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The Buddha Refuses To Smile Over Pokharan



Indian National Social Action Forum

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*Even a fool may be called wise if he knows the extent of his foolishness.
But what kind of a fool is the man who considers his foolishness as
wisdom?*

*Victory sows the seeds of hatred. The conquered is unhappy indeed.
The victor cannot be happy either because he lives in constant fear of
retaliation. The man who has given up both victory and defeat is
contented and happy.*

Gautam Buddha

The PM must be really relieved!
Pakistan and China have been put in their place.
Now only Jayalalitha must be taken care of.
(courtesy: R.K.Laxman, *The Times of India*)



No to nuclearisation of the Indian sub-continent: INSAF

INDIAN NATIONAL SOCIAL ACTION FORUM (I N S A F) is a forum of over 200 social action groups all over the country involved in combating the forces of communal politics and globalisation and seeking alternate paradigms for action and discourse in the face of the emerging challenges and search for shared perspective and solidarity. This position on the nuclearisation of the Indian sub-continent is being widely circulated all over India by INSAT State groups to mobilise public opinion.

INSAT expresses shock and disgust over the recent nuclear blasts on May 11 & 13, 1998 and the subsequent calculated attempts to build up war hysteria by Indian and Pakistani governments. INSAT is also deeply concerned by this move to committing the nations to an expensive and disastrous nuclear arms race in the subcontinent. The BJP government has made many hysterical claims but not provided an iota of credible proof that the security environment demanded such drastic steps. The previous governments had, in fact, initiated a welcome dialogue with neighbours and sought to reduce tensions across borders. These steps were to the immense benefit of the toiling masses of the sub-continent. Even the BJP could not have been efficient enough to vitiate the atmosphere in seven weeks. The nuclear tests were un-called for and designed to create a war atmosphere. The retaliatory tests by Pakistan equally

irresponsible and adventurist as they are, confirm that far from improving our security environment, the South Asian subcontinent has been converted into a tinder box. The nuclear tests have endangered our security and have pushed the nation into a MAD (mutually assured destruction) spree.

INSAF strongly condemns the hypocrisy of the industrially developed countries in imposing crippling sanctions upon India. The sanctions imposed by the United States, Japan and other nations of the North interestingly and characteristically affect only the developmental and pro-people programmes. The profit-mongering activities of multi-national corporations and international speculators continue unabated. However, INSAF as a forum representing the exploited and oppressed peoples is concerned about the severe setbacks to the economies of the two countries; especially in view of this unaffordable nuclearisation drive at the cost of more pressing developmental needs of the people.

INSAF is convinced more than ever before that humanity should rid itself of the nuclear menace, and that the movement for achieving this goal be revived in the subcontinent. In this direction INSAF groups all over India will strive to mobilise public opinion and ensure that:

1. The Government of India is forced to ban any further tests, and will not build or deploy any nuclear weapon of any description.
2. Pressurise the government to urgently initiate dialogues with our neighbours, particularly Pakistan and China to repair the enormous harm done to the development of friendly relations.

3. India's scientists and engineers should instead direct their scientific and technical expertise towards uplifting the living standards of our population, which today are among the worst in the world.

It is distressing that the honourable ministers in the government are irresponsibly creating a hysterical, jingoistic situation instead of controlling the situation. They display and encourage a cowboy mentality with a pitch for a gunfight at the O. K. Corral. It is then no surprise that the allies of the ruling party like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad go a step further and attempt to communalise the nuclear issue. This is a deliberate attempt to fan the flames of jingoism and war mongering for narrow political gains. We hereby pledge to counter in every way possible the jingoism now being spread in the country by the very same forces that some years ago, had made the nation hang its head in shame by demolishing the Babri Masjid.

We further solemnly pledge to work for a subcontinent free from nuclear weapons, and to continue these efforts till the world as a whole is rid of these anti-human, anti-nature weapons.

INSAF along with the toiling people desires peace, disarmament and friendship across the borders.

THE BUDDHA IS NOT SMILING

Rustom Bharucha

Invoking the name of the Buddha to testify the success of nuclear tests is more than a perversion of language: It is a desecration of whatever the Buddha represents in spirit and being. The message of his dhamma has obviously been lost on our nuclear hawks, who first invented the code --- 'The Buddha has smiled'-- to confirm the nuclear blast in Pokharan in 1974. Today, in the increasingly communalised political culture of India, we are getting used to such perversions of the sacred.

In the name of Rama, a mosque has been demolished, precipitating the worst communal violence since the Partition. Not only will a Rama Mandir be built on this demolished site, as the votaries of Hindutva repeatedly insist, this temple will also be apotheosis of a Rashtra Mandir. First, you destroy in the name of God, and then you equate this god with the State: there could not be a more insidious betrayal of what this god incarnates in the first place.

Today, it is not gods that matter to politicians---they are mere pretexts of communal agendas---but the 'sacrosanct' foundations of the State that justify the most blatant violations of justice and truth. As the stability of the State is placed above the instabilities of a democratic decision-making process, the absolutist 'hard lines' of authoritarianism prevail over the possible consensus of dialogue. In this congealing of dogmas, the most arbitrary national decisions can be justified in the name of Swaraj--yet another perversion of our times.

Swaraj--Gandhi's radical concept of 'self-rule'--extended beyond political and economic considerations to include the moral dimensions of any true state of independence. 'Moral', as Gandhi emphasised, 'means freedom from armed defence forces. My conception of Ramarajya excludes replacement of the British army by a national army of occupation. A country that is governed by even its national army can never be morally free.'

Are we morally free in India today? With the nuclear blasts in Pokharan, we have entered another state of violence that merely extends--I will not say transcends--the militarism of our defence forces. Gandhi had not patience whatsoever with the doublespeak of military strategists who assumed that the atom bomb could initiate a new era of ahimsa. In a sharp rejoinder to General Cariappa's dismissal of non-violence as an adequate response to the tensions of the world, the Father of the Nation reaffirmed his commitment to peace: '[I]n this age of the Atom Bomb, unadulterated non-violence is the only force that can confound all the tricks put together by violence.' If the devastation in Hiroshima had numbed Gandhi, it also alerted him to the 'suicide' of entire mankind in its failure to recognise the positive effects of non-violence.

It could be argued, however, that Gandhi is too remote from the realities of our world today. Even in his own lifetime, he was often dismissed as an impossible idealist. Besides, he has been killed so many times through any number of appropriations and betrayals, following his assassination by an RSS indoctrinated Hindu zealot---isn't it time that we allowed his soul to rest? And yet, Gandhi will not allow millions of people in this world to rest, because he epitomised what an anti-nuclear activist has

described as 'resting in action.' Gandhi reminds us of the drops of water in an ocean which are at rest, even as the ocean is restless.

In his own quest for stillness, Gandhi was not afraid to acknowledge that we may not realise Swaraj in our lifetimes. Countering the bombast of national self-sufficiency upheld by politicians today, this is a profoundly humble admission by one of the greatest experimentors of the 'self' that the world of politics has ever known. In positing 'soul-force' against 'brute-force' in his unfailingly seditious tract *Hind Swaraj*--perhaps more seditious today within the monolithic categories of *Hindutva*--Gandhi was realistic enough to acknowledge that, 'India is not ripe for it (Swaraj)'. However, since the utopian element in Gandhi's imaginary could never be entirely repressed, we are also reminded that, 'if India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, Swaraj would descend upon India from heaven.' But--the realist intervenes-- 'I am painfully aware that that event is far off as yet.'

Certainly, the blasts in Pokharan have delayed the materialisation of that even ever further. Opting for the nuclear deterrent in the name of protecting 'national security', the dominant political order in India has simply endorsed whatever in the name of humanity is associated with death and destruction. With increasing belligerence, our politicians on the Right are clamouring to join the nuclear club. This is as grotesque as it is pathetic. The big boys are not likely to accommodate a Third World country, which is not 'the most favoured nation' in the world. Instead of lamenting the dubious ethics of this restricted membership monopolised by a nuclear

mafia, shouldn't we be asking ourselves: Do we need to join this club in the first place? If we can't beat them, do we have to join them? Can we find another strategy of exposing the hypocrisies of pseudo-pacifist warmongers, who refuse to cut down on their own nuclear warheads, even though these could be used to blow up the world several times over? Do we have to accept this annihilation of reason for our own 'security'? Can we seek another path? What would that path be? I am drawn to the Middle Path, not necessarily to emulate Buddhist principles—I am not a follower of any particular discipline or creed, and I am also sceptical that principles from spiritual traditions can be automatically transferred to material and secular contexts. I accept in this regard the vulnerability and imperfection of our mediations as human beings. Keeping this in mind, I would acknowledge that a possible 'middle path' would not be one of compromise, equivocation, subterfuge (all justified in the name of expediency). Rather, it is the path of cutting through a thicket of seeming solutions, which are actually dissolutions of any sustainable life-choices. This path would also spurn the illusions of 'instant success'—a nuclear blast lasts for a few seconds, but its effects can linger forever. Defying its computerised efficiency, this path would need to acknowledge the lessons derived from obstacles and the pain of negotiating a dialogue with out intimate enemies, whose predicament we share.

The 'middle path' may be too impractical for the advocates of Political Realism in India today. But how real is their 'realism'? Surely the realities that our government has assiduously called attention to in the countdown to the nuclear tests—escalating border tensions, disclosures of enemy secrets, even the discovery of a helipad in the far corners of Arunachal Pradesh—have not been free from the trappings of fabrication. Our politicians have constructed—and magnified--'the enemy' with

all the masala that one has come to associate with the nationalist blockbusters of Bollywood. Is 'art' imitating reality these days, or is it the other way around?

Besides, more than evidence of 'the enemy' is needed in order to translate the imminence of threat into the activation of nuclear power. Countering this logic, a most emphatic causality is being endorsed by the government: 'threat to national security' must result in 'nuclear action'. All other options of negotiations are closed. Can we honestly say, however, that we are more 'secure' today as citizens of India in a nuclear state, whether or not this category is officially recognised? Is 'national security' above all other considerations? Is it a transcendent category made in the name of protecting the citizens' interests, even if they have been totally left out of the cognitive and ethical process that should go into the making of such a critical decision?

Secrecy is the *carte blanche* of the State in such mastermind predicaments. To be more precise, it is the trumpcard of a small coterie of politicians--in this case, yet another 'club' with RSS affiliations and loyalties--which presumes to represent 'the State', even when the members of its own government were not taken into account. Never has the State in India been more separated from the protocol of governance. But these are Top Secrets, remember; if they are concealed, it is for the 'good' of the nation. Thus, silenced into recognising our own nullity as thinking, responsible citizens, we have no other choice but to accept the most lamentable lack of accountability, transparency, absence of public dialogue--indeed, downright clandestine conspiracy against any possibility of democratic dissent or the articulation of an alternative line of action. Before one had the opportunity to respond to an 'nuclear option' the deed was

already done on our behalf. The mantra of 'national security' had already sanctified the blasts.

It would seem to me that we have arrived at a certain point in Indian politics when it becomes imperative to de-link the 'national' from a particular brand of 'nationalism' that has, in effect, justified the necessity of nuclear power. No Indian thinker has been more scathing in his almost visceral reaction to the 'anaesthetics' of nationalism than Rabindranath Tagore. At the core of his loathing was his deep awareness of the soul-denying mechanisms of nationalism. Must 'machine be pitted against machine, and nation against nation, in an endless bull fight of politics?' Let us listen to how the Poet initiated a dialogue around this rhetorical question.

'You say, these machine will come into an agreement, for their mutual protection, based upon a conspiracy of fear. But will this federation of steam-boilers supply you with a soul, a soul which has her conscience and her God?' Calling attention to the humble and meek who do not join this 'federation', and whose 'only crime [is] that they have not been organised', Tagore plays the Devil's Advocate: 'That does not matter, the unfit must go to the wall--they shall die and this is silence.' To which he counters by saying: 'No, they shall live', because our world is a 'moral world' and the moral nature of man cannot be divided into convenient compartments for its preservation.'

The greatest critic of nationalism in India was also its most ardent patriot. Indeed, he is the creator of our national anthem. It is sometimes forgotten that with all his fervour, this Great Sentinel (as Gandhi revered Tagore even in his deepest disagreements with him) was extremely vigilant about how nationalist rhetoric needed to be modulated in order to respect

the diversities of culture in India society. Thus, we find Tagore composing only the first verse of Vande Mataram, which has now become the signature tune for the documentation of the nuclear blasts in A.R.Rahman's pop-video version of the hymn to Bharatmata. The second verse celebrating the militant manifestations of the goddess Durga was too loaded with the rhetoric of Hindu religiosity to satisfy the monotheistic ideals of the Poet; he also realised that this religiosity could, in this words, 'wound Muslim susceptibilities'.

Are we going to accuse the Poet now for pandering to 'minority appeasement'? I think we would be better advised to rethink the creative secular task that goes into respecting differences in a pluralist society. From Tagore's troubled relationship with the idea of nationalism, we are challenged, I believe, into re-defining how national considerations can be democratised without being subsumed within the prescribed dictates of nationalism. If we allow the BJP to monopolise an authentic reading of Hindu nationalism, we are silencing other possibilities of what the national could mean in non-sectarian contexts. Instead of challenging their moral right to speak for the nation, however, we are allowing the top brass of the Hindu Right to make decisions of such a critical nature that to oppose them (perhaps when it is too late) can only open us to the charge of anti-nationalism. We should not allow this to happen. We should not succumb to the 'conspiracy of fears' which the Hindu Right is both manufacturing and capitalising on, with very strident warnings against our enemy across the border, counterpointed with reaffirmations of India's renewed supremacy.

A public debate has to be opened on the priorities of this government. Is 'national security' the fundamental anxiety for millions of people in this country, or is it the availability of water, food, housing, health care, and primary education, which

continues to be denied to an overwhelming number of our fellow-citizens? Some of the local men in Pokharan were shown dancing on television, basking in the glory that their village has not become 'world famous.' Indeed, Pokharan has already assumed the aura of a pilgrimage spot, with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad declaring that a Shakti Peeth will be built there in honour of the bomb. However, not everyone is smiling in Pokharan. For the women, the daily grind of life continues--hours of walking in wilderness and gruelling heat to collect a meagre supply of water. In this ruthless indifference of the State to the most fundamental human needs, what future can there be for Pokharan's children?

Indeed, what future can there be for our earth if it is to become a lethal laboratory for the relentless testing (and deterrence) of violence? When the erstwhile government of France had the temerity to test its nuclear resources in an island on the Pacific Ocean--perhaps the most tranquil abode of peace in our polluted world--the horror of ecocide was unmistakable. Pokharan may not be the Pacific, but it is a place in its own right. And in the eyes of Mother Earth, it is equally worthy of love.

The decision-makers behind the blasts in Pokharan have contributed their mite to ecocide--let us not evade this point in the growing anxieties over more material matters like the effects of sanctions and the future of our international trade. Of course, the economic implications of the sanctions are critical, particularly for the poorer sections of society, who are the least, recognised and the hardest hit in any financial crisis. In more pragmatic terms, the business community could justifiably ask: Are the blasts ultimately worth the sanctions in terms of our abysmal image as a 'rogue state' and the very real cutbacks in

foreign aid, which India can ill afford at this point in time, despite all the rhetoric of swadeshi? However, there is an even harder question to ask, which inevitably reaffirms the moral dimensions of the crisis: Even if the sanctions do not prove to be as devastating as some governments would them to be, does that minimise the violence of the nuclear tests? Does it justify their existence? In other words, can we afford to stop worrying and learn to love the bomb?

My response to Dr.Strangelove and his Indian clones is very clear: You do not love the bomb under any circumstances. Sanctions or no sanctions, the blasts in Pokharan cannot be justified. Here one could enhance the moral argument with an exposure of the dubious ethics of deterrence, which is now well established by an international community of peace activists. Not only is deterrence based on what Realists disingenuously acknowledge as a 'necessary evil'--the prevention of war through the threat of retaliation--it has to be 'credible', as Achin Vanaik emphasises, in order to be 'effective'. This means that 'the capability and the will of the deterrer of this 'capability' (in Republic Day Parades, for example), apart from a constant update of its technologies. Deterrence cannot afford to get stuck in a time lag; it has to be persistently competitive.

At an epistemological level, Vanaik exposes the irrationality of such nuclear logic: 'To deter is not the same thing as deterrence which is conceptualisation, a theorisation of what nuclear weapons are supposed to be capable of achieving. Nuclear weapons do not create deterrence. It was deterrence that was created to cope with, to rationalise the existence of nuclear weapons.' Instead of exposing the violent hypocrisy of this reversed causality--the post-Hiroshima legacy of Cold War militarism--our government has simply reaffirmed the causality

by testing its nuclear power in order to affirm its faith in deterrence as a military strategy. Finally, it is not the 'government' as such that ultimately controls the nuclear buttons, but a few decision-makers who make the 'right' choices for the entire nation.

Can one trust any of the decision-makers who were responsible for giving the green signal for the blasts in Pokharan? Can one believe in their derivative discourse of deterrence? Or does one simply accept that if deterrence does not remove violence, it manages at least to postpone its eruption. In this indefinite postponement--and here I bring the argument back from the realpolitik to the moral and spiritual dimensions of the problem--what are we doing to our selves? Apart from politicians, scientists are not likely to address such questions, because they tend to be almost formidably ignorant of the sources of the self. In fact, one wonders if the 'self' as a critical category exists at all the tunnel visions of their vocabularies.

One is not demonising science here, which has become only too predictable--and counter-productive--in the growing number of communitarian and anti-secularist attacks on modernity, reason, and westernisation. Science is integral for the growth of any nation, and it is not necessarily inimical to the sustenance of the self. But what science are we talking about? to whom is it being addressed? to satisfy which needs? whose needs? Now that one of the masterminds behind the nuclear tests can afford to say that he has 'achieved his life's ambition'--such hubris can only be pitied--would he be prepared to extend his expertise to 'civilian needs', for example, the distribution of water and fuel to millions of people in the country? This is not misplaced demand on my part, but a plea for getting our priorities right.

If there is a lesson to be learned from Gandhi here, it is the need to respect the economy of human endeavours, so that we do not gain---or destroy---at one else's expense, and we do not squander those natural, cultural, and spiritual resources which are necessary for our own sustenance and the world around us. Of what use is it to build a dam when the natural habitat is destroyed along with the lives (and livelihoods) of the people who live by the river? What purpose can there be in flaunting the wealth of the nations at the expense of grinding the wretched of the earth into dust? What is the point of gaining the world at the expense of losing your soul? In these homiletic questions lie some of the deepest foundations of the ecology of the self, without which no social or political transformation can be nurtured or sustained.

In the nuclear blasts, we have destroyed more than our self-respect in the eyes of the world, or for that matter, in our own eyes as well. We have squandered our possibilities of swaraj as a nation by rejoicing the ecological bases that have nourished our diverse cultures at human and spiritual levels. The Buddha could not be smiling. Let us remove that perverse wish-fulfilment from our minds, and concentrate instead on the grins of our ruling politicians, wallowing in a pseudo-mythological celebration of their assumed omnipotence and imminent self-destruction.

Towards Lasting Peace

We unequivocally condemn the nuclear weapons tests conducted by the governments of India and Pakistan. We condemn both governments for callously ignoring the basic needs of their people and draining yet more scarce resources into a destructive arms race.

We further unequivocally condemn the Indian government for:

- Initiating the latest round of nuclear tension in Asia and exacerbating the already antagonistic relationship with its neighbours, Pakistan and China.
- Whipping up communal feeling against Pakistan.

We also condemn the United States government for:

- Hypocritically intervening in a part of the world where US interventions from the 1950s onwards have actively fuelled a regional arms race.
- Imposing a programme of economic situations which will hurt the people of the two countries, not the governments.
- Imposing a lopsided global 'nuclear disarmament' policy, where five of the world's most powerful nations continue to have nuclear weapons.

We express our heartfelt support and solidarity with all democratic initiatives -- especially by the people of India and Pakistan -- to stop this criminal escalation of hostilities between the two countries and to work together for lasting peace in the region.

Tony Benn, MP UK;

Dr Sudipta Kaviraj, School of African and Oriental Studies, London;

Prof Claude Meillassoux, CNRS, Paris;

Prof Tapan Raychaudhuri, Wissenschaftskolleg, University of Berlin;

and 90 others.

