

# The 'summer' of the Right and the 'fall' of the Left

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In the English literary symbolic tradition '*summer*' and '*fall*' represent not only just seasons, but something more. The 'summer' has been symbolized as a child or a woman wearing a crown of corn ears and bearing a sheaf in one hand and a sickle in the other. The symbolic animal of 'summer' is a lion or a dragon. It is the time of romance and infinite potential. The color of 'summer' is yellow and temperatures move from mild to warm. If spring is the time of birth, then summer is the time of youth where one moves through the world with godlike ease and comfort [Source: [www.symbolism.org](http://www.symbolism.org) Copyright© 2001 John Frain]. '**Fall**' is a season where life is a reaped and winding down, middle age and a time to count one's blessings. 'Fall' represents a time for transformations, both personal and environmental, a season drenched in tradition, and it is the perfect time to reflect and embrace change. We leave the summer heat behind and blooming flowers are replaced by crisp leaves. Symbolism is etched in the spiritual fabric of 'fall'. Many traditions have been passed down and modified over the years. As you look back into your heritage you may find that 'fall' means a lot more than you expected. What is often been seen as a morbid subject, '*fall has given a positive spin to death*'. While passing of time and death of a loved one will cause sadness and mourning, 'fall' reminds us that death doesn't always have to leave us sad [From: lzmarieauthor.com, Source: <https://www.thelivingurn.com>].

One day one young friend posed a question to me: 'Sir, I am doing an experiment in the lab for about few months. But I am not getting the intended result. The experiment is giving me anxious moments! What shall I do?' I casually said: 'If the inputs and conditions of experiments are correct according to you, you must accept the result as correct and must discard your hypotheses.' My younger friend stared at me askance and left the scene with a sigh of disbelief, probably finding my answer as incoherent. But that is how I understood the law of hypothesis and thesis. If your hypothesis repeatedly fails in a lab, you cannot discard the result as incorrect, but check the correctness of hypotheses.

Shattered by the electoral verdict of the Indian common man in May 2019, the left is struggling hard to find the answers. Going into huddle at times and popping out occasionally, they blame the EVMs, the Hindutva forces and the consequent polarization of the electorate. They even blame the Congress and many other actors in the political play but rarely look into themselves. Why don't they examine themselves? Why don't they check the facts of the history for a moment? After all, their thesis was also humanly made! '*Communism*', '*socialism*' and many such projects promise good and wonderful distant lands. Marx is no doubt a Prometheus or a Moses promising us leading to that El Dorado. Yes, he said: '*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point however, is to change it.*' [Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis-XI]. But the fact remains that the history of the philosophy of interpreters did not end by then, and in fact it just began!

No idea that enters human experience would be obliterated totally without a trace. '*Secularism*' is also one such idea which made its entry into political lexicon in many participative democracies. Marxists have gone a bit further in that direction by constructing their theory and action on the '*scientific*' foundations of dialectical and materialistic approach to history, a sojourn beyond the mere 'secularism'. Here the categories such as 'idea',

‘spirituality’ and ‘religions’ are discarded. They upended Hegel, or they thought so. But even after its appearance on the world stage for over a century back, ‘dialectical and materialistic’ approach did not displace spirituality or religion from human rationality. Moreover, the experience of world citizens for the past decade or two would point to its growing phenomenon. ‘Dialectical materialism’ did not make a serious dent into human nature. But the thinking that we, the intellectuals, forming the higher layers of the society, got a Midas touch and epiphanous revelation by initiation into Marxism, and that we need to pity the common man for his poverty of thought had gone deep into the Marxist intellectual sections. They feel they are carrying the burden of saving this poor common folk! There are several challenges before the Marxists or communists. One such is ‘religion’. Religion is not just the *‘sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions’*! It is much more than *‘illusory happiness’* and *‘the opium of the people’*! The *‘abolition’* of religion is no more in sight and on the contrary the scepter of religion started haunting the communist world now with much more vigor and intensity. In fact, it re-emerged as a powerful contender for its space challenging the so called enlightenment *‘rationality’*.

The other challenge before the Marxist praxis is *‘nationalism’*, *‘an ideology and movement characterized by the promotion of the interests of a particular nation, especially with the aim of gaining over its homeland’* [the definition of nationalism is taken from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki>]. From the eighteenth century onwards it has grown as a countervailing power and a road-block against onward march of forming universal homogenous groups such as *‘class.’* It is true that its radical variants, either on the Left or on the Right had problematic patterns. But the two World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century questioned the universal human rationality beyond return. The freedom struggles of peoples of many nations from the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century and through the Indian freedom struggle created serious questions of universalism. The crumbling Soviet Bloc of late 1980s fortified the idea of *‘nationalist’* demands. Even those politics that are considered fairly evolved in the democratic process viz., of the British, or the France, or most of the Europe or the US could not grow beyond *‘nationalism’* as the current history demonstrates. Whenever the *‘nationalist’* demanded space, universal narratives suffered badly. How do we redefine the appeal for *‘working men of all countries unite!’*? How far-cry is it now in the given socio-political reality? *‘The specter of communism’* stopped haunting the Europe long back, now counter-narratives are in fact haunting Communism! Though the world had seen its threatening shades in the Hitler’s Germany, nationalism continues to appeal to the people.

*‘Globalization’* could be understood more as a missed opportunity for the Left’s universal claims. Before globalization could settle down, it was challenged powerfully by regional aspirations. Regional aspirations forcibly entered the space at all international fora, challenging the possible emergence of a universal human being. Contrary to claims of universality, the emerging trend is protecting the regional aspirations – **the local**. With regionalism also emerged the idea of social relativism - cultural, religious etc. *‘Glocalization’* joined the social science dictionary without much ado. The Left in fact actively defended the regional rights!

Relocating *‘socialism’* or *‘communism’*, even within the Indian roots, is not so an easy task. Even when, as utopians and dreamers, we endeavour to paint an image of these egalitarian ideas, the internal contradictions are enormous. By conceding the probability of resolving even these contradictions by a higher ideal, the first requirement is that - all these different shades of the Left should be ready to accede some of their territory for others. Given the experience of the Marxist faith in the supremacy of their theory and practice, the

future remains uncertain. Primarily, every shade, within the left of the centre, has to come out of the illusion that their '*Guru*' and their '*Book*' is only absolutely correct. Each must be ready to admit the insufficiency of each theory and the merit of others. It becomes a very big challenge to the Marxists, and in fact to a greater degree, even to Socialists. There must also be material contingency even for such tactical reconciliation. Who is ready for this allowance for others?

Being an ostrich of '*class construction*', the Left ignored the suffocation of the '**second sex**' for a longtime. The feminist movement however could make some sense to the Left. But in India, the problem of 'caste' has become a greater challenge. As usual the Indian Left refused to take into cognizance the problem of '*caste*' in India for a longtime. When it started understanding its significance and tried some allowance to the Ambedkarite narratives in its construction, though not internally convinced, the social dialectics underwent some more twists. Even though Lohia was initially a critic of the Marxist 'socialism' and made great foundational contribution to the localized understanding of it, and during later part of his political career, even wished to work along with Communists and the Ambedkarites, there is no evidence to argue that Lohia's arguments on caste or socialism or history were ever considered seriously by 'the other side'. Lohia, a brilliant and a rare original scholar, died as a disappointed soul with the Left's indifference. And in the meanwhile, the social forces are undergoing a process of advancement and nationalism is overtaking the space. The Left lagged in this process a generation behind. After all, the history cannot stagnate in theory!

Indian communists fought a relatively easier fight, though not a friendly one, with Congress. Most of the higher layers of the Congress obliquely recognized communists as progressive thinkers, except when it comes to dealing with those militant sections of it. Congress in itself had, and continues to have, sufficient left-wing sympathizers. But the post-2000 narratives are not that easy. The left demolished the relatively '*centrist*' political ideologies like Congress etc., over a period of time, but couldn't occupy the space so evicted by them. Science doesn't permit the existence of vacuum in the nature for longer periods, and some matter always waits for occupying the space. The space created by the Left and the Janata Pariwar, dismantling the '*centrist*' positions, without a scheme or means of occupying the same, in the meanwhile, has now been successfully occupied by the Right. Now the struggle would not be as easy as it was during the Congress heyday.

Dear Left, what next? Since my younger days when I read Marx's Theses on Feuerbach, certain doubts always were lingering in me. Marx said: '*The question whether objective truth can be attained by human thinking is not a question of theory but is a **practical** question. It is in **practice** that man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or unreality of thinking which is isolated from **practice** is a purely scholastic question*' (Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis-II). '*Social life is essentially **practical**. All mysteries which lead theory astray into mysticism find their rational solution in human **practice** and in the comprehension of his **practice**,*' [Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis-VIII]. '*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point however, is to change it,*' [Theses on Feuerbach, Thesis-XI]. We may find the stress on 'practice' or 'change' in these narratives. Post-Marx, not only Marxists, almost all the political philosophies went in a mad rush for practice.

Even when reading 'The Communist Manifesto' I was swarmed by doubts and incredulities. Its doors were opened with a big-bang - '*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*' I have been baffling with understanding this

proposition for over decades. As a broad categorization, the evolutionary changes of societies may be said to have certain generalizations. But a universal declaration of this nature could not go well within me. 'The middle classes' that have become a significant political force in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century does not fit into the descriptions. See the projection - '... entire sections of the ruling classes are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or at least threatened in their conditions of existence. ...' 'Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class.' But post-Marxist history defied Marxist logic. In nation after nation, the proletariat happily compromised with the bourgeoisie power structures. In some advanced industrial countries, they even refused to recognize the international character of the working class. 'What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.' The history of American trade union movement makes a different reading; the 'grave-diggers' have actually turned out to be the guardians of the capitalist fort! The continuous migration of faith even among the Indian communists from industrial workforce to agrarian labourers to tribal's deep lands also points its finger to the crisis in theory.

Change! Everything flows! You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you! Heraclitus! Change! Practice! These mantras dominated all the other theories also. But the Newton's laws of force also point towards the inherent nature of '*inertia*' in the phenomenal world. Change and practice are not so easy terms to be accommodated without challenge. In an individual or in a system of thought, a continuous urge for action may not be so healthy. Not only misplaced stress on action and even the fatigue of meaningless action take over the individuals and the societies! Except for barren adherents, doubts inundate the thinking and experiencing mind.

Understanding the failure is as important as celebrating the success. I have not started writing this as response to Ramachandra Guha's '*Does the Indian Left have a future?*' [22.06.2019 The Telegraph]. I started this contemplative course after about two weeks or so of the people's decisive mandate and after going through the analyses of various intellectuals, right and left. Some celebrated the forward march of the Right through wonderful paeans, and some others scribbled elegies for the Left. Guha writes: '*If the Left in India hopes or wishes to rise up from the ashes, then the first thing it must do is to become more Indian. In 1920, shortly before the Communist Party of India was established, the Mumbai Marxist, S.A. Dange wrote a pamphlet exalting Lenin over Gandhi. Ever since, Indian Communists have found their heroes in a country other than India*'. He further said: '*The problem with these foreigners is not just that they were foreigners. They were also totalitarians*'. There were references to the indigenous socialist tradition, and personalities like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Rammanohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narain etc. '*In the wake of the Lok Sabha elections, there is talk of the need to "unify" the different communist parties, and bring them under one platform,*' Guha hopes. The need to move from the position of Communist to Democratic Socialist is contemplated, with a hope that it would be 'a modest first step' towards a renewal.

'*Doubt*' is the foundation of all the growth narratives. If we have no doubts, even while failures are glaring at us, and we repeatedly re-affirm our faith in the theory and blame only the practicing individuals for all failures, secure '**The Book**' beyond criticism, it is Ahankara. Ahankara refuses the need for reflexive processes. Who needs homilies, more so, in the category of persons who firmly believe that they attained the highest realization? Can an *Advaitin* be convinced about some errors in his thinking? It equally applies to Marxists. A person or community or institution which entertains a *doubt* about the

correctness of a practice or theory may venture for introspection. However, if a strong adherent had a strong faith that his theory can never go wrong, it is the end of it. It accepts no criticism or suggestion. Marxists all over the world suffer from this intellectual arrogance. History did not teach them anything. The historical experience of USSR, or of the most of the East Europe or China never caused any such need for introspection in the Left. Instead there are more confirmations, re-assurances and re-affirmations of faith in **the Book**.

Where is the possibility of rethinking? Any system, of theory or practice, has to have either '*an internal critic*' or hear '*the external critic*'. When we refuse the hearing for both, where is the way out? Does the Left need a piece of advise? A group of people who think they had formulated their theory on the basis of historical experience, refuse further inputs of the same historical experience. The left has developed quite a defensive mechanism; if they succeed they claim success to their effort. If they fall, they attribute it to somebody else. Capitalism fails them. Consumerism fails them. Globalization fails them. Congress fails them in India. Any other person except 'I'!

The idea of reconciling various contradictory theories has always been the intellectual persuasion. Reconciling Marx and Gandhi, Gandhi and Ambedkar, Marx and Ambedkar, and Lohia and Ambedkar etc., are some of these wishful contemplative exercises doing the rounds in the academic world. For the cadre-level followers, and the commoners, these endeavors may not offer much difficulty. But for those who think they are experts of those theories and consider themselves as serious disciples of their Gurus, it is a tough challenge. The probability of success of these endeavors is also very much suspect. The hitherto history of the idea has not offered any such reasonable success. Though temporarily they appear to have reconciled, in the absence of synthesis arising out of historical experience, they repel with greater vigour and vengeance at times. It is better for each idea to work out its own path at its own cost, succeed or perish or learn lessons.

We may at times, in our Indian context, refer to Jayaprakash Narain's post-emergency political experiment. But the nuances of it need to be examined with higher rigor. The taboo of '*political untouchability*' of the Right (Jan Sangh) had been successfully lifted by that experiment. It also demonstrated another lesson of history i.e., for dismantling Congress, the immediate Frankenstein Monster, many shades of the left refused to cognize the waiting Right, for an opportunity to come out of the miasma of the patricide. The space created by the eviction of the Congress has been successfully occupied by the Right, leaving the Left fretting and fuming!

The question whether it is the end of the road for the left can definitely be answered in negative. Nothing ends anything. But, certainly there are some ringing warning bells, indicating that the time is ticking away. The left needs to understand or re-appreciate the role of 'religion' or 'spiritual pursuits of man', 'nationalism', 'regionalism' and 'cultural relativity' along with 'caste' – the specific Indian problem. Historical experience shall be the guiding factor, but not the theory alone. A morning message posted by a friend read like this: '*You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending!*'

But time is merciless; it moves on. As Omar Khayyam, philosophically said:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,*

*Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit*

*Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*