

“Thank You Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group”

Report of my stay from 8th July till 25th August 2008

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In what is probably his most famous book, the *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (1920), Max Weber could write without perplexity the following sentence:

“A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that *in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value*” (emphasis added).

No doubt, today such an attribution of “universal significance and value” to the “Western civilization” alone would appear to many both bizarre and extremely naïve. Historical evidence –from the second world war and the Holocaust, the post-war resurgence of a global bipolar system, the decline of colonialism and its unhappy legacy, the fall of communism, the rise of Asian economic and political powers, the growth of a widespread Arab anti-occidentalism and the emerging difficulties of the American hegemony- made us understand about the impossibility of pretentious euro-centric claims like Weber’s. At the beginning of the third millennium, an European scholar, analogous to the one Weber had in mind, would never bet on the exclusive relevance of the European cultural experience and would normally believe in a more plural reconstruction of the importance of different civilizations in the light of world history. I must not be considered as an exception.

The purpose of my stay in India was primarily concerned with three objectives:

1. On the basic assumption of “Learning from Each Other” on the theme of “Unity in Diversity” my studies focussed mainly on the question “*How Successful has India been in reconciling Unity and Diversity?*”
2. To finalise my book regarding Tibet.
3. To analyse possibilities of future collaboration between MCRG and the Istituto di Studi Politici S. Pio V and Libera Università degli studi S. Pio V.

1. Learning from Each Other. How Successful has India been in reconciling Unity and Diversity?”

India, second in population right after China, is home to an incomparable variety of languages, religions, ethnicities, and cultures, which co-exist as a federation under a parliamentary democracy. Unlike its neighbours Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, India is a vibrant democracy. My first impression is, that the country does not fear diversity, rather it views diversity as a defining characteristic of its civilization. India has a culture of diversity, its leaders – from the Muslim Emperor Akbar in the 16th century to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister and a Hindu – have not just tolerated but have positively embraced other peoples and ideas. The Republic was founded in a situation approaching chaos (partition, the largest mass migration in history, widespread violence between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc.); India’s federation seemed destined to fail (not least because the 500-odd principalities and reconstituted States lacked experience of government in common); since its independence, India has faced “virtually every challenge known to politics” (from wars through domestic insurgencies to an eighteen-month long state of emergency). Despite these strains and obstacles, India has experienced success in making representative government work in a bewilderingly diverse country. The measure of India’s success, so my impression, is made plain by a comparison of its experience with Pakistan’s. They are basically the same people, they look alike, they eat the same food, they dress alike. Yet, where India’s commitment to democracy, federalism, and respect for diversity has been reaffirmed, “Pakistan, right next door, is melting down”.

On the other hand it is also well known that communal, regional, and caste tensions continue to haunt Indian politics, sometimes threatening its democratic and secular ethos but to date, the Republic of India has defied manifold predictions of the imminent failure of its secular, federal democracy. The attempt to build on and accommodate diversity, rather than to impose uniformity, has not fragmented and destabilized the country and its people, contrary to warnings of experts abroad. Repeating the Indian experience elsewhere is, however, made problematic by the very singularity of the challenge of diversity facing India and of the political system

chosen in response. However, my impression is that India's experience is highly relevant to various fragile democracies in developing countries coping with deeply diverse and often conflictual societies and it is relevant for long-established democracies that are coming to terms with multiculturalism and significant religious minorities.

2. Final elaboration of my book on Tibet.

During my stay I had the opportunity to finish the final version of my book on Tibet. I had the opportunity to discuss with several scholars and the former Indian ambassador in China the issue regarding the future of Tibet.

The main objective of this book is to highlight the extent to which the sovereignty issue, which has been surprisingly overlooked in the academic literature and policy analysis on Tibet, constitutes the central aspect of the current Sino-Tibetan dispute. The analysis aims to show that, in the Tibetan case, even though the legal debate about the status of Tibet is over self-determination in the classic sense rather than minority (or indigenous) rights, this fundamental distinction of the legal international law has been losing much of its significance in the deeply changing world of our days. As it will be demonstrated, sovereignty is subject to a general process of downsizing, devolution, specialization. Old and new entities will emerge exercising some but not all the characteristics we have come to associate with the traditional nation state. The answer to this development is sought in the form of a political organization which combines the cooperation – and even integration – of states on a supranational level with a general trend towards greater decentralization through the devolution powers and responsibilities to sub-state entities. In such a way, autonomy instead of sovereignty becomes the fundamental principle for organizing political communities. The center of the world order will no longer be the all purpose nation state of the past, but rather a plurality of multi-levels of governance, deeply interconnected among themselves. These are the reasons why the choice between total independence because of self determination, and strong autonomy because of devolution, will no longer be a true dilemma in the near future. Autonomy will prevail, being together more effective and feasible. In this new perspective, the Tibetan issue could also find a positive solution. The autonomy statute of Trentino-South Tyrol, one of those rare success stories in ethnic conflict resolution in history, might represent a model for the very reason that it has allowed for the promotion of the rights of minority groups without upsetting the state borders. In the book will be analysed what lessons can be learned from this experience for the Tibetan issue.

During my stay I went to Dharmasala, where I had the opportunity to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile.

3. Future collaboration between MCRG and the Istituto di Studi Politici S. Pio V and Libera Università degli studi S. Pio V.

With Paula Banerjee I elaborated a draft proposal for a collaboration between the MCRG and the Istituto di Studi Politici S. Pio V, regarding minorities and gender issues.

Other proposals will formalise the exchange between researchers and the organization of a conference in Italy and in Kolkata.

Other possibilities of collaboration will be taken in consideration and seems very interesting.

I had the opportunity to meet representatives of the TISS University in Mumbai and representatives of the University of Delhi and the Lady Shri Ram College for Woman in Delhi. Meetings with the Italian ambassador in Delhi and the Italian Counselor in Kolkata were necessary in order to start collaborations with universities in India.

Finally I delivered lectures at the Rabindra Bharati University and Westbengal National University of Juridical Sciences, which was a big pleasure and honour for me.

I would like to thank D. Ranabir Samaddar for his stimulating discussions and guidelines in order to make my stay at MRCG a gratifying professional and personal experience.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent disposition and the high professional level of the research staff.

I also want to thank the administrative staff of the MCRG – they gave me the feeling to be part of the big “MRCG-family”.