

Address by

Prof. Luis Britto Garcia

on

**“India & Latin-America: The Process of Regional Integration and the
Non-Aligned Countries”**

To commemorate the Bicentennial of Independence of the
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

at

Sapru House, New Delhi
Tuesday, 19 April 2011 at 1100

INDIA and Latin America, COLONIZATION, DECOLONIZATION AND NON ALIGNMENT

The greatest colonial enterprise in the world

Every community is distinct, each country is unique, but in History there are chains of events that are replicated. The Conquest of America which begins in 1492, completes almost a century of the greatest colonial enterprise of all times: it spreads over a whole continent and is put into effect by pitting some indigenous groups against others and the looted wealth finances Spain's hegemonic position in Europe for two centuries and Europe's domination of the world for four. The whole venture takes place through the destruction of inconceivable material and cultural wealth, but the conquerors at least in Latin America impose one religion and two romance languages, and these will become communication channels among the conquered. The rudiments of Western culture are also taught to them and these evolve their own unique styles and pave the way for Independence and decolonization.

Imperial mechanisms of unity

The Conquest and colonization of America distracts the voracity of Spain, France, Holland and England towards the New World and possibly delays the colonization of Africa and Asia that was in its incipient stage. The Independence of America in the middle of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries intensifies the colonization efforts by the European powers in Africa and Asia. Between the two landmarks of domination and exploitation there are fascinating similarities and differences. The Conquest and Colonization of America, even if it occurred under the tutelage and with the support of the Crowns of Spain, Portugal, France and England and by the Council of the Lords of Hollands, was by and large a private enterprise: each conqueror put together a force and paid for his expedition. However since its legitimation rested on the project of ecumenical domination for the cause of Christianity, it proceeded with the systematic and methodical destruction of indigenous cultures and languages, and the forced imposition of the language and religion of the invaders. In this way, Spain and Portugal brought together in two immense political units the lands that were populated by an infinite number of diverse ethnic groups and communities often at odds with each other. After the independence of both groups at the beginning of the XIXth century, the Portuguese dominions remained politically united in the immense country of Brazil, that covers half of South America, but the old Spanish dominions split up politically into some twenty small republics. In both groupings however the unificatory elements brought by the Conquest persisted: the Christian religion in its Catholic version; the Romance languages, variants of

Spanish and Portuguese and the basics of Western culture that led to the road to modernity.

The Conqueror's capital

There are fascinating parallels and differences between the Conquest and Colonization of America and that of Asia, and we will focus here on the great union of peoples, religions and cultures that we presently call India. Even more than America, the Conquest of India is a private enterprise. After the Discovery of America in 1492, the Atlantic and the Caribbean that had become the conduits of European expansion now became one of the centres of a world economy. The Great powers managed their extensive dominions through a peculiar entity the precursors of which were the Dutch Companies of the East Indies and the West Indies. Like them the French and English companies not only had their own fleets but also their own armies, they minted their own coins and in some cases decided on matters of war and peace. Even decadent Spain adopted this system, and conceded the monopoly of trade and American piracy to entities like the Guipuzcoan Company in 1728.

The Imperial Companies

In the case of India, on the 31st of December 1600 Queen Elizabeth I of England granted to the "Governors & Company of Merchants of London Trading to the East-Indies", better known as the British East India Company, the monopoly to trade with the East Indies, a privilege that it would enjoy for 15 years and which

King James renewed in 1609 for an indefinite period of time. The Company began its operations facing stiff and often armed competition, with the Dutch and Portuguese, whom it defeated in 1612 in the battle of Swayi. This earned it the favour of the Great Mogul, who gave it the permission to trade in all ports from 1615, and in Bengal from 1632 onwards. Following the model put in place by the Dutch Companies since their founding in 1602, Charles II conferred on it in 1670 the sovereign powers to declare war and make alliances, recruit armies and exercise civil and criminal jurisdiction in its territories, powers that were slowly turning it by 1689 into a State within a State that governed autonomously in the regions of Bengal, Bombay and Madrás. In this way, a private company became a sovereign power that governed hundreds of thousands of people in a despotic manner. This led Karl Marx to a remark:

There is no doubt that the misery brought about in Indostan under British domination has been very different in nature and infinitely more intense than all the calamities that the country has experienced. I am not making a reference here to European despotism that leavens itself on Asiatic despotism by the British East India Company; a combination that is much more monstrous than any of these sacred monsters that fill us with so much fear in a temple in Salsette. This is not a distinctive trait of British colonial domination but just an imitation of the Dutch system (...) (Marx, Carlos: "La dominación británica en la India"; New York Daily, N° 3804, 25 de junio de 1853: <http://www.ucm.es/info/es/marx-engels/es/mnsoc/112htm>).

Political Integration and language as instruments of decolonization

Thus, just like in America, the outbreak of colonialism in what would later be called India is essentially a private enterprise supported by the State. It takes advantage of the diversity of peoples, cultures and local governments and pitted them against each and imposed its own domination that it would not have achieved if the peoples had been united. In all Lord Clive's campaigns, the number of sepoy soldiers was always much greater than British soldiers (Thomas Macaulay: Lord Clive; Aguilar, Madrid, 1945, 62-93). Like the Spaniards and Portuguese in America, the French and British acted with utmost cruelty but did not systematically exterminate the colonized because the latter were too numerous and because their labours would form the backbone of the colonial enterprise. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, they carried out evangelical missions but they did not manage to impose Christianity on the immense diversity and complexity of indigenous religions and cultures. However they did unite a multitude of states, nations and communities under a centralized colonial administration and in order to make it work they imposed the English language and brought some elements of modernity. After the British were made to leave, this political and territorial union and the connecting language would help the decolonized peoples to continue to consolidate their unity and find their own road to development.

Violent and Non Violent diplomatic Emancipation

Latin America and India differ somewhat as regards their emancipation. In Spanish America the fight for Independence was characterized by extraordinary violence that cost the lives of one third ~~of the~~ of the population. In Portuguese America emancipation came about through diplomatic maneuvers without bloodshed: the Brazilian oligarchy proclaimed Dom Pedro de Braganza the Emperor of Brazil, little Portugal had neither the fleet nor the army to stop this and recognised the fact as a given, and this augurs the later subjection of both countries to British naval and commercial domination. The road that India takes towards its freedom is a complex one and armed rebellions like that of 1857 are part of an essentially peaceful process of cultural, social and political resistance that culminates in 1947. The instruments of oppression are done away with by the liberated, who take advantage of the political unity that the British had brought and on this foundation they constituted the federal and constitutional Republic of India, that joins 28 states and seven territories, although the separation of Pakistan could not be avoided. The English language, that had been imposed to smoothen colonial administration, was declared the official language in order to facilitate communication among different communities who spoke a variety of languages and dialects.

Emancipation, Dependence and neocolonialism

Although Latin America gained its independence almost a century and half before India, both peoples have since then faced similar problems. Political emancipation did not by itself loosen the chains of economic and cultural

dependence. The hegemonic powers imposed relations that smacked of a false commercial reciprocity, they reduced the decolonized countries into mere exporters of raw materials or products with scarce added value. They imposed on them free trade agreements that were based on a false reciprocity between countries that were unable to protect their economic activities and products and the powerful countries that protected themselves and tried to force a bipolar policy of blocs.

Integration and Non Alignment among the Decolonized

These are challenges that demand a response. India has as one of its strongest assets its will to continue to form a single political body with its diverse communities and states that the British brought together under one empire. Latin America awakens to life after independence divided into about twenty countries, but all the pioneers of independence cherished projects of continental unity that were manifested in the Gran Colombia of 1824, in the Anfictionic Congress of Panama in 1826, in the commercial integration of Mercosur since 1991, in the Union of South American Nations Suramericanas (UNASUR) and in the Bolivarian Alternative Bolivariana for America (ALBA), the latter two since 2004. For its part, India defines its own autonomous path in the international sphere with its firm support for the Movement of Non Aligned Countries. Many countries, under the hegemony of the United States generally ignored the Non Aligned Movement in the beginning, but later slowly began to form part of it, and thus finally the 2006 Summit of the Non Aligned was held in Havana and at present

the following Latin American and Caribbean countries are part of the movement: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Granada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panamá, Perú, Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Originality of Decolonization Models

But for the processes of decolonization, not only is the greatest integration and unity of purpose fundamental amongst formerly subjected peoples. It is also necessary for them to find their own style of development and fiscal and economic management that is not a mere copy of that of the former colonial powers who oppressed them. Mahatma Gandhi preached the cultural rejection of English industrial products and the lifestyle inherent to them. The Constitution of India that came into effect on the 26th of January 1950, proclaims it a sovereign, democratic, secular and socialist Republic. This last characteristic has been modified and reinterpreted a number of times but there is no doubt that India has its own model of development, and in the last few years it has become the 11th largest economy in the world and the fourth in terms of consumption. In Latin America various countries that are part of groups like Mercosur, ALBA or CARICOM have tried socialist experiments and they also search for their own model of civilizational development to confront the triple crisis: ecological, social, economic and military unleashed by the G-7 countries.

Cultures and Decolonization

This very synthesized glimpse needs some conclusions. We notice interesting similarities and divergences in the colonial and decolonization processes. Since the beginning of the Modern period in the XVIth century, the hegemonic powers subjugated areas the size of continents, as in the case of America, or subcontinents like India. The lack of unity amongst indigenous peoples and their internal differences at times facilitated imperial enterprises. Even though they might have appeared to be military invasions, private enterprise was their driving force during a good part of the enterprise, and the vast colonial dominions are under the sway of monopolistic companies who mercilessly exploit them. The imperialists imposed their religion, their language and some elements of modernity as instruments of domination. The subjugated peoples got decolonized through struggles that included insurrectional violence as well as diplomatic maneuvers or peaceful social and cultural resistance. Once independence was achieved, they used the same instruments of domination that had once been imposed, like the language, political unity and technical advances in order to consolidate great geo political blocs. For purposes of defining, strengthening and consolidating these, cultural specificity is of fundamental importance. This allows for the establishment of difference vis a vis the colonizer and the similarity or at least the linkages between other colonized entities. In the long term, integration in global movements of independent peoples allows them to remain independent of the alienating policies of hegemonic power blocs and they define their own projects. This is decisive if one remembers that the peoples who were once

colonized or faced the threat of colonization make up the majority of the earth's inhabitants. they constitute the largest work force and have the greatest natural resources. and their rich cultural diversity is the precondition of the processes of fusion, cross pollination and hybridization of tendencies and patterns with which they make progress and thus the civilizations of the planet develop and in this manner solutions to the present planetary crisis can be found.