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New GDP Series and Its Assumptions

Arun Kumar

Controversy over the growth performance of the Indian economy took another turn with *The Indian Express* breaking the story about Niti Aayog not allowing the back series to be announced three years back because it showed a higher growth rate during the UPA regime. The suspicion that the new official series announced recently was politically manipulated to show better performance for the NDA compared to the UPA is strengthened. The Niti Aayog vice chairman has defended the official new series on the ground that it follows the System of National Accounts (SNA) 2008, recommended by the United Nations.

However, his argument that the sub-group of the Statistical Commission which released the earlier back series in July 2018 was not authorised to prepare a back series and, therefore, "there was no question of the government accepting it" is odd. The vice-chairperson undermines the credibility of a government committee and, in the process, his own. What should the public believe? We have three series of growth rates for the economy for the period 2004–05 to 2011–12.

First, based on the earlier base year, 2004–05. Second, the series produced by the sub-group of the Statistical Commission in July 2018. And, now the third series produced by the CSO and jointly released by CSO and Niti Aayog.

The second series, which came to light in August, showed that growth during the UPA's 10 years was better than that during the present government. This raised a political storm with the finance minister criticising the UPA for profligacy to achieve higher growth and leaving a mess for the NDA. The NDA government got a lifeline because the Committee on Real Sector, which released the series, stated that its series ought not to be taken as final. It stated that it had submitted its report to the Statistical Commission which would take a final view of what the revised series ought to be. So, the government legitimately argued that the final series would be released soon. What is now released is that final series.

From the political reaction of the government, it was expected, that the new final series would be different from the series released by the Statistical Commission. The new

back series is what the government needed—it shows that growth during its term has been higher than during the UPA regime.

All estimates of GDP are based on assumptions. Unlike the Census, where enumerators go house to house to count everyone, there is no agency that goes around asking everyone in the country what work they do and how much they earn. Only sample surveys are carried out and that too not of income. Some private agencies carry out income surveys but they are not so reliable. One of the key problems faced by income surveys is that people under-report their incomes to officials. Those with high incomes do not want to report correctly to evade taxes while those with low incomes hope to get some government assistance. So, mostly indirect methods are used to estimate GDP. The economy consists of many sectors, each divided into public and private sectors and organised and unorganised sectors. Estimation of the GDP for each of these can be based on many methods and databases. Each method has its own assumptions for estimating the contribution to GDP. Depending on the method, a particular set of databases are used.

To estimate the contribution of the secondary sector, the Annual Survey of Industry (ASI) and Index of Industrial Production were used prior to 2011–12. These were found to be inadequate. So, from 2011–12 the Ministry of Corporate Affairs data in the MCA21 series was used. The series was first made available in 2007 but its base kept changing every year after that, so it was not comparable and could not be used. When it stabilised in 2011–12, it could then be used from that year onwards. But a comparable back

series prior to 2011–12 could not be generated. The sub-group of the Statistical Commission bridged this gap by using a “production shifting approach”.

The method used in the now official back series should be compatible with the MCA21 series but such data are not available. So what can be done? Revert to the earlier method? But why not the production shifting approach? UN SNA 2008 does not disallow the use of such a method if comparable past data are not available.

The biggest shift in the data is in the tertiary sector. It has been the fastest growing sector of the economy since the 1980s. Its share in the GDP and its growth rate are both reduced in the new back series compared to the earlier series. This pulls down the growth rate of the economy. The big reduction is apparently due to the unorganised sector’s contribution to this sector. How valid is this? For instance, the price index used has been changed and this can make a big difference. Further, for the trade sector, sales tax

data instead of Gross Trading Index (GTI) has been used. But that is problematic as the issue arises, what about the part of the unorganised sector that was not in the sales tax (VAT) net?

There are other big holes in data too. One, has the decline in the unorganised sector since 2016 due to the twin impact of demonetisation and GST been taken into account? If this is accounted for, the actual rate of growth of the economy since 2016 would be less than 1 per cent (as I have argued in my earlier articles printed in *Janata*) and the whole debate on whether the growth rate was marginally higher during the UPA or NDA regime would become irrelevant. And, second, what about the impact of the missing black economy, which lowers the rate of growth. The new back series does not address these challenges.

In brief, many new assumptions have been used to create the new back series to show lower growth rates between 2004–05 and 2011–12, while the big problems with the method used remain unresolved.

Survey: 35 Lakh Jobs Lost in 4.5 Years

In the four-and-a-half years since the BJP-led NDA government took over, at least 35 lakh jobs have been lost among traders and in the MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) sector, says a survey by the All India Manufacturers’ Organisation (AIMO).

Released on December 15, 2018, the AIMO survey talks about the TMSME segment (Traders, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), clubbing traders along with the MSME sector, and surveyed more than 34,000 representatives

throughout the country between October 1, 2018 and October 30, 2018.

The survey said that traders saw the maximum job losses at 43 per cent over this time period, followed by 35 per cent in the small industry segment, 32 per cent in the micro enterprises segment, and 24 per cent job losses in the medium enterprise segment.

“The worst hit sectors where unorganised employment prevails are: Plastic/ Matches/ Crackers/ Dyeing units/ Stitching units/ Stone

units/ Tanneries/ Job working units/ Printing sectors,” said the AIMO release.

However, the most adversely affected is the self-employed category, which includes tailors, cobblers, barbers, plumbers, masons, electricians, and the like, who are all being eliminated, said the AIMO.

The job losses among traders are partly due to competition from e-commerce retail.

“Traders are closing down due to stiff competition from E-commerce sales and this will also result in loss of revenue in rental income by Middle Income families,” said the AIMO.

The year 2015–16 “saw a growth in all areas of business due to high sentiments and expectations from the new leadership,” says the AIMO, but it “went down next year due to demonetisation and then again due to GST implementation and then due to finance availability and higher outstanding with Government payments and compliance matters.”

The survey said the number of companies making profits had dropped drastically.

K.E. Raghunathan, the national president of AIMO, said in the release, “According to our survey, the number of companies which were making profit during 2014–15 have come down significantly. If 100 companies in Trader segment were making profit in 2014–15, now only 30 are making profits for the current year. In the Micro Scale Industries, the drop was to 47; in the Small Scale Industries, it has dropped to 65; and in the Medium Scale Industries segment, it has dropped to 76.”

According to the survey, sectors which require “immediate revival and need a great degree of assistance”

are Housing, Textiles, Automobiles, Power, Match industries, Stone Industry, Plastic, Tannery and Consumer products.

“Their immediate requirement would be that dues from government should be cleared within 15 days—whether it is GST Refunds or TDS Refunds or due in payments for supply,” said the AIMO release.

As Raghunathan said, the survey

“is a clear indicator that the TMSME sector is in a critical condition at this moment of time and we feel the Government of India needs to address the issue with a lot more seriousness and urgency.”

The AIMO represents manufacturing industries from over 3 lakh micro, small, medium and large scale enterprises.

Courtesy: Newslick

Young Women in Chile Spur Widespread Revolt

Muffy Sunde, Freedom Socialist Party, USA / Europe

In January 2018, the hemispheric #MeToo revolt blew up in Chile. Outrage over sexual abuse by Catholic priests and university professors catalysed mass demonstrations against Pope Francis, corrupt college administrations and the government’s wholesale neo-liberal privatisation of education.

Primarily initiated by women students, young, feminist men jumped in and joined their crusade to stop relentless violence against women. Latin America has the dubious distinction of having the world’s highest rates of misogynist violence. Restricted access to abortion is a cause of poverty and domestic abuse. In Chile, femicide increased 30 percent between 2016 and 2017. Too often, the Catholic Church and its anti-female stances dictate public policy.

The Chilean students are part of a tidal wave of female-led protest sweeping Latin America. In Argentina demonstrations for abortion rights brought out millions. In Brazil tens of thousands marched against a ban on abortion. In Chile

there was uproar over Pope Francis’ visit.

US coups in Latin America: Chile’s current problems stem from 1973 when the Chilean military and right-wing businessmen collaborated with the US government to overthrow duly-elected President Salvador Allende. Allende had nationalised the country’s lucrative copper mines, threatening multinational corporate profits. So, the CIA organised a so-called “anti-communist” coup and after the dust settled, the murderous General Augusto Pinochet was in power.

Chile experienced one of several reactionary US-engineered coups in the region. Overthrows in Argentina and Brazil also installed brutal pro-Wall Street dictators to protect big business by stopping land redistributions and nationalisations.

Pinochet destroyed Chile’s publicly-owned education system. Schools were made into private entities, traded on the stock market like cars and oil. A free college education became a thing of the past.

In 2011, one year of college

tuition was three times the annual wage for most workers. That same year a group of 14-year-old teens, all of them young women, took over their high school to demand affordable education. The revolt spread to 200 elementary and high schools and a dozen universities. They included a 3,000-person choreographed performance of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" to imply that Chile's education system is dead.

A galvanising trip. Students erupted again in 2018 when Pope Francis visited Peru and Chile. His trip provoked protests denouncing his protection of paedophile priests, strong stance against abortion, and collusion with the dictatorship during Argentina's dirty war. As Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the pope fingered progressive priests and lay Catholics to the military Junta in power. Most of those he named were tortured and executed.

Before the January visit, Pope Francis accused vocal victims of slandering Chile's most notorious paedophile priest. The pontiff was forced to backpedal. He apologised for the Church's handling of the paedophilia scandal and condemned femicide.

His words did nothing to quell the anger. At least a dozen churches were burned during his visit.

Pope Francis went home. But the young women and men did not. Protests broke out again in April and continued for months. These current actions denounce violence against women and demand the end to draconian laws against abortion. The specific feminist nature of the demands is a different and welcome change for organising in Chile. Women are outraged and mobilising.

When sexual harassment charges

against a prominent law professor at the University of Santiago were dropped, the students occupied the law faculty offices. They hung bras across gateways and painted slogans on the walls.

Student demands included: addressing sexual harassment and abuse; hiring more female professors; and putting women authors on reading lists.

Protesters also called for firing a cabinet minister who helped restrict abortion even further.

The rebellion spreads. In October, 100,000 students marched against new right-wing President Piñera to protest his role in getting a law tossed that banned for-profit schools.

Workers went out after the students, to protest a pension system that was privatised under Pinochet. Currently, retirees get starvation-level benefits while banks rake in the profits.

Only time will tell what happens next, but the students have pledged to expand the movement's reach to other sectors!

#MeToo

Wilderness Sarchild

I know a woman
 who knows what it means
 to be held down
 by ten boys and raped
 repeatedly,
 who didn't tell anyone
 for twenty years.
 I know a woman
 who knows what it means
 to have her girlfriend's father
 slide his finger up her thigh
 at the kitchen table,
 who didn't tell anyone
 for thirty years
 and then it just felt like
 too much time had passed
 and he really didn't do anything,
 anyway,
 not like the man in the woods
 where she was walking
 five years later.
 I know a woman
 who knows what it means
 to be visited at night
 by her father,
 how she stayed quiet, hoping

her sister in the next bed
 wouldn't wake up
 and become his next victim,
 who didn't tell anyone
 for 35 years,
 still believing
 he would kill her.
 When he died last year,
 she finally confided
 in her sister,
 who knew exactly
 what she meant.

I know a woman
 who knows what it means
 to be groped by a boss,
 patted on the ass
 by a customer,
 fired for not acquiescing
 to him, or him or him.
 After 10, 20, 30 years
 she is speaking up
 and he and he and he
 are finally getting
 their balls busted.

The Yellow Vest Movement

Prabhat Patnaik

Nothing shows the crisis of neoliberal capitalism more clearly than the popular uprising in France that is occurring under the banner of the “Yellow Vest” movement. Thousands are congregating in Paris over week-ends to protest against the intolerable burdens being imposed upon them in the name of “austerity” and to demand that resources be raised instead through taxing the rich. This movement had begun initially as a protest against the diesel price-hikes, but has now taken on a more general character and is drawing huge support from the people.

There is an effort in liberal circles to portray the movement as being sponsored by a combination of the extreme Left and the extreme Right, and as one that would ultimately serve to strengthen the fascist forces. But this is the typical tactics employed by these liberal circles to deny people’s grievances that find expression in such movements, and to garner support for themselves by invoking the bogey of fascism.

True, France has a strong fascist movement, but there is no link between that movement and the Yellow Vest agitation. And who benefits politically from this agitation will depend upon the actions of the various political formations; it cannot be glibly forecast. In fact, the movement itself has no political backers and its demands, like relief for the people and taxes on the rich, have nothing to do with the Right. On the contrary, these are progressive demands arising from the dire straits

to which neoliberalism has pushed the working masses.

The roots of this distress have to be clearly understood. In a period of crisis, since output and employment growth slows down, so does the growth of government revenue. If the fiscal deficit is to be controlled, and European Union rules stipulate that it must not exceed 3% of the gross domestic product, then government expenditure must also be curtailed. This has two effects: first, it aggravates the crisis through further curtailment of aggregate demand; and second, since such an expenditure-cut typically affects welfare expenditure the most, it causes a further squeeze on the working poor.

The working poor, therefore, are hit in three distinct ways: first, by the original crisis itself; second, by the aggravation of the crisis via the response of the government through expenditure cuts; and third, by the direct loss in living standard that is caused by the fact that the cut is usually in welfare spending. Widespread people’s protests under these circumstances, as is happening in Paris, are hardly surprising.

What, it may be asked, would happen if the government did not curtail its expenditure? There would obviously be an increase in the size of the fiscal deficit, which would be frowned upon by finance capital and would also violate the EU rules. But even assuming that the French government could ignore these factors, it would nonetheless face a more serious fall-out from the increase in the fiscal deficit.

If we compare the two situations, one where the government has stuck rigidly to the 3% fiscal deficit target and one where it has exceeded that limit because of refusing to cut government expenditure by as much as the fall in revenue, then the current account deficit on the balance of payments in the latter situation will be higher than in the former. This is because a part of the higher aggregate demand in the latter situation would have “leaked out” abroad in the form of a higher current deficit. The need, therefore, would be for larger external borrowing to cover the higher current deficit; but, precisely because the fiscal deficit is larger, international finance capital will be unwilling to give larger loans to sustain the larger current deficit.

In other words, running a larger fiscal deficit may be manageable if it causes no expansion in the current account deficit; but if it does, then the country in question will face a problem. The constraint upon enlarging the fiscal deficit, therefore, is not just something which arises because of false perceptions; it is actually a structural constraint.

To see the nature of this structural constraint, let us imagine an alternative scenario where France imposes import controls to ensure that the larger fiscal deficit does not create a larger current deficit, i.e., that the larger aggregate demand that gets generated compared with a situation where the fiscal deficit is kept controlled to within 3% of the GDP, causes an increase entirely in domestic output and employment, and does not spill over into larger

imports. In such a case, there will be no need for any additional external borrowing on account of the fiscal deficit target being exceeded.

The structural constraint upon enlarging the fiscal deficit, therefore, arises from the fact that the aggregate demand generated by a larger fiscal deficit “leaks out” abroad, at least partially, i.e., from the fact that countries are not allowed to put up import controls under neoliberalism. The US alone has done so till now. No European country has done so; indeed no European country can do so without getting out of the EU itself, which denies such freedom to member countries.

This is the dilemma of France today. Emmanuel Macron, the French President, went on television to address the nation and announced a series of concessions to the Yellow Vest demands. These included increasing the minimum wage and postponing a diesel price-hike. Macron, however, categorically ruled out any increased taxation of the rich. His announced measures, therefore, would raise the fiscal deficit beyond what the EU permits. But even assuming that the EU takes a lenient view of France’s transgressing the fiscal deficit target, the fact that France will have to borrow more from abroad would imply that it would have to please finance capital. And that will require squeezing the people in some other way.

Put differently, Macron could have taxed the rich and thereby kept to the fiscal deficit target; but he has ruled that out because it would be unacceptable to finance capital. He could have, even while increasing the fiscal deficit, imposed import controls in which case the increased aggregate demand would have

been met through larger domestic output and employment and not caused a larger current account deficit; but that is not possible under EU rules, and would again be unacceptable to finance capital. Hence his measures would cause a larger fiscal and current account deficit, and if capital inflows are to finance it then the financiers would demand their pound of flesh in the form of “austerity”, either now or, at the most, after some time.

Macron’s announced measures, therefore, while they may succeed in preventing any further protests for the time being, really amount to deceiving the people. They amount to buying peace now for a greater onslaught on the people later.

In real terms, if the working people are to be provided with some relief, then this relief can come either at the expense of the domestic surplus earners; or from larger production at home through aggregate larger demand; or from resources borrowed from abroad. Since the rich are being spared, the first of these options is ruled out; and even if some increase in domestic output occurs because

of this relief expenditure, some external borrowing will also have to be incurred, which means that a combination of the second and the third options will be used to pay for the relief.

But any external borrowing would bring in its wake “austerity”, so that ultimately the burden of the relief will have to be borne by other sections of the working people themselves.

Macron’s relief measures, in short, are a stalling, hoodwinking tactic, whereby some segments of the working people will receive relief at the expense of other segments of the working people. But the fact that Macron was forced to announce these measures testifies to the depth of the people’s anger which even the custodians of neoliberal capitalism cannot afford to ignore. From the peasants’ march in Delhi to the Yellow Vests’ demonstrations in Paris, we are witnessing a world-wide bursting forth of the people’s anger; but that only underscores the fact that neoliberal capitalism has reached a complete dead-end.

Naseeruddin Shah ko Gussa Kyon Aata hai?

Ram Puniyani

The index of health of democratic society is gauged by the feeling of security experienced by the minorities. Similarly one can say that the degree of democracy in a society is reflected by the degree of ‘freedom of expression’ in the society. In India we see that both these indices have been slipping down during last few years. There are observations that the religious minorities are

being relegated to second class citizenship. In particular, Muslims and Christians have been feeling more and more insecure during the last few years. Even earlier, it’s not that things were very good for them. ‘Security of religious minorities’ and ‘freedom of expression’ have been constantly undermined for decades in the country. But it has reached its acme ever since the BJP led NDA

has come to power at the center.

This fact came to the surface yet again when Naseeruddin Shah, one of the legends of Indian cinema, poured his heart out in the backdrop of the murder of police inspector Subodh Kumar Singh in the violence related to cow slaughter in Bulandshahr, UP. Shah was talking to Karvan-E-Mohabbat. This group, led by the indefatigable activist Harsh Mander, has been a humane response to the rising Hate crimes. The group has taken upon itself to visit and show solidarity with the families of the victims of Hate crimes, to try to put soothing balm on their wounds of having lost their dear ones. This remarkable gesture is steeped in compassion and love for the members of our diverse society.

Shah told them, "In many areas we are witnessing that the death of a cow has more significance than that of a police officer. I feel anxious thinking about my children. Because they don't have a religion, tomorrow if a mob surrounds them and asks 'are you a Hindu or a Muslim?' they will have no answer. It worries me because I don't see the situation improving anytime soon. These matters don't scare me, they make me angry." He also said that the hate prevalent in the society is like a genie which has been released from the bottle and now it may be difficult to put it back. He observed that people have become emboldened to take arms and indulge in violence as they know that they can get away with it.

In any society where love and amity are the norm, this statement from an eminent citizen like Naseeruddin Shah would have made the society introspect. Some of our progressive organisations like the Progressive Writers Association

have come forward and released a statement in solidarity with him. Some others like Ashutosh Rana have also stood by him in this anguish of his. But a bigger section came down pouncing on him. His co-star of many films, Anupam Kher, ridiculed him, saying that there has been freedom to throw stones on the army and freedom to bad mouth the top military officers, so how much freedom does Shah want? Uma Bharati, a Cabinet Minister in the Modi Government, said that people like Shah are part of the conspiracy of divisive politics. Baba Ramdev, the Baba-cum-business tycoon, called him anti-national, while the UP state BJP chief called Shah a Pakistani agent. To cap it all, Shah was booed in the Ajmer Literary Festival and was prevented from speaking.

It is not the first time a Muslim actor has been treated so shabbily. We recall that when Shah Rukh Khan in 2015 commented on the growing intolerance in society, he was compared to Hafiz Saeed of Pakistan. The next year, in the face of growing intolerance due to which large number of prominent people were returning their national awards, Aamir Khan shared his wife Kiran Rao's fears about their child. He was also denounced in a similar vein.

What has been happening during last few years? It's true that there has not been any violence on the scale of post-Godhra Gujarat or Kandhamal of 2008 or Muzzafarnagar of 2013. What has been happening is that chronic violence is becoming endemic and some ghastly individual incidents of horrific nature are coming to the fore. These frighten the Muslim community. Attacks and disruptions of prayer meetings of Christians are

making them more insecure than before. The issue of cow related violence, starting from Mohammad Akhlaq to Junaid and Rakbar Khan, has given the signal that food habits will be dictated by the foot soldiers of communal politics. To cap it all, the accused in these lynchings have been honoured by those in power, like Union Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma draping the body of one of the accused in the Akhlaq lynching case with the national flag and Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha honouring the accused in the Alimuddin Ansari lynching case after they were released on bail by the High Court.

The Love Jihad related murder of Afrazul in Rajasthan by Shambhul Regar showed the extremes to which the humanity can degenerate. Regar not only killed Afrazul in horrific manner but even got the video of the ghastly crime made by his nephew. Worse, a tableau of Shambhul Regar was taken out by Hindu outfits during a Ram Navami procession in Jodhpur. What is the divisive politics of which Shah is being accused by worthies like Uma Bharati? What is divisive: raising communal issues like Ram Temple and Holy Cow, or stating one's fears in the light of these massive violations of human rights? What must have irked Shah the most was that in the wake of the murder of a police officer, primacy was given to the killing of the cow. The mobs which have got emboldened over a period of time are imbued with Hate ideology and hatred for religious minorities. Shah's anger should be a wakeup call for the democratic spirit of our society to try put back the genie of hatred back in the bottle and discard the bottle for good.

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Assembly Verdict: BJP is Biggest Loser

Subodh Varma

The final results have not yet been declared but counting is fairly advanced and one thing is clear: BJP has suffered a major setback in all the three states it was ruling – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In Telangana, its vote has declined and its seats have gone down from five to three. In Mizoram, it was a marginal force with no seat in the outgoing Assembly. This time it has scraped through with a single seat.

In Rajasthan, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has suffered a loss of nearly 7% in its vote share compared with the last Assembly elections in 2013. In MP, the loss is about 3.5%, in Chhattisgarh the loss is a whopping 8.5%.

Compared with the 2014 Lok Sabha elections when it swept these three states on the back of the so-called Modi wave, BJP has suffered an even more ignominious loss. In Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, its vote share has gone down by about 17% while in MP it has declined by about 13%.

In terms of seats—and government formation—the waters are muddied up in MP because of the close race with the Congress leading in 115 seats and BJP in 104 at the time of writing. Since the halfway mark is 115 in the 230-member House, it looks like the MP Assembly is going to be hung—at least 116 would be required for majority. Four Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) MLAs and six independent or small party winners will come into play and become crucial. BSP, which has been consistently opposing BJP in recent years, should support the Congress but the allegiance of

independent/small party MLAs is anybody's guess.

In Rajasthan, Congress with 103 leads, appears to have crossed the halfway mark of 99 (elections were held for 199 of the 200 seats). The state has seen at least 18 independent or small party candidates winning of which at least six are BJP rebels and seven are Congress rebels. In Chhattisgarh, Congress has comfortably romped home with 63 leads in the 90-member House with 46 as the halfway mark.

So, both in terms of vote share and seats, BJP emerges as the uniform loser in these three states. The reasons for this stunning defeat are not too difficult to find.

Reaction Against Disastrous Economic Policies

In the past months, there was a groundswell of discontentment building in these three big states primarily because of farmers' destitution, raging joblessness (especially among youth), stagnant wages even as prices were rising, and the twin disasters of demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax. In other words, there was a rejection of the economic hardship imposed by the unabashed neo-liberal model imposed under the BJP leadership.

In both MP and Chhattisgarh, where foodgrain production had zoomed up in the past decade, the announced MSP was becoming more and more irrelevant as government procurement declined because of cuts in government allocations. This left a large number of farmers facing ruin because of non-remunerative prices, much below Minimum Support Price (MSP), in the open

market. This was on top of the fact that the farmers had pinned their hopes on Narendra Modi's promise to fix MSP at 50% more than the total cost of production, which he never fulfilled. As a result of this betrayal, indebtedness grew, as did distress, and an increasing number of suicides was one of the direct results. In Rajasthan, too, a similar situation was faced by farmers which led to massive protests for many months. In MP, police opened fire on protesting farmers in Mandsaur in June 2017.

Joblessness has been a notable and persistent feature of the Modi regime, and in these three states the ruling BJP faced people's ire over another betrayal of Modi—the promise of one crore jobs. The state government tried to put forth their own employment targets but miserably failed to meet them. Young people, who had supported Modi in earlier elections, turned against the BJP because of this betrayal.

Both MP and Rajasthan also saw implementation of policies that squeezed industrial labour by diluting labour laws, allowing freer hire and fire policies, and difficulty in forming their trade unions.

But the industrial workers were hardest hit by some of the lowest wages paid in the whole of the country in these BJP-ruled states. Minimum wages are just Rs 5,749 per month in Rajasthan and Rs 7,125 in MP, compared with the minimum calculated by the Indian Labour Conference formula of Rs 18,000 currently. These low wage rates combined with ever increasing prices of food items and fuel costs

led to the immiseration of workers. This, too, was a big factor in the anger against the government—both Modi at the Centre and the respective BJP-led state government.

Wages of agricultural labourers also have suffered a decline in the past few years in inflation adjusted terms. In all these states, agricultural labourers form a very large part of the electorate and their disenchantment with BJP was expressed in these elections.

The funding cuts imposed by these governments on welfare schemes like the rural jobs guarantee programme, Integrated Child Development Scheme, SC/ST scholarships, healthcare delivery system, schools and even foodgrain procurement increased the distress of people, thus turning them away from the saffron party.

It's Also A Defeat of Communal Propaganda and Violence

The defeat of BJP comes after an election campaign in which Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was the BJP's main campaigner, holding more than double the number of rallies than Modi himself. The floundering BJP leadership in these states and the national strategists like Amit Shah perhaps thought that they can retrieve the lost ground by turning up the hate filled campaign that the Yogi carries out so well. They wanted to consolidate the Hindutva 'advantage' arrived at by encouraging dozens of incidents of mob lynchings in the name of cow protection and the repeated incidents of communal violence. The Ram Temple issue was also raked up during the campaign with saints and seers mobilised to give a call for building the Temple in Ayodhya. However, the results have delivered a slap in the face of such an incendiary campaign. The

people have rejected this strategy, reminding one of the way BJP was shown the door in these very states in 1993, a year after the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and the ensuing tide of violence.

Dalit and Adivasi Anger at BJP

During Modi's nearly five years at the helm, the continued neglect and, indeed, humiliation of Dalit and Adivasi communities too has played a role in the defeat of BJP. It has drastically reduced the number of seats reserved for SC and ST in all three states and vote shares too have gone down in these seats. This is because of the relentless rise in atrocities on Dalits and

Adivasis, the connivance in dilution of the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA), the non-implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the slashing of fund allocation for Dalits and Adivasis under the special component plans and the refusal to either protect job reservation or extend it to the private sector.

In the elections to Lok Sabha, to be held in a few months' time, what has happened in MP, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan will happen elsewhere too because there too, the people's reaction will be the same to the same policies. In sum, it may be said that these elections are the beginning of the end of the Modi rule.

Building Productive Workers' Army in Venezuela

Cira Pascual Marquina

A conversation with Sergio Requena of the Productive Workers' Army . Born in 1974 in Puerto Ordaz, in the industrial heartland of Venezuela, Sergio Requena is a worker at CVG Carbonorca (state-owned plant producing anodes, a component needed to process aluminum). He is a key player in the formation of the "Productive Workers' Army", a voluntary initiative that takes on the challenge of jumpstarting industrial plants (both state-owned and worker-controlled). Since 2016, the organisation's "Productive Workers' Battles" have become a reference amongst those committed to rebuilding the industrial muscle of the nation. The project has brought hundreds of workers together and put some twelve industrial plants back on their feet. Of the twelve Workers' Battles carried out by this

volunteer brigade, eight happened while Requena headed Corpivena (a state institution whose mission is to encourage industrial sovereignty and productivity) and was able to channel some state resources to the initiative. Today that support has dried up, but the struggle continues.

I would like to begin by asking you to give us a brief overview of the situation of Venezuela's state-owned factories today.

As is the case with most of Venezuela's productive apparatus, the state enterprises are in crisis. Furthermore, those enterprises are fragmented and disjointed: each plant, each factory has its own specific objective, its own logic, meaning that there is a large number of isolated initiatives. Each is on its own, with nothing bringing them together in a network, because there

isn't a national production plan, nor is there a plan that would organise even the whole state-owned sector.

To make matters worse, there are some deliberate obstacles put up to production from within, from the enterprises' leadership. So the main problem is that there isn't a centralised production plan, but add to that the fact that within the crisis (and the disorder that comes with it), some particular economic interests have surfaced, and you get the bigger picture.

State firms form an archipelago of islands, each with its own little ruler, who single-handedly decides if the enterprise will produce, under what conditions, what happens with the product, etc. Additionally, he decides who they will contract to acquire raw materials and services. In general, a director will contract outside of the state-owned enterprises, and will do so with the aim of seeking personal economic benefits.

When President Maduro launched the Economic Recovery Plan, he referred to the fact that there are many companies producing very little or nothing at all. Our view is that there are two roots to the problem: there is no productive plan for state enterprises, and private objectives and interests organise production (or lack thereof) in state-owned plants.

There is another bottleneck: in many of these plants, the bosses argue that production has come to a halt because the enterprise doesn't have funds to purchase the machine parts that need to be acquired so that the operations can get back on track. But it turns out that the machine parts that have to be replaced come from abroad and must be purchased in US dollars.

Historically in Venezuela, and especially in state enterprises,

machines and machine parts came from abroad and were purchased in dollars. All this happened without finding out if within the country, and particularly within state enterprises, partnerships could be found leading to joint solutions. Today, the bosses continue to request dollars (which are not available) and they justify the stalled production by pointing to funding limitations instead of looking for solutions that can be found within the country.

You are part of a collective volunteer project for the recovery of the country's productive apparatus, both state-owned and worker-controlled enterprises, which has come to be known as the "Productive Workers' Army". In 2016, a group of workers from the industrial heartland of Venezuela in Bolívar State began to recover a state enterprise called La Gaviota, a fish processing plant. Can you tell us about this initiative?

I would like to begin by going back to 2013. It was the beginning of the crisis, and the workers of three privately-owned factories occupied the plants after the owners infringed workers' rights and sabotaged production. The companies were Indorca, Calderys and Equipetrol in Guyana's industrial ring. The process of recovering the plants was collective and very efficient. Soon after their occupation, the plants were back on a regular production schedule. These three plants continue to operate under worker control.

Three years later, in February 2016, folks from La Gaviota in Cumana (Sucre State), a state-owned plant, invited workers from Indorca, Calderys and Equipetrol plus others to jumpstart the fish flour plant's industrial oven. It was a five-day journey where the knowledge of each worker plus a lot of collective

creativity (and sacrifice) allowed us to jumpstart production. We did this with no resources beyond our knowledge and our tools. Really, in five days we were able to raise production from zero to 100 percent!

During those five days, we worked long hours and slept in the plant. The work was voluntary and the whole process of recovery became a crash course—we all learned a lot, and all the workers who participated were remoralised. The fact is that each "Productive Workers' Battle" is a school in which we teach each other, we share knowledge, and we look for solutions collectively.

And this brings us back to what I was saying earlier: by now there is plenty of evidence that workers are capable of recovering stalled factories and that large investments are not necessarily needed, even when production has dropped to zero.

La Gaviota was the first in a long and ongoing campaign to recover state-owned factories and factories under worker control.

Yes, after La Gaviota we went to Maquinarias Barinas in Barinas State, and there we waged the second battle. In the factory, an important part of the machinery was non-operative. Actually, there was a machine room with all new equipment that had never been made operative. It was never put to use and repairs were needed. We left it at about 80 percent of its productive capacity.

Again, the collective process of getting the plant back on its feet (well, on its feet for the first time!) remoralised the factory's staff.

In this battle, we also implemented a parallel learning space, an initiative that is now key to every battle and that we call

“Collective, Integral and Permanent Self-Formation.” We organised a workshop on freehand drawing of mechanical parts.

Then, in March of 2017, we carried out a battle in Planta Madre Wuanaganare, a factory that produces food-processing machinery in Portuguesa State.

Little by little the Productive Workers’ Battles began to draw attention. They began to be known, and we got an invitation to head up Corpivensa, a state initiative to promote industrial and productive sovereignty in the country. During the seven-month period that we were in Corpivensa, we were able to carry out eight “productive battles”. Since we had institutional support, we had that extra muscle. Of the eight productive battles that we carried out during that period, four were in gas cylinder plants, and one was in a Nutrichicha plant that produces rice-based drinks for the School Alimentation Plan. We also waged another battle in La Gaviota, and finally a battle at the Amuay Oil Refinery in Falcon State.

We have had 12 productive battles in total, and we have begun to call ourselves a “Productive Workers’ Army”. Some 2,200 people have participated in these battles, so we feel that we are an army that can be deployed to any plant in any state to raise productivity.

Our army is very varied. Our army is made up of both active workers and retired workers, both workers from the public and the private sector—in short, people with very diverse experiences. But the most important thing about our army is that it is made up of revolutionaries who want to overcome the current crisis.

When you go to a factory, your main goal is to jumpstart

production, but the educational process is also very important. Can you tell us more about this?

First, I should clarify something. We don’t only repair machinery, we also repair consciousness. There is a ideological understanding to the whole process. When the Productive Army goes into a factory, a process of remoralisation begins. The plants’ workers participate in the recovery of their factory and transform their own reality. This practice of doing (this praxis, if you will) opens the way to what Che called creating the new man and the new woman. Jumpstarting production with our own hands, with limited resources, getting the factory back on its feet, yes, all that is important. But if we do that and we fail to remoralise workers, then the plant will fall back into its earlier slumber.

Raising morale is through praxis, that is the key for us, but we also foster parallel collective educational activities, as I said before when I talked about the ongoing “Collective, Integral and Permanent Self-Formation” that we undertake. During the Productive Battles, we share experiences—skills acquired through work—and we also address organisational problems.

As a result of this, the plant’s workers get organised in workers’ councils, in feminist brigades, and in Productive Workers’ Councils. Ensuring that some form of organisation grows out of the experience is fundamental, as workers’ organisation is the only thing that will guarantee the continued production in a plant.

Basically, our main goal is to break the inertia that installs itself due to bureaucracy: inertia that ends up killing production. After we leave, there must be internal conditions (not only material conditions) to

continue the work, and that is why we emphasise organisation.

The “Chinese Model” (this term is used in Venezuela to refer to the growing participation of Chinese capital in the reorganisation of the economy) has discursively entered the public sphere. On the other hand, your model is a socialist model that points to workers’ control and seeks to bring solutions to our problems from below and from within. It could even be called a Guevarist and patriotic model, couldn’t it?

We refer to our effort, our collective epic struggle, as an “Admirable Campaign”, a term that recalls Bolivar’s campaign for the liberation of Venezuela’s western regions. We understand that there is a crisis situation, with some elements of conspiracy and economic war. Yet on top of that, there are serious management problems in public enterprises, corruption and other interests that don’t contribute to a solution. Faced with this complex situation, many are looking for solutions elsewhere.

For our part, we cast our lot with the people of Venezuela. The gaze of Venezuela has historically been directed to the exterior: we felt that we couldn’t solve our own problems. Chavez offered a brief respite from that logic; with him, we were able to see what we had, we recognised ourselves. I think it is time that we begin to acknowledge again that we can do things, that we do have skills. Our productive apparatus has practically come to a complete halt, but there are thousands of men and women who are committed to coming out of this crisis, and they have incorporated themselves into the Productive Workers’ Army. These workers do not want to be spectators. They want to be subjects

again, reactivating our participatory and protagonistic democracy.

So indeed our proposal is patriotic. We believe that we can do and make things, that we aren't doomed. We have a strong conviction that the people, the workers, the working class, together we can bring ourselves out of the crisis that we face in the industrial sector and elsewhere. We are the ones who will build the sovereign and emancipated Patria [homeland] that Chavez aspired to create with the protagonistic participation of the people. We are convinced that we can do this, that patriotic Venezuelans can do this, although we will always welcome with wide open arms comrades from other countries, people who are committed to socialism. But this is a war that we have to wage and that we must win. Only the people of Venezuela can solve the problems of Venezuela, and from our point of view, this must be done with Chavez and with commitment to participatory and protagonistic democracy.

One of the most intense debates within Chavismo right now is the debate about the “ethical referent” and the need (since Chavez’s death) to point to exemplary experiences that might bring the project out of the stagnation that we are facing now. There is a mystique around El Maizal Commune and the Admirable Campesino March, but in the working class, in the industrial sector, the Productive Workers’ Army has become a referent as well. Can you talk about this?

When we talk about ethical referents, we must talk about revolutionary coherence, and revolutionary coherence is a kind of North Star that guides our praxis. Our objective is to help to recuperate

the productive apparatus of the nation. For this to happen, as I said before, there must be a process of remoralisation and organisation, which is the key to the success of our initiatives.

In the Productive Workers’ Army we teach by example, with a praxis that brings together political and social commitment with work. So we hope that we will carry with us a school for the workers with whom we work, arm in arm, during the Productive Battles.

Sacrifice is, like it or not, an essential part of our epic struggle. We often travel for thousands of

kilometers to get to a factory; we leave our family behind; we sleep very little and when we do, we sleep in the plant. All this tends to change the plant’s dynamics. We can actually say that we—the hundreds of men and women of the Army—teach by example. The sacrifice that a Battle entails is key to a shift towards a revolutionary ethos.

All this, of course, happens with President Chavez as a guiding light. His example fills us with strength day in and day out. He taught by example and he sacrificed himself for us. In return, we commit our lives to our country.

MLK Day Today: The Legacy of the Man and the Myth

Jonah Raskin

Long gone are the days when white American radicals turned their collective backs on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), and embraced Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. In those heady days during the late 1960s, King sounded, at least to young protesters against the War in Vietnam, like a reformer who belonged to the church, not a revolutionary from “the hood.” Indeed, King was a Baptist preacher and a civil rights activist who insisted on the power of love—he meant agape not eros—and who was not a spokesman for Black Power, guerrilla warfare or violent revolution, though he wanted total “war” through non-violent means to achieve social and economic equality.

“The American racial revolution,” he wrote in 1967—a year before he died—“has been a revolution to ‘get in’ rather than to overthrow. We want a share in the

American economy.”

This January, when we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—which was first observed in 1986—we might look back at the man who worried about language and about figures of speech as much as he worried about moral issues, and who insisted “a leader has to be concerned with the problems of semantics.”

In the preface to a recent book titled *To Shape a New World*, that offers fifteen essays about King, the editors, Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, write that MLK has been both ritually celebrated and intellectually marginalised and that his “legacy has suffered collateral damage.” They call, not for “hagiography,” but for critical thinking and they remind us that “patriarchy and sexism” didn’t make his list of “evils.” It’s also worth saying that King’s “legacy” will be decided not only in the halls of academia but in the streets and

wherever humans the world over confront plutocrats and the profit motive and aim to escape from the spiritual wasteland of the twenty-first century.

King's idea about leadership and problems of semantics came to him soon after he met with Stokely Carmichael and his comrades in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). They rubbed him the wrong way, but they also prompted him to reevaluate his ideas and his values and to shift his beliefs. Indeed, while he rejected "Black Power" as a slogan and as a strategy, he recognised that "Negroes"—as he called them—would have to have political clout or they would remain disenfranchised, trapped in poverty and excluded from the American Dream.

In 1967, in an essay titled "Black Power" which is included in his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* King wrote that "one of the great problems that the Negro confronts is his lack of power." A year later in a speech entitled "All Labor Has Dignity," which he delivered to union workers in Memphis, Tennessee, he said, unequivocally, "We need power." He meant power in all its manifestations: economic, political, social and cultural.

Also, while he made fun of Franz Fanon as "a black psychiatrist from Martinique" who had screwy ideas about violence and liberation, he understood that Negroes would have to liberate themselves by reaching down into the "inner depths" of their being and sign "with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation." King called violence "the twin of materialism" and wanted no part of either one.

Had he lived he might have moved closer to the Black Power

movement and to the Black Panthers. After all, he was deeply moved by the generation of young black men who didn't want to fight and die in Vietnam and who often refused to join the US military. In his April 4, 1967 speech in which he denounced his own government "as the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today," he explained that he had walked and talked with "angry young men" who asked him, "What about Vietnam?"

He went on to say, "I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos," without first raising a voice against the war in Vietnam which he saw as a war that was "the enemy of the poor." King might have become even more critical of the War in Vietnam—it lasted seven years after his death—and more boisterous in his denunciations of "the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism." But he was also a kind of prisoner of the civil rights movement, which he had led so well and for so long, from Montgomery to Birmingham to Selma. He had helped to orchestrate the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and to bring about the end of legal segregation in the South. He was rightfully proud of the achievements of the movement for integration, but he also exaggerated victories and underestimated the power of racists who wanted to disenfranchise blacks by any means necessary, including redistricting, intimidation and outright theft of the right to vote.

In *The Trumpet of Conscience* (1968), King noted that we "we totally disrupted the system, the lifestyle of Birmingham, and then of Selma," and broke the "coalition" of "unprogressive Northerners" and "representatives of the rural

South." Richard Nixon would bring that coalition back in his so-called "Southern strategy" and so would successive Republican candidates for the presidency, from Reagan to Bush to Trump. The system King claimed to have broken seems to be alive in Jeff Sessions' Alabama today, though it might not be well.

At the end of his life, King recognised that much remained to be done. "What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't earn enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?" he asked. "What does it profit one to be able to attend an integrated school when he doesn't earn enough money to buy his children school clothes?" But he seemed to be unsure how to advance the cause and what role if any he had to play.

"I don't know what will happen now," he said in a speech he delivered on April 3, 1968. "We've got some difficult days ahead." He sounded like a man who was bowing out of the struggle. "It doesn't matter with me now," he said in that same speech. "I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you." Two months earlier in a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, he told the congregation, "I don't want a long funeral . . . tell them not to mention I have a Nobel Peace Prize . . . I'd like somebody to say that . . . Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody." How sad he sounds!

Before he was assassinated in Memphis in April 1968, he was caught up as much as ever before in the language of love. He held on to many of the concepts that no longer captured the imaginations of young blacks and young whites, who accepted the invitation that the Panthers offered to join them in the revolution.

In *Soul on Ice* (1968), Eldridge Cleaver wrote that “There is in America today a generation of young white youth that is truly worthy of a black man’s respect, and this is a rare event in the foul annals of American history.” I was part of that generation. Like many others my age, I turned away from King and his dream and toward the Panthers, many of whom were assassinated. In December 1969, I protested the murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark of the Chicago Panthers and was arrested and beaten in jail. It was hard to rally behind King’s banner of “love” when police murdered young black men and when corporations urged consumers to love cars, burgers, sneakers and more.

In the late 1960s, while Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale wanted black youth and white youth to band together, King argued, as late as 1967, that, “What is most needed is a coalition of Negroes and liberal whites that will work to make both parties truly responsive to the needs of the poor.”

By 1968, he seemed to have given up on white liberals, but rather looked toward the black masses he called upon to boycott white-owned corporations. “We are asking you tonight not to buy Coca-Cola . . . not to buy Sealtest milk . . . not to buy . . . Wonder Bread,” he told workers in Memphis in April. He added, “Take your money out of the banks downtown.”

That notion of withdrawing funds from banks—which he calls “downtown” and not “white”—and boycotting big corporations, derived from Gandhi’s ideas about how to best win Indian independence from the British. In 1968, it wasn’t Gandhi who appealed to young African Americans and young whites, but rather Fanon, Che, Malcolm X and Mao.

“These are revolutionary times,” King observed in 1967, though he himself wasn’t exactly a revolutionary. After all, he argued that same year, that “The Negro must show that the white man has nothing to fear for the Negro is willing to forgive.” H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael wanted what they called the “white power structure” to fear Black Power. As far back as 1848, revolutionaries wanted the capitalists to fear the “spectre of revolution.”

In his 2015 anthology of King’s writings and speeches, entitled *The Radical King*, Professor Cornel West makes a case for King as a “revolutionary,” though he adds that he was also a “Christian.” West goes on to say that King was “a warrior for peace”, a “democratic socialist” and a “spiritual warrior.” King resists easy labeling. Cleaver misjudged him when he wrote that he “turned tail” at Selma. For Cleaver, King was merely one of many heroes on a list that included Nkrumah, Robert Moses, Ho Chi Minh, W. E. B. Dubois and James Foreman.

Press Release

Stop The Criminalisation of Triple Talaq

We, the undersigned individuals, women’s rights activists and allies of the women’s movement, are opposed to the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018 in its present form. We appeal to the Members of Rajya Sabha to completely withdraw the Bill and significantly re-draft it in the interest of Muslim women.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, was passed by the Lok Sabha on December 28, 2017 and is pending before the Rajya Sabha. This Bill was

Professor West admires King as deeply as he abhors Obama, whom he accuses of a “betrayal” of “everything” that King stood for. What he doesn’t say and that he might have said is that if it were not for Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta, there would have been no Obama in the White House. King paved the way for Barack. He might have seen Obama as a kind of turncoat, but he was too kind and too loving to have denounced him. In January 2019, on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, I will remember King as a kind of utopian who wanted to create “the beloved community” and who realised the dangers that await movements for social change. “The post-colonial period is more difficult and precarious than the colonial struggle itself,” he wrote. Fifty years after his death, that observation is as insightful and as relevant as ever. In 1967, he noted that, “this may well be mankind’s last chance to choose between chaos and community.” Now, we are offered mankind’s last chance to choose between surviving on a planet that’s burning up or going down to destruction.

not referred to a Select Committee as urged by the members of Rajya Sabha, but the Union Cabinet incorporated three amendments based on the issues raised by the Opposition. It included the provision of bail when the wife appears before the Magistrate, allowing only the aggrieved woman and her relatives (by blood or marriage) to file a complaint, and making the offence compoundable. Owing to severe opposition to this Bill in the Rajya Sabha, the Union Cabinet issued the Muslim Women (Protection

of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance on September 19, 2018, which criminalised the pronouncement of triple talaq (or talaq-e-bidat) with punishment of up to 3 years of imprisonment and with fine.

We are writing on behalf of Muslim women from across the country and women's groups to oppose this Bill, which is arbitrary, excessive, and violative of fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Overall, if this Bill is passed, it would make Muslim women more vulnerable to violence, as well as harm their economic, household and social security.

Below are our points of objection to the Bill:

1. This Bill is purportedly brought in accordance with the Supreme Court judgement in the matter of Shayara Bano Vs. Union of India and others on August 22, 2017. But it disregards the very fact that the object of this Bill—to protect the rights of married Muslim women and to prohibit divorce by pronouncing talaq by their husband—has already been achieved by the judgement of the Supreme Court.
2. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in Shayara Bano's case held that the practice of talaq-e-bidat is manifestly arbitrary, and therefore unconstitutional. A reading of the judgment clearly indicates that mere pronouncing of triple talaq does not dissolve the marriage and there is no legal implication on pronouncing talaq. Following the same, an act that has no legal consequences being made a criminal offence, cognizable and non-bailable is manifestly arbitrary and therefore violative of Article 14.
3. There is no rationale to

criminalise the practice of talaq-e-biddat and imprison the Muslim man. The effect of Supreme Court's judgment is that the marriage is legally valid and the persons continue to be lawfully wedded. Now, if this law is passed, the Muslim men will be incarcerated, thus violating the rights of conjugality of these two persons. Criminalising the husband would also lead to unwanted separation between the couple, against the wishes of the wife.

4. Since Muslim marriage is a civil contract between two adult persons, the procedures to be followed on its breakdown should also be of civil nature. Penal action to discourage the practice of instant triple talaq is a myopic view as it leaves many other issues of economic and social security of women unaddressed.
5. Using penal actions leading to imprisonment to discourage the practice of triple talaq will not help in getting justice for women. When a woman reports a complaint about triple talaq, she wants to continue staying in her matrimonial home and draw financial support from her marital home. When the husband is put behind bars, he will be unable to pay the maintenance and contribute to raising their children for 3 years, thus depriving Muslim women and children of financial security. The Government ought to strengthen the negotiating capacities of women by providing them economic and socio-legal support rather than criminalising the pronouncement of triple talaq.
6. Penal provisions in the Bill will

make Muslim women more vulnerable to violence from their matrimonial household, as the marital family members would be hostile and blame the woman for the husband being in jail. It would hinder her household security, and she might be thrown out of her matrimonial household.

7. The pronouncement of triple talaq having no legal consequences on the marriage means that such a proclamation by a Muslim man is essentially a desertion of the wife. In any of Personal Laws, the desertion of a wife by a man is not a criminal offence. Therefore, while the Bill aims to criminalise the pronouncement of talaq, in effect it is only criminalising the act of desertion of a Muslim wife by her husband. Criminalising desertion by Muslim men, which constitutes only a civil offence for men of all other religions, is discriminatory under the Constitution.
8. If there is violence within the marriage in addition to the pronouncement of triple talaq, then the woman could use the existing provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. These two laws, taken together, represent a wide spectrum of legal options available for women survivors of domestic violence, encompassing both criminal and civil provisions. The Domestic Violence Act presents women with civil redressal with its focus on availing monetary relief, custody, residence and protection orders, whereas Section 498A presents women

- with the option of prosecution and imprisonment.
9. No economic and socio-legal support is provided by the government to women, children and other dependents, when the erring men are put behind bars. The Domestic Violence Act, 2005 under Section 21 already provides for the aggrieved woman to be provided custody of the child and Section 20 provides for maintenance to be paid to her. Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 also provides for maintenance for the aggrieved woman. The Bill therefore, does not provide anything by way of additional rights to the existing laws already in place. In fact, the Bill takes a step back in only providing for subsistence allowance for the woman.
 10. The Bill talks about providing “subsistence allowance” for the aggrieved Muslim woman. Subsistence allowance is not defined and is open to interpretation. The law on maintenance has gone much further in providing much more than just subsistence allowance for the complainants. By providing only subsistence allowance, this Bill provides an aggrieved Muslim less than what she is legally due.
 11. The Bill allows for the aggrieved woman as well as anyone related to her by blood or marriage to be the complainant. There is no provision for a relative to seek the consent of an aggrieved woman before filing a complaint. It becomes therefore easy for a family member of a woman to file a complaint of triple talaq against her husband without her consent leading to his imprisonment and separation from her. Further, it becomes an easy avenue for relatives of women who have entered into marriages against their wishes to separate the couple and exact revenge. The problem becomes particularly acute in the case of inter-religious marriages of Muslim men with a woman of another religion.
 12. The punishment prescribed in the Bill is up to three years, and makes the offence a cognizable and non-bailable one. The same is draconian and disproportionate. A punishment, to be just, should have only that degree of severity which is sufficient to deter others. The terms of imprisonment up to 3 years is arbitrary and excessive. Serious crimes like Causing death by rash or negligent act (IPC Sec 304A), Rioting (IPC Sec 147), Injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class (IPC Sec 295)—are all punishable by 2 years in jail or fine or both; Bribery (IPC Sec 171E) is punishable by 1 year; Negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life (IPC Sec 269), Causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others (IPC Sec 337)—are punishable by 6 months in jail or fine. All these criminal acts have lesser punishment than pronouncing triple talaq, which is arbitrary and excessive, and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution.
 13. The Law Minister Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad has said that the practice is still “continuing unabated”. He has pegged the number of divorce cases pronounced by way of triple talaq to be 400 in 13 months. This data, for a country as large as India, is not enough to draw conclusions and create a criminalising bill. Moreover, the statement seems to be based on popular beliefs or perception rather than corroborated by any material evidence.
 14. The Law Minister has also said that there is an urgent need to criminalise triple talaq, and hence the Ordinance was passed. However, the practice of unilateral triple talaq has been going on for hundreds of years, and no government had banned the practice until the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. If it was as urgent, why was no legislation passed against it until after the SC judgement? This is a move to serve political ends than truly meeting the needs of Muslim women.
 15. The move to imprison Muslim men will add to the prevailing insecurity and alienation of the Muslim community. Family and community members might create undue pressures on the woman not to report against her husband. Criminalisation of instant triple talaq will further stifle the voices of Muslim women instead of offering them avenues for justice.
- The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights) Bill instead of protecting the rights of Muslim women makes them vulnerable to violence and insecurity. We wish for the Government of India to withdraw this Bill from consideration in the Rajya Sabha, and review the fundamental flaws pending broad based community consultations.
- Endorsed by: several organisations, intellectuals, academicians and activists.

British Raj siphoned out \$45 trillion from India: Utsa Patnaik

Ajai Sreevatsan

When renowned economist Utsa Patnaik began to sift through old tracts of British economic history in order to understand the nature of fiscal relations between London and colonial India, the fate of the Kohinoor wasn't much in the news; Shashi Tharoor hadn't yet spoken in favour of reparations at Oxford University—a speech which went viral; and not many books had been written about the thousands of Indian soldiers who fought under the British flag in the empire's many wars overseas.

While the past few years have shed additional light on the colonial experience, there is much that we still do not know. For example, how much money was really taken out of India? In a collection of essays published recently by Columbia University Press, Patnaik attempts to make a comprehensive estimate. Over roughly 200 years, the East India Company and the British Raj siphoned out at least £9.2 trillion (or \$44.6 trillion; since the exchange rate was \$4.8 per pound sterling during much of the colonial period).

To put that sum in context, Britain's 2018 GDP estimate—a measure of annual economic output—is about \$3 trillion. In the colonial era, most of India's sizeable foreign exchange earnings went straight to London—severely hampering the country's ability to import machinery and technology in order to embark on a modernisation path similar to what Japan did in the 1870s. The scars of colonialism still remain, Patnaik says. And yet,

in an India where historical slights are endlessly litigated and towns are arbitrarily renamed, an adequate accounting of the enduring burden of colonialism is perhaps yet to be undertaken. Excerpts from an interview:

In a recent paper, you suggest Britain drained out nearly \$45 trillion of wealth from India. Could you put that quantum of money in perspective and what difference it would have made to the Indian economy?

Between 1765 and 1938, the drain amounted to £9.2 trillion (equal to \$45 trillion), taking India's export surplus earnings as the measure, and compounding it at a 5% rate of interest. Indians were never credited with their own gold and forex earnings. Instead, the local producers here were 'paid' the rupee equivalent out of the budget—something you'd never find in any independent country. The 'drain' varied between 26–36% of the central government budget. It would obviously have made an enormous difference if India's huge international earnings had been retained within the country. India would have been far more developed, with much better health and social welfare indicators. There was virtually no increase in per capita income between 1900 and 1946, even though India registered the second largest export surplus earnings in the world for three decades before 1929.

Since all the earnings were taken by Britain, such stagnation is not

surprising. Ordinary people died like flies owing to under-nutrition and disease. It is shocking that Indian expectation of life at birth was just 22 years in 1911. The most telling index, however, is foodgrain availability. Because the purchasing power of ordinary Indians was being squeezed by high taxes, the per capita annual consumption of foodgrains went down from 200 kg in 1900 to 157 kg on the eve of World War II, and further plummeted to 137 kg by 1946. No country in the world today, not even the least developed, is anywhere near the position India was in 1946.

What was the system in place to orchestrate this drain of wealth? Why wasn't there any large-scale local opposition to it?

All the colonising powers put in place tax collection systems. The very name for the district administrator was 'Collector'. When the Company first got revenue collecting rights in Bengal in 1765, its employees went completely mad with avarice. R.C. Dutt, a civil service officer in the British Raj, documented that between 1765 and 1770, the Company trebled the tax revenue in Bengal, compared to the erstwhile Nawab's regime. You know what that means for a peasant who is already quite poor? The Nawab was collecting sufficiently high taxes, so when the Company took over and forcibly trebled collections over five years, people were driven into starvation. There was a massive famine in Bengal in 1770. Out of a population of

30 million, the British themselves estimated that 10 million died.

From 1765 up to the takeover by the Crown, the Company was using a quarter to a third of net revenue collections to purchase export goods from the peasants. This was an abnormal use of taxes and the peasants themselves did not know they were getting diddled. If the same Company agent who collected the producer's tax had at the same time bought his goods out of that tax, then the producer himself would have said: *dal mein kuch to kala hai* (something fishy is going on here). But the Company agent who bought produce out of the tax money was a different person and did so at a different time from the Company agent who collected the tax. So, the producers did not connect the two.

The market is an amazing thing: it obscures real relationships. A large part of the producer's own tax payment simply got converted into export goods, so the Company got these goods completely free. The later mechanism after the Crown took over was a further development using bills of exchange. The only Indian beneficiaries of this clever, unfair system of linking trade with taxes were the intermediaries or *dalals*. Some of modern India's well-known business houses made their early profits doing *dalali* for the British. Income tax on businesses and professionals was virtually non-existent until WWII.

What happened to the money that was drained out of India? What was it used for?

The modern capitalist world would not exist without colonialism and the drain. During Britain's industrial transition, 1780 to 1820, the drain from Asia and the West

Indies combined was about 6 percent of Britain's GDP, nearly the same as its own savings rate. After the mid-19th century, Britain was running current account deficits with Continental Europe and North America, and at the same time, it was investing massively in these regions, which meant running capital account deficits too. The two deficits summed to large and rising balance of payments (BoP) deficits with these regions.

How was it possible for Britain to export so much capital—which went into building railways, roads and factories in the US and continental Europe? Its BoP deficits with these regions were being settled by appropriating the financial gold and forex earned by the colonies, especially India. Every unusual expense like war was also put on the Indian budget, and whatever India was not able to meet through its annual exchange earnings was shown as its indebtedness, on which interest accumulated.

As under the Company, under the Crown too, a third of India's budgetary revenues was not spent domestically but was set aside as 'expenditure abroad'. The secretary of state (SoS) for India, based in London, invited foreign importers to deposit with him the payment (in gold and sterling) for their net imports from India, which disappeared into the SoS's account in the Bank of England. Against these Indian earnings he issued bills, termed Council Bills (CBs), to an equivalent rupee value—which was paid out of the budget, from the part called 'expenditure abroad'. So, Britain had complete command over all the international purchasing power that Indian producers had earned. Even if a part of it had been

credited to India, we could have imported modern technology and started industrialising long before Japan did under the Meiji restoration in the 1870s.

The world has changed considerably since the 19th century and China's recent foray into Africa is sometimes referred to as new age imperialism . . .

It would be quite incorrect to call either Chinese or for that matter Indian entrepreneurs in Africa as modern imperialists. This is a ploy that the North uses to deflect attention from the crimes that they committed against our people, after getting forcible political control. Britain and other countries taxed the colonised, took their foreign earnings, and drove them into hunger.

Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs in Africa are merely trying to do business in agreement with independent governments. We can never hope to replicate the development path that Northern countries followed. They dealt with rural displacement and rising unemployment through massive, permanent out-migration, mainly to the Americas. That option is not open to labour-surplus India or China. We need to develop an industrialisation strategy that preserves employment and livelihoods.

As trade barriers are once again going up, which is reminiscent of the British empire's policy on Indian cloth imports, are there any lessons India can learn on this front from the colonial experience?

The lesson we have to learn is to disengage. I am not unhappy at the idea of protectionism in the West. Because, frankly, we have

to turn our eyes inward. We have an enormous domestic market and its purchasing capacity needs to be raised. We must trade more with other developing countries. And trade on terms which are not exploitative—essentially what is called fair trade. The developing world must start thinking in terms of cooperative solutions. Some barriers to trade with the Northern countries is also essential, because the dogma of ‘free trade’ was promoted by them to serve their own interests at our expense.

Transnational companies are trying to change our cropping patterns towards export crops, as they did during the colonial period. They want free access to our agriculture, because they cannot ever produce the crops we can, particularly in winter. The new globalisation is all about the North accessing fresh fruits and flowers from the South in the middle of winter. Tropical countries should be banding together in order to use the year-round productivity of their lands as a bargaining chip to obtain better terms of trade for their farmers. Today’s advanced world population, to this day, is highly dependent on the ex-colonial world for its standard of living. Nearly 70% of the 12,000 items sold in a modern supermarket in the West has a tropical import content.

The terms of trade are still not fair. Yet, many still adhere to the belief that the advanced countries became advanced because they are terribly innovative and entrepreneurial. Very little of real history is taught to either Indian or British students. In the Cambridge Economic History of India, for example, there is not a single word on the stringent protectionist policy

against Asian textiles that Britain maintained from 1700 to 1846. Nor is there a single word on Britain’s appropriation of India’s entire export surplus earnings for 180 long years from 1765 to 1945.

While independent India maintains cordial relations with Britain, there has been much political tumult of late with regard to Mughal history. Both the Raj and the Mughals are regarded as outsiders. How do they compare?

The Mughals did come from outside, but then, waves of migration have always come from outside. What the Mughals did was exactly what the Rajasthan princes also did. They taxed the people, but in moderation, and spent all taxes within the country. They settled here and did not retain any permanent ties with their places of origin. Clearly, the Mughals can in no way be equated with the British because there was no export drive, no cheating of local producers, and no tax-financed annual drain out of the sub-continent.

As an economist interested in history, what is your view on the idea of reparations? Should Britain return the large sums of money that you suggest it drained out of India?

Not only Britain, but the whole of today’s advanced capitalist world flourished on the drain from India and other colonies. Britain was too small to absorb the entire drain from colonial India. So it became the world’s largest capital exporter, which aided the industrial development of Continental Europe, the US, and even Russia. The infrastructure boom in these countries would not have been

possible otherwise.

Colonial drain helped to create the modern capitalist world, from North America to Australia—all regions where European populations had settled. The advanced capitalist world should set aside a portion of its GDP for unqualified annual transfers to developing countries, especially to the poorest amongst them. Britain, in particular, morally owes reparations for the 3 million civilians who died in the Bengal famine because it was an engineered famine.

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