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Rahul in New Avatar?

Kuldip Nayar

RAHUL Gandhi is the new star on the Congress firmament. His mother Sonia Gandhi has passed on the baton to him and he is the party president. Rahul is the great grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru. Thus the office of Prime Minister, if and when the party is voted to power, remains with the dynasty. It has, naturally, given a sense of unity, important for a country of division and diversity.

Rahul Gandhi is not that young. At 48, he is the youngest president of the Congress so far. Whether he has answers to problems plaguing the country is yet to be seen. But he is considered very blunt. He has rightly attacked the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party and its mentor RSS for dividing the people. A combative Rahul specifically targeted the Prime Minister, taking on the issue of corruption.

However, the parties joining hands to attack the government on the killing of 39 Indians in Iraq is misplaced. These people were kidnapped four years ago. One wishes that Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj had used pressure by the West to have the Indians

released. The attitude of the West is not understandable. None of these has bemoaned the massacre. This underlined the contempt the whites have for the third world where the black and the brown live.

Similarly, the Congress has singled out the BJP for the massacre. Congress leaders blamed the government for the delay in announcing the killing. Shashi Tharoor, a Congress leader, criticised the government for giving "false hope" to the families of the hostages. "This is saddening for every Indian, rest I would ask why this information was delayed by the government, they should tell how it happened and when did they die. Also, the way government gave high hopes to the families was not right," he said.

So far, parliament's stand too is prosaic. Its debate reflects the division between the Congress and the BJP. Granted that they are polls apart, they should have come together for the action on the massacre. Sushma Swaraj's explanation that they wanted to be sure does not condone the inordinate delay. To condone this, she should have announced the government's

action. At present it looks as if it has pocketed the normal anger over the killings.

She was, however, right when she said that without concrete evidence, the government could not have announced the killings. "It is the duty of any responsible government to not declare anyone dead without confirmation. I have said earlier that I won't declare them dead without evidence, and won't wait for even a day once it's confirmed" Sushma Swaraj said.

"Are we going to play politics over dead bodies? I want to ask the Congress, why did they disrupt the House today?" Swaraj said. "I went to Lok Sabha with a heavy heart today and came out even more disappointed," she said in a press conference after her speech was disrupted in parliament.

Rahul Gandhi, I think, should open a new chapter. Unity or even a semblance of it is necessary to blunt the criticism on late announcement over the killings. Still there is no action. The Muslim countries could have been marshalled to condemn the massacre. We should have been able to convince our neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh, to come out on the killings.

In the meanwhile, Sonia Gandhi's dinner meeting with the opposition leaders was a step in the right direction to bring all non-BJP parties together to see that the BJP does not return to power in 2019. Congress chief spokesperson Surjewala, however, said the dinner was not organised for politics but for amity and friendship among opposition parties. "The intention is not political, but to hold discussions in a family-like setting at a time when the nation is confronted with a number of issues, including the

farmers' unrest," he said after the dinner.

Surjewala said at a time when the Congress was not allowing Parliament to function, it was obvious that leaders of various parties would get together to discuss the current political situation. Sonia Gandhi has consistently been pushing for broader opposition unity, urging political parties to set aside their local differences and get together in the larger national interest to keep the BJP out of power in 2019. In fact, Sonia categorically said that Narendra Modi would not return to power.

Apparently, this is just the beginning of all parties coming together to oust the BJP. CPI(M)'s Mohammad Salim said more comprehensive meetings will soon follow. Pawar has called another meeting of opposition parties later this month. However, the BJP hit out at the Congress after Sonia's dinner. "It seems Sonia and Rahul Gandhi doesn't believe in democracy. They speak outside on democracy but don't practise it in Parliament. Congress doesn't have democracy in its genes," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananth Kumar said.

At the plenary session, the Congress president did not leave a chance to attack the BJP claiming that the Modi government colluded with India's biggest crony capitalists. He also accused the BJP saying that party was the voice of an organisation, while the Congress was the voice of a country. Yet he admitted that the Manmohan Singh government didn't meet the expectations of the people in its last few years. He said, "We are humans, we make mistakes. (But) PM Modi thinks he is not human but an incarnation of God."

Rahul, in his concluding remarks, said that the Congress will take the country forward. "To every youngster in India, we are your instrument. The Congress party belongs to you. We want to open our doors to your talent, your bravery and your energy. This country is struggling and it needs you," he added.

How far Rahul can remove the ills within the Congress is yet to be seen. People in the country await his action or functioning. The foremost thing is employment. Can he create two lakh jobs a year and increase the GDP to 11 percent to stave off the economic backwardness ?

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Worrying Silence Over Threats and Post-Poll Violence in Tripura

Apoorvanand

In view of the ‘violent’ language used during the Tripura campaign by BJP, post-poll violence comes as no surprise. What is worrying is the deafening silence of political parties, media and civil society.

Should it have been left to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) alone to condemn the violence that the ‘conquering army’ of the BJP and its allies is unleashing on the defeated CPI(M) in Tripura? Should it have been only the CPI(M) communicate that should have informed us about the attacks, burning and destruction of its offices and brutalisation of its members by the victorious BJP?

Why did political parties, media and our liberal intellectuals maintain a stoic silence in the face of the mocking threat of the BJP leadership to the former Chief Minister of Tripura Manik Sarkar, asking him to look for shelter in West Bengal, Kerala or Bangladesh?

The media, however, have reported with barely concealed glee that a statue of Lenin was bulldozed by the rampaging hordes of the jubilant members of the BJP. The BJP, on its part, has issued a terse statement asking its members to maintain restraint, failing which they would risk expulsion from the party. Is this warning only for the sake of public consumption? If not, why is the party justifying the demolition of the statue of Lenin and the attacks on the offices of the CPI(M) as outpouring of popular anger against the CPI(M)?

The reluctance of the media to

even verify the claims of the CPI(M) regarding the violence against it, leave alone report the acts of arson, violence and vandalism on their own, shows the depth to which the media have fallen. Is the violence so insignificant as to be ignored? Or, does the media think that it is natural? Is it not its duty to see if the CPI(M) is exaggerating or do its allegations have some truth? Or, does it think that the violence of the winners is justified to a certain extent and should therefore be tolerated?

The CPI(M), which has ruled the state for 25 years, has become so helpless that it can only appeal to the BJP not to indulge in violence in the wake of its sweeping victory. Its inability to even resist the attacks effectively shows that the party had no strength of its own, all it had was the power of the state machinery. The way it has given way to the violence proves that the party was nothing but a pack of cards and its cadre lacked conviction in their much trumpeted people’s ideology. Its record in West Bengal also shows that all it could achieve in its days of power was to mobilise around it a mass of lumpens, who deserted the party once power went out of its hands and it no longer had the fruits of power to distribute among the loyal folks.

Secondly, the fact that the CPI(M) has also indulged in violence in the past cannot be a justification for violence against it now. Democracy cannot survive revengeful and competitive violence.

The violence taking place against the CPI(M) should be a concern of all political parties and not only the one which is being targeted. Ideally, the parties should raise this matter in Parliament and take it up with the President of India and make it an all party issue.

The way the police in Tripura is treating the attacks also shows that like their counterparts in the other states, they are only slaves of the masters of the day. Till yesterday, they were servants of the CPI(M); today they are on the side of its oppressors. It seems that the police lacks a sense of it being an instrument of the state, with the duty to uphold the law and maintain order and harmony.

The election campaign of the BJP was, right from the beginning, violent in its form. Its threat to throw the CPI(M) into the Bay of Bengal and its call to the people of Tripura to throw away Manik for Hira was symbolically violent.

We need to be concerned that elections are now being fought as wars and the BJP does not hesitate to employ violent imagery to energise its cadre. It is as if it is on a ‘capture India’ drive, determined to use all means, fair or foul, to achieve this end.

The silence of the civil society, media and political class against the symbolic and physical violence of the BJP would prove to be costly for everyone and not just the CPI(M).

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Two Year Battle Fought From Prison : How Handcuffed Prisoners Defeated Biggest Imperial Power

Bharat Dogra, Jagmohan Singh and Madhu Dogra

Despite many limitations and adversities, after their imprisonment in 1929, Bhagat Singh and his comrades were able to inspire and mobilise millions of people for a greater participation in freedom movement by their courage and noble conduct. This period of the imprisonment of Bhagat Singh and his close comrades thus became one of the most glorious chapters in the freedom movement of India and indeed in all liberation struggles. During these two years April 1929–March 1931, Bhagat Singh and his close comrades can justly be credited with not only defying but even defeating the world's biggest imperial power from behind the bars. The more the colonial government tried to repress and torture them, the more reverence and affection they received in the entire country because of the courage and determination with which they faced the onslaught. This is how the colonial power, despite its vast reach and strength, was defeated by its handcuffed prisoners.

Much more than their own defence, Bhagat Singh along with B.K. Dutt and other comrades concentrated on focusing attention on rights of all political prisoners and issues concerning this. In the course of the various struggles of the freedom movement, a large number of political prisoners (mostly freedom fighters) were all the time being imprisoned, and the terrible conditions in jails posed a serious threat to their life and health, much

beyond the punishment to which they were sentenced by the legal system. Bhagat Singh and his close comrades went on fasts ranging from 60 to 95 days to demand the essential rights of all political prisoners.

Secondly, despite the fact that the colonial government was violating all norms of justice to rush up the case against Bhagat Singh and his close comrades, denying various essential rights to the accused, Bhagat Singh and his colleagues worked very hard to present their views and ideology in careful, well-thought-out ways. As a result it became increasingly clear to people that these revolutionaries had actually taken all care to save human lives in the Assembly Bombing Case. A terrorist generally tries to take the maximum number of human lives, whereas these freedom fighters had taken the maximum precaution to ensure that there was no loss to human life. This was evident in the way the bombs were prepared, and the way in which these were used. They had also given away their revolvers on their own to security-men, although they could have used these weapons to make good their escape.

It was becoming increasingly clear to the people from the conduct and statements made by the revolutionary prisoners that far from indulging in any indiscriminate violence, they had planned their activities very carefully keeping in view only the interests of their country and the freedom movement

for which they were willing to make any sacrifice and bear any hardship.

This became apparent from the courage and nobility with which they faced torture and beatings. They endured fasting for very long periods. Even as they saw their own health and the health of their dearest friends collapsing before their eyes, they did not surrender. Paralysis gradually spread from one part of the body of fasting freedom fighter Yatindranath Das to another part, and yet he did not break his fast. Prison authorities used to mix milk in the water, so that when they drink water the fast of the revolutionaries would automatically break. Instead of drinking this milk-mixed water, the thirsty prisoners simply broke the pitchers containing this water. When the authorities tried to force feed them in a cruel way, the prisoners resisted so much that they were injured. Ultimately, fearing loss of life due to force feeding, the jail officials had to discontinue these efforts.

As news of such acts of courage and determination spread, the support for these revolutionaries grew rapidly in the country, just as these young freedom fighters had hoped.

In a paper 'Bhagat Singh as Satyagrahi', (Modern Asian Studies 43, 3-2009) Neeti Nair has summarised the impact on the nation:

"Soon after news of the hunger strike spread, 30 June (1929) was observed as Bhagat Singh-Dutt

Day in a majority of districts in the Punjab. In Lahore, 10,000 people attended a meeting organised by the City Congress Committee . . . The Tribune reported that thousands of Lahorians had expressed their solidarity with the hunger-striking prisoners by fasting that day. . . . Bhagat Singh and Dutt were hailed as the honour of Punjab and Bengal. . . . Volunteers from the Congress and the youth leagues marched in procession with red banners carrying photographs of the hunger-striking prisoners bearing the inscription 'Dutt is at the point of death, all for country's honour sixteen young men are starving to death in your Lahore'. When the success of these processions unnerved the administration and Section 144 was suddenly imposed, Congress, Ahrar and Akali leaders including Sardar Mangal Singh and Zafar Ali Khan courted arrest by shouting the newly banned slogan Inquilab Zindabad along with members of the newly banned Naujawan Bharat Sabha. . . . The Satyagraha Committee won its first victory when the District Magistrate was forced to modify his order and release the defiant demonstrators. The Naujawan Bharat Sabha celebrated its victory by announcing that 21 July 1 be celebrated as All India Bhagat Singh–Dutt Day. The proposed programme included fasting, processions, the collection of funds for the Conspiracy Case Defence Committee and meetings to explain the purpose of the hunger strike and protest the treatment of political prisoners."

When fasting freedom fighter Yatindra Nath Das died on September 13, 1929 after a continuous fast of 63 days, "50,000 funeral processionists marched through Lahore. The

Central Legislative Assembly passed a motion of adjournment to censure the government for their policy regarding the hunger striking prisoners in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. . . . In the Punjab, Drs Muhammad Alam and Gopi Chand Bhargava resigned from the Punjab Legislative Assembly. Subhas Bose led the miles-long funeral procession in Calcutta; . . . Rabindranath Tagore was inspired to compose a song."

Later, "when Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to death, Bhagat Singh Appeal Committees were established in every district of the Punjab. At a Bhagat Singh day on 17 February 1931, colleges emptied out into streets, 15,000 people met in Lahore. Over 138,000 signatures seeking the commutation of the death sentence were sent by the All Punjab Bhagat Singh Appeal Committee to the Viceroy. In Amritsar, a public meeting organised by the Workers and Peasants Party demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee insisted that commuting the death sentence was an essential condition for peace."

Indeed the protest against the glaring unjust trial and death sentence even reached Britain where an appeal titled Stop the Lahore Executions! was signed by thousands of people. This appeal stated,

"We, the undersigned electors in Great Britain, emphatically protest against your sanction being given to the sentences, including three death penalties, passed by the judge in the Conspiracy Case at Lahore, India, after a trial, the character of which arouses the gravest misgivings.

"We are aware that the twenty-seven Indian youths accused

in this case were not only tried without a jury but by the special personal instructions of the Viceroy. Extraordinary regulations were adopted to conclude the trial without regard to the usual procedure.

"We regard the sentences passed under these circumstances as a violation of justice and demand that they should be disallowed by you. If the three death sentences are put into operation, we shall hold you and your Government responsible for sanctioning what amounts to the murder of political opponents under the guise of official judicial sentences.

"Without entering into the question whether there was any justification at all for the trial of the accused men at Lahore, whose conviction could only be obtained by such extraordinary means, we desire as strongly as possible to press our views upon you that there should be in all cases, without exception, an open, normal trial by a jury of the countrymen of the accused persons."

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Hindutva's Desperate Attempt to Use Bhagat Singh Against Love

Saurav Kumar

Love always elevates the character of man. It never lowers him, wrote the young revolutionary in a letter to his comrade in 1929.

Come Valentine's Day, and the Hindutva brigade—comprising of organisations such as the Bajrang Dal, Hindu Vahini Sena, Shiv Sena, etc.—start gearing up to unleash violence on young couples. In the past few years, hooliganism has marked this day in every big city and town. The main reason for this is the Hindutva brigade's view that Valentine's Day is against 'our culture and tradition'. However, this vicious campaign is not limited to 'tradition'. Fresh efforts are being made by these organisations to stop Valentine's Day celebrations by conducting an orchestrated propaganda linking Valentine's Day with revolutionary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh's martyrdom day.

It is well known that when it comes to twisting facts, appropriating icons of India's freedom movement such as Bhagat Singh, and even circulating fake news on social media, none can beat the Hindutva groups. For, playing around with historical dates and their significance to whip up hatred mainly works to the advantage of the divisive Hindutva agenda.

Take the case of Valentine's Day, which falls on February 14. On the eve of Valentine's Day in 2011, some people spread a rumour that the revolutionary freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged by the British

government on February 14.

The zealots went on to spread this misinformation through Wikipedia. As *The Hindu* reported, "The Wikipedia page on Bhagat Singh underwent many editing changes on February 13 and 14, Valentine's Day." The date of his hanging had been changed from March 23, 1931, to February 14, 1931. On Twitter, this misinformation spread like fire.

The attempts to change history did not end there. The Shiv Sena (Punjab) demanded the day be marked as a 'Black Day' because freedom fighter Bhagat Singh was hanged on this day.

Last year, this propaganda reached a crescendo when an education officer in Pune passed an order in a school, asking it to observe February 14 as the martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. The Solapur zilla parishad education officer (primary) Tanaji Ghadge also issued a letter to all block education and administrative officers, asking them to organise a programme in all schools under their jurisdiction on February 14 paying tribute to the martyrs of the freedom struggle, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, stating that this was because they were hanged on this day.

The self-proclaimed nationalists of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and other Hindutva groups (followers of Veer Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar), are in a state of pain as they don't have an icon of their own who gave up his or her life or made sacrifices

during the freedom movement. What lies behind their zeal to oppose 'westernised love' by distorting history is an attempt to plug their own ideological and political deficit. This is why they have devised a new game plan since the past decade—to misinform people and instigate in them hatred against open-minded youth. In this process, the Hindutva forces are distorting history to hijack the heroes of the freedom struggle, particularly, young revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, by portraying them as agents of Hindu Rashtra.

The whole world knows that the death warrant for Bhagat Singh was issued on October 7, 1930, and he was hanged on March 23, 1931.

There is, of course, a wider irony to the Hindutva groups' disinformation campaign. In a letter to Sukhdev dated April 5, 1929, Bhagat Singh wrote, "Love elevates the character of an individual".

You asked me one thing, whether love ever proved helpful to any man. Yes, I answer that question today. To Mazzini it was. You must have read that after the utter failure and crushing defeat of his first rising he could not bear the misery and haunting ideas of his dead comrades. He would have gone mad or committed suicide but for one letter of a girl he loved. He would become as strong as any one, nay stronger than all . . .

As regards the moral status of love I may say that it in itself is nothing but passion, not an animal passion, but a human one – and very

sweet too. Love in itself can never be an animal passion. Love always elevates the character of man. It never lowers him, provided love be love.

But the insane hatred against Valentine's Day being whipped up by Hindu fundamentalists is spreading misinformation among the people with regard to the country's proud legacy of sacrifice for love. Bhagat Singh and his comrades logically advocated the idea of an independent India which was to be inclusive in nature, with strong bonds of commonality and rejection of religion in matters related to the state. In simple terms, they were against the formation of any Hindu rashtra or an Islamic state.

The distortion of history and facts by religious zealots, therefore, reposes a greater responsibility on us to keep alive the ideals for which these revolutionaries lived and died.

Courtesy: The Wire

Bhagat Singh: Destroy My Statues

Now the Regime and its cohorts have started on the job of destroying statues of Lenin (these exemplars of Sangh Parivar culture at one place even kicked around the head of one such statue like a football).

Soon, on March 23, these very gentlemen will be observing the 87th anniversary of the hanging of Bhagat Singh—a profoundly committed supporter of the man whose statues they are destroying. For Bhagat Singh to be paid homage by the likes of them is indeed a second, and worse, hanging of him and of his comrades.

Indeed, he would certainly have been deeply insulted that he has been exempted by these hoodlums from the same treatment they have given to Lenin. Perhaps he would have demanded that, rather than being garlanded by them, they bring his portraits and statues too under the

axe—much like Bertolt Brecht, in the following lines, demanded of the book-burning Nazis:

The Burning of the Books

When the Regime commanded that the books with harmful knowledge Should be publicly burned and on all sides

Oxen were forced to drag cartloads of books

To the bonfires, a banished Writer, one of the best, was shocked to find that his

Books had been passed over. He rushed to his desk

On wings of wrath, and wrote a letter to those in power

Burn me! he wrote with flying pen, burn me! Haven't my books

Always reported the truth? And here you are

Treating me like a liar! I command you

Burn me!

Courtesy : RUPE, India

Gandhiji and Socialist

Conversations between D. S. Nagabhushana and Ramchandra Guha - II

Reply by Ramachandra Guha

October 9, 2017

Dear Shri Nagabhushana,

With due apologies, you have in your last mail misrepresented what I said about Gandhi and Kamaladevi. I said clearly and emphatically that (a) she compelled Gandhi to change his mind about women in the Salt March; (b) she took Gandhi's ideas of satyagraha to the racist American South. And now you say I claimed Gandhi and she interacted on 'non political issues'!

On the issue of JP as Congress President, at Heggodu you mentioned that this was proposed in the year 1940. Now you say it was 1948. Let's assume you erred the first time (we all do); in 1940-2, since it was vital that the Congress have a Muslim President in answer to Jinnah's challenge, it was inconceivable for JP to be President—only Azad could have been. By 1948 it may indeed have possible. By 1948 JP's heroism was well established; and he was very close to Nehru too. So what you say may indeed have

been the case—that Nehru wanted JP as Congress President. But this is not reflected in Gandhi's Collected Works. Besides, in the last months of his life, all Gandhi was concerned with was Hindu-Muslim harmony—the issue of who was to be Congress President would have been of far less significance to him.

You wonder why some people today might prefer Nehru and JP to Lohia. One reason may be that JP and Nehru both were usually courteous in their language, even with their political opponents, whereas Lohia

was often unnecessarily personal and abusive. In your first mail you referred to me as a "pampered frog of English"; I do not think Nehru or JP (or Gandhi or Kamaladevi) would have used such language in intellectual or political debate—though Lohia perhaps might have. This vicious streak in Lohia often obscured and did disservice to his brilliance and originality.

Your last paragraph, on the other hand, reinforced what I have missed by not knowing Kannada. I wish I would know more about Devanur Mahadeva and read people like him in their own language. But even on this matter, allow me to please correct one of your misperceptions. You claim that I fling the names of Nagaraj, Ananathamurthy and Karnad with arrogance and authority. To the contrary—I have merely said that I was fortunate to have known them as friends. I have stressed the personal debt and never anything more. I have never claimed any deep knowledge of Kannada scholarship or literature on the basis of a few friendships. I am not so foolish, or so arrogant. In the course of my life across India I have had the great good luck to have known, often quite closely, remarkable writers who write in Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil, and Oriya. These encounters have made me slightly less ignorant of those literary traditions. Likewise with my Kannada friends. I am sure I would be able to learn a great deal from you too.

*With best wishes,
R. Guha*

Reply by DSN

October 9, 2017

Dear Sri Guha,

Sorry, you have missed again the point I was trying to make that day and in my last two letters. That is, whether Gandhi had any conversations of any substance with Socialists or not. Your answer that day was an emphatic no. You defended your answer through construction of circles of proximity around Gandhi. Yes, you did say that Kamaladevi had some conversations with Gandhi about participation of women in Satyagraha and such other things; but at the same time you asserted that except for this, there is no trace of conversations of any substantial nature that Socialists had with Gandhi. And all this was said by you only as a response to my argument through my bunch of questions that implied that conversations of Gandhi with Socialists were as important, if not more, as the four conversations you spoke of that day. More importantly, I was trying to make a comment on our historians by questioning your selection of those four conversations as the most important ones of Gandhi's life. Whether Sri Guha or somebody considers the conversations of Gandhi with Socialists as important or not was not of much concern to me, then.

I did term the subjects of conversations that Kamaladevi had with Gandhi as non-political, in the strictest sense of the term political, as they were not directly concerned with the State and its policies. But I tend to concede, if you insist, that they were political. Believe me, there was no intention of misrepresenting you in this regard.

Regarding the language of Lohia, yes he was pungent in his remarks many a times. More pungent than necessary sometimes, I too think.

But he was a lovely man too I was told by some of his close associates like S/s Madhu limaye, Kishen Patnaik, Mrs. Roma Mitra and so many others whom I met in Delhi during late seventies and early eighties. According to them, it had become necessary on his part to be pungent selectively at least, in the face of all pervading 'middle class' pleasing Nehruism of those days. After all he was not a bad man and he was in fact a great soldier of freedom struggle. But you see how badly he was treated by Nehru's policemen during his protests.

You should go through the indecent letter correspondence between PM Nehru and HM Sardar Patel (See Collected Works of Lohia by Mastram Kapoor) which discusses the pros and cons of releasing Lohia from Prison to attend an International meet. Lohia deserved a better treatment and engagement by the English speaking class of his time, I always thought. Please remember that people like Nehru and JP will always be a part of history and people like Lohia will always live on and kicking inside us. It was in this context that I called people like you as 'pampered frogs of English well'. If it is offending, so was your assertion that you did not learn Kannada because you can afford to live without it in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

*With regards,
D.S. Nagabhushana*

PS : I forgot to write about what you have said regarding the proposal of Gandhi to make JP the Congress President. You say that it was Nehru's proposal, even though you are not even sure whether that kind of proposal was ever made,

which according to my reading was a proposal by Gandhi. I do not know what made you to turn that proposal of Gandhi into Nehru's! You say that by that time JP's heroism was well established and he had come closer to Nehru. It is this kind of interpretation of history on your part that I object to. JP was enough of a hero in the eyes of the Nation well before 1948 with many examples of gallantry, the last one connected with his escape from Hazaribag Prison in 1942 November. And JP was always favourably disposed towards Nehru. He never antagonised Nehru.

My reading of history of that time tells me that Gandhi was disillusioned with the working of most of the leadership of Congress and also wanted to push the Socialists, towards whom he had started moving then, to join the mainstream to take responsibility in Nation building process. And hence it was Gandhi's proposal which Nehru could not implement citing opposition to it from rightist elements in Congress. Thus the appointment of Babu Rajendra Prasad. I hope I need not tell you that there is enough history beyond the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.

PS-2 : Regarding your assertions about my comments on your seemingly limited knowledge of Kannada literary tradition, I submit that they were based on some press reports about your address at Karnataka Sangha, Shivamogga. However I feel even now that you should resist from talking about Kannada literary tradition since your knowledge of it is patently very limited and whatever knowledge you has come to you only through a

your limited interaction with only a selected few, that through English. Even Mr. Sheldon Pollack does not flaunt his knowledge of Kannada literary tradition in public, like you.

DSN

REPLY FROM GUHA

October 10, 2017

Dear Shri Nagabhushana,

Our correspondence reminded me of some correspondence I had exchanged earlier this year with Uday Dandavate, son of Madhu and Pramilla. Do see below. You will see there my manifest admiration for the Socialists and my wish that proper justice be done to their contributions.

Please also see this piece I wrote on Madhu Dandavate in 2005:

<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2005/11/20/stories/2005112000240300.htm>

Here I wrote: 'Dandavate was a remarkable product of a remarkable political tradition. This was the socialist movement, from whose ranks came some of the most talented, and certainly the most honest, politicians of modern India.'

Once more, let me emphasize that the importance of the socialists is independent of how close they were or were not to Gandhi while the Mahatma was alive. Incidentally, I checked with a colleague who knows far more than me about the subject, and he confirmed that he too had never found any evidence that Gandhi would have recommended JP for the Congress Presidency. He further pointed out that even if JP's name had been proposed, Sardar Patel (not Nehru) would have vetoed it at once! I should further note that Rajen babu was President of the Constituent Assembly, not of the

Congress, in 1948; the Congress President in fact being that right-wing Patel favourite Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

In my correspondence with Uday Dandavate, back in April, I said:

'One of the more significant of the multiple tragedies of contemporary India is the death/degradation of the Socialist movement. Unlike the Communists, the Socialists were patriots; unlike the Congress, the Socialists genuinely believed in and fought for social and economic (including gender) equality. There is a major book waiting to be researched and written on their contributions both to the freedom struggle and to political life after Independence.'

I do not know whether you are inclined to write such a book yourself. It would certainly be a worthwhile task. If not, perhaps you know someone who might.

With best wishes

R. Guha

REPLY FROM DSN

October 10, 2017

Dear Sri Guha,

Thanks for your response. Once again, I would like to inform you that my objection to your talk on that day was as to why you did not include conversations with Socialists in your selection of four important conversations of Gandhi. My objection becomes more relevant now after you have given such a big account of your admiration for Socialists. If you can include Bhagat Singh, who had no personal rapport with Gandhi, in your selection of conversations, why not Socialists, with whom Gandhi had so much

of personal rapport and love and admiration? Again I should say that it is not of much concern to me whether according to Ram Guha Socialists were very proximate to Gandhi or not.

Yes the Nation has forgotten Socialists. But why are historians also forgetting Socialists? They—that too only honest among them—seem to remember them only when they are questioned on that count? It is like our U.R. Ananthamurthy praising some of us (who admired most of his writings but questioned his personal integrity regarding some of his social enterprises) in private but never in public or in his writings! I may also record here my dismay at your appreciation (praising it to the hilt) of URA's last book on Swaraj, a poor attempt of URA to use Gandhi for his dishonest tirade against Modi. I am calling it dishonest because he did not utter a word against the Gujarat genocide of 2002 when it happened or soon after, may be because he was occupying a cozy seat of some power offered by the then NDA govt. I have personally questioned URA about this in an interview, perhaps the last one of his life. This very long interview, which stretches from his early writings to his last public dialogue on Modi's candidature for Pmship, was done for the Socialist monthly 'Hosa Manushya' (meaning 'The New Man') which I edited for six long years till 2016 (stopped because of my failing health, and to be restarted in next November).

Again, regarding your doubt about Gandhi's proposal to make JP the President of Congress party, I should say that you have failed to find any evidence for it because of your problem with the definition of

evidence. It seems you recognise only that document which is sanctified by one authority or the other. That way your history can only be categorized as 'sanctified' history. I hope you don't suspect the integrity of late Minoo Masani, who—I think you concede—was nearer (in fact, a witness) than you and me to the theatre of events of the last forties. He in his book *Is JP the Answer?* (Macmillan, year of publication not mentioned!) writes :

A little later on the eve of the transfer of power, Gandhi—who as is well known was not happy about the line taken by Nehru and Patel—sought to create a new balance in the Congress by thinking of JP as the new President of Congress so that he might be a countervailing force and a check on Nehru and Patel who were to head the new Government. Nehru did not repond when Gandhi put the idea to him. He in turn suggested Acharya Narendra Deva who was close to him. Narendra Deva was in turn vetoed by Sardar Patel. Finally Dr. Rajendra Prasad was nominated President.

It is not only Minoo Masani who has recorded this proposal of Gandhi, but also all the biographers of JP that I mentioned in my first letter. It is for you to believe them or not. For your additional information, even Google provides this information! Further you say that Pattabhi Seetharamaiah was the President of Congress Party in 1948 and not Rajendra Prasad. Yes indeed, Pattabhi was the President in 1948, but he occupied that seat only after Rajendra Prasad, who was made President of Congress party in November 1947 after the resignation of J.B. Kripalani, relinquished it to become the President of the Constituent Assembly.

The problem with historians and political commentators like you seems to be that you don't want to believe or recognise anything that goes even slightly against Nehru. It has been the bane of post-Independence history writing and Socialist history has been one of its victims. It is for the same reason, though for a more dangerous political purpose, that Sangh Parivar has been doing a propaganda campaign against this kind of tilted history writing. This way, I should say, historians of this ilk are also responsible for the rise of Hindutva forces in recent history.

You have suggested that I may think of writing Socialist history. In fact I have written extensively about it in Kannada; it may not exactly be history as such. For your information, I have written brief biographies of JP and Lohia and subtitled all my (volumes of) social—including some of my literary criticisms, with which I started my writing career—and political writings as socialist discourses. I am not inclined to write in English as I am not good in it. You can find a lot of evidence of it in my correspondence with you. I am so tired of writing to you in English. In fact that is why I expect people like you to learn at least to speak a local language so that we can converse with you freely and clearly and mutually learn.

I think I should close my arguments with you now, at least for the time being. I should say that I learnt and also unlearnt quite a bit through this correspondence. You may please excuse me if my faulty English has troubled you.

*With regards,
D.S. Nagabhushana*

REPLY FROM GUHA*October 10, 2017**Dear Sri Nagabhushana,*

From being merely a pampered frog I notice that I have now become a historian who helped the rise of Hindutva. Your penchant for personalised polemic does not become a scholar of your passion, courage and great intelligence.

Your English is admirably fluent and evocative. Like Lohia, JP, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Tagore, you have the capacity to express yourself extremely lucidly in your mother tongue as well as in the language of our erstwhile conquerors. Lohia, JP, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, all chose to write in English when they wanted to reach out beyond their cultural universe. If you were to distill your knowledge and learning into a book on India's socialist traditions in English you would do a service to your fellow Indians. Please don't let your pride get in the way.

*With regards**R. Guha***REPLY BY DSN**

Sorry Sir, my English is so poor that I am unable to make out what you are saying in the second sentence of your above mail. If you are saying that I cannot make a scholar of myself by any means, you are right!

Yes I have said what I have said about historians of your type who have helped the raise of Hindutva forces in this country. It is for you to dismiss it outright or mull over it for its worth.

I have never said that writing in English is bad or unacceptable. What I have said is that writing

in English because you have been incapacitated to write in an Indian language is pathetic. Please see the conversation Gandhi had with his friend Mr. Polak in the former's autobiography on learning English vis a vis the mother tongue.

*With regards,**DSN***REPLY BY GUHA***Dear Sri Nagabhushana,*

1. Thanks-- yes, I know the Gandhi/Polak debate, and wrote about it here, in 2011:

<http://ramachandraguha.in/archives/a-question-of-english-the-telegraph.html>

Those Indians who are genuinely bilingual (such as yourself) can surely (like Gandhi and Lohia) communicate in both their languages! So please do not disregard my plea...

On the rise of Hindutva and who may have contributed to it, how would you react to my saying:

i) That Lohia's obsessive anti-Congressism and the coalitions he forged between Socialists and Jana Sangh in 1967 helped the rise of Hindutva;

ii) That JP's inclusion of the RSS in his anti-Indira movement and the certificate of patriotism he gave them helped the rise of Hindutva.

Surely these two acts by massively influential politicians you admire are far more worthy of critical scrutiny than the mere writings of a mere scholar, and that too in an elite language, English.

But since you press the point, do read the papers of today-- the Hindutvawadis have issued

fresh threats against me in Malleshwaram police station. The BJP and the RSS certainly do not consider me an ally or friend of Hindutva-- to the contrary, they threaten and intimidate me regularly!

But again, I urge you, let's get beyond these polemics and think of aiding something both of us want. Both you and I would like our younger compatriots to know of the history, heritage, and possible contemporary relevance of the Indian socialist traditions. So please do sympathetically consider the two proposals I made in my last mail.

2. Do see this mail below. Can I put this young scholar in touch with you please? I am sure your advice and encouragement will go a long way in motivating him to take up this vital and important project.

3. Prompted by your correspondence, I went back to Gandhi's Collected Works. It turns out that you were right, and that JP's name was indeed discussed for the Congress Presidency in January 1948. But it also turns out that my hunch was correct, namely that if this had indeed happened Nehru would have encouraged it. It seems that when Nehru resigned from the Presidency, he wanted a socialist to succeed him, and proposed Narendra Deva. To which Gandhi responded that if he wished he could even have JP to succeed him (JP of course being even closer to Nehru than ND was). This proposal of Nehru's, as amended by Gandhi, was then taken forward, and, as anticipated by both you and me,

the Congress Old Guard (led by Patel) nixed the proposal to have any socialist, whether ND or JP. From the sources, it appears that Gandhi himself, being busy with Hindu-Muslim unity, was not attending the crucial CWC meetings which decided this. But their proceedings were reported back to him. In a letter to Premaben Kantak, Gandhi says of the matter: 'As far as I know, Jayaprakash's views and policies are not harmful to the country's interests, but his method is. If, however, he becomes President, he must follow the Congress policy. Anyway, he was wise enough to decline to be President in the prevailing atmosphere of opposition to him. When a person who has opposed the official policies from outside becomes the leader of the whole country, he would if he has any touch of patriotism in him give up this opposition'. In other words, JP would have had to abandon or modify his radical Socialism if he wanted to become President of the Congress.

In this letter to Prema Kantak, Gandhi also says: 'About the Socialists, I believe that they are self-sacrificing, studious and courageous men'. But then he adds: 'I do not know what they have been doing. If it is enough to know what appears in the newspapers about them, then that much I know, though not in great detail.' This rather seems to prove my point which so upset you, namely, that while Gandhi admired and had affection for the socialists, he was not really in

close or continuous contact with them. On the other hand, you were right in calling attention to the fact (which had escaped me) that JP was, in the last month of MKG's life, indeed a candidate for the Congress Presidency.

Thanks for giving me a chance to explore this fascinating issue, and with best wishes,

R. Guha

REPLY BY DSN

Congratulations Guhaji! At last you have found a shred of evidence at least regarding Gandhi's proposal to make JP the president of Congress party. Congratulations also for ultimately proving to yourself through that shred of evidence that Socialists were not very proximate to Gandhi to have conversations with him!

So, now it is for you to fix the proximity gradings of S/s Bhagat Singh/Savarkar, Jinnah and Ambedkar with respect to Gandhi who according to you on that day had some important conversations with him.

*Regards,
DSN*

REPLY BY GUHA

October 11, 2017

Dear Sri Nagabhushana ji,

I don't believe that you can or will dispute that Gandhi's conversations with Jinnah and Ambedkar were definitive for India and for him. I think the real cause of your upset is that I spoke that day of Gandhi's arguments with the armed revolutionaries and not with the socialists. The reasons for this were simply that, in the India

of 2017, there is a real romance among the youth about Bhagat Singh and the Maoists and their methods, and it is vitally important to defend nonviolence against this misguided and dangerous faith in violent politics.

I still wish you would get over your hurt and injured pride. I am as keen as you are to have the (non and often anti-Marxist) socialists treated fairly and fully in our current and future political discourse. And I seek your help in this regard. Will you please think of consolidating your extensive writings in Kannada in the form of a short book on Indian socialism in English for a wider audience? And will you also talk to the young scholar who is keen to pursue a history of Indian socialism? If not the first, at least the second, I hope, though of course ideally both....

*With regards
R. Guha*

REPLY BY DSN

October 11, 2017

Dear Sri Guha,

Please don't imagine all kinds of reasons for my elaborate (ably assisted by you) correspondence with you. As my primary questions to you on that day indicated, I was only curious to know if there were any particular reasons for you to chose only those four conversations and if you consider those four only as the most important conversations of Gandhi's life. As a sympathiser of the Socialist movement, I also wanted to know as to why you don't consider conversations of Gandhi with Socialists as important. But instead of replying objectively to me, it appeared to me and some

friends there that you took my questions as a challenge to your authority on modern Indian history. And you started bulldozing me with all kinds of explanations as to why you don't consider Socialists were anywhere near Gandhi to have conversations with him, which I don't accept even now. Because, my reading of history of Indian Independence tells a different story. So where is the question of getting hurt or injured here?

I also read authors who write in English only, like H. Rajarao, R.K. Narayan, Mulraj Anand, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy etc., and you too, but I don't look at them in high esteem only because they write in English and pity them when get arrogant with the power of their English language. You may note that I did not choose to continue my arguments with you there after you asked for evidence for Gandhi's proposal with regard to JP. After all you were the honored guest for us on that day and I was only a layman in the audience. (It is also a fact that you did not allow me to continue my arguments, with waterfalls of your English diction!)

I wrote to you only to fulfill my obligation to you to provide some evidence of Gandhi's conversations with Socialists from your Bible called 'Collected Works of Gandhi' and of Gandhi's proposal regarding JP. But this correspondence got elaborated for so many allied reasons!

As you rightly judged, I am not a scholar and also cannot become one to associate myself with any academic or University projects. In fact I am damn afraid of them! Regarding your suggestion to bring out the English version of my writings on Socialist history, it is

for the English knowing Kannadigas interested in the subject to take the initiative if they feel it is worth taking. I am just not interested. I am a Swarajist in that way. My 'neighbourhood' is enough for me!

It seems, as a last resort of confrontation with me, you have chosen to repeat the rusted arguments of our tired secularists and Marxists to defame Lohia and JP. Lohia's anti-Congressism or JP's inclusion of Jansangh and RSS in his total revolution movement are to be understood in the political context and political compulsions of their time, when Jansangh and RSS were no forces at all. You should also note that neither Lohia nor JP compromised in any way with their political values. It may be of some interest to you to go through the last interview of Lohia's life with Prof. Bross, a foreign journalist (August 1967), in which Lohia has spoken about his relations with different political streams (published in Lohia Special issue of Janata, 2010). Have you forgotten the fact that post-JP Jansangh, soon after its reincarnation as BJP, was reduced to 2 seats in the 1980 elections? It was from there that they built the party and Sangh parivar to reach where they are today! On the other hand these so called secularists only tried to grow on anti-Hindu communalism (and social justice) sloganeering without doing any hard work at the ground level to build their parties. Now to save their faces in the face of drubbing they have got in people's court, they have resorted to Lohia and JP bashing! Good luck to them and you too.

Regards,
D.S. Nagabhushana

REPLY BY Guha

October 12, 2017

Dear Sri Nagabhushana,

I want to thank you for our exchange, which has educated me a great deal, not just about the JP Presidency idea which I was ignorant about, but about much else. In the days of Twitter and Facebook such exchanges are rare, if not impossible.

I also wanted to apologize for any arrogance or insolence I may have displayed that day in Heggodu while replying to your interventions.

With regards
R. Guha

PS: I hope you don't mind if I fill in a little detail about my personal background. My parents spoke English at home, but since I grew up in Dehradun I learned Hindi as a second language. I used a great deal of Hindi sources in my early research, and have also done some small translations from Hindi, including one of JP's remarkable essays Nagaland mein shanti ka prayas. Inspired and encouraged by our correspondence, I shall now actively pursue a project I have long wanted to do—this is to help edit and refine the translation into English of a major social history of modern Uttarakhand by a remarkable Kumauni scholar named Shekhar Pathak.

RREPLY BY DSN

October 12, 2017

Dear Sri Guha,

Thanks for your mail and I should say that I am really touched and humbled by its contents.

With regards,
D.S. Nagabhushana
(Concluded)



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