liberal democratic structure and, by extension, of the constitution.

The CPI(M) is presently advocating for two constitutional reforms: the right to work as a fundamental right and electoral reform through the introduction of proportional representation. Additionally, the party is emphasising the need to protect and strengthen the constitutional order, which it alleges has been undermined by the RSS-BJP's communal-corporate nexus and cronyism (CPI(M) 2022b). The Communists appear to be prioritising liberal constitutional approaches as the best strategic way to navigate between the purportedly subversive politics of the RSS-BJP, accused of colluding with foreign finance capital and endangering the existing, albeit limited yet functional democratic system, and the Communists' own agenda for radical social transformation. Furthermore, the rise of the RSS-BJP has led to an unprecedented scenario that has forced the Communists into an electoral alliance with ideologically antagonistic forces. For example, during the 2024 parliamentary elections, this included the Shivsena, an ultra-right Hindutva and linguistic nationalism based political party which was once an ally of the BJP, operating primarily in Maharashtra state and which is currently in opposition. To justify this consortium, along with the other partners, the Communists have posited constitutionality as the middle ground. For quite a time, this effort has been causing political contradictions.

One politically significant instance of such contradiction was the split in the West Bengal CPI(M) in 2001 and the birth of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Saifuddin Chowdhury, the founding president of the PDS and a former central committee member of the CPI(M), argued that democracy has matured worldwide, creating ways to bring about socialism without expediting societal conflict. The PDS contends that people's active participation has changed the objective reality of Indian democracy, which is no longer the sole preserve of the exploiting classes while the rise of neo-fascist forces has put it under threat. The party believes that the socialist cause can only be advanced by strengthening and expanding the existing constitutional democratic framework to its fullest extent and by renouncing the politics of working-class dictatorship premised on class conflict. Although the CPI(M) opposed this formulation at that time by expelling Chowdhury from the party, presently the stance of all the parliamentary Communists suggests a reconciliation with this idea. However, it has a major pitfall: the tendency towards governmentality.

### **The Governmentality Pitfall**

Before proceeding, it is important to briefly clarify what it is meant by "governmentality," especially in the context of a post-colonial society like India. When discussing governmentality, Foucault (1991, 87–104) implied that the state power, previously seen to be stemming from its sovereignty, had been replaced by a new form: the governmentalisation of state. Unlike sovereignty, which is premised upon law and individual rights, governmentality is centred on the management of society through targeted interventions aimed at promoting societal welfare. Governmentality thus operates on the premise of inclusion or claims of inclusion, functioning as an administrative exercise to organise society. It conceptualises contemporary democracy as not being structured by or for the people but rather as a system centred on governing them.



For post-colonial democracies like India, this conceptualisation has been expanded further to denote a process of apparent reversal of the consequences of primitive accumulation and a distinct form of social governance. State power in post-colonial capitalism arguably assumes a dual role through governmentality: on the one hand it regulates class conflict by managing poverty and the social reproduction crises to prevent “people” from transforming into “dangerous classes,” while on the other hand, it ensures continual surplus accumulation (see Sanyal 2007). In this context, the political legitimacy of a regime is garnered not through the participation of sovereign citizens but by providing “life support” to the “people” or the vast “reserve army of labour” which is deemed superfluous in post-colonial capitalism. “Governmentality” is seen as the state ideology, entirely subsuming “living labour” through its complete dependency on “social welfare” to ensure continuous reproduction of capitalist hegemony (Samaddar 2017, 89–109).

Historically, the liberal democratic welfare state, based on the Keynesian economic model and emanating from what Foucault (2008, 129–150) identified as the ideology of liberal governmentality, had a brief presence in India – primarily during the period of industrialisation from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. The economy of this regime relies on the government’s counter-cyclical fiscal policies. These involve long-term public spending through deficit financing to boost economic activities and aggregate demand. The state money injected into the system is used to pay for commodities produced under a capitalist production system owned by big enterprises. Consequently, the socially produced surplus goes to the capitalists, strengthening their control over the economy. This increased power allows them to erode and eventually end Keynesian state intervention, thereby taking complete economic control. Following Keynesianism, India’s welfare state approach was also to avoid the crucial issue of ownership of property and control over the appropriation of surplus, which does not bring substantial change in overall productivity and real wages. While constitutional democracy safeguarded elite interests by universalising the right to property, the state was also not positioned to implement any effective redistributive measures, leading to a lack of capital formation.

Planning is not feasible without control over factors of production and distribution, and control is unattainable without social ownership over means of production. But the Nehruvian planned economy invested available capital in modern industries to expedite transfer of the means of labour and raw materials from the agrarian sector, further weakening productive activities outside the industrial sector, which created a situation reminiscent of India’s colonial past, with the notable difference being the growth of Indian industries in place of British ones. Economic activities remained heavily concentrated in a few pockets, largely centred on former colonial cities with huge pauperised surplus populations waiting to be engaged in the capitalist labour process. Post-colonial India already lacked capital due to colonial exploitation, and this short phase of Keynesian interventionism exacerbated this as the state ran out of capital resources. Stagnant capital formation and continued deficit financing by the state led to a financial crisis by the end of 1980s. Eventually, in 1991, the state had to borrow from international financial institutions, permanently ushering in a neo-liberal economic regime through a structural adjustment programme.

While colonial plunder decimated the native economy and left behind a vast pauperised surplus population, the brief period of the Keynesian liberal democratic form of the Indian state also failed to resolve the issue of surplus population, and as explained earlier, somewhat exacerbated it. With the ascendancy of financial capitalism in the neo-liberal regime, the problem of surplus population continues: first, through ongoing primitive accumulation; and second, through capital’s ability to extract surplus value without



directly engaging labour power, broadly via financialisation where the surplus population's labour is unlikely to be commodified. The basic characteristic of post-colonial capitalism in India is marked by people's constant vulnerability to double exclusion: from the capitalist labour engagement and from the means of subsistence – this has remained unchanged, with its degree increasing during the neo-liberal phase.

In both liberal and neo-liberal phases, the overall goal of the state has remained fixated on poverty management and governing “people” by ensuring the social reproduction of the labouring classes. However, there is a prominent difference in the types of governmental interventions in the two phases. In the liberal phase, governmental initiatives were mostly carried out through investments in public goods, whereas in the neo-liberal phase “welfare” has been individualised in the name of social security, eroding the concept of public goods and thereby reducing the accountability of the state.

For a post-colonial capitalism like India, governmentality has been at the core of its constitutional democratic framework. Even the promise to resolve the issue of surplus population through “full employment” requires the Keynesian welfare state to manage and govern the unemployed. By resorting to constitutionalism, the Communists have leaned towards the same approach, moving away from their initial critical position as articulated by Somnath Lahiri in the Constituent Assembly, the Calcutta Thesis, and by Sarat Bose, which used to be the benchmarks of radical transformative politics for the Communists.

The tilt towards governmentality has been further bolstered by the dominance of finance capital, which is characterised by continual and rapid primitive accumulation along with the supremacy of finance capital. The shift from industrial to financial capital has enabled accumulation of enormous surplus value while increasingly distancing capital from labour power by reducing direct engagement (Fumagalli 2019). This has resulted in labour precarity, rendering the formal institutional arrangements built around conventional labour markets redundant and leaving the question of subsistence and life of the labouring classes unaddressed. As the relation between wage and labour receded, in the absence of mediating structures to ensure social reproduction of labourers, financing individual consumption emerges as the only viable arrangement to subsist. In industrial capitalism, there was a need to balance production for consumption and production for exchange (or production for generating surplus value). However, financial capital has resolved this issue for the capitalist classes through the financialisation of life, extracting value generated by living labour through rent and interest.

Neo-liberal governmentality has thus focused on interventions such as individualised social security through direct benefit transfers and insurance schemes, along with initiatives that facilitate credit linkages of the labouring families. In response, the Communists have advocated for a Keynesian model to liberal governmentality, emphasising a public goods-centric welfare approach with traditional fiscal and monetary regulatory policies to establish state control over investment and capital flows. The most radical they have gone is to demand increased taxation of the rich, universal healthcare and education, and halting privatisation of certain strategic sectors such as energy, railways, defence, etc., with government executives replacing private stakeholders. However, hardly any of these measures challenge capitalist hegemony.

### **Whither Transformative Politics**

This shift of the Communists towards governmentality has posed two distinct threats to the integrity of communist radical politics. The first threat arises in cases where the

Communists have enjoyed state power. I have argued elsewhere that the redistributive land reforms undertaken by the CPI(M)-led government in the state of West Bengal were governmental actions (see Mukherjee and Mukherjee 2024). These reforms resulted in the consolidation of an agrarian middle class that began to dominate the rural political space and the party itself. This culminated in the party's eventual adoption of neo-liberal policies to liberalise previously implemented land reforms and expedite gentrification through land acquisition. This shift disrupted the politico-economic balance in a society dominated by small-marginal landholders and petty commodity producers, who subsequently united against the CPI(M)-led leftist government and ultimately removed the Communists from power in the state in 2010. This also led to a significant decline in the Communists' status as a major electoral force. Having secured a large chunk of their seats from the state of West Bengal in the 2004 general elections, which had given them unprecedented electoral strength, their complete wipe out in West Bengal pushed them to the political margins.

The second threat is to political identity. As all parliamentary political parties in India operate within the ideological frame of governmentality to varying degrees, the distinguishing factor among them gets blurred because governmentality is inherently technocratic and ostensibly apolitical. From this perspective, the primary consideration for the labouring classes becomes which political party is more efficient at serving their individual social reproduction needs. For example, if the Trinamool Congress (a post-ideological populist regional party from the state of West Bengal) is more efficient in addressing social reproduction crises than the Communists in West Bengal, it naturally encroaches on the political space previously held by the Communists. Similarly, the BJP's 2024 electoral manifesto was full of promises of interventions (named as *Modi ki Guarantee*) to address the same crises. However, what differentiates the RSS-BJP from others is indeed its persistent subversive politics, which envisions a rightist radical transformation of society to replace constitutional liberal democracy with a new form of state, a "Hindurastra."

The RSS-BJP differs notably from the Communists in its approach to dealing with the liberal democratic constitutional framework, which inherently pushes towards a centrist position. Ahmad (2016) presents a compelling argument to differentiate the two, as he argues that while the Communists primarily address this dilemma theoretically, the radical right resolves it organisationally. The radical right maintains its core organisation, the RSS, in a semi-clandestine manner, with the BJP functioning as its prominent political wing. The BJP publicly upholds liberal democratic norms, accompanied by an extensive network of various fronts that continually test the boundaries of legality and liberalism through clinical practices of violence.

Liberal democratic politics, based on rights and social justice is inherently individualistic and does not contradict the political culture of capitalism. This individualism aligns with governmentality, which sees the state as an entity responsible for looking after its citizens, thereby treating people as subjects. It alienates people from their communities and reduces them to consumers and units of labour. The RSS's invocation of majoritarian politico-cultural practices and memories of a glorious civilisational past serves as an auto-critique of this process of individualisation by emphasising collective identity rooted in religious and cultural traditions. While the BJP continues to engage within the contours of constitutional governmentality, the RSS reinforces the imagery of religious spaces as the new commons, persistently pursuing its civilisational mission beyond mere electoral victories. This strategy effectively transforms liberal institutions from within, using entirely legitimate means, while the radical right's extra-parliamentary interventions build

consensus for their mission. This approach ultimately guides society towards a politico-cultural transformation without dismantling the constitutional framework.

This presents a near-Gramscian picture of the radical right's success in consolidating the majority's social subjectivity. However, there is a fundamental disparity between the projects of the radical right and the Communists. The radical right focuses primarily on superstructural changes, maintaining the economic base and reinforcing corporate capital's absolute dominance. In contrast, the Communists' politics aim for the radical transformation of the economic structure and in parallel, the politico-culture that legitimises and reproduces the existing economic conditions.

The CPI(M) (2015), in a Draft Review Report, emphasised the need to combine parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work. By the inherent character of a radical organisation, the extra-parliamentary work ought to be the guiding light of parliamentary interventions. The struggle for social transformation taking place outside the space of the constitutional democratic framework directs the kind of policies to be advocated within the parliament, similar to the case of the radical right. The question is, what is the basis of this extra-parliamentary work as envisaged by the Communists?

The answer may lie within class politics, which is premised upon the production, distribution, and appropriation of socially produced surplus (Resnick and Wolff 1987, 19–25). Class politics highlights how the conflicts between surplus producers and appropriators in a society, as well as the competitive struggle among them, impact policy decisions of the state. This approach to politics does not aim to engage with speculations about any ideal state or resolve the issue of what is “bad” or “good” government, instead envisaging society as a form of political organisation devoid of any spatial hierarchy. This politics envisions a collectivist production and appropriation of surplus, ushering in a completely different type of society and state structure. It is based on a fundamentally transformative notion which not only seeks to change the social reality but the very coordinates of reality itself, when individuals are not just self-serving entities pursuing individual rights but are rather positioned within communities, making decisions on behalf of their “commons,” collective goals and well-being.

While discussing the failure of Communist parties in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to sustain socialist states, former General Secretary of the CPI(M) and Politburo member Prakash Karat (1997) emphasised the need for Communists to beyond the entrenched idea that public ownership is synonymous with state ownership while various forms of public ownership can prevent bureaucratic stagnation by promoting popular participation. He observed: “This is possible only if the revolutionary party does not confine its role to administering the state and managing the economy ... This, in turn, is related to the lack of institutionalising socialist democracy, which is not possible by merging the ideology of the Party with the state” (Karat 1997, 6).

The revolutionary experiences of Soviet Russia and China have shown that revolution is an event that disrupts the normal flow of time. However, there is an underlying continuity between the periods before and after revolution. This event emerges from the practices of pre-revolutionary times and gives birth to new practices, both of which critique their respective eras, signifying persistent transformative praxis in tandem with changing objective conditions (Samaddar 2023, 212–227). Revolution is thus a transformative political continuum that transcends time and stages. From this perspective, what Karat argued about the socialist countries should be applicable to pre-revolutionary societies as well.

Moving away from the orthodox position of equating state ownership with public ownership requires prolonged innovative interventions to explore existing forms of

communitarian politico-economic practices, build new ones, and sustain them. It entails envisioning micro-level community collectives in as varied forms as possible. These collectives would facilitate both the initiation and consolidation of non-exploitative processes of production, distribution, and appropriation of surplus value. Simultaneously, they would supplement macro-level planning over the market and socialisation of the means of production, ultimately functioning as people's democratic institutions. These people's democratic institutions would further facilitate the emergence of what Lenin (1917) identified as counter-hegemonic "dual power," marking a condition in which new political structures of self-governance and spaces of new consciousness transcend the existing liberal constitutional framework. However, realising this vision requires a re-orientation of Communist politics as a practical socio-economic project aimed at valuing and rebuilding communal life, shifting from its present state-centric individual rights-based approach.

Today's struggle for the Communists is then purely ideological, unfolding within the realm of politics. If the institutionalisation of socialist democracy demands a clear differentiation between state ideology and party ideology as Karat (1997) had expressed it, then Indian Communists must decide whether to slide further towards governmentality or to redefine and renovate what they have termed extra-parliamentary work.

## Disclosure Statement

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