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Karnataka Elections: Some Musings...

Neeraj Jain

With the swearing in of Kumaraswamy as the Chief Minister of Karnataka on May 23, 2018, the curtains have come down on the eight day drama that unfolded in the State following the declaration of election results of the Karnataka State Assembly polls on May 15. The BJP became the single largest party, winning 104 seats, but was 7 seats short of the half way mark. Meanwhile, erstwhile rivals Congress and JD(S), who won 78 and 37 seats respectively, quickly stitched together an alliance and staked claim to form the government in the State.

However, late in the evening on May 16, Governor Vajubhai Vala, an old RSS man, multiple term minister in the Gujarat State government and a close aide of Narendra Modi during the 13 years he was Chief Minister of Gujarat before he was nominated Governor of Karnataka in 2014, chose to invite the BJP legislature party leader B.S. Yeddyurappa to form the government in the State and gave him a huge 15 days to prove his majority. The Congress-JDS combine rushed to the Supreme Court for an urgent

hearing, challenging the Governor's order. In an unprecedented pre-dawn hearing that began at 2.11 am and ended at 5.28 am, the Supreme Court refused to stay the swearing-in of Yeddyurappa as the Chief Minister, but asked the Attorney General to place before it the papers on the basis of which the Governor had taken his decision at the next hearing on May 18. Hours later, in the morning of May 17, Yeddyurappa was sworn in as Chief Minister of Karnataka by the Governor. With the BJP having been given 15 days to stitch together a majority, the Congress-JDS in what has become routine today for Indian democracy quickly bussed out their MLAs to the Telengana capital of Hyderabad to prevent the BJP from reaching out to them and getting them to defect. Simultaneously, the Congress released a series of audio recordings, where BJP leaders (including B.S. Yeddyurappa himself) were heard talking to Congress MLAs, promising them Cabinet berths and huge amounts of cash for switching sides.

Resuming the hearing on the Congress-JDS petition on the morning of May 18, the three judge

Supreme Court bench reduced the 15-day window given by the Governor to Yeddyurappa to prove his majority, and ordered a floor test in the Karnataka Assembly at 4 pm on May 19, turning down pleas made by Yeddyurappa's counsel for more time. This decision effectively sealed the fate of Yeddyurappa, as the time given by the Supreme Court was too less for the BJP to successfully indulge in horse-trading. After 56 hours as Chief Minister, he resigned from his post even before the trust motion was moved in the Assembly.

An analysis of the Karnataka election results reveals that while the Congress got nearly 2% more votes than the BJP (Congress got 38% votes, BJP 36.2%), the BJP was more successful in translating its votes into seats, managing to get 26 more seats than the Congress. The JDS-Congress alliance together has 56.4% of the votes (JDS got 18.4% votes). But the biggest winner of the 2018 Karnataka Assembly elections is clearly the BJP – it increased its vote share by 16% as compared to its tally of 19.9% votes that it got in the 2013 Assembly elections. The Congress too increased its vote share by 1.4% over its 2013 number. The JDS suffered a slight decline in its vote share – it had got 20.2% of the votes in 2013.

This clearly reveals that fascist forces have made deep inroads into the southern state of Karnataka. The BJP-RSS formula of launching hate campaigns against the minorities and raising false emotive issues like the issue of Jinnah's portrait in AMU and thereby polarising the electorate to consolidate the so-called 'Hindu' vote is succeeding even in the south.

Pushed to the wall by the BJP juggernaut which is threatening to marginalise all the opposition parties

in the country, the top leaders of nearly all the prominent opposition parties came down to Bengaluru for the swearing in of the JD(S)-Congress coalition government headed by H.D. Kumaraswamy on May 23. Among those who attended were Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, SP president Akhilesh Yadav, BSP supremo Mayawati, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, LJD leader Sharad Yadav, as well as the Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee and her Andhra Pradesh counterpart Chandrababu Naidu. Clearly, the ground is being set for an anti-BJP coalition for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The opposition needs to thank Governor Vajubhai Vala for creating the conditions which led to this huge show of opposition unity. His decision to invite Yeddyurappa to become the Chief Minister and giving him 15 days to prove his majority – enough time to get at least 7 MLAs to defect – clearly proved once again to the opposition the ruthlessness of the BJP in its quest for absolute power, steamrolling all opposition. The Congress-JDS coalition is also likely to be more stable; the threat posed by the BJP and its RSS pracharak Governor will force both to be more accommodative in the inevitable tussle between them over distribution of Cabinet berths.

If the growing offensive of the fascist forces on the democratic and secular fabric of the country is to be checked, then a unity of the opposition is a must. Only a united opposition can defeat the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. That the BJP can be defeated was proven by the defeat of the BJP candidates in recent byelections held in UP and

Rajasthan. Had the Congress and JDS entered into a pre-poll alliance in Karnataka, they would have swept the polls, winning at least 150 of the 222 seats. The same scenario would have prevailed in the 2017 Assembly elections in UP, where the 39% vote share of BJP would have been no match for the combined vote share of Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party and Congress at over 50%.

But the problem is, even if the opposition unites and wins the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, it will not be enough to check the gradual growth of the RSS-led fascist forces in the country. The RSS is probably the world's largest cadre-based organisation. On the other hand, the united opposition is only a rag-tag coalition, that will have only come together due to the threat posed by the BJP. Its commitment to democracy and secularism is very weak, as is proven by so many past instances. Neither does it have an alternate pro-people economic programme. In fact, it is the policies of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation implemented by the previous UPA Government—which led to rising inflation, worsening unemployment, a huge agrarian crisis, and a massive increase in poverty and destitution—that created the conditions for the BJP to sweep to power in 2014.

Therefore, if indeed the opposition unites and does win the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, there is no guarantee that it will not implement policies that blatantly favour big corporate houses as in the past. There is no guarantee that it will take steps to hugely increase access to free / affordable and good quality education and health care and safe drinking for the ordinary people, that it will provide a decent

pension to the elderly, that it will implement policies that will lead to the creation of a large number of secure and regular jobs with a decent pay, that it will take steps to revive Indian agriculture and bring it out of the crisis which has pushed more than 3 lakh farmers to commit suicide in the past two decades, that it will take steps to reverse the policies of privatisation being implemented in the country for the past three decades. And in case it does not implement these pro-people policies, once again, in the next elections, the BJP will take advantage to come back to power, and meanwhile the RSS will have further increased its strength.

Given this situation, it is important for the socialist parties and socialist activists within this opposition alliance to unite and press the united opposition to accept a minimum alternative pro-people programme. This alternate programme can be the genuine implementation of the economic programme as outlined in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. The Directive Principles direct the State to:

- strive to build a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life.
- strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and ensure that there is no concentration of wealth in the country;
- ensure that the ownership and control of the country's resources should be such that they benefit the common good, implying that they should not be used for private enrichment.
- make effective provision for securing the right to work, for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensure equal

pay for equal work for both men and women, and ensure that people get a decent wage that enables them to have a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.

- regard improvement of public healthcare facilities and raising the level of nutrition of the people as among its primary duties.
- make effective provision for securing the right to education; endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.
- endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities amongst people.

Even though the Directive Principles are not enforceable by law, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar made it very clear in a speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 19, 1948 that the Assembly desires that in future, both the legislature and the executive must make these principles "the basis of all executive and legislative action . . . taken hereafter in the matter of the governance of the country." He went on to explicitly state that the Assembly desires that future governments must strive in the fulfillment of these Directive Principles "even under hard and unpropitious circumstances". This means that the Constitution makers were of the opinion that while at the time of independence, due to the immense poverty of the country, it was not possible to make the economic and social rights embedded in Part IV of the Constitution justiciable, as development proceeds and wealth generation takes place, these rights

must be guaranteed.

Seventy years later, so much wealth creation has taken place in the country. Therefore, all believers in socialist ideology and principles must come together and demand of the united opposition that the time has come to implement the economic programme contained in the Directive Principles, that the economic rights mentioned in the Directive Principles be considered as fundamental rights and they be guaranteed.

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Who Allows Usurpation of Constitutional Values?

Sandeep Pandey

Prakash Singh, a former Director General of Police, who was Chief of the Border Security Force, UP police and Assam police, has written a piece in the Indian Express saying that Kathua and Unnao incidents of rape were not the darkest hour since independence as claimed in a protest letter to the Prime Minister by 49 prominent retired bureaucrats, which include N.C. Saxena, E.A.S. Sarma, Harsh Mander, Wajahat Habibullah and Aruna Roy. Towards the end of his article, Prakash Singh suggests that rather than playing into the hands of forces out to tarnish the image of India, the distinguished civil servants should have asked for systemic changes in the criminal justice system. If he thinks that the incidents of Kathua and Unnao were bad, by writing this article he is conveying a totally opposite message. His article seems to be playing down the incidents.

They were not mere rape incidents. They were incidents in which the government was taking the side of accused. Even that is not something new. In a number of incidents, the political parties in power have for their vested interests sided with the culprits. But what is most appalling about the Kathua incident is that in a rally in support of Special Police Officer Deepak Khajuria who is an accused in the rape and murder of the 8 year old nomad girl Asiya, the tricolour was used by right wing Hindutva group and Bhartiya Janata Party office bearers who participated in it. Such things have never occurred before in this country. The politics

of nationalism is being used either to conduct crimes or to defend criminals.

Consider the kind of things which have started taking place with the rise of BJP as political force and specially since its ascendancy to the seat of power in Delhi:

- Narendra Dhabolkar was shot dead on 20 August 2013, Govind Pansare was fatally attacked on 16 February 2015, Professor M.M. Kalburgi shot dead on 30 August 2015 and Gauri Lankesh too was shot dead on 5 September 2017 for holding views which were critical of right-wing thinking.
- On 28 September 2015 a mob killed Mohammad Akhlaq near Dadri by lynching on the suspicion of having slaughtered a cow and consuming beef. There is a law in Uttar Pradesh to deal with cow slaughter.
- On 18 March 2016 another mob calling themselves gau rakshaks lynched 32 year old Mazloom Ansari and 12 year old Imtiaz in Latehar district of Jharkhand and hanged them to death from a tree when they were walking 8 oxen to a cattle fair.
- On 11 July 2016, four dalit youth who traditionally used to skin dead cows were accused of cow slaughter and beaten in public by gau rakshaks in Una, Gujarat, an incident which created national uproar.
- On 1 April 2017, Pehlu Khan was returning from Jaipur after purchasing cows and calves and heading towards his village

Nuh in Haryana when he was stopped by a cow vigilante group and lynched to death, even though he had all the proper documents from Jaipur Municipal Corporation to show that the cattle was meant for dairy. Sadhvi Kamal praised the murderous gau rakshaks and equated them to Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhra Azad.

- On 20 April 2017, the BJP Member of Parliament Raghav Lakhpal Sharma from Saharanpur in UP tried to forcibly take out a rally to mark the birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar through a Muslim locality of Sadak Dudhali village. Ambedkar's birth anniversary is 14 April. Why did he insist on taking out a rally through a Muslim locality? When the police denied him permission, the MP attacked the residence of Senior Superintendent of Police with his supporters.
- On 5 May 2017, members of Thakur community forcibly wanted to take out a Maharana Pratap Jayanti procession through a Dalit basti in Shabbirpur village of Saharanpur. There were clashes at Sant Ravidas temple in which a youth Sumit Singh died due to asphyxiation after he tried to burn the idol of Sant Ravidas. Thakurs took revenge and burned 55 Dalit houses.
- When violence erupted in Kasganj on Republic Day 2018, the District Magistrate of Bareilly, Raghvendra Vikram

Singh, publicly raised the question as to why Hindutva groups forcibly enter Muslim dominated areas, raise anti-Pakistan slogans and create ruckus? One person died that day in the ensuing violence.

- Akhila Ashokan converted to Islam, adopted the name Hadiya, and married Shefin Jehan. In May 2017, the High Court of Kerala annulled the marriage based on a report of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) stating that she was a victim of indoctrination and psychological kidnapping. In March 2018 Supreme Court restored her marriage. NIA has been supposedly established to combat terror in India.

India is not short of problems, from farmers' suicides to malnourishment of children, that

we needed these new types of problems to be thrust upon the country. The above mentioned series of incidents, a list which is by no means complete, have vitiated the atmosphere in the country in which Dalits, Muslims and opponents of right wing ideology have been the main targets. The BJP government has not taken action against the attackers as such incidents promote its political agenda of polarisation of society and hence enables it to garner votes. This has jeopardised the Constitutional values of democracy, equality and secularism, about which 49 former bureaucrats have expressed concern.

Prakash Singh should have stood up against this usurpation of our Constitutional values and made it a half century of former bureaucrats who have spoken out against it,

rather than appearing to take the side of forces which he himself believes to be divisive.

He calls Babri Masjid a dilapidated mosque and regrets that there was no protest over damage to 208 temples in J&K. The first serial bomb blast incident in Mumbai took place in reaction to the Babri Masjid demolition. Even though it might have been a dilapidated structure, it was responsible for triggering a series of terrorist incidents in India. It is a pity that a person of his standing makes this kind of comparison. It is because of people like him holding responsible positions in government that incidents like those described above are allowed to take place and the culprits are not restrained. We hope that he'll review his position.

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Panchayats Massacred in Bengal

Mrinal Biswas

Forebodings were there. People were wondering as to how much violence would be unleashed in panchayat elections this time in West Bengal. Feared perpetrators were the ruling Trinamul Congress led by the maverick Mamata Banerjee. As was expected, widespread violence marred the elections; nearly 30 people died, and there were hundreds of injuries. However, this poll violence did not catch the attention of people across the country, because of the excitement generated by the turbulent Karnataka assembly elections which took place at around the same time.

The brook-no-opposition policy of Bengal's ruling party is no more

a secret. It is now well known that the Trinamul Congress wants opposition-mukt (opposition-free) bodies at different levels. The panchayat elections were held under that fearsome pressure. Lumpen elements with adequate backings manipulated the entire poll procedure, from the very beginning when nomination filings are done to the last stage of vote counting. It was indeed a massacre of democracy in the State.

The State-appointed Election Commissioner apparently failed to act independently. State interference in the affairs of the State election commission were very visible to all. The Commission's notifications

and decisions drew widespread opposition protests. It attracted flak even from people like Somnath Chatterjee, former Lok Sabha Speaker and distinguished lawyer. The Commission was forced to approach the Calcutta High Court and even the Supreme Court under pressure from the opposition parties.

The opposition parties in the electoral arena were the CPI(M)-led Left Front, Congress and BJP. None of these parties were any match to Trinamul in the mobilisation of lumpen elements. Even before the election day, these elements instilled a sense of fear in the minds of the rural citizens with demonstrations of their fire power. Ironically, it was

Is it Politically Relevant Today to Ask Whether Nehru Visited Bhagat Singh in Jail?

Ram Puniyani

the CPI(M) which had in its heydays terrorised the opposition and the voters. Now, Trinamul has imitated this example with great success. No less a handicap for the opposition was the apathy shown by the apparatus of the State machinery, especially the police, which completely failed to do its democratic duty. And so a cakewalk for the Trinamul Congress was a foregone conclusion. Mamata Banerjee has however claimed that the elections were more peaceful than in the past, showing that democracy is truly alive in Bengal, and the election results demonstrate the tremendous support her party continues to enjoy.

When one comes to cold figures it will reveal that no opposition parties could file nominations or rather were not allowed to file nominations for altogether 20,076 seats spread over gram panchayats, panchayat samitis and district councils (zila parishads). Hence, the Trinamul Congress won these seats uncontested, which constitute 34.20 per cent of the total panchayat seats. Elections in the rest of the seats were held in extraordinary circumstances, amid polling officers resigning and several incidents of ballot papers being tampered by armed gangs invading the booths. Opposition polling agents were driven out in several places. These elements created a reign of terror outside several polling centres, with the police remaining mere onlookers. Opposition party activists and innocent voters under attack left the polling booths in many cases. Predictably, Trinamul swept almost the entire panchayat polls, with minor aberrations here and there.

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In the recently held Karnataka elections, Narendra Modi made several statements which were not true, and which were made to raise the emotive pitch against his opponents. In a blatant lie, at a rally in Bidar, he asked, “When Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Batukeshwar Dutt, Veer Savarkar, greats like them were jailed fighting for the country’s independence, did any Congress leader go to meet them?” One is surprised as to how can this be an electoral issue today? The central tactic of BJP and communal organisations is to bypass the issues related to people’s needs and distract their attention towards emotive issues. Modi has very regularly raised such issues in an attempt to put his opponents in a bad light. He has no qualms about even saying untruths with great amount of confidence. In the statement–question raised by him about Congress leaders visiting Bhagat Singh and Savarkar in jail, he is speaking a lie on one side and trying to glorify his icon Savarkar on the other.

As a matter of fact, the Indian National Congress, while it had differences with revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, greatly respected the high level of commitment and dedication of these young men. There are reports in the *Tribune* (August 9 and 10, 1929) about Nehru visiting Bhagat Singh and his comrades in jail. Motilal Nehru had even formed a committee to demand humane treatment for the

revolutionaries on fast unto death. In his autobiography, *Towards Freedom*, Jawaharlal Nehru gives a very touching account of his meeting Bhagat Singh, Jatin Das and other young revolutionaries, “I happened to be in Lahore when the hunger strike was already a month old. I was given permission to visit some of the prisoners in the prison, and I availed myself of this. I saw Bhagat Singh for the first time, and Jatindranath Das and a few others. They were all very weak and bedridden, and it was hardly possible to talk to them much. Bhagat Singh had an attractive, intellectual face, remarkably calm and peaceful. There seemed to be no anger in it. He looked and talked with great gentleness, but then I suppose that anyone who has been fasting for a month will look spiritual and gentle. Jatin Das looked milder still, soft and gentle like a young girl. He was in considerable pain when I saw him. He died later, as a result of fasting, on the sixty-first day of the hunger strike.”

The other aspect of the statement by Modi is to equate Savarkar with dedicated young revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh. This seems to be a clever ploy to elevate Savarkar to a level to which he does not belong. While Bhagat Singh was in jail, pending death penalty, he was requested by his family to seek clemency, which Bhagat refused. On the contrary, he wrote to the British Government that since he and his comrades have been sentenced

to death for waging war against the empire, he should be made to face the firing squad and not be given death by hanging. In contrast, Savarkar, after being sentenced for his role in the case of murder of a British officer, totally changed his stance in jail, surrendered to the British and wrote a series of apology letters, promising them help in future! He continued to remain loyal to the British after his release from jail.

In the early 1920s, the Congress, in recognition of Savarkar's initial role, tried to put pressure on the British Government for his release, but Savarkar was already writing petition after petition to the British to release him. He in fact gave a written undertaking, which in a way represented his total surrender to the British, "I hereby acknowledge that

I had a fair trial and just sentence. I heartily abhor methods of violence resorted to in days gone by and I feel myself duty bound to uphold law and constitution (British: added) to the best of my powers and am willing to make the 'reform' a success in so far as I may be allowed to do so in future." (from facsimile of Savarkar's letter to British authorities, published in *Frontline*, April 7, 1995). There are many such letters and finally the British granted him clemency.

This act of his seeking pardon from the British was a betrayal of freedom movement. His followers present it as a tactical ploy to get released so that he could continue his struggle against British rule. As matter of fact, after his release, Savarkar floated the concept of Hindu nationalism, brought to fore the word 'Hindutva' (total

Hinduness) and stated that there are two nations in the country, the Hindu nation and the Muslim nation! This was precisely opposite of the politics of Muslim nationalism being brought up by Muslim league. This is what also contributed to the tragedy of partition.

So Modi on the one hand lies about Congress leaders ignoring those struggling for freedom, while on the other he puts Savarkar in the same category as Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh remained committed to his ideology and path of resistance against British power. For his principles, he undertook a hunger strike in jail. In contrast, Savarkar buckled under the jail conditions and surrendered to the British. The Goebbelsian methods being resorted to by Modi need to be opposed.

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Broken Dreams and Lost Lives: Israel, Gaza and the Hamas Card

Stanley L. Cohen

For days now, the Israeli rewrite has been well underway, working overtime, to convince the world that seven weeks of carnage in Palestine, more particularly Gaza, did not happen. Or, if it did, Israel's response to the Great Return March was a measured, proportionate answer to the menace posed by some burning kites, waving flags and nihilist teens armed with slingshot weapons of mass destruction.

At times, we've seen Zionists rip a page straight out of the "Sandy Hook" playbook, suggesting gruesome virtual film footage of the on-going blood bath was

largely staged as if an anti-Semitic Hollywood back lot production. Indeed, to some, it appears the latest Palestinian victims include the same crises actors used over and over again in false flag operations ranging from Douma, Syria to Parkland, Florida.

Other apologists have turned the morgues of Gaza into a cynical goodwill gesture. Urging belief that if Israeli intent was mass slaughter thousands more would have found eternal peace as opposed to merely being left crippled or limbless on the floors of overbooked hospitals covered with the burn of noxious

fumes as rivers of blood passed them by.

To be sure, the methodical madness that is Israel goes something like this: We have the most effective, disciplined, efficient killers in the world. Had we wished to execute many more, we could have done so with abandon and relative ease.

Of course, it is that very expertise that puts to lie the claim that the 124 clearly identified members of the press killed or injured these past months had fallen victim by mere happenstance, alone.

Apparently, Palestinians should give thanks that Israel merely

wanted to set a tone with a controlled atrocity, these past Fridays of protest, as opposed to one of its, by now, regular scenes of effortless carnage sown throughout Gaza like a well planned mosaic of anguish to the palpable indifference of the world.

Can it be long before Israel deducts the cost of ammunition, otherwise dangled for its token monthly occupation tithe, for the extorted quiet trauma of some two million political prisoners?

After-all, busy these days in Syria, saber-rattling in Iran and preparing for its long overdue coast to coast crush of Gaza, even the most prosperous war criminal can, at times, run up against constraints on available weaponry. Despite being the world's 8th largest arms exporter, Israel, always on the make for more and more military gifts, would have us believe it is no exception.

And, predictably, when other excuses have collapsed to the honest lens of public transparency, the Hamas card is once again played with almost sneering contempt for the world's ability to pierce the half-truths that fly, each day, alongside the Star of David cast throughout the occupied skyline that is Palestine.

Time and time again, many have been an all too willing, if not complicit, party to Israel's deflection use of Hamas to explain away the inexplicable: just how proportionality can ever be manipulated to excuse an unchecked attack by the 16th most powerful military force of our time, with thousands of tanks, aircraft and combat ships, with a multi-billion dollar yearly military budget, upon a largely tattered urban enclave armed with little more than the determination and spirit of its long embattled people.

It works. It has for decades in

a world that long ago condensed the "good" to those with proper skin tone, religion and culture and the "bad" to those who invariably pray five times a day, not once each Saturday or Sunday.

There are distinct components to Israel's grand witting misspeak about Hamas and Palestinians: the first is a desperate attempt to recast who and what the movement is and from where it has come.

On this point, Israel is to be applauded as it has apparently, successfully, packaged and sold an entirely fictitious representation of the movement to those who seek little more than a fabled narrative to maintain their dutiful support of its colonial project.

I am no stranger to Hamas. To me the movement is not an academic pursuit or abstract intellectual curiosity that only takes shape whenever it confronts the brute force that is Israel . . . be it in the 365 square kilometer (141 sq mi) confines of Gaza or in the streets and universities of the West Bank. To the contrary, I have been privileged to represent more than a few of its leaders for some two decades. On occasion, the movement has sought my counsel on issues of international law prior to making its decision on how best to proceed with a given matter.

Many of these men and women have also been close personal friends for years. I have often shared a warm welcome and meal at a family dinner table or an overnight stay with Hamas leaders throughout my travels in the Middle East—on occasion against the backdrop of on-going Israeli carnage or in its aftermath.

I have known well most of its founders and current leadership

including those that have either been assassinated or languish today in Israeli prisons and elsewhere, denied any scrap of justice or due process. Over the years, I have spent literally thousands of hours meeting with movement leaders in prisons, at conferences, in Palestine and elsewhere.

These are virtuous, dedicated nationalists who seek not power for the sake of it or personal profit but have long stood among those who have fought against overwhelming odds and violence to lead the way toward a Palestinian home built of the marrow of freedom, justice and equality.

Contrary to the Israeli and Western effort to reduce Hamas to a collective of essentially unschooled or unsophisticated foreign born so-called Islamists, nothing could be further from the truth. Hamas is a movement born of Palestine, composed of Palestinians who were raised on the very streets where the blood of their people and families has been lost to the occupation terror imposed by Israel. For the many who suffer from a now decade old blockade of Gaza—with its lack of food, water, medicine and mobility—Hamas and their families have known the same isolation and paid a like price.

Comprised, originally, of physicians, scholars, academics, lawyers, scientists, artists, religious leaders and farmers, it is a movement that evolved of necessity, born in the vacuum of what would obviously become the failed vision of Oslo.

More than a few of these leaders escaped the tyranny of Israeli oppression, years before, to obtain education and accomplishment abroad—only later to give up the fruits of all personal success to return

to their homeland and fight for its liberation.

Over the years, Hamas evolved from a social service network, throughout Palestine, to become an armed guard of the Palestinian people through the discrete Qassam Brigades and an elected political movement swept to power in 2006. That victory came in what was described, then, by former President Carter as the most transparent and successful electoral process he had observed as a monitor over his many years of such service in the Middle East.

Not long thereafter, all of Gaza was punished for the temerity of its electoral will through the imposition of the embargo that a decade later remains in place as an on-going stranglehold on the health, welfare and safety of its two million residents, punctuated by massive deadly Israeli onslaughts every few years.

Portrayed as little more than a terrorist group, one story, in particular, speaks volumes about the depth and breadth of the movement. Invited by one of its top leaders to attend a luncheon outside of Palestine, I arrived at a fourth floor walk-up to find most of its leadership, along with a number of other Palestinian resistance movements, engaged in a debate. No, it was not a heated argument over political tactics or military targets. During the next two hours, tempers flared over whether, and to what extent, language immersion should be included as a teaching tool in grammar school education throughout Palestine. The discussion was led by a PhD linguist schooled by the legendary MIT professor, Noam Chomsky. Hebrew was among the languages to be learned.

I am not naive or starry-eyed. Like all political and national liberation movements Hamas has had its problems and made its share of missteps. Nevertheless, Israel's long-standing attempts to reduce it to a selfish and reckless collective willing to sacrifice the interests and safety of Palestinians, including their own families, to the winds of cheap political gain, is just so much nefariously crafted delusion.

Although this unashamed invention has found a warm welcome in the insipid language of Zionist supporters and ignorant pundits, those with informed knowledge or experience with Hamas understand this call for what it is: a shameful and typical deflection from Israeli responsibility for what can only be called a willing slaughter, these last few months, that ranks among its many others . . . always, of course, because it had no choice.

The notion that the movement would ask or send people of Gaza to certain injury or death, at the hands of Israeli assassins lying in wait for all to see, reeks of the grand imperial lie that has been Israel for seventy years.

It is no less repugnant than the racist proposition that Palestinians, themselves, care so little about their own families or community that they would willingly sacrifice them en masse to gain the momentary sympathy of a world long inured to their isolation and loss of liberty and life.

Born of supremacist arrogance, Israel now seeks to reduce millions of Palestinians, who have struggled for generations, to little more than unthinking sheeple awaiting instructions from Hamas on when, and how, to express their will or gain their independence. Those with any

connection to Palestine, or its long oppressed people, know all too well that the bars of its prison will never quiet its innate thirst for justice and freedom.

In Israel, the expedient conflation of victimiser and victim . . . of occupier and occupied . . . is brazen and readily transparent; an indecent marriage of those that would pull the trigger with others who fall prey to its barbaric squeeze. There is simply no honest or moral equivalence.

Yet, in a world that has long found Palestinians to be unworthy of equality and safeguard, this perverse union should come as no surprise. Indeed, willful blindness to Israeli slaughter is the explosive fuel that empowers its rage.

For decades, now, Hamas has become a convenient foil for Israel and its compliant choir after each new horror. Meanwhile, Israel walks away to rearm . . . leaving Palestine to bury her children, but not her hope.

Against the wail of broken dreams and lost lives, the Great Return March, marches on. For Palestinians, there is no choice.

Courtesy: Counterpunch.com

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Nicolas Maduro Wins Venezuelan Presidential Elections

In a big win for the global socialist movement, the heroic people of Venezuela overwhelmingly voted President Nicolas Maduro to power for a second term as Venezuela's president in the presidential elections held on May 20, 2018, Sunday. The National Electoral Council (CNE) of Venezuela announced the result on Sunday night. It declared that with 92.6 percent of the votes counted, Maduro had 5.8 million votes (67.7% of the vote), while his closest rival, former governor Henri Falcón, got 1.8 million votes (21.2%). CNE President Tibusay Lucena added that in total, 8.6 million Venezuelans voted, out of an electoral registry of 20.5 million people.

Despite the crippling sanctions imposed by the United States, and despite its open support for the capitalist opposition which is trying to use every trick in the book to sabotage economic development in Venezuela and push the economy into such a deep economic crisis that the people eventually get fed up and vote Maduro and the Socialist Party of Venezuela out of power, the people firmly stood behind him and the Bolivarian Revolution initiated by former President Hugo Chavez that Maduro is seeking to continue.

As several visitors to Venezuela have pointed out, the people of Venezuela are today amongst the most politically conscious people in the world. While they are of course concerned with the economic crisis gripping Venezuela, they are fully aware that it is the result of imperialism's assault on the Bolivarian Revolution.

In the background of this historic win, we are publishing this series of articles by Marco Teruggi on Chavismo, one article in every subsequent issue. All these pieces were written before the elections.

Chavismo in Seven Parts

Marco Teruggi

Part I: First Delivery: The Old Man and the Machete

One must ask: what are we naming when we say 'Chavismo'? How many types of Chavismo live within Chavismo? It is necessary to break down this word that we use daily. More than a word, it's a category, with a history of more than 20 years. It's necessary to do it particularly in times like these, where we are in dire straits: the presidential elections are round the corner, and we need to win.

I write from certainty: Chavez is more than Chavez. More than a government; a party; a liturgy; 2,000 communes; two million houses; dozens of elections, almost all won. What is it? Chavismo is greater than its very core.

In order to get an answer, you have two steps: dismembering it then putting it back together as a whole. An exercise of analysis to delve into the depths of a political process that adversaries loathe and fear, and which often—in their own ranks—

is reduced to its governmental dimension.

It's hard to understand how we continue standing, against the ropes or in the center of the ring, without getting into the territories where Chavez passions are born; the subjectivities; forms of organisation; relationship between the parties, tensions that seem sometimes to reach the limit and then they're resolved. Behind this question is the main question: what do we defend when we go to elections or confront violence designed to push us to a civil war?

They are eight chavisms. Put them on the table in parts, which are then rearranged to become a single word. It is ourselves, in eight deliveries and a metamorphosis.

First Delivery: The Old Man and The Machete

The old man relates the tale of

when they put a needle in his eye and it loosened everything. He imitates it with his finger, from far away to almost touching it. After they scraped the inside, he thought that was it and he would never see again. During the day the light went from thin to full, and Cuba was not Cuba but Venezuela again, in the lower part of Merida, which is sometimes Zulia, or also Trujillo, and this area is known as Sur del Lago. He returned to grab the machete, put on his boots, walk with his half-opened shirt, and rescue land from the hands of the landlords. This can cost you your life. More than 300 peasants were killed in 18 years. Taking power away from those who have always had it unleashes death.

It was his first time on a plane; in an excellent clinic, everything was free. What political process invests money in the eyes of an old peasant? What does an old peasant

think when he recovers the eyesight he once took for granted? He went with his wife and several contingents of Venezuelans. He has not forgotten a single detail, nor about how land is retaken: 15 years later, he is still there; stubborn, with his machete and his muddy boots. The country has changed in that time; the wave of advances against the oligarchy stagnated, with a balance of more than four million hectares recovered and several open debates. Did the lands that were rescued become productive? Did recoveries work better in the hands of the state or organised peasants?

Thousands of pages of similar stories could be written, from the dispossessed masses who could study, get medical attention; those who went from being excluded to politicising, entering theaters and offices—not only to clean them—to access new, imaginary departments, to be claimed by Chavez, coming from that historical territory. It was a radical democratisation in the hands of ordinary people. The barrios, the poor, peasants, marginalised, women—especially women.

Like a dam that burst, and the losers of betrayals of independence and elite pacts broke into the scene. With joyful passions, shockingly cheerful.

Historic Debt

The accumulated historic debt was immense when Hugo Chavez assumed the presidency. Lack of health, access to education, housing, identification, water, food. The greed of those who drove an oil-producing country to poverty. The myth of a happy Venezuela pre-Chavez is false. That Venezuela had flown through the air on February 27, 1989, and the protagonists were the ones who built the backbone of Chavismo. Chavez put his strategic bet on them. And the first thing to

solve that debt in an accelerated way was the opening of public health centers, educational missions, water for the barrios, and food on plates.

Reducing the issue to material affairs is like reducing Chavismo to a government: a mistake. The process encouraged millions: as a people, their national history, their way of life, their skin color. Dignity was the power that was set in motion: it faced the 2002 coup d'état, the oil strike, allowing us to resist these years in which material conquests—with the exception of housing—no longer go forward, but they go backwards instead. Those who are mostly affected are the middle and lower classes, centrally the Chavista social base.

Chavismo was configured as something of its own identity, the political name for those who were always out of the game. There is an equation that rarely fails: the more materially humble a neighborhood is, the more Chavista its people are. The emerging middle class was the first to move away from the impacts of a war designed and combined with errors of their own—the historic middle classes mostly associated their destiny with that of the rich emigrants to Miami. The dimension of Chavismo as identity, enhanced by the rational/sentimental link with Hugo Chavez, was built by the conquest of things: they did not fall from the sky.

I hear the old man. When we are thirsty, he cuts a coconut with the machete, shares its water; part of the production—the recovered lands that now produce corn, yucca, bananas—because this is about democratising the land and restoring its productivity, which the landlords never exploited. The old man has not become rich; he has skin like leather, skinny with tense muscles. Who is going to take away his Chavista vision? Although the situation is

difficult, peasants have been evicted with the complicity of those who should be Chavistas. When offered a bribe in dollars, they turn their back on Chavismo, or maybe they never believed in it. He himself is Chavismo.

Chavismo's Social Base

There are millions like him: the hardcore social base of Chavismo, emerging when many insist the fight is over. On July 30 last year, more than eight million people went out to vote for the National Constituent Assembly after four months of violence, when being a Chavista in an upper-class area was almost certainly a death sentence. Why did they cross rivers to get around paramilitaries and go to vote? It was not for the government, the party, or the need to change the constitution. It was for something bigger, more profound. A history; an identity, it was for oneself. The scale of priorities, values and responsiveness is another.

If you do not understand class—its past, territorial, economic, cultural forms, its way of doing politics—Chavez is not understood. There is the genesis. And that's where you should begin to achieve common sense again. Because many in the same popular areas have moved away, disaffiliated, entered the army of those who rise every day to solve material problems and stopped believing in the revolution. They do not go to another political option; they return to privacy, withdrawal. A product of the wear of war and disappointment with Chavismo leaders who reproduce the ways of doing politics against which the revolution rose: monopolists of the word. It is Chavismo against itself, the many Chavismos within Chavismo. The old man knows it.

Chavez said: "I'm no longer myself." He was right.

Guilty Men of Two-Nation Theory: A Hindutva Project Borrowed by Jinnah in India

Shamsul Islam

No other fascist organisation, in the present world, can beat Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in demagoguery, double-speak and unabashed use of conspiracies. A leading Indian English daily, in the aftermath of 2002 genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, candidly wrote that in case of the RSS, what George Orwell termed as “doublespeak” would be an understatement.¹ It stands true always in the case of RSS. So far as its conspiring mind-set is concerned, it was none other than Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who became the first President of independent India, who brought to the notice of the first home minister of India, Sardar Patel that,

I am told that RSS people have a plan of creating trouble. They have got a number of men dressed as Muslims and looking like Muslims who are to create trouble with the Hindus by attacking them and thus inciting the Hindus. Similarly there will be some Hindus among them who will attack Muslims and thus incite Muslims. The result of this kind of trouble amongst the Hindus and Muslims will be to create a conflagration.²

These above mentioned nasty characteristics of the RSS are in full flow in the case of the recent Hindutva hoodlums’ attack on Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in the name of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Here is a brief recap of the attack: The former Vice President of India,

Hamid Ansari was to address students of AMU as part of awarding the life-time membership of the Aligarh Muslim University Students’ Union (AMUSU) ceremony on May 2, 2018. This programme of Ansari, the former VP of India had the clearance of the intelligence agencies and local State administration as per the protocol.

According to Ansari, his programme at AMU was publicly known and the authorities concerned had been officially intimated about the standard arrangements, including security for the occasion. Despite all this, “the access of the intruders to close proximity of the university guest house where I was staying remains unexplained”.³ The Hindutva hoodlums justified the attack arguing that in AMUSU a photo of founder of Pakistan was displayed. Jinnah’s photo was there as he was conferred life-time membership in the year 1938. It never bothered the Hindutva gang for more than 80 years, but they now resurrected this issue as Hindutva rulers in power in UP were losing fast support of the common Hindus. Ansari rightly said that the precise timings of the attack on AMU and “the excuse manufactured for justifying it” raises serious questions. The Hindutva arsonists demanding removal of Jinnah’s portrait thought that nation did not know that Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, ran coalition governments with the Hindu Mahasabha in 1942–43, as we will see later.

A Few Facts About Jinnah We Must Know

It is pertinent to know the past of Jinnah before he became a prophet of Muslim separatism. During the early decades of the 20th century, he was a die-hard secularist and a part of the Congress leadership, which included Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Annie Besant, M.K. Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel and other such icons who led the freedom movement against British rule. Importantly, during these years when Jinnah was apostle of Hindu–Muslim unity and stood for freedom of a united India, the Hindutva camp bracketed him with Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Azad and denigrated him.

Jinnah was not a supporter of militant activities against the British but when Bhagat Singh was jailed and the British Government, which was hell-bent on judicially murdering Bhagat Singh, introduced a bill in the Central Assembly that allowed the court case to begin against him even in the absence of the accused, he delivered a powerful speech against his trial in the Central Assembly (the then Parliament of India), on September 12, 1929. Jinnah said:

The man who goes on hunger strike has a soul. He is moved by that soul and he believes in the justice of his cause. He is no ordinary criminal, who is guilty of cold blooded, sordid wicked crime. . . . I do not approve of

the action of Bhagat Singh . . . I regret that, rightly or wrongly, the youth of today is stirred up . . . however much you deplore them and however much you say they are misguided, it is the system, this damnable system of governance, which is resented by the people.⁴

Earlier, in 1916, he was the leading defence counsel of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (a favourite of the Hindutva clan) in a sedition case against him, punishment for which could have been the death penalty. Jinnah won the historic case against the British government to the terrible humiliation of the foreign rulers.

Around 1935, there arose a serious religious conflict between Sikhs and Muslims of Lahore over possession of a religious site which was claimed to be a martyr's Gurdwara and a mosque by Sikhs and Muslims respectively. The Muslim party approached Jinnah to fight the legal battle on its behalf. Jinnah refused the brief and kept away from the case.

Jinnah parted with the Gandhiled Congress in 1920–21, as he was against mass politics, especially involving religious leaders in national politics. Congress tried to isolate him. Instead of fighting back, he chose to take a path which led him to lead the same Muslim League which earlier he had described as a representative of feudal and aristocratic elements of the Muslim community. In his personal habits and religious beliefs, he could not be counted as a practicing Muslim. Incidentally, he did not know how to read or write Urdu, being proficient in English and Gujarati.

Hindu Nationalists and Not Jinnah Propounded the Two-

Nation Theory

Long before the appearance of Muslim advocates of the two-nation theory, Hindu nationalists had propounded this idea. Muslim League advocates of the two-nation theory were late comers. In fact, in this case, they borrowed heavily from the Hindutva school of thought.

The ball was set rolling by Hindu nationalists at the end of the 19th century in Bengal. In fact Raj Narain Basu (1826–1899), the maternal grandfather of Aurobindo Ghosh, and his close associate Nabha Gopal Mitra (1840–94) can be called the co-fathers of two-nation theory and Hindu nationalism in India. Basu established a society for the promotion of national feelings among the educated natives which in fact stood for preaching the superiority of Hinduism. He organised meetings proclaiming that Hinduism despite its casteism presented a much higher social idealism than ever reached by the Christian or Islamic civilisations.

Basu not only believed in the superiority of Hinduism over other religions but also was a fervent believer in casteism. He was the first person to conceive of the idea of a Maha Hindu Samiti (All India Hindu Association) and helped in the formation of Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, a precursor of Hindu Mahasabha. He believed that through this organisation, Hindus would be able to establish an Aryan nation in India. He visualised a powerful Hindu nation not only overtaking India but the whole world. He also saw,

the noble and puissant Hindu nation rousing herself after sleep and rushing headlong towards progress with divine prowess. I see this rejuvenated nation again illumining the world by

her knowledge, spirituality and culture, and the glory of Hindu nation again spreading over the whole world.⁵

Nabha Gopal Mitra started organising an annual Hindu Mela. It used to be a gathering on the last day of every Bengali year and highlighted the Hindu nature of all aspects of Hindu Bengali life and continued uninterrupted between 1867 and 1880. Mitra also started a National Society and a National Paper for promoting unity and feelings of nationalism among Hindus. Mitra argued in his paper that the Hindus positively formed a nation by themselves. According to him,

The basis of national unity in India is the Hindu religion. Hindu nationality embraces all the Hindus of India irrespective of their locality or language.⁶

R.C. Majumdar, a keen observer of the rise of Hindu nationalism in Bengal, had no difficulty in arriving at the truth that:

Nabha Gopal forestalled Jinnah's theory of two nations by more than half a century.⁷ (And since then), consciously or unconsciously, the Hindu character was deeply imprinted on nationalism all over India.⁸

Role of Arya Samajists

The Arya Samaj in northern India aggressively preached that Hindu and Muslim communities in India were two different nations. Bhai Parmanand (1876–1947), a leading light of the Arya Samaj in northern India, who was also a leader of both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, produced an enormous amount of anti-Muslim literature which stressed the fact that India was a land of Hindus and that Muslims

should be relocated.

Long before V.D. Savarkar (1883–1966) and M.S. Golwalkar (1906–73) laid down elaborate theories of Hindu Rashtra allowing no place for minorities, it was Bhai Parmanand who declared in the beginning of the 20th century that followers of Hinduism and Islam in India were two different peoples because Muslims followed a religion which originated in Arab lands. Parmanand specialised in writing popular literature in Urdu in which the main emphasis would be on Hindus being true sons of India and Muslims as outsiders. As early as 1908–09, Parmanand called for the total exchange of Hindu and Muslim populations in two specific areas. According to his plan, elaborated in his autobiography,

*The territory beyond Sind should be united with Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier Province into a great Mussalman kingdom. The Hindus of the region should come away, while at the same time Mussalman in the rest of India should go and settle in this territory.*⁹

Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), a renowned leader of the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha as well of the Arya Samaj, was another prominent advocate of the two-nation theory. A.G. Noorani writes that:

*Long before Mohammad Ali Jinnah pronounced his poisonous two-nation theory in 1939 and demanded a ruinous partition of India in 1940, the Mahasabha leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Savarkar had openly advocated this theory. . .*¹⁰

In 1899, Lajpat Rai while writing an article for the Indian National Congress in the Hindustan Review

declared that “Hindus are a nation in themselves, because they represent civilisation all their own.”¹¹ By 1924 he was more articulate in expounding his two-nation theory. He wrote:

*Under my scheme the Muslims will have four Muslim States: (1) The Pathan Province of the North Western Frontier (2) Western Punjab (3) Sindh and (4) Eastern Bengal. If there are compact Muslim communities in any other part of India, sufficiently large to form a Province, they should be similarly constituted. But it should be distinctly understood that this is not a united India. It means a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India.*¹²

Lajpat Rai proposed the partition of Punjab in the following words,

*I would suggest that a remedy should be sought by which the Muslims might get a decisive majority without trampling on the sensitiveness of the Hindus and the Sikhs. My suggestion is that the Punjab should be partitioned into two provinces, the Western Punjab with a large Muslim majority, to be a Muslim-governed Province; and the Eastern Punjab, with a large Hindu–Sikhs majority, to be a non-Muslim governed Province.*¹³

It may be noted that the Muslim flag-bearers of the two-nation theory had a fair knowledge of theories propounded by Lajpat Rai and others. However, instead of challenging this anti-national and anti-Muslim theory, they simply copied it.

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Citizens' Statement on Police Violence Against Sterlite Protestors in Thoothukudi

On May 22, 2018, the Tamil Nadu police opened fire in Thoothukudi on a protest march in which thousands of people were participating, demanding the closure of the Sterlite Copper Plant in their area. At least 13 people have died in the firing, and hundreds injured. The police even gave hot pursuit and shot at women and others in fishing hamlets like Thereseapuram.

The people who died are just ordinary people who have been forced to take to the streets, and march to the Collectorate to demand action from an administration that has systematically and for decades failed to enforce the law on Sterlite, and allowed it to violate environmental and land use planning laws with impunity for over two decades.

The District Collector, the chairperson and member secretary of Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, the Secretaries holding the environment portfolios in the Central and State governments, the Ministers of Environment at the State and Centre, and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu need to account for their inaction in the face of overwhelming evidence of illegalities, environmental harm and damage to public health.

Just two months ago, on March 24th 2018, there was a similar protest in which too tens of thousands of people had participated. This forced the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) and the Rural Development Officer (RDO), to take groundwater samples from

7 locations within Sterlite factory premises and 8 from villages around the factory. The results revealed widespread and high levels of contamination in all 15 groundwater sources. Levels of the neurotoxin heavy metal lead, which is particularly toxic to children, were found to be between 4 and 55 times higher than levels considered safe for drinking water.

The company has been shut down many a times through court orders for violation of environmental safeguards, since 1998. At least 15 workers have died and many have been injured due to hazardous working conditions. In 2013, the Supreme Court of India too found the company guilty of misrepresentation, unlicensed operation and polluting the environment, but curiously allowed the company to operate after paying a small fine as it felt India needed the copper.

The company failed to reform its ways even after this narrow judicial escape. The regulators—TNPCB and Ministry of Environment and Forests—too continued their cosy relationship with Sterlite ignoring blatant violations of statutory conditions and clear indications of pollution.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has lost its moral right to govern, and should at the very least ensure that the senior ministers who failed to read the signs properly and take preventive action resign. But before anything else, the Government of Tamil Nadu should have the decency to declare an end to the

toxic terrorism unleashed by Sterlite and permanently close down the polluting unit.

We also demand of the Govt. of TN immediate disbursement of at least Rs. 1 crore compensation to the families of each of the deceased persons, Rs. 50 lakhs to each of the severely injured persons and a permanent government job to at least one member in the family of each of the deceased.

Sd/ by over 100 activists from all over the country.

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