

Three and a half decades of victory of neo-liberals

Prem Singh

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If we look at the journey of neoliberalism/privatisation in India for the last three and a half decades, we find that the game has been completely in the hands of neo-liberals. Now it can be said without any ifs and buts that corporations, through neoliberal consensus, rule the present India (not the Constitution; the Constitution has become a mere object of quarrelling debates). Team-Modi has also declared that they are not only privatising but corporatizing the system. That is, neoliberalism/privatisation has culminated into corporatisation of India. Therefore, the much-talked New India (*naya bharat*) may be called corporate India (*nigam bharat*).

Before discussing this topic further, it would be appropriate to look at the brief history of the journey of neoliberalism in India. The duo of PV Narasimha Rao-Dr. Manmohan Singh, as the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister of India, had laid its foundation in 1991 in the name of New Economic Policies; and then easily handed over the reins to the duo of Vajpayee-Advani. Running skilfully and successfully on the corporate *kartavya* path, they handed over the baton to Sonia Gandhi and Dr. Manmohan Singh. Sonia Gandhi and Dr. Manmohan Singh's advisors also ran along with them in the race; to advise them that the new *kartavya* path has to be run in such a way that the thrown out masses feel that there is a place for them also in the newly formed corporate India.

The story that follows is not very old. However, it will certainly be called unpleasant. One may call it *maya* (illusion) of the corporate world that the very advisors suddenly snatched the baton from Sonia Gandhi and Dr. Manmohan Singh handed it over to Narendra Modi. Every system bears its own dynamics. The neoliberal system too has its dynamics. Systems know when and in what role to include or use them in their favour. The neoliberal system too included/used the progressive and secular camp of India in its favour and is doing so till date. Some ground for this task of neoliberal system was prepared by the fourth conference of the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Mumbai in 2004. WSF, which later became popular as 'NGO Fair', was formed in Brazil in 2001 against the forces/system of global capitalism or globalization/neoliberalism by such NGOs, civil society activists and intellectuals who were themselves dependent on the funds/prizes of the same system. In 2007, a coalition of such elements formed India Against Corruption (IAC); under

its aegis, 'anti-corruption movement' took place in 2011; and within no time, the decision of decisive victory of neo-liberalism took place in the country. India, which got freedom from colonial slavery after a long struggle and sacrifices of Indians, became an integral part of the neo-imperialist network.

In fact, progressive and secular actors had placed their bets on 'Chhota Modi' (younger Modi), but the bet on 'Bada Modi' (elder Modi) worked. For some time, progressive and secular actors lived in the deception that this sudden incident outside their plans was merely an aberration, which they would soon correct. They strangely and surprisingly united with Chhota Modi. Ignoring the fact that the neo-liberal system is in itself a corrupt and dishonest system, they propagated the lie that Dr. Manmohan Singh is corrupt and dishonest. Some of them even started claiming that if the corrupt Congress is removed from power, they will straightaway make Chhota Modi the Prime Minister of India.

Especially the enthusiasm of the governmental communists and the socialists aspiring to become governmental was worth seeing. When there is a drama, there is bound to be excitement. When their new hero resigned from the post of Chief Minister of Delhi and reached Banaras to defeat Narendra Modi in the Lok Sabha elections, then the advisors also reached there for campaigning. Ganga Maa had called Bada Modi to Banaras. Hence Chhota Modi, before filing his nomination, also took a dip in Ganga Maiya under the full surveillance of the media. Both the media termed as *godi* (lapdog) and *pratirodhi* (resistant) today, were jointly broadcasting that dip live. In this way, the corporate-communal nexus of Indian politics became completely sacred!

But Narendra Modi made the aberration rule of the game. However, there was no great feat of Modi in doing this. The fundamental deviation had already happened in 1991, when the country's economy was taken off the axis of the Constitution and the values of the freedom movement and placed on the axis of global economic institutions and multinational companies. Modi simply decisively made the country's Constitution, resources and labour subservient to domestic and foreign corporate powers. To ensure that this subservience remains permanent, and the people of the country do not unite against the corporate rule, on the one hand he started the practice of spreading communal/casteist/tribal hatred in the society, and on the other hand, distributing cash hand-outs. The electoral opposition and most of the intellectual class/civil society, while cursing Modi day and night, started the exercise of running on the path determined and directed by Modi.

One would ask that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has not been mentioned in this story yet. Yes, RSS was very much there all the time. Till Vajpayee's time, RSS used to feel some reluctance in corporate slavery. It probably thought, or should have thought, that the stain of supporting colonial slavery during the freedom struggle can be washed away to some extent by opposing neo-imperialist slavery. But as soon as RSS tasted absolute power, it got drowned in the joy of absolute slavery. Various types of *sangh vicharak* (RSS thinkers) got indulged in a campaign of discrediting and distorting the values, movements and icons of the Indian freedom struggle. RSS accepted with great pleasure that the *atmnirbhar bharat* (self-reliant India) being built by team-Modi by selling off national resources, borrowed foreign capital and third-rate digital technology is its much relished '*swadeshi bharat*'. Just like there is an excitement for wedding, RSS, full of excitement, has become the vanguard of neo-imperialist slavery. The funny thing about this stance of RSS is that it also keeps distributing certificates of patriotism, bravery, sacrament and de-colonised mind!

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Anyway, a turning point came in the journey of neo-liberalism in the country in 2010-11. The two decades-long struggle against neoliberalism was destroyed and there was a neoliberal consensus among the political and intellectual elite of India. Earlier, it would be said that the grip of neo-imperialism was tightening on the country. After 2010-11, India was accepted as an integral part of the neo-imperialist network. Now, there was no need for any neoliberal to remain hidden like before. They all openly joined the open hard core supporters of neoliberalism – whether they were in the secular camp or the communal camp. The neoliberals of the secular camp seemed to boast that they would suck out the poison of communal fascism flowing in the veins of neoliberalism. Hence, there was nothing to worry about. But they all started keeping silent on the communal/casteist/family politics of the opposition. In doing so they deliberately blocked the possibility of creating any space for alternative politics vis-a-vis the corporate-communal nexus.

A recent sample of the neoliberal consensus can be seen in the quarrelling debate on the Constitution in Parliament; and the sentiments and views expressed on the contribution of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh after his demise. Not a single MP, columnist or editorial raised the question that the New Economic Policies implemented in 1991 were a decision contrary to the Basic Structure Doctrine of the Constitution; that various constitutional provisions related to the legislature-executive-judiciary were not created with

the objective of establishing a capitalist system in India. The secular-progressive camp, while complaining and protesting against the devaluation, distortion and misuse of constitutional democratic institutions by the Modi government, fails to see that these institutions were not created to build and run a distorted type of corporate capitalist system in the country. They were meant to fulfil the constitutional objective of establishing an egalitarian society and secular state, not an inequitable society and communal fascist state/politics.

There is no interference of civic consciousness in the corporate India that is in front of us. To make India a socialist secular democratic republic, an essential effort had to be made to develop civic consciousness among Indians. This could not be achieved by merely conducting elections and forming governments. In a vast, traditional, complex and plural society, the development of modern civic consciousness/civic spirit/sense of citizenship could only be done by the collective, continuous and coherent efforts of concerned leaders and intellectuals. Whatever may be the reasons for this, it did not happen during and after independence. Today, the flood of communalism is overflowing not only in politics but also in society. The civic identity of Indians is vanishing in the darkness of religion and caste based identities. There is no serious effort visible to pick up the thread of the lost task of developing civic consciousness. As if the corporate-communal nexus has become the accepted destiny of India under the neo-imperialist yoke.

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While taking the “historic”, “bold” and “crisis-solving” decision to make India’s economy subservient to global financial capitalism by implementing the New Economic Policies, Dr. Manmohan Singh had thrown a challenge that ‘if there is any other option, tell us’! The propaganda was done, which has not stopped till date, that in 1991 the country was caught in a deep economic crisis, and its economy was on the verge of sinking. Thanks to Narasimha Rao and Dr. Manmohan Singh that they saved the sinking ship of the country. But no leader, economist, governor of the Reserve Bank, economist advisor to the Prime Ministers/governments and progressive intellectuals tell which and how much of the population of India had to be affected by that economic crisis? Did that crisis came on the daily wage/contract workers of the unorganized sector, artisans, hawkers, small shopkeepers, small traders, farmers, fishermen, cattle-keepers, gardeners, boatmen, organized sector workers, government-non-government Class IV employees, unemployed youth – who would be 80-85 percent of the country's total population – who dig wells every day to feed their

families and others too, or came on the minority of the population – the political-intellectual-administrative-business-high professional/celebrity elite?

No one even tells who has been economically empowered with the implementation of fifth, sixth and seventh pay commissions that came after liberalization? Were the "beneficiaries" of these pay commissions also the biggest beneficiaries of the quota-permit raj that has been cursed day and night since 1991? Did they create a market-oriented India for themselves and their progeny after sucking the blood of "socialist India"? So that they can spend the "earnings" of arrears/salary/allowances received from increased pay scales on various foreign brands of liquor to cars in the open market; so that they can buy and sell property worth crores in black; provide expensive education to their children abroad; travel by air within the country and abroad at government expenses; get the most expensive treatment done for free by joining the panel of private hospitals This list can be as long as you want. If you add to this the consumerist opulence of leaders, industrialists, domestic and foreign builders, top professionals and celebrities, it will become a monumental book.

There was a talk of poor and rich India before 1991 as well. But with the New Economic Policies, it was decided to make India pauper at the bottom and super rich at the top. Those who had taken full advantage of the mixed economy, they themselves created the hoax of open market economy. They were considering themselves poor as they were deprived of the consumerist glamour of America and Europe. All of them could not settle down in America or Europe. They decided to make India an integral part of the global consumer market. And they did it very well. The operators and supporters of this distorted capitalist system, which has caused suicides of lakhs of farmers, hunger/malnutrition/illness/illiteracy of crores, displacement of crores, unemployment of crores of Indians, and has sowed seeds of hatred in the society, fearlessly preach that economic inequality is the key to a strong economy.

It would have been a blessing if the advocates and players of corporate India could have been happy by merely taking loans and drinking ghee. In their greed to plunder infinite luxury, they started selling water, forests, land and public sector undertakings. Governments, leaders and bureaucrats started playing the role of middlemen. Liberalised India, Shining India, New India, Economic Power India, Super Power India, Smart India, Digital India, Hindu India, Vishwaguru India are the various expressions of the India of these super rich people.

However, it could also have been possible that in the event of the country's economy going bankrupt, some sacrifice could have been made to protect the country's independence, sovereignty and self-reliance. Independence, sovereignty and self-reliance could have been protected by adopting simplicity, frugality and labour. A little sacrifice would not have been a big deal in comparison to the sacrifices made by Indians to gain independence from British imperialism. There was no need to learn any new lessons separately for this in Gandhi's country. If the decision was to join the open market economy, then at least that process could have been done on its own terms. But the choice was made for the pleasures of slavery. It needs to be remembered that the 'Architect of New India' and his team merely signed the documents prepared by neo-imperialist institutions. Not even a single line of those documents was written in India. Every word of the Indo-US nuclear deal, much praised by the advocates of corporate India, was also written outside India in America.

Here the question can be raised that when the history of the victory march of neo-liberalism has been given in this article, then the history of the struggle against neoliberalism should also have been given. I have written and spoken about the anti-neoliberalism struggle many times in many places. Such occasions will keep coming in the future too. However, telling that story again would only anger the multi-faceted neoliberals even more.

Voices were raised in the entire country in favour of independence, sovereignty and self-reliance, and there were also active resistances. Despite the fact that many obstacles were erected in the path of struggle and its potential, a tremendous resistance against the globalist forces continued during the two decades of neoliberalism. Voices challenging the forces of globalization continued to exist not only in alternative political streams and civil society, but also in mainstream politics. Globalism is actually neo-imperialism, which should be opposed with the strength of the values of India's freedom movement and the Constitution along with new ideological innovations - such a message used to have some effect on the consciousness of the teenage and young generations of the time. The possibility of victory of the values of the freedom movement and the Constitution had been created by it. If that struggle has been forgotten, and its flow has not been transmitted to the new generations, then it is a proof of the flaw in our understanding and responsibility.

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(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)