

Remembering **Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919)**



Panel Discussion on **Life and Ideas**

Prof. Irfan Habib • Prof. Utsa Patnaik • Dr. Chirashree Das Gupta

Full text Report



**CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

An autonomous research institute supported by
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**ROSA LUXEMBURG
FOUNDATION**





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Speakers:

Prof. Irfan Habib ♦ Prof. Utsa Patnaik ♦ Dr. Chirashree Das Gupta

Tuesday, 19th March, 2019
Constitution Club, Rafi Marg, New Delhi



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As part of the commemoration of Rosa Luxemburg in the centenary year of her murder, the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, South Asia, had organised a panel discussion 'Remembering Rosa Luxemburg' on 19th March, 2019, at Constitution Club, New Delhi. The panel discussion was followed by a screening of Margarethe von Trotta's award winning biopic 'Rosa Luxemburg'.

This report provides a complete text of the presentations and remarks made in the panel discussion. The presentations were transcribed by Ashmita Sharma and edited by Indrani Mazumdar. The booklet has been formatted by R. Sundaresh .

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Remembering Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919)

19th March, 2019, New Delhi

Opening Remarks

N. Neetha

Acting Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS)

“Welcome to all who have responded to our invite.

As you all know, this panel discussion and film screening on the life and ideas of Rosa Luxemburg has been organised in a collaboration between CWDS and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS).

Rosa Luxemburg's status, sometimes controversial, is established in women's and workers' movements. Yet there has been little discussion around her ideas in the field of women's studies. In this hundredth year after her murder, the CWDS-RLS collaboration has provided us with an opportunity to hear and engage with some of our own scholars of eminence, and their views from outside one's own field of women studies, on the significance of Rosa Luxemburg's theory and practice for our situation and times.

In both theory and practice Rosa Luxemburg was firmly within the Marxist tradition, and it may well be asked as to why CWDS is involved in organising this event. CWDS has a history of being open to various strands of thought and ideology, while remaining institutionally non-aligned. Our founder director Prof. Vina Mazumdar, who spent many years as a teacher of political science – would quote from Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda, Nehru, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, John Stuart Mill, as well as Marx and Engels with equal ease, and take from all in the service of women's studies. CWDS' small faculty represents various strands of opinion and ideology and can sharply disagree with each other on theories, issues and perspectives. Yet we all share a common interest in learning, and when an opportunity presents itself to learn about someone like Rosa Luxemburg, we have no hesitation in going forward with it.

We are very happy that a scholar of the stature of Professor Irfan Habib is here with us on this occasion. He of course needs no introduction, and I'm sure all here know well that he is one of the foremost historians of this country and currently Professor Emeritus at the Department of History, AMU. His works,

beginning with his path-breaking study 'Agrarian System of Mughal India' to several volumes of 'A People's History of India', his 'Essays in Indian History' and a whole host of other writings are probably familiar to you all. Perhaps less is known about his 2003 essay on 'Capital Accumulation and the Exploitation of the 'Unequal' World,' where he specifically discusses Rosa Luxemburg's thesis on capitalism's relationship with the non-capitalist sector. A warm welcome to Professor Irfan Habib and thank you for having agreed to be a keynote speaker.

Let me also welcome Professor Utsa Patnaik, currently Professor Emerita at CESP, JNU, whose work again many of you will be familiar with. Her longstanding engagement with agrarian relations in India - from the mode of production debates of the 1970s to the present period of more pervasive crisis - has provided all of us with a sweep of information and analysis across several decades. Many of you would be familiar with her books 'Peasant Class Differentiation: A Study in Method' and 'The Republic of Hunger & other Essays'. In her more recent writings such as 'Imperialism in the Era of Globalization', (jointly with Professor Prabhat Patnaik), she has discussed some of Rosa Luxemburg's propositions. Thank you Professor Utsa Patnaik for having readily agreed to speak on the panel today.

Chirashree Das Gupta, Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at JNU is a friend to CWDS. Her book on 'State and Capital in Independent India' was recently published (2016), and her article on 'Gender, Religion and Tax Concessions: The Tenacity of the Hindu Undivided Family' is certainly read with great interest by women's studies students and scholars. Chirashree has an abiding interest in gender and political economy, and we look forward to a special focus on women's issues and gender in Rosa Luxemburg's thought in her presentation. Welcome Chirashree.

Ritu Dewan – moderator of today's discussion, is another old friend of CWDS, and I should mention that it was she who reminded us last year that 2019 is Rosa Luxemburg's death centenary, and encouraged us to organise such an event. Formerly professor and head of the department of economics at Bombay University, she wears many caps – as former president, IAWS, and office bearer of the ISLE. I am not going to list her works now, but should mention that Ritu has been known from very early on as one of the few feminists among economists, and one who kept a focus on labour issues in women's studies. Welcome Ritu.

We are all waiting to listen to the panellists. But, before I hand over to Ritu as the moderator for this panel discussion, may I introduce Neha Naqvi, representing the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in this event – she has played an important role in the organising of this programme. I welcome her and she will surely have a few words to say herself. Once again a warm welcome to all of you."

Neha Naqvi

Project Manager, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia:

“Good afternoon. On behalf of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, I would like to welcome you all today and thank you for your presence.

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung is one of six political foundations in the Federal Republic of Germany. We are a registered non-profit, and stand within the tradition of the worker’s and women’s movements – identifying as anti-fascism and anti-racism.

The foundation began working in South Asia in 2004. Our original office was set up in New Delhi in 2010 and is currently responsible for partnerships with civil society organization and institutions of learning in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Agriculture, labour rights, gender justices and social transformation are the focal points of our work in the region.

Rosa Luxemburg herself, was unwavering in her commitment to understanding the nature of oppressive system and thereby transforms them. 2019 marks a 100 years since she was ruthlessly murdered. In solidarity with the ideals she stood for – we honour her today. It is in this capacity that we have the enormous privilege of collaborating with the Centre for Women’s Development Studies this year. With ‘Remembering Rosa’ we are collectively engaging with her life – her works, and the profound effect her emancipatory politics had on so many.

With this said – it is a real pleasure to have Professors Habib, Patnaik and Dewan and Dr. Dasgupta address us this afternoon. Your work has shaped a very many of us in this room. To have you here renews the hope – that it remains possible, despite the dark times we live in today – to come together to further the development of alternative concepts that will enable the creation of a more united and just society. I thank everyone present today for your commitment to justice, dialogue and democratic spaces and I thank you for your time.”

Prof. Ritu Dewan

Moderator and Chair

Thank you Neetha, Neha, CWDS and RLS for this great opportunity.

Rosa Luxemburg, whose life began on 5th March 1871 and ended on 15th January 1919 when she was murdered, remains dear and important to us in the present for several reasons. In recalling her life and ideas today, there are many aspects that resonate with a special meaning and significance.

She was an Economist – a Political Economist whose ability to analyse developments is a quality of importance when our economy and our political institutions are in shambles

She was a Feminist — when the process of gender de-equalisation is on. She remains a source of inspiration for women’s studies and was the first to assert that the struggle for women’s emancipation and against oppression, against exploitation is a joint struggle of both men & women.

Lenin called her an Eagle of the working class. We need such an Eagle in times when our workers are in utter destitution and there are onslaughts on the very definition of a ‘worker’ especially a woman worker. We need such an Eagle when unrelenting attacks are being made on our workers organisation

She was a Socialist — when the ideal and objective of Socialism given in our Constitution is being violated and torn to shreds.

She was an Anti-War activist — when today the clouds of conflict and anti-peace trends loom large.

She spoke for the Rights of Prisoners and there are many in India today – prisoners of conscience.

She fought for Freedom - of expression, of articulation, of organisation, of belief, of action that has a special relevance for us today. Today, as we Reclaim her Legacy, we recall her words:

“Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.”

We have a most eminent panel before us and are indeed all looking forward to an exciting discussion.

Panel Discussion on Life and Ideas

Prof. Irfan Habib

It is a great honour for me to be given the opportunity to speak at a commemoration of the life of Rosa Luxemburg in this hundredth year of her martyrdom.

Rosa Luxemburg was murdered in January 1919, along with Karl Liebknecht, both leaders of the Communist Party of Germany and of the Spartacus League. An uprising had taken place in Germany which was sparked off by the removal of a leftist police chief in Berlin by the Social Democratic Government of Friedrich Ebert. (Social Democrats had taken power in 1918 when Germany faced defeat in World War I). Ebert called in the German Army to crush the January revolution. Its leaders - Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht were arrested on January 15th from an apartment in Berlin, tortured and then killed. Her body was thrown into a canal, but her corpse was found only many months later. Liebknecht was also shot in the head, his body left in a wood. Jogiches, longstanding comrade, companion, and friend to Rosa Luxemburg, who initially escaped arrest, spent the days after she was killed, trying to find and expose her murderers. He was himself arrested and assassinated in March that year.

Rosa Luxemburg is the best known woman theoretician in the history of Marxism. She wrote mainly in German. Among her store of writings, a very important work 'The Accumulation of Capital' was initially published in early 1913. It was followed soon after by her reply to critics 'Accumulation of Capital: An Anti-Critique'. Accumulation of Capital in English translation has an introduction by another woman economist, Joan Robinson. There is a selection of her writings compiled by Professors Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson, 'The Rosa Luxemburg Reader'. Sobhanlal Dattagupta has edited another work, 'Readings in Revolution and Organization: Rosa Luxemburg and her Critics', and finally there is an edited work on 'The National Question: Selected writings by Rosa Luxemburg'. All these are now available in English and my knowledge of Rosa Luxemburg is practically confined to these writings of hers.

Let me start with some facts about Rosa Luxemburg. She was a Polish Jew, born in Zamosc, in the Russian occupied border of Poland at that time. She joined the Socialist Party of Poland known as Proletariat in 1887, when she was only 16 years of age (she was born in 1871). Then in 1889 she moved to Germany as her political activity began to attract the attention of the Tsarist police. There she

met Leo Jogiches who became her adviser - he was also a major political party organizer who went to her assistance throughout her life, and after her death. He died for her cause.

In 1893, she joined the German Social Democratic Party. So she was a Polish Jew who now joined the German party but she was also interested in the Polish party and later the Polish question of the Social Democratic party of Poland. Here in the German party, one must remember that the German party was then the largest Marxist party in the world. It had won many elections, and constituted one third of the Federal Parliament (Reichstag). It was very well organized. Not only the party but also a large number of trade unions and mass organizations including women's organizations which were led by Clara Zetkin, close friend of Rosa Luxemburg. Now it was in the German party and the Polish party that Rosa Luxemburg was faced with a large number of problems, a large number of questions, for which her answers differed from the leadership of the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany.

I shall begin not in a chronological order, but in an order which perhaps we, as Indians, would be more interested in. The first question is about colonialism and the working class movement. It must be remembered that colonialism was not seriously taken up as a subject for political action by the working class movement of Europe until very late. Even about the Russian Communist Party - the Bolsheviks - it could be said, that they began looking seriously at the colonial question only from 1919 onwards. Working class movements in Europe were insular, in the sense that they were only concerned with the problems of the working class of their countries. With their wages, their importance in society, their fight for socialism within their own countries. Their interest in colonialism was marginal.

It was therefore an act of genius on the part of Rosa Luxemburg that she found that without understanding colonialism one could not understand capitalism. These two things were deeply connected. It was in 1913 that her book, 'Accumulation of Capital' came.

(Before Prof. Utsa Patnaik I am very nervous talking about economic matters. But unfortunately I have to put my head on the block.)

Rosa Luxemburg put before her readers a particular puzzle which I call the 'Luxemburg puzzle'. The increase in capital, which Marx called extended reproduction, and which for brevity's sake she called accumulation, can take place only by the production of surplus value. Now she says - take a closed capitalist society (which is what Marx did in Capital Vol. I and subsequent posthumous volumes II and III) - a society in which there are only two classes, capitalists and workers (all countries in Europe were tending to become closed capitalist

societies at various stages). Now suppose there is a closed capitalist society, then how can the surplus produce be increased? That is the problem.

In Marx's categories - capital is developed in two parts – constant and variable capital. Variable capital is the one that is spent on labour and which other economists call wages fund. So when wages fund is distributed among workers, then workers can only buy as much as they are receiving in wages - they can't buy more because they are only workers. They live on wages in a capitalist society. So whatever the capitalists pay the workers, they buy from those wages. So, the one part of capitalist production - wage goods - or what Marx called Department 2 is accounted for by what the workers buy and what the capitalists buy as consumer goods out of their own surplus.

As far as the surplus is concerned, that can only be sold to the capitalists because workers cannot buy beyond their wages. So only capitalists can buy capital goods - products of Department 1. But how can they buy? They buy from their own resources, their own surplus. So how can these be increased? They have got the surplus with which they buy from their own goods. It is surplus that they had already obtained. Therefore, her conclusion was that in a closed capitalist society there cannot be any extended reproduction. Marx was therefore - not let us say wrong, but - incomplete. Well, he gave the example of extended reproduction in the case of a capitalist. But what could be true for one capitalist, wouldn't be true for the whole economy because by buying from each other capitalists could not create additional surplus. Then how does this additional surplus get created? She argued that it got created because the capitalist economy exploits non-capitalist sectors - for example peasants, colonies.

Karl Marx's articles in the New York Tribune were not available to Rosa Luxemburg - they had not been re-printed - she didn't know of them. It was only in the Soviet Union that they were discovered in print. So she didn't know that there was an enormous work available from Karl Marx on colonialism. And therefore, she wrote her own two chapters in which she describes how colonies are exploited by capitalist powers. They were almost like Marx's writings - extremely powerful indictments of colonial exploitation. The two chapters being the struggle against national economy and the introduction of commodity economy. Under these two chapters she describes how - through military means - colonial powers, capitalist powers, were exploiting China, India and the Arab countries. She therefore, argued that capitalism - in order to expand - must exploit the colonial countries, creating capital there. And otherwise also turning them into captive markets and by their exploitation - not through so called free trade, but actually through imposed trade and commerce - to create resources for additional capital.

It has been found, (and the credit goes to Bukharin who unfortunately wrote a very harsh critique of Rosa Luxemburg, but it was Bukharin who got the quotations from Karl Marx) that in colonial trade lower values from capitalist countries are exchanged for higher values in colonies and therefore there was an unequal exchange. Now we know that there was also considerable amount of tribute which flowed from colonial countries into the capitalist countries on which Prof. Utsa Patnaik is a leading authority.

So the first very important achievement of Rosa Luxemburg was to put the anti-colonial struggle on the agenda by a purely theoretical work. If you want to oppose capitalism, you must oppose colonialism and on this basis she had already criticised the German Socialist Democratic Party leadership for not adequately attacking the colonial policies of the German government and its massacres in Africa and other African colonies. So this was a very important contribution of Rosa Luxemburg, bringing the whole colonial question in the strategy of the working class movements through a theoretical work. It is a pity that this particular aspect was not taken up by the Communist International and others. Bukharin, Sweezy and others indulged in pin pricking as far as Rosa Luxemburg's articles were concerned. Not actually seeing that she was raising a very important point, which was that the fight against capitalism cannot be separated from the fight against colonialism.

In the communist movement, this particular message was brought home by Lenin in 1919 when he presented his thesis on the colonial and national question. But it was without the theoretical grounding which Rosa Luxemburg had provided. I would not go into this further. Arghiri Emmanuel's writing on unequal exchange has revived interest in Rosa Luxemburg's thesis. And surely Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of extended reproduction needs a better kind of treatment than the summary dismissals by Otto Bauer, Bukharin, and Sweezy.

The second important element that I see of Rosa Luxemburg is on the national question. Europe was then divided among political powers, particularly central and Eastern Europe where boundaries did not conform to linguistic areas. Austria-Hungary embraced a large number of non-Germanic and non-Hungarian nationalities, especially Islamic nationalities. Poland was divided into three parts, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary. So, the national question was important in Europe. There were two views about it. One was by Lenin that national self-determination should be an object of the communist movement. Irrespective of the struggle for socialist revolution, communists should agree, or social democrats should agree about the entitlement of each nation to determine its future - on whether it wants to secede or not – referred to as self-determination.

Now of course in theory, while the working class movement was international, the bourgeoisie - the capitalists and middle classes which were together called the bourgeoisie - were nationalists. To Lenin it was immaterial whether the national self-determination took place before or after the revolution. Rosa Luxemburg had a different position. I think there is a need to understand her approach to this particular question. Rosa Luxemburg was not against national self-determination. What she was saying was that working class unity - international unity - should be the primary concern. And the socialist movement should first try to overthrow the capitalists and then arrange for autonomy, and if necessary, for the independence of nations.

In other words, the struggle was not about principle, but of the phase in which the self-determination should be placed. Rosa Luxemburg argued that eyes should be fixed on organizing working class unity around international unity, rather than national differences. As for national differences - when you seize power - then you decide whether Austria and Hungary, Bosnia, Croatia and others would be different countries or not - it would be a decision at that time. While Lenin in effect argued that the two things were unrelated, and that the communists had to decide whether they wanted national liberation, national self-determination first or not. I think that Rosa Luxemburg needs a hearing, particularly in the context of the present situation in India.

It is true that World War I was an inter-imperialist war, but how did it come about? Inter-imperialist wars don't come about unless there is popular support. How did popular support come for the First World War? Austria-Hungary controlled - was in occupation of Bosnia. Serbia was an independent state at that time and Serbians claimed that Bosnians spoke the Serb language and should therefore belong to Serbia. There was also the religious question. (This might ring a familiar bell for us). Many Bosnians were Greek Orthodox whereas Austrians and Hungarians were Catholics. The crown prince of Austro-Hungary was assassinated by a Serb nationalist when visiting Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia (an act of terror in our present language). Austria-Hungary demanded that Serbia should be punished for it (We are also demanding something similar). Serbia had a relationship with fellow Slav country - Russia. When Austria-Hungary went to war with Serbia, Russia decided to support Serbia. Austria had a defensive alliance with Germany and therefore Germany went to war with Russia. The national feeling was so strong that social democrats, who had been crying that they would never go to war (they got the resolution of the 2nd International in which it was said that none of their parties would join the war), the same social democrats voted for war credits. France now went to war against Germany and Austria because it had a secret treaty with Russia. And England had a secret understanding with France, and with Germany's invasion of Belgium in order to

reach France (otherwise where would they fight), meant that England would also enter the war on behalf of Belgium. So you got World War I.

Now the whole question is about nationalism. Was it right for German social democrats - was it right for German socialists or French socialists (except Jaures who was assassinated in France) - was it right for Mensheviks in Russia, to support the war? The nation demanded it, but should we listen to the demand of nation. You should not listen to the demand of nation. Against such a demand, Rosa Luxemburg went to prison. Karl Liebknecht who voted against war credits went to prison. This is the second aspect where Rosa Luxemburg has a message for us.

The third important aspect of Rosa Luxemburg's views was on party organization. In the communist movement we heard about (and I hope we are still loyal to) democratic centralism. You elect the leadership and then whatever the leadership says - you say yes to it. Otherwise parties and movements can't function. Rosa Luxemburg said no to it. German social democracy was an immense achievement. Every kind of profession was organized - women, physically handicapped, workers and so on. Everything was organized with German efficiency. And they followed by and large, democratic centralism. But as we can say now, in theory the leadership was strictly Marxist - with theoreticians like Bebel and Kautsky and Hilferding - but in practice they were like the Labour Party of Britain. That is to say they could accommodate themselves with the German government as long as some strikes took place, some wages were raised. There were bad things being done in the colonies but the colonies were far away. To Rosa Luxemburg this was anathema.

Lenin would have said you break with the party and form your own. As he did. But there was a difference between the Russian and Social Democratic party in Germany. The difference was that in the Russian Social Democratic Party - Bolsheviks and Mensheviks - were still conspirators while the German Social Democratic Party was one that was a mass party - with over 1/3rd of the votes in Germany. And therefore to break that movement - to contest that achievement - was to Rosa Luxemburg, not feasible. What she argued was that there should be freedom of thought within the party, that there should be democracy within the party. That Rosa Luxemburg should be able to say what she wanted. She began by criticising Bernstein and ultimately the whole German Social Democratic party leadership agreed with her. But the basic fact was that while the Social Democratic Party of Germany was very Marxist in theory, it was, like the Labour party of England, very reformist in practice. Therefore, when the test came in 1914, the bulk of the German social democrats voted for war and voted for war credits (this is a very familiar situation that you will see in India too) and Rosa Luxemburg was not recognised. She said freedom of thought, freedom of discussion was an

essential element of a Marxist party. And here also there was a great difference between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg.

Finally, I come to women. It must be said that the communist movement, generally speaking, paid very little attention to the women's movement. Not only communists, but previous social democrats also. Several social democratic parties, while putting and giving women the right to vote in their programmes, did not really take it seriously or make it a real issue. This was true of Germany; this was true of England where they did not get the right to vote until 1919. (In fact, as we know, women in India would not have had the right to vote except for the fault of the English draftsman who wrote 'adults' when it was meant to be adult members of the male sex. He forgot, and the Madras High Court saw it and said both men and women can vote. India got it through - as usual - through a mistake).

Well, Rosa Luxemburg made this a major issue. Women should be able to vote and they should be in the immediate short term program of the social democratic parties and she heavily criticised the Belgian party for reneging on this commitment. But she also argued that women should not seek privileges. The other day I was reading that she was hostile to women being exempted from night duty. She said that these kinds of privileges were unworthy of women. They should not have these privileges. They should be totally equal. It is true that her writings on women are few because she left this work more to Clara Zetkin. But Clara Zetkin - who survived the murders of 1919 and became a very important leader of the Communist party of Germany - she continuously wrote and fought for women's rights.

I therefore would like to close here, except to say a few words about Rosa Luxemburg's death. She had finally decided that the Social Democratic Party of Germany was far too gone on the reformist path, on the path of collaboration with the nation-state, and therefore along with Karl Liebknecht, Clara Zetkin and others, formed the Communist Party of Germany in 1918. In November 1918, a revolution took place in the German army - the so called November revolution - with the social democrats involved. When in power, the social democrats under Ebert, continued to collaborate with the German Nationalist parties and therefore, Karl Liebknecht decided that the Communist Party of Germany would now undertake revolution (so far as we know Rosa Luxemburg was not a party to this but she agreed when the decision was conveyed to her). Unfortunately the soldiers did not support them against Ebert. The social democrats' position was very powerful, their influence was very strong among the soviets. But there was a group of national fascists whose movement ultimately led to the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 - they murdered both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht after inflicting all kinds of brutalities on them.

Rosa Luxemburg was murdered on 15 January, but her body was found in one of the underground drains only in May. So that was how she was martyred. I am very happy that we are doing our duty by her, in observing the centenary of her martyrdom. Thank you.

Prof. Utsa Patnaik

Firstly, thank you very much for the privilege of being allowed to say a few words on this very important occasion about a great revolutionary - Rosa Luxemburg.

Prof. Habib has in his own inimitable manner given us an insight into an enormous range of issues that Rosa Luxemburg thought about and was involved in. I will be more narrowly focused because I don't have the competence to deal with a life that was as varied and rich as Luxemburg's. I will talk mainly about her economics, particularly about colonialism and the capitalists.

As we know already, Rosa Luxemburg was born in a Russia occupied small town in Poland, in 1871. This was 13 years before Marx's death. So, for her Marx was not a figure from the past, he was a figure who was very much there. She was also born 13 years before Keynes's birth. Just to add a couple of words to what Prof. Habib has already said, she started her academic work - she was of course a brilliant student from the beginning - she started her academic work by studying philosophy much as Marx has done and then she shifted to the study of economics. Her doctoral thesis which she completed in Zurich, was on the industrial development of Poland. It's after that that she shifted to Germany and got married to a German national so as to escape deportation from Germany. And she became a very famous member and activist of the German Social Democratic Party.

Her brilliant mind grasped a basic problem with Marx's analysis of capitalist accumulation that Prof. Habib has referred to already. Namely that it was carried out within a formal model of capitalism that was completely closed - it had no trade, no third strata or classes other than capitalists and workers. Rosa Luxemburg was working on a kind of informative textbook for party workers. And it was when she was reading Marx all over again that a certain contradiction in Marx's analysis struck her.

It is not the case that Marx intended his model of capitalist accumulation to take place within a closed society with only workers and capitalists. Because if we read Marx's own work plan - which he set out in 1859 in his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy - then it becomes very clear that Marx never meant

his analysis to remain confined to a closed economy. He fully intended to study the global working of capitalism. He says the following:

“I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order: capital, landed property, wage-labour; the State, foreign trade, world market. The economic conditions of existence of the three great classes into which modern bourgeois society is divided are analysed under the first three headings [capital, landed property, and wage labour]; the interconnection of the other three headings is self-evident.”

In practice however, Marx could not complete his stated intellectual project. The first three projects, namely the analysis of capital, landed property and wage labour took up the remainder of his entire working life which was only another quarter century or so before his premature death. And this analysis was carried out within a formally closed capitalist system without external trade and without any other social classes.

As Prof. Habib rightly pointed out, Marx's writings in the New York Tribune were not generally available at that date. But even after they became available, scholars - particularly in northern universities - and particularly the economists, have not taken those writings very seriously precisely because those writings, even though they were full of insights and recognised de-industrialisation, the drain of wealth etc., have not been integrated into his rigorously worked out formal model of capitalist accumulation in *Capital*. This had very serious consequences because we find that many of those who called themselves Marxists in northern universities simply do not take any account of colonialism and imperialism at all as phenomena. For them imperialism does not exist - even colonialism was not important as far as the growth of the capitalist system was concerned.

The great service that both Lenin and Luxemburg did in this context, is to extend Marxist analysis to areas that Marx himself had not touched. Lenin, by integrating the role of the peasantry and of the colonies in any revolutionary struggle, and Luxemburg of course had the temerity to criticise Marx himself - the great man! But you know her criticism was from the inside. Her idea was really to advance the Marxist theoretical analysis, to carry it forward, to make it more relevant. So we look to understand it in that context, and Prof. Habib has already explained what the core of the problem was; namely that in a closed capitalist system the realization of surplus was impossible, according to Luxemburg. And frankly I think she was right because I don't find Lenin's defense very convincing - that you could have more and more capital intensive methods of production which would take care of the realization problem.

So when you read Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* (and particularly to the young people here I would suggest that you do read it) – because, yes the first few chapters are difficult because she is giving the ideas and debates that concern the economists at that time, but then the remainder of the book is written in a very interesting style - very racy and very caustic as well. She is not simply criticizing Marx, but all those theories which preceded Marx that did not take into account the problem of effective demand. In fact, when Joan Robinson wrote her introduction to the *Accumulation of Capital* in one of the editions (Robinson also says that it was difficult for her to get through the Marxist verbiage because she was not familiar with it), that really what Rosa Luxemburg was doing, and she was one of the earliest to do it, was to raise the question of the problem of demand which was not there in Ricardo.

I will give you an example of the caustic manner in which Rosa Luxemburg dealt with anybody who had an illogical argument. She says when she is discussing Ricardo's controversy with Sismondi, and I quote from Luxemburg (she is quoting Ricardo here):

“Supposing that 100 workers produce 1,000 sacks of corn, and 100 weavers 1,000 yards woollen fabric. Let us disregard all other products useful to man and all intermediaries between them, and consider them alone in the world. They exchange their 1,000 yards against the 1,000 sacks. Supposing that the productive power of labour has increased by a tenth owing to a successive progress of industry, the same people will exchange 1,100 yards against 1,100 sacks, and each will be better clothed and fed; new progress will make them exchange 1,200 yards for 1,200 sacks, and so on. The increase in products always only increases the enjoyment of those who produce.”

This is basically saying supply creates its own demand. So Rosa Luxemburg makes the remark

“The great Ricardo's standards of reasoning, it must regretfully be stated, are if anything even lower than those of the Scottish arch-humbler, MacCulloch. Once again we are invited to witness a harmonious and graceful country-dance of sacks and yards – the very proposition which is to be proved, is again, taken for granted. What is more, all relevant premises for the problem are simply left out. The real problem – you will recollect – the object of the controversy had been the question: who are the buyers and consumers of the surplus product that comes into being if the capitalists produce more goods than are needed for their own and their workers' consumption;

if, that is to say, they capitalise part of their surplus value and use it to expand production, to increase their capital? Ricardo answers it by completely ignoring the capital increase.”

So she critiques in this vein other authors who ignore the question of demand completely.

Then she comes to Marx’s diagram of expanded reproduction. She says that Marx’s diagram of enlarged reproduction cannot explain the actual and historical process of accumulation. And why? Because of the very premises of the diagram. And what is the premise? The assumption that the capitalists and workers are the sole agents of capitalist consumption. From this she concludes, as Prof. Habib has pointed out, that there is a basic contradiction in assuming this. In reality, the capitalist system was not constrained by being limited only to capitalists and workers or their hangers on – like your professional classes, the clergy and so on - who are considered to be a part of the basic classes in the capitalist society.

The fact that she had the temerity to criticise Marx was something that shocked many Marxists. But Marx himself, I think, would have appreciated it. The whole point about Marx’s own approach to theory, was ruthless criticism. He was not a person who tolerated any loose reasoning or illogical reasoning, or any contradiction in an argument. And of course, I personally think that if he had completed his intellectual project - if he had lived long enough to discuss foreign trade, world market and the state, as he had intended to do - then we would have seen very new 4th and 5th volumes of Capital compared to the 1st and 2nd volumes. In fact, some assumptions of the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd volumes, would have been completely abandoned.

The fact that Marx did not live to complete his project does not mean that Marxists should abandon that project. It is essential for Marxists not to treat Marx’s writings as some kind of received wisdom – as a bible - as many northern Marxists are prone to do. But to actually carry the analysis forward in the direction that Marx would have carried it forward, had he lived. It is also necessary I think, for us (if we are serious about Marxism as a theory to be applied in the present day) to understand that a great many of the theories that we are taught today, especially what economics students are taught, are basically logically incorrect. I don’t want to go into my critique of Ricardo; many of you have heard it ad infinitum, so I am not going to repeat that.

But the solution that Rosa Luxemburg found to the problem that she identified is well-known. She said that in reality, capitalist production does not exist in a vacuum. It exists surrounded by other forms of production that are not capitalist – which are non-capitalist or pre-capitalist. And there are two things that she identified. Firstly she says, and I quote

“Capitalist production supplies consumer goods over and above its own requirements, the demand of its workers and capitalists, which are bought by non-capitalist strata and countries. The English cotton industry, for instance, during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, and to some extent even now, has been supplying cotton textiles to the peasants and petty-bourgeois townspeople of the European continent, and to the peasants of India, America, Africa and so on. The enormous expansion of the English cotton industry was thus founded on consumption by non-capitalist strata and countries.”

[She gives us copious figures on exports of cotton yards and cotton cloth and so on.]

And then the other example that she gives is not a final consumption good like cotton textiles, but of rubber, which is an intermediate, and the huge amount of rubber production and export carried on by British owned companies located in Asia and Africa where the commodity can be grown.

But I would argue that while Luxemburg did us an inestimable service by bringing in the whole question of colonial exploitation, as Prof. Habib has pointed out, even her understanding was limited by the information available at that time. She really identifies accumulation as being dependent on access to non-capitalist strata and classes located outside national boundaries in what we call the third world.

I think an even stronger proposition can be put forward and that is, that the very rise of capitalist production in the core capitalist countries would probably not have been possible without prior access by these countries before they had their industrial revolution. Before they had manufacturing production on the factory basis, they had prior access to the non-capitalist countries. And I would have the temerity also to criticize even a passage from the Communist Manifesto, written in 1848. Remember, in 1848 the kind of information about colonialism that was available to anybody living in Germany or England at that time, was very limited. It was basically from the writings of the colonizers and the imperialists themselves, who had a very slanted view - to say the very least - of the whole process. So this is a quote from the Communist Manifesto,

“The bourgeoisie by the improvement of all instruments of production by the immensely facilitated means of communications draws all even the most barbarian nations into civilizations.”

[This is another thing that sort of strikes the ear in a rather unfortunate manner that not only Marxists, but Keynes and others - Victorians after them - talked about

civilized nations and barbarian nations. They were not very sensitive about the language they used. I don't see what was so very civilized about the capitalist system which, hardly a quarter century after Rosa Luxemburg was murdered, killed six million of its own citizens in gas chambers. What's so civilized about that? Or about the Keynes, who also talked about civilized nation, whilst representing 'civilized nations' which was starving to death 3 million civilians in Bengal through a process of profit inflation. So civilized is actually what they gave to themselves. And we always have to question the categories and the adjectives that they use for themselves.

So to return to the quote from the Communist Manifesto:

“The cheap prices of the commodities are the heavy artillery, with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate.”

Not at all! It is not the cheap prices of the products which battered down Chinese walls, whether in India or in China. It was gun boats. It was simple use of force. It was the battle of Plassey, battle of Buxar in eastern India and later on the opium wars in China. And what was the objective? Not cheap prices because they didn't produce cotton textiles at that date cheaply - not until the 1780s and 1790s. So what was the objective at that time of opening up the ports of countries like India and China? The objective was to acquire our manufactured products, which were much cheaper, than the manufactured textiles in Europe at that time. So this is a serious misrepresentation. Now we can forget it because the combined ages of Marx and Engels at that time was probably not fifty. They were very young and they probably had not really very good access to the actual history of colonial conquest.

This is the point I am really trying to make - that long before they sought markets in colonised territories, they went to these territories and subjugated them, acquired political power. That too by using literally heavy artillery - not metaphorical heavy artillery but actual heavy artillery - through violence - in order to acquire products from these countries they could not produce themselves. Because they could not produce raw cotton to make cotton textiles. They did not have a silk industry for silk textiles. They could not produce tropical crops, which they still cannot do. And that is why - the continuity of the motivation of colonialism and imperialism. The motives which drove them in the 17th and the 18th century to come half way across the world to colonize our territories - those motives have not gone away. Those motives are still there, except that we do not recognize them. In other words, we will not recognize neo-imperialism and the way it works today, unless we recognize that what they wanted from us, first and foremost, was not markets. They wanted our goods and they wanted access to

our productive tropical land and products that they themselves could not produce then, and still cannot produce today.

And that is an important argument that we put forward in this joint book ('Imperialism in the Era of Globalization') that Prabhat and I have written, and which has not been put forward before, regarding this fundamental material reality that we were richer societies - richer in terms of endowments, richer in terms of the variety of primary production - than societies located in the cold temperate North. And that motivation continues to this day. That is what the WTO is all about. That is why the mantra of free trade which is continuously poured into our ears - 'Open up your economy! Open up your agriculture!'. That is what northern countries today wish to have - unhampered access to our agriculture - just like in the past.

By the way - let me reiterate a fact that is not mentioned anywhere in the more than 1000 pages of the Cambridge Economic History of India. And that is that from the year 1700 until 1846, the British market was protected against the entry of Asian textiles from India and Persia by law. From 1700 to 1744 it was protected by an outright ban, i.e., the cotton textiles that the East India Company imported from India and Persia were not allowed to enter Britain. They were allowed to enter the ports where there were warehouses, but they had to be re-exported to other countries by the East India Company. There was a ban on the consumption of our textiles that lasted for the best part of 75 years. In fact there was a ban on the consumption of pure cotton goods so as to keep out our textiles. And after 1774, when Arkwright petitioned the British parliament and said - look we are now producing these pure textiles/cotton textiles ourselves, why should we have a ban - Parliament lifted the ban. But it put tariffs. So it prevented our textiles from entering the British market from 1774 until 1864.

This enormously long period of protectionism of 150 years finds no mention anywhere in the Cambridge Economic History of India. It finds no mention in the work of somebody like David Landes, whose thesis and book was precisely on technical change and cotton textile industry in Britain. It finds no mention in Eric Hobsbawm. So, we have to write our own history. We can't rely on the history which is written there.

Let me wind up with a point on which, I think, insufficient theoretical discussion has taken place. And that is the question of the freedom and servitude of labour. Traditionally we have been taught that the capitalist system actually frees labour from all kinds of pre-capitalist barriers to movement, from all kinds of bondage and so on, and the creation of a class of free wage labourers is one of the positive achievements of the capitalist system. But as far as I am aware, there is no systematic analysis of the fact that the freedom of labour which came

about in the core countries of the North, was accompanied by the imposition of servitude on peoples of other lands. Precisely when labour was becoming more free in England, or in France or in Germany, you have the inception of slavery, or the continuation of slavery for at least 150 years or so. After the whole process of capitalist development had started in the core countries, slavery continued till its final abolition around the middle of the 19th century. And this slavery was not something carried over from the earlier systems; it was a slavery which was initiated by the very fact of capitalist expansionism outside the boundaries of the core countries. And it was a recrudescence of slavery after 1000 years from the slavery of antiquity to the slavery which underlay the capitalist system, and bonded labour where there was no outright slavery. How do you analyse this? I am not sure any Marxist has really devoted enough attention to this kind of theoretical analysis.

Now one could go on for a very long time about what a brilliant person Rosa Luxemburg was. But her brilliance consisted in the fact, to my mind, that she combined two attributes. She was absolutely uncompromising in her scholarship but at the same time she was completely uncompromising in her politics. And it was this combination of scholarship and politics which really marks her out as an outstanding personality - an outstanding revolutionary. She was murdered even before she had reached 50 years of age. So we can imagine that if she had lived longer, how much more she would have given us in terms of her contribution. The *Accumulation of Capital* is the only work in economics that she had produced, but that became a classic and remains a classic still. The best tribute we can give her is to read it. So I would urge you to read it. Thank you.

Chirashree Das Gupta

I am very grateful to CWDS and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation for thinking of me to be a part of this panel. It is a daunting exercise to be on a panel with such doyens, and after all that has been said, it is difficult to think of what one can add.

In her life and death for socialist revolution, Rosa Luxemburg displayed a towering strength of mind and intellect that commanded respect even from her critics. Understanding her life and times, as has been said by Prof. Habib and others, are in so many ways pertinent for those of us here in this room who are part of the struggle against fascism in the current conjuncture in India. For as Adrienne Rich commented in 2004:

“Rosa Luxemburg travels into the 21st century like a great messenger bird spanning continents, scanning history to remind us that our present is not new, but a continuation of a long human conflict

changing only in intensity and scope. Her fiery critical intellect and ardent spirit are as vital for this time as in her own.”

What was she like – this woman who travels to us with a message across a hundred years? In September 1919, eight months after her murder, a close friend and comrade Clara Zetkin wrote:

“Rosa Luxemburg was a woman of indomitable will. Severe self-control put a curb upon the mettlesome ardour of her temperament, veiling it beneath an outwardly reserved and calm demeanour.....A severe task-mistress to herself, she treated her friends with an instinctive indulgence; their woes and their troubles were more poignant to her than her own. As a friend she was a model of both loyalty and love, of self-effacement and gentle solicitude. With what rare qualities was she endowed, this “resolute fanatic”! How pregnant with thought and vivacity was her intercourse with intimates!¹

As a measure of what she stood for – there’s so much that Prof. Habib and Prof. Utsa Patnaik have talked about. But one of things that I really want to start with - to add a few dimensions to what has already being said - is that an outstanding feature of Rosa Luxemburg’s life is the passionate spirit and sensitive humanity that marked her uncompromising opposition to colonialism, imperialism, militarism and war. It’s quality was of course a product of the same analytical intellect and consciousness that has also been talked about before, but her own words still speak to us with such force.

In 1913 - with predictive power, she presented her analysis of the build up to the world war that was to break out within a year of her writing the following lines:

“Armaments and wars, international contradictions and colonial politics accompany the history of capitalism from its cradle. It is the most extreme intensification of these elements, a drawing together, a gigantic storming of these contradictions which has produced a new epoch in the course of modern society. imperialism has opened the final phase, the division of the world by the assault of capital. A chain of unending, exorbitant armaments on land and on sea in all capitalist countries because of rivalries; a chain of bloody wars which have spread from Africa to Europe and which at any moment could light the spark which would become a world fire.”²

1 Clara Zetkin (1919), ‘Rosa Luxemburg,’ in The Communist International, No.5, 1 September, p.5, Marxists’ Internet Archive

2 Rosa Luxemburg (1913), ‘The Idea of May Day on the March’ Leipziger Volkszeitung, April 30, 1913, Rosa Luxemburg Archive (marxists.org)

Now this she wrote in 1913, and right after she was of course, arrested and charged with inciting public disobedience for having made an anti-war speech. When she stood before the prosecutor and the judges, her spirit of defiance is evident in what she said,

“In the course of 1913, many of your colleagues have sweated and laboured to load a total of 60 months in prison on to our journalists alone...Do you think this flood of sentences caused a single Social Democrat to have any doubts or to deflect him from his duty? Oh no, our work mocks at the spider’s web of your criminal code, it grows and flowers in spite of all prosecution....he [the prosecutor] asks for my immediate arrest since ‘it would be incomprehensible if the accused did not take to flight...Sir I believe you, you would run away; a Social Democrat does not. He stands by his deeds and laughs at your judgements. Now sentence me.”³

She was indeed sentenced to 12 months in prison and was then again in prison for another two and halfc years, till the end of WWI.

Yet, even though she stood in court defending her party, there was no hesitancy in her scathing critiques of the German social democrats when they capitulated to national chauvinism – as Prof. Irfan Habib has already mentioned - when in the name of defending national existence – they voted for war credits that enabled the German monarch to finance Germany’s participation in WWI.

But what resonates most at the present moment is what she wrote about the happenings in the course of the war in the Junius pamphlet of 1916, which was written while she was in prison. It reminds us of what went on in Germany during the war, but is also eerily reflective of some of the things that are happening around us and in the times that we are living in. I quote:

“Gone is the first mad delirium. Gone are the patriotic street demonstrations, the chase after suspicious looking automobiles, the false telegrams, the cholera-poisoned wells. Gone the mad stories of Russian students who hurl bombs from every bridge of Berlin, or Frenchmen flying over Nuremberg; gone the excesses of a spy-hunting populace, the singing throngs, the coffee shops with their patriotic songs; gone the violent mobs, ready to denounce, ready to persecute women, ready to whip themselves into a delirious frenzy over every wild rumor; gone the atmosphere of ritual murder....

3 Luxemburg trial, quoted in J.P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, Verso, 2019, p. 492

Business is flourishing upon the ruins. Cities are turned into shambles, whole countries into deserts, villages into cemeteries, whole nations into beggars....

Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics-but as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity so it appears in all its hideous nakedness.”

Then she argued that war is methodical organised gigantic murder, but that in normal human beings this systematic murder is possible only when a state of intoxication have been previously created. As she said this was a tried and proven method of those who made war, and then went on to say:

“Bestiality of action must find a commensurate bestiality of thought and senses. The latter must prepare and come with the former.”⁴

I need not dwell on the significance of this today as we stand here, a few days after Pulwama, except to say that this was Rosa Luxemburg’s response and alternate perspective against the surrender by the social democrats to social chauvinism.

Another aspect of Rosa Luxemburg’s life which it is important to bring to the fore is her opposition to the death penalty and conditions of those in prisons. One of the things that she wrote about after being released from prison on 9th November, 1918, at a time when she was in the midst of a revolutionary upsurge that was spreading across Germany which Prof. Habib has talked about. Despite poor health she threw herself into the complexities of the on-going struggle, and yet the first piece that she wrote immediately after her release was an attack on the death penalty, in which she demanded elimination of the barbaric disciplinary system, detention in chains, corporal punishments, etc. So this strong position against different kinds of incarceration and death penalties is something that was based on her actual experience in prison, and she called it a ‘Duty of Honour’ to really stand up and speak out against.

The third aspect that I wanted to talk about and I don’t know if I should, because much has already been said about Accumulation of Capital and her study of political economy. Nevertheless, I may add that much before she wrote Accumulation of Capital, when she was still in her 20s, she had argued that the entire strength of the modern labour movement rests on theoretical knowledge. This was a statement that she made when she was debating with Edward

4 Rosa Luxemburg (1916) The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy

Bernstein and his theorization regarding the capacity of the capitalist system to adapt through development of credit system, cooperatives, etc. Bernstein held that the proletariat could slowly become the middle class and concluded that socialism could be achieved by means of progressive extension of social control and the gradual application of the principles of cooperation. Luxemburg strongly differed and offered a trenchant critique of what she called the first attempt to give a theoretic base to the opportunist currents in social democracy. Instead she pleaded for dialectics and the materialist conception of history.

One of the things I think that essentially drove her and she puts it right in the beginning of the book, *The Accumulation of Capital*. She tells us that the real question is (and this is where I think the connection between her work on political economy and her theorization on the role of women in capitalist society come together) the problem of reproduction. The problem of reproduction not in the narrow sense that it has been reduced to in terms of simply looking at reproductive work, but the question of reproduction of the capitalist system itself. Her problem was, as she said, that as soon as the problem is identified, or as she put it,

“..as soon as economic theory gets an inkling of the problem of reproduction, as soon as it has at least started guessing at the problem, it reveals a persistent tendency suddenly to transform the problem of reproduction into the problem of crises, thus barring its own way to the solution of the question. When we speak of capitalist reproduction...., we shall always understand by this term a mean volume of productivity which is an average taken over the various phases of a cycle.”

So, she was not talking about capitalism in crisis, but about capitalism as it exists. Luxemburg's answer to the problematic that she set out has been explained twice and I don't want to repeat it. But let me just quote what she wrote in the conclusion of *The Accumulation of Capital*.

‘Capitalism is the first mode of economy with the weapon of propaganda, a mode which tends to engulf the entire globe and to stamp out all other economies, tolerating no rival at its side. Yet at the same time it is also the first mode of economy which is unable to exist by itself, which needs other economic systems as a medium and soil. Although it strives to become universal, and, indeed, on account of this its tendency, it must break down because it is immanently incapable of becoming a universal form of production.’.

Now it is this part of Rosa Luxemburg's thought and it is this theoretical formulation that has opened up a new vista on the relationship between capital and non-capital and laid grounds for subsequent arguments about how colonialism

and imperialism were intrinsic to the development and expansion of capitalism. And you have heard expositions on this from two scholars, Prof. Habib and Prof. Utsa Patnaik. Other scholars - Prof. Prabhat Patnaik and Kalyan Sanyal, have engaged with the relation between capital and non-capital, although from differing perspectives. It is this aspect around which theoretical insights into the particular ways of this relationship have been drawn - not only for India but for the entire world of colonialism and capitalism. This is I think, the one aspect of her work that has left a direct imprint on the way scholarship has progressed in India.

But unfortunately the same is not the case as far as her writings on party organization, or her writings on the women's question, or even her writings on militarism and war are concerned. These are not areas that have seen much engagement with Rosa Luxemburg in India.

If we turn to her writing on women - although she wrote very little and left it mostly to Clara Zetkin. But one of the things that is important is how she approached the question of women's suffrage, which once again Prof. Habib has talked about. I think that it is important to point out that she believed that the issue of suffrage was not a job for women alone, but was a common class concern of the women and men of the proletariat.

She was uncompromising on the issue and it led her to openly attack the Belgian Social Democrats in 1902 when they dropped the call for women's suffrage to broker an electoral alliance with the liberals. In holding up the question of women's suffrage, what Rosa Luxemburg essentially does is to theorise the question of proletarian women's claim to equal political rights - not as something that is a right for rights sake. In her piece on 'Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle' in 1912, her argument was firmly anchored in a political economy framework where, as she said,

“The narrow, secluded woman of the patriarchal “family circle” answers the needs of industry and commerce as little as those of politics.”

She pointed out that the capitalist state had neglected its duty even in this respect and that it was the social democrats, their unions and organizations of women (the organizations that Prof. Habib was talking about), and it was the proletarian class struggle that had widened women's horizons, made their minds flexible, developed their thinking. It was socialism that brought about the mental rebirth of the mass of proletarian women, showed them the great goals for their efforts. So it was the goal of socialism, the goal of revolution, of emancipation, in which she saw women's suffrage as a milestone. Not as an end in itself.

Quoting Charles Fourier's words that in any society the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation, she then added:

"This is completely true for our present society. The current mass struggle for women's political rights is only an expression and a part of the proletariat's general struggle for liberation. In this lies its strength and its future. Fighting for women's suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat."

Today a century after her death her thesis on women's work remains an important question before the contemporary women's movement even more so in India. And her words resonate with contemporary concerns, when she says:

"As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task."⁵

Now whether one agrees with her or not, Rosa Luxemburg remains an important figure for women. Even though she wrote very briefly on the women's question, for the women's movement, there is so much in her formulations that is still very relevant today.

The last point I want to make is about her struggle against bourgeois liberalism. In 1912 she wrote 'On the Fallen Women of Liberalism' in which she was on the one hand, critical of the strategy of the social democratic party in terms of the electoral compromises that it made. On the other, she was trying to show that the parliamentary system and its alliances cannot bridge class contradictions and the dangers of ending up on the side of the system. This underlay her argument when she wrote that the next military bill would show that social democracy was still the only foe of reaction as before, and not the liberals. She identified questions of militarism and imperialism as being "the central axis of political life today" and warned that those who were for militarism, would also be for the indirect tax and tariffs "as B follows A." The unanimous majority of the bourgeois parties on the military and colonial question would, at most, be shaken on questions of the size

5 'Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle' (1912), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p.241-242

of tariff and tax (“a family quarrel”). And so, on the one hand there were great expectation from the social democrats to stand up to war and imperialism, and on the other hand you had the compromises that were developing which finally needed the breaking away from the Social Democratic Party, and the formation of the Communist Party.

Now, in India, as farmers march onto the streets and workers, students and women form new fronts against fascism, it may well be pertinent to recall what Rosa Luxemburg told her students when lecturing in the school in Berlin about why she paid so much attention to political economy.

“Why must we study political economy as a science? As long as economic relations between people regulated themselves without difficulty, these relations did not require scientific study. With the onset of a capitalist style economy this has changed. Crises are a side effect of this economic style. Unemployment is also a constant phenomenon of today’s society as well as the daily and hourly price fluctuations by which one individual can become a millionaire in a short time without having to lift a finger, while another will become a beggar. These phenomena are not naturally so and are not inevitable. They have been brought about by human institutions, are of human creation and, nevertheless, bourgeois society is at a loss when faced with it as if it were dealing with uncontrollable elemental forces. We stand before an anarchist style of economics that has outgrown us. This is the reason for having to study the relations of economic life in a scientific manner political economy is the science of all sciences; it prepares the ground on which we want to walk in the country of the future.”⁶

A day before her brutal murder she wrote, and I end with this,

Order prevails in Berlin. You foolish lackeys! Your “order” is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will “rise up again, clashing its weapons,” and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing: I was, I am, I shall be.⁷

* * *

6 Vorwärts on 20th October 1907, cited in ‘Rosa Luxemburg – a life for the socialist idea’ Exhibition developed by Maxi Besold, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2002

7 Rote Fahne, 14 January 1919



Panel Discussion on Life and Ideas

Speakers:

Prof. Irfan Habib
Emeritus, History, AMU

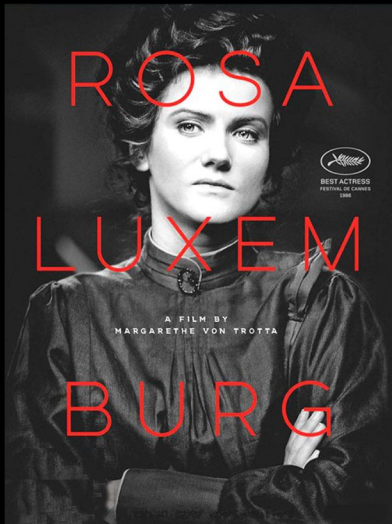
Prof. Utsa Patnaik
Emerita, CESP, JNU

Dr. Chirashree Das Gupta
CSLG, JNU

Moderator:

Prof. Ritu Dewan
Former President IAWS (2014-2017)

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