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The Intellectual behind *India Unbound*

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India Unbound (2000) is famous and most read book written by Gurcharan Das. He is a well known author and public intellectual. He has special interest and keen eye on the so called economic ascent of India. With his education (graduate from Harvard University) and profession (C.E.O of a M.N.C Procter and Gamble) he is champion of capitalism in India. In *India Unbound* (2000), Das has written a paeon to liberalization. But the question is – Is his theory of liberalization an ultimate panacea for all the problems of India. Is Gurcharan Das doing his duty of an intellectual and what type of intellectual Das is?

According to Antonio Gramsci there are two forms of intellectuals – “organic” intellectuals and” traditional” intellectuals. Organic intellectuals work from within a class towards strengthening its position, either by providing technical know-how to the class or by ensuring its domination through ideological consent from the masses through different institutions of the “civil society” like education , culture etc. Traditional intellectuals are residues from earlier class formations, whose pursuits may not have any class function to perform anymore. The class for Das is working is dominant capitalist class in India. Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks* has raised the question of the role of ‘intellectuals’ in spreading hegemony. He begins with the question – are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group has its own particular specialized category of intellectuals? Then he goes on to describe the types and roles of intellectuals in society. According to Gramsci, the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizer of a new culture, of a new legal system,etc. This helps him to gain the benefits of capitalism in an efficient and smooth way. It is to be noted that the mass of the peasantry , although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not ‘elaborate’ its own organic ‘intellectuals’, though it is from peasantry that other social groups extract their intellectuals. According to Gramsci, it is an obstacle in the path of revolution.

The capitalist in India have their own share of “organic intellectuals” and Das is one of them. While obliging his duty Das has stressed upon the neoliberal policies adopted by G.O.I after the opening of economy in 1991. Neoliberalization refers to the policies whereby a handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profits. It has its origin from the policies of Regan and Thacher and for the past three decades it has been the dominant global political economic trend. The governments which have adopted these policies represent the immediate interests of extremely wealthy investors and few large corporate. Neoliberal policies are characterized as free market policies that encourage

private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic and parasitic government, that can never do good even if well intended. In his book *India Unbound* (2000) Das asserts:-

India has recently emerged as a vibrant free market democracy after the economic reforms in 1991, and it has begun to flex its muscles in global information economy. The old centralized bureaucratic state, which killed our industrial revolution at birth, has begun a subtle but definite decline. With the rule of democracy the lower castes have gradually risen.(15)

Here Das sounds as if these policies are doing poor people, lower castes and everybody else a great service. But the consequences of these policies are exactly opposite: a massive increase in social, political and economic inequality, a marked increase in severe deprivation for the poorest peoples of country, a disastrous ecology, an unstable national economy and unprecedented rewards for the wealthy. Defenders of neo-liberal order claim that the spoils of the good life will invariably spread to the broad mass of the population as long as the neo-liberal policies that exacerbated these problems are not interfered with:

The leaders, for their part, who had fought for decades for freedom and who were now in power, were also in a hurry. They could not wait for the benefits to “trickle down” from a market oriented strategy. However, the socialism that emerged was a ‘rather weak and hollow reed in which one could blow almost any kind of music.’ (Das 99)

The ultimate reasoning for the neo-liberals is that there is no alternative. Communist societies, social democracies and even modest communist powers such as U.S.S.R have all failed; even the citizens of these countries have adopted neoliberalism as the only feasible course. This system is not perfect but what alternative do we have?

In his introduction to Noam Chomsky’s book – *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (1999), Robert W. McChesney calls neoliberalism as :

... “capitalism with the gloves off”. It represents an era in which business forces are stronger and more aggressive, and face less organized opposition than ever before. In this political climate they attempt to codify their political power and enact their vision on every possible front. As a result, business is increasingly difficult to challenge, and civil society(nonmarket, noncommercial and democratic forces) barely exists at all.(8-9)

These neoliberals also have a perverse understanding of democracy. According to these the work of a democratic government is just to protect private property and enforcing contracts, and to limit the political debate to minor issues whereas the big matters of production and distribution should be determined by market forces. In his introduction to his book *India Grows at Night*(2012), Das admits his misconception about the role of a democratic government as he says:

... I began to believe that the state was ‘a second order phenomenon’, at best a protector of what people choose to do in private life or in civil society and at worst capable of destroying those freedoms, I celebrated the heroic idea that India was rising despite the state. Two decades later, I have realized that I might have been wrong. I am now

convinced that the state is of first order importance. It can either allow human beings to flourish or it can become biggest obstacle to their realizing their potential. To rise despite the state is courageous but it cannot be long term virtue.(3)

In country like India these neoliberal policies have caused social inequalities which undermine any effort to realize the legal equality necessary to make democracy credible. The rich corporate world of India is capable of influencing media and the political process and it compromises the democratic spirit of our system. Das is favouring and propagating those neoliberal policies which have caused great problems in India. Recently numerous unearthed scams point toward the unholy nexus between corporate world, politics and media. These few wealthy corporate houses are dictating the terms to G.O.I. With the help of media and their own intellectuals (Das is one of them) these capitalists are trying to gain the consent of the governed. One of the striking features of the neoliberal policies adopted by the present congress government in India is its inability to have honest and candid discussions and debates. In spite of the opposition of many political parties G.O.I passed the bill for another hike of F.D.I percentage on Indian industries. One of the most opposed and discussed decision was the increased F.D.I limit in multibrand retail sector. Walmart is leading company in this sector , and despite being a product of USA, it has to face strongest criticism in USA. In his article, “Let grass roots decide on Walmart”, published in *The Hindu*, Garga Chatterjee tells us that setting up of Walmart is resisted in many parts of America and municipal area of Watertown is one of these. In another article – “Make the Right Diagnosis”, published in *The Hindu*, by Jaswant Singh (politician from B.J.P) – there is apt similarity (according to Singh) between the UPA -2 policies and the policies of Nazi party in Germany. Quoting Jaswant Singh:

In any event, as commented upon by Sydney Merlin in the “Quarterly Journal of Economics”, the word privatization first entered academic literature to describe the Nazi party’s policy at “facilitating... by its members...” This has disturbing similarity with UPA-2 policies; witness the proliferation: 2G, commonwealth G, coal G and so on. This amounts to stripping the assets of the state, not a healthy moving away of the state from superfluous and inefficient non-activity. One more caution about ‘reform’. This is not a synonym for unbridled consumerism of a variety which is alien to our cultural ethos. It is distressing in the extreme to witness today, as Avishek Parin has observed that, “ we purchase to consume incessantly, even as it consumes us back with its spectacular superfluity. We must not become a consumerist society; Walmart, Sears-Roebuck and their ilk are not our yardstick of economic progress. There are values beyond “money and markets” too. (6)

Recently, the colours of the fabled economic success of India have started to fade and after a period of fast (8-10%) economic growth this rate has fallen to 5%. Also, this growth in the previous decade has not been inclusive and instead of making the countrymen happy and contented it has resulted in disenchantment.

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