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D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Mumbai - 400 007.

Email : janataweekly@gmail.comWebsite: www.janataweekly.org

Socialist Candidate Lopez Obrador Wins Mexican Presidential Elections

Neeraj Jain

In a major victory for the global socialist movement, the leftist candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (widely known as AMLO) won the presidency of Mexico in the elections held on July 1, 2018 with a landslide win. He got more than 53% of the vote, more than double the total for his nearest rival, according to a preliminary count released by Mexico's electoral authority INE.

With participation at 62.9%, Ricardo Anaya from the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) came second with just over 22% of the vote.

AMLO will be the first socialist president of Mexico, and will be the first president who is not from either the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) or PAN in almost a century. After his win, he announced that he would tour the country as president-elect as part of creating a government "of the people, by the people, for the people". He said his government will be a transition period for a new era in Mexico's history. Lopez Obrador will take office on December 1, 2018 and will govern until 2024.

AMLO's party, *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* or Morena

(English: National Regeneration Movement) fought the 2018 presidential elections in coalition with the left-wing Labor Party (PT) and the conservative Social Encounter Party (PES) under the name of *Juntos haremos historia* (English: Together we will make history). Morena and the Together We Will Make History coalition are also slated to gain an absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, giving Lopez Obrador ample legislative support when he enters office next December. AMLO's Morena party also swept the local elections. The party took 80.2% of municipal polls, while PAN had a sorry turn out of 11.5% and the PRI 8.2% of local votes.

The landslide win would give AMLO a platform both to address Mexico's internal problems and face external challenges like the threat of a trade war with the United States. Lopez Obrador has said he wants to make Mexico more economically independent of the United States. He also declared that one of his priorities would be to root out corruption, and said he would spare no one, including comrades, friends

and officials, in his commitment to root it out. His Moreno party supports “zero tolerance” of security force corruption, a law against conflict of interest, an “accelerated” transition over to renewable energy, and a return to peace in the streets and homes.

One of the most important changes planned by AMLO is to reform the approach taken on security matters, which includes the removal of military forces from the streets through a training and professionalisation plan for the police. Over the past decade, Mexico, in collaboration with the United States, unleashed the military on the country's drug cartels. This “war” has claimed over 150,000 lives between December 2006 and August 2015, making Mexico one of the world's most deadly conflict zones.

Indicating that he was serious about his promise to change the government approach on public security, AMLO announced immediately after his victory that he will not use the services of the presidential security. "I will not use the services of the presidential general staff, I will not be surrounded by bodyguards, those who fight for justice have nothing to fear . . . The people will protect me," he said in a speech.

Obrador also announced that he and his staff are working on proposals to improve living conditions for the Mexican people that include scholarships for young people, pensions for the elderly and the revision of previously awarded oil contracts.

Socialist Leaders Congratulate AMLO

Immediately after the results

were released, Lopez Obrador was congratulated by socialist leaders from across the globe, including US Senator Bernie Sanders and the leader of the British Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn.

Corbyn repeated Lopez Obrador's recurring words “yes we can” and assured that change is possible both in Mexico and in United Kingdom, where the left is still the opposition. “We can bring a voice to the poor and marginalised, we can bring change, we can win. Today is a new beginning. As we build for the future we must also remember and secure justice for those who died during those elections,” he continued, in reference to the many candidates, politicians and citizens who were killed during the campaign period.

On his Facebook site, Bernie Sanders also congratulated Mexico's president-elect: “Congratulations to Andres Manuel López Obrador, the newly elected president of

Mexico. Now is the time to stand up to Trump's divisiveness and xenophobia and create a continent which brings countries together to focus on economic, social, racial and environmental justice.”

Several other Latin American socialist leaders, including the President of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro and the Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, also congratulated AMLO for his stunning victory in the polls. Calling Lopez Obrador a brother as he hailed his "overwhelming victory" Bolivian President Evo Morales said: “We are sure that your government will write a new page in the history of Latin American dignity and sovereignty.” The Argentinian football legend Diego Armando Maradona also hailed AMLO's victory, saying that Lopez Obrador's victory means the Latin American people are “alive.”

Email: neerajj61@gmail.com

What Option is There Before India and Pakistan But for Friendship and Peace?

Sandeep Pandey

The India Pakistan Friendship and Peace march from Ahmedabad to Nada Bet during 19 to 29 June, 2018 concluded successfully, even though Ahmedabad Police detained the marchers for about 3 hours as soon as the march began from Gandhi Ashram, and the Border Security Force didn't give permission to the march to reach the border and stopped it at Nadeshwari Mata Mandir, a distance of 25 km from the border. Hence the total distance of this march on foot was curtailed to about 250 km. From

Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad, the march proceeded along Adalaj, Kalol, Chatral, Nandasan, Mandali, Mehsana, Bokarwada, Sihi, Balisana, Patan, Dunawada, Roda, Totana, Thara, Devdarbar, Diyodar, Kuwala, Bhabhar, Dudhwa and Suigam to Nadeshwari Mata Mandir at Nada Bet.

The march was taken out to demand that the Governments of India and Pakistan reach an agreement to stop killing each other's soldiers on the border. Recently on 21 June 2018, on the occasion of

international yoga day, Indian and Chinese soldiers practiced yoga together at Daulat Beg Oldie in eastern Ladakh. Why can't a similar atmosphere of bonhomie be created on the India–Pakistan border? The two countries need to grant easy permission for visas to each other's citizens to allow them to travel across the border. If possible, they should waive the visa requirement for old people, children, journalists, academics, social activists, religious leaders and labourers. One route on Gujarat border with Sind should be opened to facilitate travel and trade between two countries either at Khavda or Nada Bet. The bus service between Suigam and Nagarparkar which was there till 1972 should be restored. Opening of Khavda route will be a great help for those fisherfolk whose family members get caught by the coastal guards of the other country and then have to spend years in jail without any information reaching back home. Sometimes family members may not even know that their kin have landed in jail on the other side of border. Recently, it was reported that a Gujarat fisherman Deva Ram Baraiya died in a Karachi jail and his family has yet to receive any official communication from any of the two governments or his body, even though three months have elapsed since his death (his body has being preserved by a Pakistani NGO at its morgue). Two other fishermen, also from Gujarat, Dana Arjun Chauhan and Rama Mansi Gohil, suffering from various ailments, were released at the Wagah border. One can imagine the travails of their arduous journey back home, covering thousands of kilometers on both sides of border. The two countries must make public the

list of each other's prisoners and ensure their early release, preferably through a shorter route. For people who may find it difficult to get a passport made or obtain a visa, if the daily evening military ceremony at Wagah–Attari border is replaced by a Peace Park and people from across the border are allowed to meet freely for a couple of hours every day merely by depositing one of their identity cards and under a suitable security apparatus, the event would serve a great purpose. Such peace parks could be created at all openings along the border. Finally, it is important that China, India and Pakistan should give up their nuclear weapons to make Asia a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone and safe for all people of the region and the world.

About 500 signatures were collected during the march on the above mentioned issues on a petition addressed to the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan.

The peace march received a major boost when PM Narendra Modi's wife Jashodaben decided to join the march on 23 June for about half an hour in the morning to express her solidarity. She whole heartedly supported the idea of peace and friendship with Pakistan and thought that the killing of soldiers was avoidable. Jashodaben's endorsement also had a soothing effect on the people subscribing to jingoistic variety of nationalism who were raising questions about the goals of the march. Jashodaben and her brother Ashok Modi also signed the statement of the march.

During the march, people raised the demand at Balisana, where about hundred families have relatives in Karachi, to open a Pakistani Consulate at Ahmedabad so that they could be saved the trouble of

going all the way to Delhi to obtain their visas.

Baldev Nath Bapu, the head priest of a temple in Devdarbar belonging to Lohana (Thakkar) community, hosted the peace march during daytime on 26 June, 2018. He described his experience of visiting Pakistan in October 2017 for about a month. He is building a hospital in Salemkot from the donations he received from his followers in Pakistan. He refuted the allegations that Hindus are forcibly converted to Islam in Pakistan and temples are destroyed there. He publicly stated that not once during his month long stay there did he receive any complaints like these. He said that in Pakistan people are talking about the possibility of Suigam–Nagarparkar route being opened by 2020 or 2022.

Earlier, in Totana, the march paid its respect to Sadaram Bapu, aged over hundred years, who has played an important part in preserving communal harmony in the area. It appears that spiritual gurus have a role in maintaining peace and harmony along the Gujarat–Sind border.

At a closing event of the march in Ahmedabad, peace activists from Pakistan Karamat Ali and Saeeda Diep joined over internet and interacted with the marchers and their supporters. Entrepreneur Piyush Desai of Wagh Bakri tea company was so overwhelmed with the idea of the peace march that he has decided to hold weekly meetings at Gandhi Ashram to promote the philosophy of peace and communal harmony.

A letter has been written to Narendra Modi on behalf of the India–Pakistan Friendship and Peace march to start a bus service between Ahmedabad and Karachi similar to

the one started by former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee between Delhi and Lahore.

India and Pakistan have been overtaken by Bangladesh in social indices like literacy, malnourishment, sanitation, health status of children and women, fertility rate and women empowerment primarily because both of them have invested heavily in defence, including the development

of dangerous nuclear weapons, whereas Bangladesh has judiciously concentrated on improving the general condition of its women and children. The security for common people comes from fulfillment of their basic needs. Nuclear weapons at best protect the vested interests of the ruling elite. How are our nuclear weapons providing security to a child dying of hunger or a farmer

committing suicide? If we don't take care of the basic needs of people, of what use are the pompous weapons for common people?

India and Pakistan must bury their differences and resolve all their outstanding disputes amicably through dialogue and give peace a chance.

Email: ashaashram@yahoo.com

Compulsions of 2019: Retreat in Kashmir

Anil Sinha

New Delhi has made one more retreat in Kashmir. The Mehbooba Mufti government was forced out and governor's rule imposed. There should not be any doubt that the BJP decided to withdraw from its alliance with PDP because it knew that there is no solution to the Kashmir issue right now. The government also knew that if there is any solution, it is not for it to implement it. The BJP wants itself to be seen as a strong party which can go to any extent to deal with terrorists or any one opposed to the Indian state. The 2019 polls are only few months away and the party felt it urgent to reinforce the image.

This is not the first time that a ministry in Kashmir has been forced to end its tenure without completing it. It has been done several times since 1953, when Sheikh Abdullah, then prime minister of Kashmir, was dismissed and arrested. He had no clue of New Delhi's plan about him. He was holidaying in Gulmarg when he was served the order of the Sadr-i-Riyasat, the constitutional head of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. He was accused of conspiring to declare Kashmir independent. In

fact, two of his ministers conspired with New Delhi and staged the coup. The Sadr-i-Riyasat, the Yuvraj of the erstwhile Maharaja Hari Singh, was manipulated to order the dismissal.

Since then, it has been repeated many times. One thing has remained common each time, that every time people associated with security play an important role. In 1953, the then Chief of Intelligence B.N. Mullik had played a key role. This time, National Security Advisor Aji Doval was there to guide the government. Shortly before the decision, Doval met BJP president Amit Shah at his residence.

However, one factor has changed significantly. The opposition to New Delhi is now not limited to political parties. It is now dominated by diverse elements, from communal fanatics to liberal progressives. The field fighters are generally led by terrorist organisations based in Pakistan. This was not the case till the early nineties. Now, the security forces are equipped with Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

The BJP cited deterioration in the security situation and the

“discriminatory attitude” towards Jammu and Ladakh regions, areas with non-Muslim majority, as the reasons for withdrawing support to the government. While it avoided detailing its other differences with the PDP in public, it nevertheless leaked them. The differences, obviously, are not new. In fact, the two parties had fought the last assembly election on these same issues and had fiercely opposed each other. After the elections, even though they entered into an alliance with each other, both the alliance partners never relinquished their stance.

The issues are related to reconciliation in Kashmir. The PDP has always been demanding talks with all stake holders, including Hurriyat Conference and Pakistan. It wanted softer actions against stone pelting youths and relaxation in the powers of the armed forces. The BJP has been opposed to all these demands. The BJP wooed PDP to join the government on the assurance that it will work for peace and reconciliation in the valley, and lent its support to the “healing-touch” policy of the PDP. However,

after formation of the coalition government, the BJP did not adhere to its promises. Now, it is blaming the PDP for discriminating with Jammu and Ladakh in the distribution of Rs 80,000 crore development allocation from the Centre.

It is now clear that there was no basis for forming a coalition. It looks as if the BJP had formed the coalition government to maintain the status quo in the Kashmir valley, so that the Kashmir issue should not become a hinderance in its governing the rest of the nation. The party knew very well that it could not adopt a soft stand—neither could it abandon its demand of repealing Article 370, nor could it endorse soft measures—because that would go against its long standing stance.

In fact, the BJP has never changed its Kashmir policy, not even in the Vajpayee era. It always said that they were suspending their demand because their coalition partner did not agree. Their partnership with the PDP never deterred them from expressing aggression on the Kashmir issue. It could be seen during actions like the surgical strike. While the coalition government in Kashmir did not do any official propaganda about this, the BJP made a hype of it.

The planned status quo has harmed the prospects of reconciliation immensely. The PDP has lost its credibility and in turn the country has lost a strong democratic force in the valley. Among the mainstream political parties, this was the only party which had considerable following in the alienated areas in Kashmir.

Past experience clearly suggests that the valley has been peaceful in times when we had better relations with Pakistan. It also suggests that

there is no way other than dialogue to move towards a settlement.

A close scrutiny of the historical evidence would reveal that the deterioration in the Kashmir situation has much to do with the failure of India in keeping the country secular. Very few people now recall that the National Conference showed its commitment towards secularism and progressive ideology in the era when the rightwing and communal ideology was at its peak. In the 1930s, when organisations like Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League were spreading virulent form of communalism and secular leaders such as Abdul Gaffar Khan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had failed to contain its spread, Sheikh Abdullah had successfully fought against it. He even succeeded in changing the name of Kashmir Muslim Conference to National Conference in 1939 and incorporated people from all religions and faith in its leadership. His Naya Kashmir manifesto was far more progressive than any of the contemporary documents. The Naya Kashmir resolution envisaged

a socialistic and secular society. The National Conference was under the ideological influence of Gandhi and Nehru. Impressed by the amity in Kashmir, Gandhi remarked on August 1, 1947 that Kashmir is the beacon of light for secular India.

The communal propaganda in the state by Praja Parishad and Jan Sangh's campaign in other parts of the country affected relations between the union government and Sheikh Abdullah. Nehru succumbed to anti-Sheikh propaganda and agreed to order the arrest of the greatest leader of the state. "The Sheikh's dismissal and arrest on 9 August 1953, apart from causing a revolt in the state, caused a deep wound in the psyche of Kashmiris. It meant that while Kashmir remained steadfast with secular India, the Union didn't!" writes senior Kashmiri leader Professor Saifuddin Soz in his recently released book.

We fail to understand that Kashmir is not a geography, it is an identity. Identities needs negotiation.

Email: sinhaa43@gmail.com

Emergency, Indira Gandhi and RSS

L.S. Herdenia

I do not hold any brief for Indira Gandhi as far her decision to impose emergency is concerned. There is no doubt that the emergency period will be recorded as a black chapter in the democratic history of the country. But certainly, I have every reason to differ with Arun Jaitley when he compares Indira Gandhi with Hitler.

Hitler perhaps was the cruellest ruler in the history of mankind. Besides destroying all the democratic institutions of Germany, he targeted

one particular community (Jews) and wanted their total physical annihilation. While Indira Gandhi also committed many atrocities during the emergency, she did not go to the extremes to which Hitler went. She did not target any particular community during the emergency. In our country, there are leaders who orchestrated the genocide of people belonging to particular community in Gujarat, but certainly, Indira was not one of them.

Hitler not only destroyed democracy but destroyed Germany itself. But Jaitley must appreciate the fact that Indira restored democracy and ordered elections, fully knowing that total annihilation awaits her.

Here I will like to draw attention to another fact that Jaitley ignores, that the then Chief of the RSS congratulated Indira Gandhi when the Supreme Court gave judgment in her favour. M.D. Deoras, in his letter to Mrs. Gandhi written from Yerwada Central Jail dated 10 November 1975, wrote, "Let me congratulate you as five judges of the Supreme Court have declared the validity of your election". In an earlier letter written to Mrs. Gandhi from Yerwada Jail on 22 August 1975, Deoras had stated, "I heard your address to the nation which you delivered on August 15, 1975, from Red Fort on the radio in jail [Yervada jail] with attention. Your address was timely and balanced so I decided to write to you." In this letter Deoras praised the programme which Mrs. Gandhi announced in the course of her speech. Deoras writes, "As you said in your speech delivered on 15th August 1975 inviting the entire country to this work, it was most befitting occasion and the time".

These days, the BJP and the RSS claim that they were the main opponents of the emergency and that it was largely due to their struggle that the emergency was lifted. But the fact is that the RSS assured Mrs. Gandhi that the Sangh keeps itself aloof from the power politics. In the above mentioned letter dated 10 November 1975, Deoras writes, "RSS has been named in the context of Jayaprakash Narayan's movement. The government has also connected RSS with Gujarat movement and Bihar movement without any reason.

The Sangh has no relation to these movements." Deoras repeatedly appealed to the Prime Minister to "set free thousands of RSS workers and remove the restriction on the Sangh. If done so, power of selfless work on the part of lakhs of RSS volunteers will be utilised for national upliftment (government as well as non-government)".

Deoras also sought the help of Vinoba Bhave in lifting the ban on the RSS. In a letter written to him from St. George's Hospital's prison ward no. 14, Bombay, Deoras wrote, "At the feet of respected Acharya Vinobaji, this is my prayer to you that you kindly try to remove the wrong notion of the Prime Minister about the Sangh and as a result of which the RSS volunteers will be set free. The ban on the Sangh will be lifted and such a condition will prevail as to enable the volunteers of the Sangh to participate in the planned programme of action relating to country's progress and prosperity under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Prayer for your blessings."

Shri Jaitley claims that Indira Gandhi was like Hitler. If so, why did the Sangh, of which you were a part in 1975 and are now one of its top leaders, accept Indira Gandhi as their leader. It may be mentioned here that Vinod Dua in his popular programme Jan Gan Man Ki Baat has termed Deoras' letters as pieces of apology.

During the emergency, a slogan was very popular: Emergency ke teen dalal, Vidya, Sanjay, Bansilal. At that time, Vidya Charan Shukla was the Information & Broadcasting Minister, Bansilal was the Defence Minister, and Sanjay Gandhi was the younger son and the closest confidant of Indira Gandhi. All these three were the main executioners of

the emergency. Later BJP co-opted both V.C. Shukla and Bansilal. V.C. Shukla contested the Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket, while the BJP became a part of the Haryana state ministry headed by Bansilal. Sanjay died in an air crash in 1980, but BJP admitted his wife Maneka Gandhi to the party and made her Central Minister, and she continues to be so. To the best of our information, Maneka Gandhi has not condemned the emergency till today. If Indira was like Hitler, then V.C. Shukla, Bansilal and Sanjay Gandhi were her main commanders. Shah Commission, which the Janata Government constituted to enquire into atrocities committed during the emergency, found them guilty of doing several acts to enforce the provisions of the emergency. It was V.C. Shukla who monitored the censorship on the media. What happened afterwards for the BJP to reward Shukla? This was the volte face of the BJP, which is the political wing of the RSS.

In the end, it may be mentioned that the RSS actually has admiration for Hitler. This admiration was reflected in some school textbooks of Gujarat. There was a hue and cry against this act of the Gujarat government, after which these laudable references to Hitler were removed.

Spectre of Fascism

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Stronger Laws Needed For Social Security of Unorganised Workers

Bharat Dogra

One of the gravest shortcomings of labour welfare in India has been that while as many as 90 percent of the workers are in unorganised sector, most of the welfare laws have not been applicable to them.

Enacting protective umbrella legislation which can apply to all sections of unorganised workers is not easy as a very wide range of works and occupations have to be covered. Some of these leading occupations are—agricultural workers, forest workers, rickshaw pullers, vendors, domestic workers, home based workers, construction workers, rag pickers and wholesale / retail trade workers. Nevertheless, it is important to have a comprehensive law that provides at least some protection for all unorganised workers as the alternative is to have separate laws for too many categories of workers—a task which is even more complicated and time-consuming.

In this context it is important to look back at some important recommendations of the Second Labour Commission as these still remain very relevant.

The Second National Commission on Labour (NCL) was asked, as perhaps its most significant task, to propose an umbrella type legislation for workers in the unorganised sector.

The NCL Report explained why it is important to have new legislation to cover various categories of unorganised workers, and also elaborated on the scope and aims of this legislation:

Most of the Labour Laws that we have today are relevant only to the organised sector. Furthermore, the laws in the statute book that relate to some sectors of the unorganised sector are too inadequate to give protection or welfare for the vast majority of workers in the unorganised sector. The schemes of Welfare Funds and Welfare Boards are also confined to a few states and specific categories of workers in the unorganised sector. It is in this context that we have to look at the need for new legislation that will have general applicability and will provide essential protection.

The way to extend legal protection to the employments and vocations in the unorganised sector is not by legislating separately for each employment or vocation. This will only multiply the number of laws when one of our goals is to simplify and reduce the number of existing laws. It is, therefore, logical and wise to enact an umbrella type of law for the unorganised sector which would guarantee a minimum of protection and welfare to all workers in the unorganised sector, and would leave it open to the government to bring in special laws for different employments or sub-sectors if experience indicates the need for it, provided that the sub-sectoral laws do not take away any of the basic rights or the

access to social security that the umbrella legislation provides. Such an arrangement will give full respect to the federal nature of our Constitution as well as the different needs of diverse groups of workers. It will also be open to governments to repeal existing sub-sector laws or merge existing (welfare) Boards with the Boards or Funds that we are suggesting in the Umbrella Legislation.

The unorganised sector accounts for over 90% of our work force. Their percentage is likely to increase. They are as entitled to protection and welfare / security as workers in the organised sector, who are often described today as the privileged sector of the work force. The laws that exist today hardly touch the work force in the unorganised sector. It is therefore necessary to enact new legislation to cover workers in this sector. There is a wide variety of employments in this sector. Conditions vary, levels of organisation vary. The nature of the relations with employers vary. There is an expanding sector of those who are self-employed, or are on contract, and work from homes. It is difficult to have separate laws for each employment. This will only result in endless multiplication of laws. "Hence the need for one umbrella legislation" that covers whatever is basic and common, and leaves room for supplementary legislation

or rules where specific areas demand special attention. But we cannot overlook the fact that all such legislation is enacted with the twin purposes of extending protection, and welfare / security. Protection includes security of employment, identification of minimum wages or fair wages, making the minimum known to workers, ensuring the full payment of these wages without unauthorised deductions, and a machinery at the threshold of his / her workplace to enforce the law on minimum wages and working conditions. Welfare / security has to include medical services, compensation for injury, insurance, provident fund, pensionary benefit, etc. We have also tried to keep in view the need to ensure that the machinery proposed for enforcement of benefits is not vitiated by distance, centralisation, top heavy structure, inaccessibility, multiplication of administrative set-ups, etc.

The NLC Report says that in specific terms, the objectives of the legislation will have to be:

- a) To obtain recognition for all workers in the unorganised sector.
- b) To ensure a minimum level of economic security to these workers.
- c) To ensure a minimum level of social security to these workers.
- d) To facilitate the removal of the poverty of these workers.
- e) To ensure future opportunities for children by eliminating child labour.
- f) To encourage formation of membership based organisations of workers including Trade

Unions.

- g) To ensure representation of workers through their organisations in local and national economic decision making.

According to the NLC, the Social Security measures for the unorganised workers should include:

- a. Health care;
- b. Maternity and early child care;
- c. Provident fund benefits;
- d. Family benefits;
- e. Amenities / Benefits including housing, drinking water, sanitation, etc.;
- f. Compensation for injury during employment (including invalidity benefits and survivor's or dependent's benefits);
- g. Retirement and post-retirement benefits (gratuity, pension and family pension);
- h. Some cover in cases of loss of earning or the capacity to earn;
- i. Besides these, there should be schemes, either independent or in association with the government, welfare bodies, NGOs and social organisations, for the upgradation of skills and the education of workers, and for the elimination of child labour, forced labour, and unfair labour relations and practices.

After holding discussions with a large number of concerned persons and considering the recommendations of a study group on this issue, the National Commission on Labour suggested a draft of this legislation in which apex boards for unorganised sector workers will be created in all States by the respective State governments. This apex board in consultation with the State government will create State Welfare Boards for various categories of workers. The State

Board in consultation with district panchayats will also constitute district boards.

In this draft, Worker Facilitation Centres (WFCs) are local centres of activities of the Board, co-ordinated by respective District Boards. The District Board in consultation with local panchayats will constitute them, WFCs will work in panchayats and areas of workers' concentration. Workers will be enrolled by the WFC and welfare benefits to them will also be provided by WFCs.

The Central and State Boards will raise funds by way of contribution, cess, assistance, grant from government through budget allocation or donations from employment providers, private sector, workers and other legally permitted sources.

The Board will encourage the growth and formation of organisations of workers. A legal minimum wage will be fixed without any gender discrimination. Non-payment of minimum wage shall be punishable. Women workers will be given due representation at all levels.

The Central and State Government shall order dearness allowance on minimum wage linked to All India Consumer Price Index Number at least once in every six months, and where the dearness allowance is ordered on the above lines the minimum wages shall be revised once in five years and in other cases once in two years.

Workers will be covered by social protection measures as may be prescribed by the Central or State Government. The worker shall be eligible to social security protection, namely, old age, invalidity, group insurance, sickness, medical and employment injury benefits. The woman worker shall be eligible for

maternity benefits and childcare / daycare facility while at work. The local authorities will create and invest their resources to develop better living conditions for the workers by providing amenities like housing, safe drinking water, sanitation, etc. The State Board shall encourage alternate insurance for employment injury to cover employer's liability

under Workmen's Compensation Act.

Work shall be permitted only in safe and healthy environment and working places. The State government may frame appropriate rules in this regard. Workers shall have sufficient rest, leisure, holidays, leave and optimal working hours. Workers shall be given one holiday

in each week.

As the legislation enacted since then has fallen short of these recommendations, it is important to keep alive these recommendations and to emphasise that the right of unorganised sector workers need to be protected much more effectively by better and stronger legislation.

Email: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

India Most Dangerous Country for Women

Belinda Goldsmith and Meka Beresford

India is the world's most dangerous country for women due to the high risk of sexual violence and being forced into slave labour, according to a poll of global experts released on June 26, 2018.

War-torn Afghanistan and Syria ranked second and third in the Thomson Reuters Foundation survey of about 550 experts on women's issues, followed by Somalia and Saudi Arabia.

The only Western nation in the top 10 was the United States, which ranked joint third when respondents were asked where women were most at risk of sexual violence, harassment and being coerced into sex.

The poll was a repeat of a survey in 2011 that found experts seeing Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, India and Somalia as the most dangerous countries for women.

Experts said India moving to the top of the poll showed not enough was being done to tackle the danger women faced, more than five years after the rape and murder of a student on a bus in Delhi made violence against women a national priority. Government data shows reported cases of crime against women rose

by 83 percent between 2007 and 2016, when there were four cases of rape reported every hour.

The survey asked respondents which five of the 193 United Nations member states they thought were most dangerous for women and which country was worst in terms of healthcare, economic resources, cultural or traditional practices, sexual violence and harassment, non-sexual violence and human trafficking.

Respondents also ranked India the most dangerous country for women in terms of human trafficking, including sex slavery and domestic servitude, and for customary practices such as forced marriage, stoning and female infanticide.

India's Ministry of Women and Child Development declined to comment on the survey results.

Trapped by War

Afghanistan fared worst in four of the seven questions, with concerns over healthcare and conflict-related violence. Kimberly Otis, director of advancement at Women for Afghan Women, said women and girls faced severe gender-based violence, abuse,

illiteracy, poverty and other human rights offences.

"The ongoing war and conflict are getting worse in Afghanistan, which puts the lives of women and girls at increasing risk," said US-based Otis, a survey participant.

Afghanistan's Public Health Minister Ferozuddin Feroz said the deteriorating security situation was making life difficult for women, with large parts of the country still in the control of Taliban fighters after nearly 17 years of war.

"Nowadays, suicide bombings and armed conflict is the third (highest) cause of deaths and disability in Afghanistan," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview in London.

"Instead of focusing (spending) on maternal health, on nutritional status, we spend it on trauma."

The impact of a seven-year war drove Syria into third place in the survey, amid concerns over access to healthcare and both sexual and non-sexual violence.

"There are so many dangers for girls and women," said Maria Al Abdeh, executive director of Women Now For Development, which supports women's centres in Syria.

“There is sexual violence by government forces. Domestic violence and child marriage are increasing and more women are dying in childbirth. The tragedy is nowhere near an end.”

Somalia, where more than two decades of war has fuelled a culture of violence and weakened institutions meant to uphold the law, was again named as one of the five most dangerous countries for women.

Saudi Arabia ranked fifth, with women’s rights experts saying there had been some progress in recent years, but the recent arrests of female activists ahead of the lifting of a ban on women driving showed much more needed to be done.

“One of the worst laws that prevent women from having equal opportunities is guardianship—because every woman is subjected to a male guardian. She cannot get a passport, cannot travel, sometimes she cannot work,” said Ahlam Akram, founder of BASIRA (British Arabs Supporting Universal Women’s Rights) in the UK.

#MeToo Puts US on List

Experts said the surprise addition of the United States in the top 10 most dangerous countries for women came down to the #MeToo and Time’s Up campaigns against sexual harassment and violence that have dominated headlines for months.

“People want to think income means you’re protected from misogyny, and sadly that’s not the case,” said Cindy Southworth, executive vice president of the Washington-based National Network to End Domestic Violence.

Rounding out the top 10 most dangerous countries for women were

Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen and Nigeria.

India, Libya and Myanmar were considered the world’s most dangerous nations for women exploited by human traffickers in a global crime worth an estimated \$150 billion a year.

“In many countries the simple fact of being female creates a heightened risk of becoming a victim of slavery,” said Nick Grono, chief executive of the Freedom Fund, the first private donor fund dedicated to

ending slavery.

The poll of 548 people was conducted online, by phone and in person between March 26 and May 4 with an even spread across Europe, Africa, the Americas, South East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific.

Respondents included aid professionals, academics, healthcare staff, non-government organisation workers, policy-makers, development specialists and social commentators.

Chavismo: Part VII

The concluding part of a seven part series of articles by Marco Teruggi on the ongoing socialist revolutionary project in Venezuela that the Venezuelans fondly call Chavismo, in memory of Hugo Chavez, the brilliant and charismatic leader of the Venezuelan revolution who died in 2013. Chavez himself called it Bolivarian Revolution, to commemorate Simon Bolivar.

The Barracks and the Revolution

Marco Teruggi

It is a forested area near the border with Colombia. The members of the militia gradually arrive, in motorcycles, buses, trucks. They are coming from the shanties in the outskirts of the nearby town. They have come for a day-long training camp of the National Bolivarian Militia of Venezuela, which is a part of Venezuela’s National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB). They are proudly wearing their beige uniforms, with insignia denoting their different ranks. They include people of all ages, both young and old, many are women, they are people from various walks of life, but what is common to them all is, they are all Chavistas. They practice formation drills and shooting, learn how to quickly respond to emergencies, etc. At the

end of the day, they will change into their civilian clothes once again and go back to their daily activities.

The militia is a key element of the Chavista project. Just as a revolution cannot be built from above, through the state apparatus, it cannot be defended in the classical way, with doctrines learnt from North America in the School of the Americas. This becomes all the more important in a situation where the enemy is attacking you through methods that do not correspond to traditional forms of warfare—it does not have uniformed armies, declared generals and regular armaments. It is not even easily identifiable. Most importantly, it is all the time seeking to create the illusion that it does not exist.

Popular Participation

The premise for building the militia is the same as that for every aspect of the socialist construction project in Venezuela: there is no possibility of revolutionary transformation of society, the society cannot advance towards socialism, without incorporating new forms of organisation which encourage maximum possible participation of the people. Chavez described the militias as “a first sign of developing a popular armed force to safeguard our integrity and our sovereignty” and “expressions of the new communal state; an integral part of the new structures of communal power that we are building”. And so, in 2008, the government passed a law forming the National Bolivarian Militia. The doctrine on which the militia was formed was that it was necessary to have “the people in arms” both for supporting the FANB against imperialist aggression and for defence of the nation against internal enemies. The National Militia of Venezuela is an autonomous and auxiliary force of the Armed Forces' service branches, with its own chain of command and service arms, and reports directly to the President via the Operational Strategic Command of the FANB. Responding to the call made by Chavez, tens of thousands of young men and women from all over the country, including the barrios in cities and the rural areas which constitute the social base of Chavismo, have joined the militia, described by Chavez as a strategic arm for the defence of the revolution.

There is a deeper concept underlying the formation of the militia, and that is the doctrine of “civic–military” alliance as the cornerstone for safeguarding and

advancing the revolution. “The union of the people with the soldiers, and the soldiers with the people, is one of the fundamental pillars of the Bolivarian revolution,” said Chavez, who was himself an officer in the FANB. The genesis and development of the revolution cannot be understood without understanding the development of this unity. The first important incident was the massive popular uprising called Caracazo that took place on 27 February 1989 in response to the IMF-imposed structural adjustment reforms that had led to a dramatic fall in living standards. As angry protestors from the shantytowns of Caracas poured out into the streets, the government called in the army to quell the protests. The army peppered the protestors with machine guns—more than 3000 people were killed. The government's willingness to use indiscriminate violence against its own citizens not only shocked the people but also the lower-level soldiers who were from poor backgrounds themselves—they were deeply dismayed at being ordered to kill “their own people”. This created the conditions for the military uprising of 4 February 1992 by a section of the military whose aim was restoration of democracy and inaugurating a new political era in Venezuela based on Bolivarian and nationalist principles of justice, equity and national sovereignty. The coup failed, but its leaders, including Chavez, gained enormous support among the population. It was this growing unity between the military and the people that led to the failure of the 11–13 April 2002 coup d'etat—not only was there massive mobilisation on the streets, but large sections of the military

also revolted again the military leaders who participated in the coup, notably the Maracay Battalion and the presidential honor guard.

The Military in Economic Life

The military in the ongoing Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela has been involved in playing several roles simultaneously. One of its important roles is obviously defending the country's borders against external threats. But apart from that, military officials, both serving and retired, have been appointed to important posts in government offices and public administration, and military personnel have been extensively involved in executing public policies, often in collaboration with grassroots movements. Some of the important economic responsibilities that have been carried out by the military include Great Mission Sovereign Supply (La GMAS), AgroFanb, Military Corporation for Mining, Petroleum and Gas, and the Military Transport Company (Emiltra).

La GMAS, for example, was created in 2016. It is headed by Venezuela's Defence Minister, and has the responsibility of boosting production and guaranteeing the smooth distribution of food and medicine supplies. It has also been given control of the country's ports to root out corruption and mismanagement at the point of entry for imported food.

Expanding Role for the Army

Why is the army being given an extended role in economic affairs? One reason is that following the defeat of the Chavistas in the elections to the National Assembly in 2015, the right wing opposition

in Venezuela launched a wave of economic sabotage attempts to cripple the economy. Simultaneously, the imperialist forces led by the USA launched a renewed attempt to destabilise the Venezuelan government. Faced with attacks from both external and internal flanks, in order to restore government control over the economy, the Maduro government decided to hand over crucial economic departments to the army, which is spread out all over the country, is a well-disciplined force, can implement decisions quickly due to a centralised command structure, and most importantly, its soldiers have close connections with the people of the country as they have been involved in innumerable community projects all over the country.

Despite this, the economic crisis continues, and the picture in Venezuela remains complex and the revolution is facing its greatest challenge since the 2002 coup attempt. The international blockade imposed by the United States continues. The plots of the opposition to destabilise and weaken the revolution continue; these affect the army too. The resolution of this crisis is not going to depend on changing the leadership of the revolution, but by strengthening the participation of the people in the struggle to rejuvenate the economy, including both the production and the distribution systems.

Civic-Military Myth

It is undoubted that there can be no Chavismo without the unity of the people and the armed forces, without the civic-military alliance. This bond is being stretched to its limits both by the numerous tasks that the army is being called out to do, one of

which is defending the border with Colombia from where innumerable attempts are continually being made by the USA to infiltrate and weaken the country. It is because of the loyalty of the army to Chavismo that the revolution has been able to survive the attacks by the right wing and advance so far.

Of course, there are chinks in the armour of the army too. In March this year, a conspiracy inside the FANB was nicked in the bud. Six lieutenant colonels, a first lieutenant and two sergeants belonging to a right wing movement called the 'Movement of Transition towards the Dignity of the People' were arrested. All the soldiers belonged

to the Ayala Battalion, which in one of the important battalions in the country and is located in Caracas. How much were they offered by the empire to carry out a coup?

It is important to study, deepen the understanding, and implement with renewed vigour the military doctrine laid out by Chavez on how to build an armed forces at the service of the revolution, which staunchly refuses to work for the interests of the ruling classes and the empire. It is a crucial theme for a continent where the army has historically always been associated with corrupt right wing dictatorships and the empire.

Bhindranwale Still Lives

Kuldip Nayar

Indian history is replete with tragedies which, when retold, suggest that the happenings could have been avoided. Operation Bluestar is one of them. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a militant, holed himself up at the Akal Thakt, the highest Sikh seat, and created a state within state. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi used the army to silence his guns and sent tanks into the Harmandir Saheb. Whatever one may say, Bhindranwale continues to enjoy respect in the hearts of Sikhs.

I had a taste of it the other day when, unwittingly, I referred to him as a terrorist. Sikh historian Khushwant Singh could get away with the remark that Bhindranwale was a terrorist. But I could not. Although I explained that it was an off-the-cuff remark, not meant to cast any reflection on Bhindranwale, there was a furore in the Sikh

community. I was criticised for having offended the Sikhs.

Indeed, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wanted to finish the Akalis and found an opportunity while challenging Bhindranwale. In fact, there was more to it than just what meets the eye. According to one story which was later confirmed by her personal secretary R.K. Dhawan, the plan was to garner voters for the 1984 Lok Sabha elections which were due a few months later.

Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi, nephew Arun Nehru and Rajiv's adviser Arun Singh were behind the decision which forced Mrs. Gandhi to order the army to storm the Golden Temple in Amristar to flush out the militant leader and his cohorts. Dhawan was quoted as saying that the trio—Rajiv, Arun Nehru and Arun Singh—believed that a successful army

operation could enable them to win the elections hands down.

Operation Bluestar was not just Mrs Gandhi's last battle. It was the first, and perhaps the most disastrous, of Rajiv's blunders. A report in the Caravan magazine said that "Indira Gandhi, who had evidently approved Bluestar with the greatest reluctance, regretted the operation immediately, according to Dhawan, who was with her when she first saw images of the damage to the shrine." President Giani Zail Singh wanted to visit the shrine to make amends but was dissuaded. He took a civilian plane on his own and visited the Golden Temple to offer his apology.

The deepest cut was that he was asked to defend the operation on AIR. Subsequently, he told me that he wanted to say no but realised that it would create a crisis in the country, the President taking one line and the government the other. He did go on air and defended the operation. He literally wept while addressing the nation.

Mrs Gandhi, too, was horrified to see the footage of the Golden Temple which was brought by Arun Singh. Arun Nehru told me that his phupi (aunt Indira Gandhi) was not willing to carry out the operation until the last minute. But then the army chief and also the trio, which guided Operation Bluestar, eventually changed her mind. This was mainly because Rajiv Gandhi had started dealing directly with Punjab affairs which until some time ago was handled by his brother, Sanjay Gandhi.

It is another matter that Mrs Gandhi had to pay with her life for the attack on the Golden Temple when her security guards gunned her down. Rajiv Gandhi swept to power

with the biggest mandate (421 seats in a house of 544 members) in Indian history following his mother's assassination.

I was a part of the team which comprised General Jagjit Singh Aurora, Air Marshal Arjun Singh and Inder Gujral, who subsequently became the Prime Minister, to span the distance between the Akalis and the government on the one hand and Sikhs and Hindus on the other. All the people whom we spoke to made a case where it was clear that the government had overreacted. Our finding also was that the Army operation was not necessary and that Bhindranwale could have been dealt with differently. We said so in our report to the Punjabi Group which had deputed us to probe the anti-Sikh riots that followed Mrs Gandhi's assassination.

The anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and neighbouring areas could have been suppressed immediately. But then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi intentionally did not ask either the police or the Army to intervene. He reportedly remarked that the riots were spontaneous. He even reacted by saying that when a big tree falls, the earth is bound to shake.

Now 34 years after the Army stormed the Golden Temple, the declassified British documents show that the UK military had advised India on retaking the temporal seat of Sikhs, kicking off political storms in both London and New Delhi. The British Government has ordered an inquiry into the revelations and the BJP has demanded an explanation.

The revelation is contained in a series of letters declassified recently by the National Archives of the UK after the 30-year secrecy rule. In an official communication, dated February 23, 1984 and titled 'Sikh

Community', an official with the Foreign Secretary told the private secretary to the Home Secretary that "the Foreign Secretary wishes him to be made aware of some background which could increase the possibility of repercussions among the Sikh communities in this country".

The letter went on to say that if the British advice were to emerge in public, it could increase tension in the Indian community in Britain. However, there is no evidence in any of the declassified communications if the British plan was finally used for the June 1984 operation.

When I was posted as High Commissioner in 1990, I found that there was a prejudice against the Sikhs entering the building and one of my first actions was to throw open the doors to all. The search of only the Sikhs when entering the High Commission was discontinued.

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Nonviolence or Nonexistence? The Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Robert J. Burrowes

Fifty years ago, on 4 April 1968, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

The night before he died, King gave another of his many evocative speeches; this one at the packed Mason Temple in Memphis. The speech included these words:

Men for years now have been talking about war and peace. Now no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence in this world, it is non-violence or non-existence. That is where we are today.

In clearly identifying this stark choice and having been inspired by Mohandas K. Gandhi's wide-ranging social concerns, King's concerns were also broad:

The Triple Evils of poverty, racism and militarism are forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle. They are interrelated, all-inclusive, and stand as barriers to our living in the Beloved Community. When we work to remedy one evil, we affect all evils.

So what has changed in the past 50 years? The world has traveled a great deal further down the path of violence. So far, in fact, that nonexistence is now the most likely outcome for humanity.

Despite the vastly more perilous state of our planet, many people and organisations around the world are following in the footsteps of Gandhi, King and other nonviolent luminaries like Silo, and are engaged in what is effectively a last ditch stand to end the violence and put

humanity on a path to peace, justice and sustainability.

Let me tell you about some of these people and organisations and invite you to join them.

In Bolivia, Nora Cabero works with the Movimient Humanista. The Movement has many programs including the Convergence of Cultures which aims to facilitate and stimulate true dialogue—oriented towards the search for common points present in the hearts of different peoples and individuals—to promote the relationship between different cultures and to resist discrimination and violence. Another program, World Without Wars and Violence emerged in 1994 and was presented for the first time internationally in 1995 at the Open Meeting of Humanism held in Chile at the University of Santiago. It is active in about 40 countries. It carries out activities in the social base and also promotes international campaigns such as Education for Nonviolence and the World March for Peace and Nonviolence.

Eddy Kalisa Nyarwaya Jr. is Executive Secretary of the Rwanda Institute for Conflict Transformation and Peace Building and is also President of the Alternatives to Violence Program. For the past 18 years, he has been active in the fields of 'peace, reconciliation, nonviolence, healing of societies, building harmonious communities' in many countries including Burundi, Chad, eastern Congo, Darfur (western Sudan), Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan and northern Uganda. Late last year he

was in New Zealand to deliver a paper on the Great Lakes conflict. In Rwanda, the Institute for Conflict Transformation particularly works on nonviolence education in schools, universities and refugee camps. Another initiative is the conduct of workshops on nonviolence and peace through sports for head teachers in the country but it also has programs to fight early marriages and pregnancies, as well as offering trauma counseling to refugees.

In Russia, Ella Polyakova is a key figure at the Soldiers' Mothers of Saint-Petersburg. Ella and her colleagues work to defend the rights of servicemen and conscripts in the Russian military. Ella explains why:

When we were creating our organisation, we understood that people knew little about their rights, enshrined in Russia's Constitution, that the concept of "human dignity" had almost disappeared, that no one had been working with the problems of common people, let alone those of conscripts. We clearly understood what a soldier in the Russian army was, a mere cog in the state machine, yet with an assault rifle. We felt how important hope, self-confidence and trust were for every person. At the beginning of our journey, we saw that people around us, as a rule, did not even know what it meant to feel free. It was obvious for us that the path towards freedom and the attainment of dignity was going through enlightenment. Therefore, our organisation's mission is to

enlighten people around us. Social work is all about showing, explaining, proving things to people, it is about convincing them. Having equipped ourselves with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Russia's Constitution, we started to demolish this dispossession belt between citizens and their rights. It was necessary to make sure that people clearly understood that, having a good knowledge of rights, laws, and situations at hand, they would be able to take responsibility and protect themselves from abuse.

Bruce Gagnon, coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, was recently part of a committed effort to convince the Maine state legislature not to give warship-builder General Dynamics, which has already received more than \$200 million in state and local tax breaks for the Bath Iron Works (BIW), any more 'corporate welfare'. Bruce recently completed a fast, which lasted for more than a month, as one of the actions that Maine peace activists took to try to prevent this welfare payment to a company that has spent \$14.4 billion buying back its own stocks between 2013–2017 and whose CEO was paid \$21 million in 2016.

Despite their efforts, the Maine House of Representatives voted 117–31 in favor of the \$45 million General Dynamics corporate welfare bill and the Senate supported it 25–9. The decision was announced on the same day that General Dynamics sacked 31 workers from the BIW. As Bruce noted: "It was an honor to work alongside [those] who stood up for the 43,000 children living in poverty across Maine, for the tens of thousands without health care, for our starving public education

system, and for the crumbling physical infrastructure as Maine joins Mississippi in the 'race to the bottom'." You can read more about this ongoing campaign to convert the Bath Iron Works into a location for the production of socially useful and ecologically sustainable non-killing technologies on their website.

Gaëlle Smedts and her partner Luz are the key figures at Poetry Against Armsbased in Germany. "The inspiration for this campaign is the life, work and legacy of the Latin American poet, philosopher and mystic Mario Rodriguez Cobos, also known as Silo. His total commitment to active nonviolence, his denunciation of all forms of violence, his doctrine for overcoming pain and suffering and his magnificent poetry are a great affirmation of the meaning of life and transcendence." Poetry Against Arms publishes poetry/songs of people around the world who take action to resist militarism.

Since the 1970s, the world's leading rainforest activist, John Seed, has devoted his life to saving the world's rainforests. Founder and Director of the Rainforest Information Centre in Australia, one of his latest projects is to save the tropical Andes of Ecuador, which is "at the top of the world list of biodiversity hotspots in terms of vertebrate species, endemic vertebrates, and endemic plants". From the cloud forests in the Andes to the indigenous territories in the headwaters of the Amazon, the Ecuadorean government has covertly granted mining concessions to over 1.7 million hectares (4.25 million acres) of forest reserves and indigenous territories to multinational mining companies in closed-door deals without public knowledge or consent. These concessions will decimate headwater ecosystems

and biodiversity hotspots of global significance. If you would like to read more about this campaign and what you can do to help, you can do so in John's article 'Ecuador Endangered'.

Apart from the individuals mentioned above, signatories and endorsing organisations are engaged in an incredibly diverse range of activities to end violence in one context or another. These include individuals and organisations working in many countries to end violence against women (including discriminatory practices against widows), to rehabilitate child soldiers and end sexual violence in the Congo, activists engaged in nonviolent defense or liberation struggles—see Nonviolent Defense/Liberation Strategy—in several countries and occupied territories, as well as campaigns on a vast range of environmental, climate and indigenous rights issues, campaigns to promote religious and racial harmony as well as campaigns for nuclear disarmament and to end war.

Given the perilous state of the global environment and climate, still others are focusing their efforts on reducing their consumption and increasing their self-reliance in accordance with the fifteen-year strategy outlined in 'The Flame Tree Project to Save Life on Earth'.

If you would like to be part of the worldwide movement to end violence that has drawn so many people and several organisations mentioned above together, along with many others in 103 countries around the world, you are welcome to sign the online pledge of 'The People's Charter to Create a Nonviolent World'.

Reverend King posed the fundamental choice of our time: nonviolence or nonexistence. What is your choice?



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Why Was Gandhi Killed?

Salil Misra

Why was Gandhi killed? Those who killed him claimed that he was the greatest enemy of the Indian nation and also of Hinduism. They had a particular picture of India and of Hinduism in mind and believed Gandhi to be an obstacle in the implementation of that picture.

To get the facts straight, Gandhi was killed on 30 January 1948, by Nathuram Godse, directly assisted by Gopal Godse, Narayan Apte and Vishnu Karkare, all of them associated with the Hindu Mahasabha. It is possible that more may have been involved in the conspiracy to eliminate him. Killing Gandhi was not a spontaneous, on the spot decision. Considerable preparation had gone into it. A bomb was thrown at his prayer meeting on 20 January. It was suggested that, given the threat to his life, security at his meetings should be increased. But Gandhi refused to allow it on the ground that it would create inconvenience for common people who regularly attended his prayer meetings. He was completely against security arrangements that would separate him from his own people. Given the lack of these restrictions, it is surprising that such meticulous and comprehensive preparations

were needed to eliminate Gandhi. It is quite clear that if somebody really wanted to kill Gandhi, it was not at all difficult to do so.

In retrospect it seems difficult to believe why would anyone want to kill Gandhi. His life was dedicated to serving others. His activities were not against any one in particular. For instance he fought British imperialism but was always friendly to the British people. He was convinced that the system of imperialism was bad above all for the people of England. They needed to be liberated from the evil of imperialism. In a famous appeal, Gandhi called on the British to get off the back of Indian people so that they could all walk together. Even though he maintained total opposition to anti-human ideologies such as racism, fascism, imperialism and—in the Indian context—communalism, he expressed love for the individuals and leaders practising those ideologies. There was not a trace of any personal hatred or animosity in his speeches and writings. Gandhi truly practised and popularised the Biblical maxim: Hate the evil, not the evil doer. Given these traits, it is difficult to believe that someone, anyone, should want

to physically eliminate him.

However, attempts had been made on Gandhi's life even earlier. He was assaulted twice in South Africa, in 1897 and in 1907, but survived miraculously. In India a hand grenade was thrown at his car in Pune in 1934 in a violent reaction against his campaign to open wells, temples and public roads for lower castes. But the determination by some to eliminate him became much more sustained in the 1940s.

National unity of all the Indian people, cutting across religion, caste, language and region was a mission with Gandhi. This mission of achieving national unity received a severe setback with the demand for Pakistan in 1940. Muslim League, under Jinnah's leadership, declared that Indian Muslims were not a religious minority but a nation and therefore entitled to their own separate nation-state. This extraordinary demand, for which there was no proof in history, was based on the famous two-nation-theory, according to which there was no single nation of Indian people. Rather there were two separate nations—Hindu and Muslim. Jinnah also asserted that there was nothing in common between Muslims and Hindus and that the two could not possibly live together in peace and harmony. Therefore, according to Jinnah, the only solution to the Hindu–Muslim problem was a physical and geographical separation of Hindus and Muslims and their constitution into separate nation-states. The British government appeared sympathetic to this demand purely for tactical reasons. Gandhi and other national leaders were quite taken aback by this demand. Gandhi called the demand for Pakistan a “basic untruth”, perhaps

the strongest word in his dictionary.

However, in the 1940s, the demand for Pakistan gathered momentum. It was generally aided by the politics of the British and the activities of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha. The two organisations were in principle opposed to each other, claiming to represent Muslims and Hindus respectively. But through their activities, they actually ended up helping each other. The leaders of both the organisations—Jinnah and Savarkar—succeeded in creating a deep communal divide between Hindus and Muslims. Never before in Indian history was the divide, mutual contempt and suspicion between the two communities as deep as it was in the 1940s. Gandhi was distraught by these developments and tried to counter it in his own way. He was uncompromisingly opposed to the partition of India. But he also knew that partition could be prevented only by the concerted efforts of Muslims and Hindus. However, intensification of communalism made this difficult. Gandhi spent all his energies against communalism but also witnessed somewhat helplessly the growing tide of communalism.

The events of late 1946–early 1947 shattered all of Gandhi's hopes of finding an amicable settlement of the communal problem. In August 1946, the Muslim League–led government in Bengal gave a call for ‘direct action’. The result of the call was sheer mayhem. Calcutta witnessed massive communal violence for the next four days in which around 5000 people died. Soon communal violence engulfed large parts of India, spreading to Noakhali in East Bengal, Bihar, Bombay and UP, before finally

descending on Punjab with full fury. Muslims were the aggressors in Bengal and Hindus in Bihar. This was the first time in Indian history that the country had experienced communal violence on such scale and intensity. It was also the first time that communal violence had spread like wildfire, forming a chain of barbarity. With the possible exception of 1857, never before and certainly never after, had India come so close to a civil war-like situation. Certainly, incidents of communal violence have been quite frequent in independent India, but nowhere near the scale and intensity reached during 1946–47.

Gandhi understood that these events were inevitably taking India closer to partition, but felt helpless in the face of the deepening communal divide. In his prayer meetings he often gave into a feeling of despair: “As a result of one year of communal riots, the people of India have all become communal. They are tired and frightened. . . . The popular view is contrary to mine. . . . No one listens to me any more. I am a small man. . . . neither the Congress nor the Hindus nor the Muslims listen to me. . . . I am crying in the wilderness. . . . Everybody is eager to garland my photos and statues [but] nobody really wants to follow my advice.”

However, since Gandhi realised that he did not have the support of the people to fight against the partition, he decided to do the next best thing—to try and prevent communal violence, reach out to the victims of communal violence and provide his healing touch to them. He reached Noakhali in November 1946 and stayed there till March 1947, giving solace to Hindu victims and making appeals to Muslims for sanity. From there he went to Bihar to provide a

similar healing touch to Muslims and appealing to Hindus to give up violence and provide all security to Muslims. Hearing of renewed violence in Calcutta, Gandhi again rushed to Calcutta to spend time with Hindus and Muslims. On the eve of independence he refused to come to Delhi and decided to observe India's independence—a day he had eagerly looked forward to—with silent prayers and fasting.

After partition in August 1947, communal violence increased further and was particularly severe in the provinces that were partitioned, Punjab and Bengal. The fury was much greater in Punjab than in Bengal. One simple reason was Gandhi's presence in Bengal. His appeal to people worked like magic and helped subside communal passions considerably. Gandhi went on a fast against violence, drawing very positive response from the people, both Hindus and Muslims, who laid down arms and promised to Gandhi not to indulge in violence and arson. But unfortunately there was no Gandhi in Punjab (and no Gandhi-like figure in Pakistan) which experienced the worst form of violence. The power of Gandhi's magic was recognised even by the last British Viceroy, Mountbatten, who called Gandhi a "one man boundary force" and wrote in a letter: "My dear Gandhiji, In the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting." This was an open recognition of Gandhi's miracle and his remarkable influence on the people of India.

It was this success of Gandhi which actually cost him his life. His activities really offended the communal leaders who saw in him

the biggest obstacle to their agenda of creating a communal divide. They renewed their efforts against him. The partition of India had been opposed by nationalists like Gandhi but also by Hindu communalists. They were opposed to partition for entirely different reasons. Gandhi saw it as a violation of national unity but the Hindu communalists saw it as a concession to Muslims and were opposed to it. The truth was that both Hindu and Muslim communalists had contributed to partition by preventing Hindu-Muslim unity. However, once Gandhi accepted partition, he continued to work for Hindu-Muslim unity. Now his efforts for communal unity acquired a new dimension. He also became active in promoting India-Pakistan fraternity. Gandhi understood better than anyone else that if the two countries did not develop and maintain friendly relations, this would lead to disaster, taking its toll on both. Neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan simply could not afford to remain antagonistic to each other. It was clear that in promoting Indo-Pak friendship, Gandhi was thinking not only of present but also of future. In a statement, remarkable for its prophetic value, made in July 1947, Gandhi said: "The Pakistanis will say that they must increase their armed forces to defend themselves against India. India will repeat the argument. The result will be war. . . . [Shall] we spend our resources on the education of our children or on gunpowder and guns?"

Such statements and efforts of Gandhi really offended the members of Hindu Rashtra Dal, an organization set up in 1942 by Savarkar, whose members were to act like storm troopers of Hindu Mahasabha. They accused Gandhi of placating

Muslims and of being an enemy of Hindus. In reality Gandhi was only working for Hindu-Muslim unity and India-Pak friendship. He sent a message to Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan, expressing a desire to visit Pakistan to speak to the people. It was agreed that he would visit Pakistan in February 1948.

It was always an integral part of Gandhi's politics that he did not simply preach or talk; he backed it up with concrete action. When he found that the Muslims of Delhi had become unsafe and vulnerable to violence at the hands of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan, themselves victims of communal fury in Pakistan, Gandhi promptly went on what became his last fast on 12 January 1948, making an appeal for peace and sanity. And as always, his appeal found a positive response from the people of Delhi, including refugees. The violence on Muslims of Delhi came to a dramatic end in a week's time, leading Gandhi to break his fast on 18 January. Gandhi had once again been successful in bringing to an end large-scale violence through his personal efforts.

It was this success of Gandhi with his people which made him the object of deep visceral hatred by the communalists and they became determined to eliminate him. Nathuram Godse later declared that Gandhi with his "pro-Muslim fast" had acted "treacherously to the nation" and had proved to be a "father of Pakistan" instead. Godse was therefore determined that Gandhi's life "had to be brought to an end immediately" so that the "Indian nation could be saved". On 30 January, Godse implemented his resolution by pumping three bullets into the frail 78 year-old body of the

apostle of peace and love.

Godse killed Gandhi. But was he able to eliminate Gandhi? Gandhi's efforts towards the end of his life were geared towards ensuring that India would not become the Hindu equivalent of a Muslim Pakistan. Gandhi wanted India to develop as a secular, democratic republic. Those who wanted India to be a Hindu mirror image of Pakistan, also knew that Gandhi was the biggest obstacle to their plans. And so they killed him. But in the end it was Gandhi who won. The people of India backed him rather than the Hindu communalists, by choosing a secular and democratic polity for independent India. Gandhi's magic worked even after his death.

There was another arena of contest between Gandhi and those

who killed him. This pertained to the nature of Hinduism and the direction in which it should grow. Both Gandhi and Godse had contrasting images of Hinduism they wanted to build. For Godse, it was a militant, aggressive, violent and intolerant Hinduism, suspicious of Islam and Muslims, driven towards a physical conquest over adversaries. The Hinduism Gandhi practised was just the opposite— inclusive, compassionate, harmonious, and at peace with itself and with others. Godse understood, quite correctly, that Gandhi was the real obstacle to his brand of Hinduism. And so in order to save "his" Hinduism, he decided to kill the "greatest Hindu". As Gandhi himself said in his prayer meeting of 21 January 1948 referring to the bomb attack a day earlier:

"Those [behind the attack] should know that this sort of thing will not save Hinduism. If Hinduism is to be saved, it will be saved through such work as I am doing. I have been imbibing Hindu Dharma from my childhood . . . Do you want to annihilate Hindu Dharma by killing a devout Hindu like me?"

This debate on Hinduism has its reverberations even today. Both the possibilities—the Gandhian and the Godse-ite—are present within Hinduism today. Which one will eventually prevail? The fate of Hindus, and indeed of India, will be eventually decided by the course taken by Hinduism—Gandhi's or Godse's.

Email: salil@aud.ac.in

Globalisation and Employment Situation in India

Neeraj Jain

India began the globalisation of its economy in 1991, when the Indian Government, in exchange for a huge foreign loan to tide over the foreign exchange crisis, agreed to implement a Structural Adjustment Programme as demanded by its foreign creditors. One of the conditionalities of these economic reforms imposed on the country was removal of all restrictions on foreign investment, thereby allowing giant foreign multinational corporations to enter and invest in all sectors of the economy.

Ask any college student about the benefits of globalisation for the Indian economy, and he / she will immediately answer that the entry of foreign corporations is leading to

the creation of jobs in the economy. All economics text books in the country teach this; all academicians and intellectuals also assert this.

Before we examine the impact of entry of foreign corporations on employment, it is important to understand the nature of these corporations whom we have given an unfettered entry into the Indian economy.

Origin of Multinational Corporations

By the early 20th century, a profound change took place in the capitalist economies of Western Europe and the United States: the typical small firm came to be replaced by the giant corporation.

The economies of the capitalist countries now came to be dominated by giant monopolies, which not only had an enormous capacity to expand production, but also were in a position to earn super-profits by forming cartels and manipulating prices upwards. Since these corporations were huge, and had an enormous capacity to expand production, and since such a huge quantity of production obviously required huge raw material resources and enormous markets, these giant firms now entered into intense competition with each other for controlling raw material sources and markets of other countries. One consequence of this was that their international operations began to

expand, as they began investing heavily in other countries. By the late 1970s, the international operations of the monopoly corporations of the developed capitalist countries had expanded to such an extent that they came to be known as multinational corporations (or MNCs).

By the late 1970s–early 1980s, another important change took place in the world economy. The economies of most of the developing countries, who had become free from colonial rule during the post-Second World War years and had attempted to implement economic policies aimed at the indigenous capitalist development of their economies—one of whose important components was limiting the penetration of foreign capital in their economies—began to fail, and they became deeply mired in foreign debt (discussing the reasons for this is beyond the scope of this essay). The developed countries now arm-twisted these countries into opening up their markets for inflow of foreign goods and capital (this is precisely what happened with India also in 1991). Thus began what has come to be known as the globalisation of the world economy. It has enabled the corporations of the developed countries to enter into these economies and once again acquire control over their raw material sources and markets.

The onset of globalisation in the 1980s has enabled the MNCs into becoming truly giant behemoths with operations straddled across the globe.

MNCs in the Twenty-first Century

The world economy today is dominated by a relatively few giant MNCs. A MNC is a giant corporation, which, though it has

its management headquarters in one country, operates in several countries. The majority of the world's MNCs are headquartered in the rich nations—the United States, European Union and Japan.

Globalisation has enabled these MNCs to spread their tentacles into each and every country throughout the globe. They have become so big that they are now bigger than entire countries! A study made by the anti-poverty charity Global Justice Now found that in 2015, of the 100 biggest economic entities in the world, 69 were corporations (measured by their corporate turnover) and only 31 were countries (measured by their government revenues). The combined revenue of the 10 biggest corporations was more than the combined taxes raised by the bottom 180 countries.

Since they are so big, competition with them is simply not possible. Therefore, when MNCs enter a country, they quickly gobble up the local corporations (or the latter become their junior partners). Consequently, only a few MNCs today dominate each and every economic activity at the global level, be it manufacture of automobiles or semiconductors or medicines, or be it retail or transportation or information technology, or be it banking and finance, or be it the various sectors of agriculture, from seed and pesticide manufacture to wheat and rice production. Note that here we are not talking of a few firms dominating a particular economic activity in a particular country but their dominating that economic activity at a global level. The same MNC operates in twenty or fifty or more countries, and along with a handful of other such MNCs, dominates global production in

that particular sector. To take an example, today five multinational firms produce nearly half the world's motor vehicles, and the ten largest firms produce 70 percent of the world's motor vehicles.

Some more examples:

- The world's top 10 semiconductor makers account for more than half of the global market.
- Ninety percent of the global music market is accounted for by just 5 corporations.
- Fifteen companies dominate the world's pharmaceutical industry and account for 50 percent of the global sales revenues (in 2016).
- Just 2 companies, Coca-Cola and Pepsico, account for 60 percent of the global non-alcoholic beverage market.
- Just 2 corporations supply most of the world's large commercial jets: Boeing Co. and Airbus Industrie.
- The world's top 10 seed companies control 75 percent of the global commercial seed market (2011); the top 10 pesticide firms control 95 percent of the \$44 billion global pesticide market (2011); and 10 corporations control 55 percent of the global fertiliser market.
- In the animal pharmaceutical industry, the top 10 companies control 76 percent of the world veterinary pharmaceutical market.

The power wielded by these giant corporations over the global economy is best illustrated by a single statistic: the combined revenue of the top 500 corporations in the world is of the order of 35–40 percent of world GDP!

MNCs and Employment Generation

The MNCs are so huge, they have so much capital at their disposal, that they are able to employ the latest labour-saving technologies to produce an enormous amount of goods with very few workers. And so MNCs create very few jobs. In 2015, the world's 500 biggest corporations (the Fortune Global 500) generated \$27.6 trillion in revenues, which equalled roughly 38 percent of the world's GDP. Yet, they employed a mere 67 million people worldwide, which is just 1.7 percent of the global labour force. [The global labour force totalled nearly 4 billion people in 2015.]

Globalisation and Employment Generation in India

i) Private Sector

This is precisely what is happening in India too. As mentioned earlier, India began globalisation in 1991. While globalisation has led to an increase in the country's GDP growth rate, it has not led to an increase in employment generation. The foreign corporations entering the Indian economy are creating very few jobs. But at the same time, they are destroying many more jobs than they are creating, as their entry is forcing many companies, especially the small companies, to close down, while the big Indian private business houses are being forced to restructure their operations, reduce their workforce and replace permanent workers with contract workers.

That big corporations are not creating large number of jobs in India is admitted even by Arvind Panagariya, the Vice Chairman of India's Niti Aayog (he has since resigned) and a staunch supporter of globalisation. According to statistics given by him, two decades

after India began globalisation, in 2009 only 10.5 percent of India's manufacturing workforce was employed in large firms having more than 200 workers, while 84 percent was employed in firms with less than 50 workers.

Additionally, the neoliberal economic reforms have also pushed India's agriculture into deep crisis, so much so that employment generation in this important sector that accounts for half of India's employment has slowed down to near zero (we discuss this in greater detail below)!

ii) Globalisation and Public Sector Employment

The WB-dictated SAP imposed on India demands that the Indian Government privatise public sector enterprises and also reduce investment in welfare services such as education, health and agricultural extension and privatise these services. This has led to a drastic fall in public sector recruitment. Public sector employment in the country continuously increased in the decades after independence, from 70.5 lakh in 1961 to 190.6 lakh in 1991. But with the beginning of globalisation, this has got reversed. Public sector employment [including every form of government—Central, state, local government as well as quasi-government (public sector enterprises, electricity boards, road transport corporations, etc.)] over the period 1991–2012 has fallen in absolute terms, from 190 lakh to 176 lakh. This decline has taken place in every sphere of economic activity, from manufacturing, construction and transport to community, social and personal services.

iii) Globalisation: Net Impact on Employment in India

With very little job generation taking place in the private sector, and jobs declining in absolute terms in the public sector, the net result of the neoliberal economic reforms has been a slowdown in employment growth rate in the country.

This is borne out by employment growth rate figures for India. NSSO survey data show that employment growth rate (even with the government's fudged figures which consider all underemployed people in 'involuntary employment' as employed) has been decelerating ever since the economic reforms began. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of employment in the country fell from 2.44 percent during the period 1972–73 to 1983, to 2.04 percent during the period 1983 to 1993–94, 1.84 percent over the period 1993–94 to 2004–05, to an abysmal 0.12 percent during the period 2004–05 to 2009–10. This slowdown has taken place despite globalisation having led a sharp acceleration in the country's GDP growth rate (see Table 1).

Employment growth during 1999–2000 to 2009–10 was 1.49 percent per annum, lower than any previous ten-year period. And employment growth for the entire post-reform period, that is, for the 16-year period 1993–94 to 2009–10, was only 1.3 percent per annum. So the reforms, in spite of high GDP growth, have completely failed to deliver on the employment front.

It is estimated that in India, the total number of new people who enter the job market every year in search of jobs is around 13 million. That means that during the 16 years from 1993–94 to 2009–10, a total of 208 million people entered the job market. The NSSO data given in Table 1 indicate that of these, only

86 million or 41.3 percent got any kind of jobs.

And of these, only a very few got factory jobs! According to the Annual Survey of Industries, the principal source of industrial statistics in India, total employment (workers plus sales and supervisory and managerial staff) in all of India's registered factories (both small and large scale industries combined) increased by only 3.01 million during this 16-year period (Table 2). This means only 1.5 percent of the total people who entered the job market during these 16 years got any kind of factory jobs. In other words, despite the massive entry of foreign corporations into the country since the beginning of globalisation

in 1991, very few factory jobs have been created. The total number of people working in factories two decades after globalisation, in 2010, was only 11.72 million, or 2.5 percent of the total official workforce in the country of 460 million (see Table 2).

To conclude, globalisation is not leading to the creation of jobs in the country; rather, it is the main reason for the terrible employment crisis gripping the country. The acceleration of economic reforms under the Modi Government has led to a further worsening of this crisis. We shall discuss that in a subsequent essay.

Email : neerajj61@gmail.com

Table 1: Total Employment, Employment Growth Rate and GDP Growth Rate 1983 to 2009–10¹⁶

	<i>Total Employment (in million)</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>CAGR</i>	<i>GDP Growth Rate (at constant 1999–00 prices)</i>
1983	302.76	1972–73 to 1983	2.44%	4.7%
1993–94	374.45	1983 to 1993–94	2.04%	5.0%
2004–05	457.46	1993–94 to 2004–05	1.84%	6.3%
2009–10	460.22	2004–05 to 2009–10	0.12%	9.1%
		1999–2000 to 2009–10	1.49%	
		1993–94 to 2009–10	1.30%	

Table 2: Total Number of Employees in Registered Factories, 1993–94 to 2009–10 (in million)¹⁸

	<i>Total Factory Employment</i>	<i>% of Total Workforce</i>
1993–94	8.71	
2009–10	11.72	2.5%

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Communal Harmony and Popular Music

Amarendra Dhaneshwar

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 18. *Annual Survey of Industries 2010–2011 (Factory Sector)*, mail.mospi.gov.in/index.php.

“There is an enduring empathic connection with the world of Indian popular cinema. Today, this cinema, which draws upon images and symbols from the traditional regional cultures and combines them with more modern Western themes, is the major shaper of an emerging, pan Indian, popular culture. The cinema has striking parallels with traditional folk theatre. The popular culture as represented by cinema goes beyond both classical and folk elements even while it incorporates them. The appeal of the film is directed to an audience so diverse that it transcends social and spatial categories,” writes the eminent psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar in his book *Indian Identity*.

Cinema has an enviable grip on popular imagination. The moving image on the screen continues to fascinate the viewer even though it is no longer restricted to the cinema hall or the television set. It has invaded the cell phone and is most easily accessible through networks like *You Tube*. It is necessary to harness the popular medium of cinema in order to spread the message of communal harmony and religious tolerance.

This writer can cite his personal experience to prove the point. On June 23 this year, 'Lokayat', a group of activists from Poona, had invited me to perform songs stressing communal harmony at the S. M. Joshi Foundation Auditorium. I went there well prepared, though a little apprehensive about the impact. From the very start till the end, the audience which comprised

of many youngsters who were in their teens were not only engrossed but they participated in the music making process with claps and also by tapping their feet and lending their vocals wherever they could. For me, it was not only a satisfying experience but also reaffirmation of dearly embraced humanitarian values and principles.

Cinema is a popular art and it has always reflected the aspirations of the society and nation in general. There is an innate tolerance in our society which has accommodated various religious groups and followed the 'Live and let live' policy, not just as a slogan, but as a deeply ingrained precept. This finds reflection in works of art as well as in popular cinema. In the pre-independence times, films like *Padosi* ('Shejari' in Marathi) were made and ran for weeks together amidst the tense communal atmosphere triggered by the pre-partition animosities generated by the hateful campaign run by Jinnah and the Muslim League. In a chartbuster titled *Kismet* starring Ashok Kumar and Mumtaz Shanti, there was a song which became an all time hit—*Door Hato E Duniyawalo Hindustan Hamara Hai*. The first line of the *antara* in the song is “Yahan Hamara Tajmahal Hai Aur Kutubminara Hai, Yahan Hamare Mandir Masjid Sikkhonka Gurudwara Hain”, which proclaims multiplicity of faiths in our country and equal tolerance for them.

A comedian like Kishore Kumar was a hero of the film *Hum Sab*

Janata

is available at

www.lohiatoday.com

Ustad Hai. The hero exhorts the people around to share love with everyone irrespective of the religion. “Kya Hindu Kya Musalman Hum Sab Hain Bhai Bhai”, he says. In a fascinating simile, the song compares human beings belonging to different denominations to a musical instrument which produces good music when all the strings are well tuned.

We have been witnessing communal riots which lead to loss of precious human life and damage to property for all these years. These riots are triggered by mutual hatred and suspicion. *Baiju Bawara*, one of the most successful feature films of the early 1950s, has the legendary singer Baiju as the lead character. In one of the scenes in which the land is devastated by marauding troops who go on rampage, Baiju makes a sudden appearance and exhorts the troops to shun violence and become good humans. He sings *Insan Bano Karlo Bhalai Ka Koi Kaam*, a moving song sung by Mohammed Rafi and set in the raga Todi by the composer Naushad. This song is as relevant today in order to persuade the aggressive rioters.

The film *Dhool Ka Phool* by B.R. Chopra was about an unwed mother. It deals with a serious topic in a sensitive way. The pregnant heroine who has been unceremoniously forsaken by the hero becomes an outcast and she unwillingly abandons the child born out of wedlock on a street. The child noticed by a kindly Muslim elder is brought up in a truly secular fashion. In a moving song sequence, “Accha Hai Abhitak Tera Kuchh Naam Nahi Hai; Tujhko Kisi Mazhabse Koi Kaam Nahi Hai” (Good that you have no name which would indicate your faith and you are not concerned

with any religion as such). The lyrics penned by none other than Sahir Ludhyanvi proclaim humanitarian values which are beyond religion or denomination: “Malik Ne Har Insan ko Insan Banaya, Hamne Ise Hindu Ya Musalman Banaya; Kudarat ne to Bakshi Thi Hame Ekhi Dharati, Hamne Kahi Bharat Kahi Iran Banaya” (God made us human beings, and we made ourselves Hindus and Muslims; Nature has gifted us with one land and one Universe, we humans divided it into India and Iran). Such lyrics when

sung tunefully and with conviction are bound to tug at the heartstrings of the listener who is otherwise not exposed to such song content.

Gandhiji used to say that he could better understand the poetic content of poetry by saints when it came to him through the medium of music. This also applies to the songs which project the message of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Email: amardhan@gmail.com

Kabir: Love, Mysticism and an Alternative Vision

Neha Dabhade

While many wise persons through the centuries the world over have spoken about love and its transformative value, in India, the message of love has been passed down from generation to generation by different saints. One saint-poet who particularly stands out is Kabir. Kabir, through his teachings, poetry and life became the most influential proponent of the value of love. And his message has left a deep imprint on culture and philosophy in India. 28 June 2018 marked the 500th death anniversary of the mystic poet, reformer and saint. Kabir's ideas are as relevant and revolutionary today as they were during his times. Through this article, the author attempts to revisit the message of Kabir in the present context and the complex challenges it poses.

Kabir has a huge following in northern India across communities. He is quoted by scholars and

laypersons alike. The Prime Minister of India is no exception. On the occasion of Kabir Jayanti, PM Modi quoted a famous doha from Kabir to emphasise his government's promise of sabka saath, sabka vikas (development for all), “Kabir khada bazaar mein, maange sabki khair; na kahoo se dosti, na kahoo se bair.” [Standing in the marketplace (the world), Kabir asks for prosperity for all. Neither special friendship, nor enmity for anyone.] It is rather interesting to see that the ruling dispensation is invoking Kabir, an iconic thinker and prime example of communal harmony in India, when the General Elections 2019 are nearing. Let us take this opportunity to examine the tall claims made by the government while incorporating the message of Kabir in its policies, against Kabir's own philosophy and teachings.

Kabir's ideas

Kabir, a saint-poet, was one of the tallest figures of the Bhakti movement in India. Though his birth year is contested, he is believed to be the contemporary of Sikandar Lodhi. It is believed that he was born in a Hindu family but raised by a Muslim weaver family. He grew up to be a mystic poet in Varanasi. He sharply critiqued not only the inequality and social hierarchy in the Hindu philosophy but also the orthodoxy in Islam. Through his life and dohas, he encouraged others to think critically about social hierarchies and embrace love, compassion and honest introspection of self and the world. Kabir's fundamental message is love. One of his most famous dohas which encapsulates this message beautifully is:

Poti padh padh jag mua, Pandit bhayo na koye

Dhai akshar prem ke, jo padhe so Pandit hoye

(Reading books everyone died, none became wise; one who understands love is greater than any learned scholar)

Though the message of love seems to be simplistic, yet it is revolutionary for the times torn by conflicts, identity politics and inequalities. The time he was living in was marked by the dominance of Brahmins, rigid religious traditions, rituals and customs, feudal laws and orthodoxy. These hierarchies and rigidity were an anathema to love and humanism which Kabir sought to underline. Kabir sought to provide a broad overarching framework of love, compassion and mysticism which was extraordinary and rebellious, in that it defied tradition. He urged the people to re-imagine a world order based on

honest introspection and beyond materialism. He had an alternative socio-political vision characterised by transcendence, humility and spirituality which comes across clearly through his dohas:

Kabira Garv Na Keejiye, Uncha Dekh Aavaas

Kaal Pairon Punyah Letna, Ooper Jamsi Ghaas.

(Kabir, don't be so proud and vain, living in your high mansion. Tomorrow, you'll be lying under the feet, with grass growing on top)

One aspect of Kabir that can't be ignored is that he was not just a saint-poet but also a reformer. His contribution in this area needs more elaboration. As mentioned above, he was against social hierarchies and injustice and therefore has a large following amongst the Dalits even today. He critiqued the dogmas and superstitions in the Hindu philosophy. One example of where he took on the orthodoxy and defied tradition was his decision to move to Maghar from Kashi (Benaras). While Kashi is a holy city for the Hindus who believe that it is the gateway to heaven, it is believed that Maghar is a gateway to hell. In order to explain his move he says,

Kya Kaasi, Kya Oosar Maghar, Ram hriday basu mora

(What's the difference between Kashi and a barren Maghar, when divinity resides within?)

Similarly, Kabir tore into the orthodoxy of Islam too. He bitterly criticised the rituals and rigidity in Islam. Criticising the clergy, he says, "Mullah, why do you go up the minaret to call so loudly? Is your lord deaf? For whose sake do you make a loud prayer-call, He is in your heart."

He advocated the oneness of God.

This God can be realised through devotion to God without the need of any pandit or mullahs (priests). He rejected organised religion and emphasised a humanistic approach towards religion.

Kabir against social hierarchies

Similarly, Kabir was also strongly against caste divide in society. At a time when identities based on religion and caste are fracturing social cohesion and social justice, when the State which is duty bound to promote equality, fraternity and liberty of all citizens has failed to do so, it is important to recall the teachings of Kabir.

A direct criticism of the caste system by Kabir can be found in these couplets:

"If you say you're a Brahmin, Born of a mother who is a Brahmin,

Was there a special canal, through which you were born?"

"Were the Creator concerned about caste,

We'd arrive in the world, with a caste mark on the forehead."

The Dalits in India are still violently denied equal opportunities and rights despite constitutional provisions which call for equality. The dominant Hindutva politics which also shapes the policies of the ruling dispensation upholds the caste system and its inherent hierarchy. Atrocities against Dalits are common news in the media almost every day. Ghastly violence is perpetrated against Dalits on account of reasons like marrying persons from upper castes, using wells or roads used by the upper castes, wearing new clothes or showing any signs of wealth or even sporting a mustache—all these actions are considered as prerogatives and

privileges of the upper castes.

One is compelled to then think whether the ruling dispensation really adheres to Kabir's teachings? The violence against Dalits are not merely physical assaults by isolated individuals. These assaults are manifestations of the deep-rooted hatred against Dalits, and mindset of a society which still believes in the notion of inferiority based on pollution. To add to this dehumanising idea is the concoction of nationalism promoted by the right-wing extremists which makes the cow holy while justifying and normalising violence against Dalits. Dalits and others are severely punished on the suspicion of cow slaughter. Cow becomes a religious symbol to be revered and protected over human beings. This symbolism and ritualism is precisely what Kabir sought to counter. He wonderfully captures the need to self-introspect and not project hatred towards others in the following couplets:

*Bura jo dekhain main chala, bura
naa miliya koe,
Jo dil khoja aapna, toh mujhse
bura naa koe.*

(I set out to find the crooked ones, but couldn't find anyone; when I looked into my own heart, I found there was nobody more crooked than me!)

Kabir: A Bridge between Cultures

The iconoclastic saint Kabir is a symbol of India's syncretic culture. Kabir didn't identify himself as a Hindu or a Muslim. He renounced the orthodoxy in both religions:

*Chahe Geeta baanchiye, ya
padhiye Quran,
Mera tera pyaar hi har pustak
ka gyaan!*

(Whether one reads the Geeta or the Quran, all holy texts

essentially speak of love)

“My one God is devoid of all attributes; He is neither Hindu nor Muslim;

I perform no puja nor namaz.”

“Brother, where have these Gods come from; who has misled you;

Allah, Ram, Karim, Keshav Hari, Hazrat, they are all the names of The One.”

For Kabir, love and compassion for all was more important. However, one can't say that this legacy of love is carried out untainted in India today. The social fabric of India is under immense strain due to communal violence, distrust, hatred and overwhelming stigmatisation of communities based on religious identities. The boundaries of religious identities are hardening, creating political binaries. The dominant discourse being promoted is that of homogeneity. The Hindutva ideology which proclaims that Hindus are the original and rightful citizens of India has set its own standards and litmus test for nationalism. Its idea of nationalism is based on upper caste Hindu traditions and negates the pluralism present both in Hinduism itself as well as in the culture of India, which has borrowed from different religions and traditions.

As opposed to this, Kabir's teachings provide space for inclusion of multiple narratives because he recognised multiple truths. The Hindutva supremacists attempt to shrink this inclusive space and uphold a single narrative of homogenisation. This is being manifested in the constant attack on Muslims, by attacking or discrediting the contribution of the Muslim community to Indian culture. For example, the history of India is sought to be rewritten, or roads and

monuments named after Muslim rulers are being renamed.

This hatred has spread to such an extent that there have been 60 incidents of mob lynching from 2010 to 2017, according to the *India Spend report*. Most of these incidents have taken place in BJP ruled states. The most recent incident took place in Hapur in Uttar Pradesh in June 2018. Two Muslim men, Qasim and Samayuddin, were attacked by a mob, allegedly over rumours of cow slaughter. In a photo of the incident that has gone viral over the social media shows Qasim being dragged by the mob in the presence of the UP police; he later succumbed to his injuries. In another video, a panting Samayuddin bleeding profusely from his head can be seen pleading with the mob. This case unfortunately is not unique in its brutality. Such cases of mob lynching, starting from Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri to Afrazul in Rajsamand, have been a heart wrenching tale of inhumanity and pure hatred. In Dadri, the call to attack Mohammad Akhlaq was given from the temple!

If the government was indeed keen on spreading the message of Kabir in Indian society, it would have worked on multiple levels to arrest this trend. On one level, there would be an honest quest for justice. However, instead, the State is leveling charges against the victims instead of the perpetrators. On another level, it would work for social harmony and cohesion by treating all religions equally. *Hindu Rashtra*, which is directly antithetical to the slogan of “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas”, would not be the stated objective of the ruling dispensation.

It is unfortunate if not surprising that BJP seeks to appropriate Kabir,

given his colossal legacy and following amongst the marginalised. A similar attempt is being made to appropriate Ambedkar and other tall leaders by the party for electoral gains. However, one hopes that Kabir's ideas are remembered in earnest and not for political gains. His idea of love has the power to work as an antidote to the violence that is sought to be normalised and polarisation that is prevailing in the society. Kabir's deep spirituality, which rests on love and self-introspection, offers an alternative to bigotry and hatred being spread in the name of religion and caste. He defied traditions to imagine and construct a vision of society based on love, devotion and humility. This also demands courage to see the truth and accept multiple truths—based on inclusion and loving others. This humanist approach towards society will help us to remould our society and make it more humane and harmonious.

Perhaps this last couplet will better convey his message of courage, transcendence and love:

Bhala Hua Meri Matki Phoot Gayee

Mein to Paneeyan Bharan se Chhoot Gayee.

(Thank God, that this pitcher of mine is broken; I no longer need to keep filling it with water.)

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Press Release

US Pressure on Modi's Foreign Policy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's so-called aggressive foreign policy is once again ready to surrender the political sovereignty of the country to American imperialism. After breaking the nuclear treaty with Iran, the American President Donald Trump has told all countries of the world that they should completely stop importing oil from Iran until November 4. Nikki Haley, the visiting representative of the United States to the United Nations, has given the same message to the Prime Minister of India in stern words. She has said that India should rethink its relations with Iran, because America considers Iran a threat to world peace. Haley said that Iran is going to prove the next North Korea. However, in reality, the US has recently made an agreement with North Korea with great fanfare. Due to the engagement of the US representative in connection with the same deal, the India-US dialogue on July 7 has been cancelled.

The explanation of Ravish Kumar, spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, did not have any special effect on Nikki. Ravish has said that relations between India and Iran are very old. India is the largest importer country of hydrocarbons from Iran. Indian Oil wanted to buy 7 million tons of crude oil from Iran by March next. In May, India imported 771,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran. The biggest difficulty after the US pressure would be the cash payment. It is not clear how India will pay for the import of crude oil of \$10 billion. India's oil companies have prepared a flexible plan for the payment along with making payment to Iran in certain items. These items include things like wheat and medicines.

Here, the real question arises: Is India's tilt under American pressure not a challenge to its political and economic sovereignty? The ruling class of India and the advocates of capitalism the world over do not tire of declaring India to be a fast emerging superpower. The Socialist Party wants to ask if superpower India has no right to decide who to befriend and whom to do business with? It seems that pomposity of 'aggressive' foreign policy of Modi is only to mislead the people of the country.

Earlier, when India had prepared to build a gas pipeline from Iran, the then Bush administration had pressurised India to break the gas agreement with Iran. Today, when India is dependent on Iran for meeting its energy needs, it is being forced to rely on Saudi Arabia and other countries. Meanwhile, under the pressure of the US, India has continued to vote against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency. Yet Iran has continued its friendship with India. The reason for this is that India has had a stable Iran policy for a long time. Till recently, it appeared that Prime Minister Modi's friendship with Iran was growing. But now it seems that under American pressure, he is ready to overturn India's established Iran policy.

The Socialist Party would like to caution the citizens—if this happens, India's image as a sovereign nation will be weakened in the world and its interests will be damaged. Therefore, the Socialist Party demands that the Modi Government should not sacrifice India's long-tested Iran policy under American pressure.

- **Abhijit Vaidya**
Spokesperson, SP(I)

Letter to Editor: Seminar on:

Targeted Tamil Nadu: Indian Civil Society Must Intervene

S.P. Udayakumar

We, the people of Tamil Nadu, are being targeted and taunted by right-wing political forces and a few wings of the Indian State machinery. Resenting our principled stand against caste oppression, communalism and hate politics, and rebuffing our informed position on the neo-liberal economic scheme and destructive ‘development’ projects, the above-mentioned forces despise us vehemently.

Ever since the massive, nonviolent struggle against the Koodankulam nuclear power project at Idinthakarai during 2011–2014, people all over Tamil Nadu have been waging massive struggles against anti-People, anti-Nature and anti-Future projects such as the hydrocarbon extraction and petrochemical projects in the Cauvery river basin in central Tamil Nadu, Neutrino project in Theni district, GAIL pipeline laying project in the agricultural fields of western districts, Sterlite copper smelter project in Thoothukudi, 8-lane greenfield highway between Salem and Chennai to transport the mountainous minerals, and so forth. There has been rampant sand mining in all our rivers and in our sea coasts, blatant encroachment of our water bodies, and a multitude of stone and granite quarries on our hills and mountains. The once green and lush Tamil Nadu is fast becoming a semi-arid zone with little or no rainfall, persistent drought and severe water scarcity.

The deeply disturbed and concerned people of Tamil Nadu

oppose the contemporary fascist development paradigm and the destructive projects that destroy our ecology, damage our health and wellbeing, and denude our futures. We are opposed to the Liberalization-Privatization-Globalization (LPG) policies and projects of the Central and State governments, and their mindless acceptance and execution of structural adjustment policies and stabilisation programs dictated by the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the multinational corporations (MNCs).

Instead of informing us about the so-called ‘development’ projects with all the relevant reports and documents, organizing public hearings and taking a final call with transparency, accountability and popular participation (TAPs), the authorities impose the projects unilaterally, undemocratically and in an authoritarian manner. Rather than accepting the simple facts that the ‘ordinary people’ of Tamil Nadu can think for themselves, that they can take a stand on issues that affect their lives, resources and livelihoods and that they are capable of safeguarding their rights and entitlements, the above-mentioned forces go berserk with all kinds of ludicrous claims and accusations.

They call us Maoists, Naxalites, Jihadis, Tamil Tigers, anti-Indians, foreign stooges, secessionists, anti-developmentalists, and so on. An article in the *Organiser* magazine (dated June 24, 2018), mouthpiece of the RSS, sums it all up succinctly: “It is proved time and again, that the

influence of Left Wing Extremist (LWE) organisations, Muslim fundamentalists organisations and Tamil secessionists (TS) organisations are prevalent in the genesis, conduct and guidance of all these movements assisted by the Churches of all denominations” (p.17).

The above article goes on to compare the Tamils with the Kashmiris. It says: “[P]olicemen were attacked and these attacks were videographed and made viral by these groups to make the perpetrators of those offences as heroes in the eyes of young people as was done by Kashmir extremists in the valley. The practice of exposing the family details of police/military personnel involved in operations and inciting people to take revenge on them has become a regular affair like Kashmir” (p.16). In other words, Tamil Nadu is seen as another Kashmir in the making and the Tamils are being looked down upon, just as the Kashmiris are. In this perspective, the Thoothukudi massacre of May 22, 2018 becomes a legitimate security action carried out to keep a bunch of anti-national Kashmiri-like elements at bay.

To make matters worse, the weak and discredited Tamil Nadu government has been toeing the line of the BJP government at the Centre in order to ensure its own longevity and to reap rich dividends from different sources. They arrest dissident leaders and activists all over the state under draconian laws such as the goondas act, NSA, UAPA

and so forth. The state police arrest 'ordinary people' quite arbitrarily, detain them illegally, treat them poorly, and literally run a 'police raj' in the state. They do not grant permission to organise protests or public meetings, curtail people's freedom of speech and freedom of assembly severely, and behave in a very high-handed manner.

To put it tersely, the Tamils are being targeted and taunted by both the pro-corporate BJP government at the Centre and by their cronies in the State. We are not able to take it anymore. We do not want to feel that we are being abandoned by the rest of India and the larger world. And we want the Indian civil society to know more about our plight and come to our rescue.

So we are organising a consultation between some of the Indian civil society leaders and local leaders of Tamil Nadu, and a public hall meeting afterwards on July 15, 2018, Sunday, at the Chennai Reporters' Guild, Chennai.

Email: drspudayakumar@yahoo.com

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Book Review

Champan Satyagraha

(Second Edition: December 2017)

**Editor: Ravela Somayya; Published by :
Lohia Vijnana Samithi, Hyderabad**

This is the second edition of the book published to commemorate the centenary of Champan movement led by Gandhi. It is gratifying to note that the book needed a second edition within a short period of four months.

This second edition comes with addition of various reviews and comments on the first edition and also some new writings on the movement. The size of the book is literally doubled. The new articles are from eminent writers like Ramachandra Guha, S.N. Sahu, Anil Nauriya and Vadrevu China Veerabhadru. They are really enlightening.

Ramachandra Guha asserts that the roots of Gandhi's leadership lie in the Champan movement. It established his credibility as a leader with conviction when he dared the colonial authorities to arrest him for defying the unlawful laws. He has exposed the different vested interests that were opposing him.

It is true that there were resistance movements by the indigo farmers even before the Champan movement. But they could not succeed against the brutal suppression by the colonial authorities. Those movements were sporadic and there was no unifying force for them. It cannot be gainsaid that the Champan movement succeeded because of the unifying force provided by Gandhi. He also served as an enlightened leader of

the movement, mixing freely with the peasants.

The Marxist historian Irfan Habib has paid glorious tributes to Gandhi in the first edition of the book. He appreciated the way in which Gandhi managed to earn confidence of the peasants in spite of being a stranger to them. He moved as one among them. Gandhi also impressed them as an ethical person when he preached non-violence and stood upright against the threat of imprisonment for defying the administration.

In his article, Tushar Gandhi, the great grandson of Gandhi, has rightly stated that the Champan movement has to be understood as a powerful lesson to fight for the rights of the oppressed and exploited, not confined merely to the indigo farmers. He regretted that the condition of farmers is still the same as it was a century ago. We refuse to learn from history. Moreover he conceded that a similar movement may not be possible now since the various associations of farmers are divided and represent different political parties. It is a matter of shame that exploitation of farmers has become so intense that it is driving them to suicides.

Anil Nauriya gives the background to Gandhi's involvement in the movement. At that time, Gandhi was seeking to understand India as it was different from South Africa in many respects. Gandhi

was aware of the problems of indigo cultivators in India as the journal *Indian Opinion* published by him in South Africa had reported on it earlier. But having involved himself into the movement at the invitation of the suffering peasants, he gave it his heart and soul. Instead of assuming leadership directly, he started to understand the people and their actual problems. He mixed freely with the peasants to gain their confidence. He had to educate them and infuse confidence that they can get their problems solved. He earned their respect by defying the authorities, inviting imprisonment.

Nauriya also writes about what was happening all over the world at the same time as the Champaran struggle was taking place in India. When Gandhi entered Champaran, Lenin entered Russia from Switzerland to lead the Bolshevik revolution. In June 1917 Annie Besant was interned for starting the Home Rule League. There were public agitations all over the country in her support. Gandhi advised them to adopt the method of “passive resistance”. He told them “it may be illegal but not unlawful”. He believed in it deeply. As a result Annie Besant was released in September itself.

People followed Gandhi with confidence not just because he infused confidence in them about their capacity to struggle, but also because of the righteousness of his method of non-violence, which gave them the moral courage for their fight. While Lenin was appealing to industrial workers and soldiers, Gandhi in India was looking to organise the poor peasants spread over tens of thousands of villages. He had to unite them and set a common goal before them.

S.N. Sahu writes that Gandhi studied the conditions of farmers in such detail and truthfully that the report submitted by him to the colonial government formed the basis for the Champaran Agrarian Act, 1918 that stopped the forcible cultivation of indigo by the farmers. Sahu also explains the ramifications of the agricultural movement led by Gandhi in various fields like education, gender equality, public hygiene and communal harmony. It transformed the agrarian movement into a social movement, on which the entire independence movement was moulded.

The genuine agony felt by Vadrevu China Veerabhadru, while commenting on the first edition of the book, has to be noted. He laments that the most important incidents of history—like the Champaran movement—are the least mentioned in writings on history. Even intellectual members of society do not give due importance to such movements that determine the real course of history. The trend is to highlight capitalist and elite aspects ignoring rural and poverty problems. He described the Champaran movement as an ethical rather than political movement. It was an attempt on the part of Gandhi to express his indignation at the injustice being perpetrated on the innocent and helpless farmers. The subsequent movements like non-cooperation and Quit India were taken up for purely political purposes. Gandhi’s willingness to get imprisoned for defying an unjust law was the way to infuse confidence among the people to stand by their own convictions. He felt it necessary to liberate the people from mental slavery before making them ready for political freedom. The independence

movement was successful because of the groundwork done by him.

One hundred years back, the Champaran movement taught us that political and social freedom is possible through non-violence and truth. But the Naxal movement of fifty years back insists that political freedom is possible only through agitation and violence. The riddle is that the common people are indifferent to both the movements. They while away their time enjoying cheap entertainments. That is the heartfelt agony of Vadrevu China Veerabhadru and it reflects the feelings of intellectuals in the society now. His reflections are given in a Telugu version. It would have been worthwhile to give an English version of the same.

The additions made in the second edition of the book really add weight to the book. The significance of Champaran movement is analysed from different angles and from different points of view helping the reader get a wholesome idea of its place in history.

Ravela Somayya and the Lohia Vignana Samiti are to be congratulated for bringing out this volume.

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How do We Promote Peace in India Today?

Ram Puniyani

We are passing through times when Hate against weaker sections of society and religious minorities is increasing by leaps and bounds. The increase in incidents of mob lynching all over the country on the pretext of child lifting is coming on the back of mob lynching of Muslims on the pretext of cow-beef slaughter and numerous incidents of public flogging / humiliation of Dalits. Mobs seem to be emboldened by the fact that there has been an approval of these acts from the top. Ministers like Mahesh Sharma came to the funeral of Dadri accused; now Mr Jayant Sinha welcomed the accused of Alimuddin lynching case when they got bail. Even more worrying and frightening is that now several horrid incidents of rape are being given a communal twist; on the one hand, fake news is being employed with impunity, and on the other, the rape accused are getting social support. It's a matter of shame that in the Kathua rape case, the then Ministers from BJP Chaudhary Lal Singh and Chander Prakash Ganga attended the event organised by Hindu Ekta Manch, which was protesting against the

arrests in the case.

Now, in the case of Mandsaur rape, the incident is being given false twist to demonise a community. The accused belonged to Muslim community. Muslim groups took out a procession demanding severe punishment for the accused. The Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia joined a candle light procession to demand death penalty to the accused. Social media was used to spread the false message that he was demanding the release of the accused. The pictures of the procession were photo-shopped to present Muslims in bad light. A message was circulated which said that members of the Muslim community rallied in Mandsaur demanding that the perpetrators of the crime be released because the Quran sanctions rape of non-Muslim women; the reality is that the text of the placards in the Mandsaur procession read: "We won't tolerate attacks on daughters, stop this brutality".

A false tweet is being circulated: "NCRB report: India is most dangerous for women. Reason: In India, 95% of the rape cases have

a Muslim perpetrator. Of the total 84,734 rape cases, 81,000 rapes had a Muslim rapist and 96% of the victims are non-Muslims, and with an increase in their population, number of rapes will also increase.” Nothing can be farther from truth. NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) does not record the religion in cases of rape. This tweet and the one about Jyotiraditya Scindia was exposed by AltNews, a news portal which doing a great service to society by giving the truth and exposing such fake news which are deliberately trying to demonise the religious minorities in the country. One recalls that in the case of Muzzafarnagar riots in September 2013, the violence was incited by circulating a video of two young men being beaten by a Muslim mob, creating the impression that it was a recording of the killing of two Hindu youth in Kawal village in Muzaffarnagar district. The police later confirmed that it was a two-year old picture from Pakistan and was available on You-tube and was of a crowd beating up thieves.

Recently in Kairana, the Mahagathbandhan candidate Tabassum Hasan won the election against the BJP candidate. After winning, she stated, “This is the victory of truth and ‘Mahagathbandhan’ (coalition) and defeat of the BJP in the State and Centre. Everyone has come out and supported us. I thank them.” On social media and on TV debates, her words were twisted and what was presented was that she said, “This is the victory of Allah and defeat of Ram”. This quote was posted on a number of pro-BJP pages on Facebook, including a page by the name of Yogi Adityanath—True Indian which posted it on 1 June,

and was shared massively.

One recalls that in recent times, the BJP has deliberately muddied the waters of social media by employing thousands of trolls, as Swati Chaturvedi’s book I am a Troll, tells us. The hate propaganda began with the demonisation of Muslim kings for breaking Hindu temples in medieval period, for spreading Islam, for having large families, indulging in polygamy, being terrorists etc. Now it has taken a dangerous turn with people trained in communal ideology and in the use of social media blatantly twisting facts. There are reports that in the forthcoming elections, the BJP is planning to train lakhs of volunteers in the use of social media for electoral gains. The rising hatred is becoming like a monster, propelling itself beyond control.

Is the social media to be blamed for intensifying this hate? Some control and restraint is needed, some fact-check is necessary for this highly impactful media. What is also needed is that portals like AltNews are made more popular to counter these falsehoods. It is heartening to note that Twitter has decided to suspend seven crore fake accounts. We also need to ensure that the misconceptions and hate which are ruling our society and our streets need to be countered by messages of love. What we need is that truth is propagated and the message of peace is made more effective. We have activists like Faisal Khan, who through his organisation Khudai Khidmatagar takes out peace marches. Harsh Mander’s Paigam-E-Mohabbat (Message of peace) has been doing yeoman service by meeting the families of victims of lynching and creating an atmosphere of amity.

The Mahant from Ayodhya, Yugal Kishore Sharan Shastri, through his less advertised peace marches, is trying to reach out to various sections of society with a message of tolerance and peace. Such efforts need to be upheld and broadened. These are just a few examples of the initiatives in this direction, there are many more which need to be projected to promote and preserve amity in India.

Countering Hate and promoting amity became the central message of the father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who struggled to promote peace in the highest traditions of his Hinduism. As the fake news is assuming frightening proportions and is doing serious harm to the concept of fraternity inherent in Indian nationalism, we need to retune ourselves to the core value of amity, which was one of the foundation values of our freedom movement and is very much a part of our Constitution.

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Some Lesser Known Facts About India's Past

Neeraj Jain

The Indian Subcontinent till the early 18th century was one of the world's most developed regions. Europe caught up with it and became more developed because of its industrial revolution, financed by the barbaric plunder of Latin America and Africa. This made it possible for Europe to colonise and plunder India. It is British colonial rule that destroyed India and transformed this thriving civilisation into one of the world's poorest countries.

This would sound surprising to many of our readers who have come to believe the propaganda of the Hindu fundamentalists about India's past. They describe the late medieval period (the period from around 1200 AD to 1700 AD, that is, the period of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire) as a dark age, during which the Muslim kings looted India, carried out large scale massacres of Hindus, destroyed thousands of temples, and so on.

The reality is the exact opposite. The advent of Islam and Muslims led to the intermingling of the diverse indigenous culture of the Indian subcontinent with Islamic culture. A new syncretic culture was born, resulting in great advances in the realms of art, literature, music, architecture, painting and the crafts. An important contributing factor was the policy of religious tolerance pursued by the kings of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Emperors. This period also saw the birth of the *Bhakti* movement, which has been described by several scholars as the Indian renaissance, when thinkers like Kabir, Nanak, Basav and Tukaram were questioning the feudal social system, including the

caste system, social hierarchies and even the power of religion over the individual. These thinkers were not marginalised voices, but voices of powerful groups like the traders and artisans.¹

This socio-cultural development was paralleled by considerable economic progress. During the period of the Mughal Empire, India was the world leader in manufacturing, producing 25 percent of the world's industrial output up until the mid-18th century.² The American Unitarian minister, J.T. Sunderland, has described the wealth created by India's 'vast and varied industries' in beautiful words:

Nearly every kind of manufacture or product known to the civilised world—nearly every kind of creation of man's brain and hand, existing anywhere, and prized either for its utility or beauty—had long been produced in India. India was a far greater industrial and manufacturing nation than any in Europe or any other in Asia. Her textile goods—the fine products of her looms, in cotton, wool, linen and silk—were famous over the civilised world; so were her exquisite jewellery and her precious stones cut in every lovely form; so were her pottery, porcelains, ceramics of every kind, quality, colour and beautiful shape; so were her fine works in metal—iron, steel, silver and gold.

She had great architecture—equal in beauty to any in the world. She had great engineering works. She had great merchants, great businessmen, great bankers

*and financiers. Not only was she the greatest shipbuilding nation, but she had great commerce and trade by land and sea which extended to all known civilised countries. Such was the India which the British found when they came.*³

To give just one example about the development of Indian industry during the 16th–18th centuries, in terms of shipbuilding tonnage, the annual output of Bengal alone totalled around 2,232,500 tons, larger than the combined output of the Dutch (450,000–550,000 tons), the British (340,000 tons) and the North American (23,061 tons) shipbuilding industries.⁴

The reason for this social, cultural and economic development during the period of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire was that these Muslim kings had not come to colonise and loot India. They settled here, integrated with the indigenous culture which led to the development of a beautiful syncretic culture, and contributed to India's development, making India the world's most prosperous region.

This flourishing civilisation was destroyed by British colonial rule. The British had come with the intention of colonising India, and so after defeating the native princes in battle, they systematically went about plundering and raping India. They destroyed our vibrant industry and agriculture and turned our cities into ruins. Famines ravaged the land: one-third of the population of Bengal, or 50 lakh people, starved to death during the famine of 1769–70, there were another 20 such big famines during the 120 years from

1770 to 1890, and this sequence continued till the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 which devoured nearly 40 lakh people.⁵

It is the British who first came up with this fraudulent portrayal of history that projected medieval India as being under the despotic rule of Muslim kings who subjected Hindus to immense persecution. This provided them with a justification for their colonisation of India—that they had come to liberate Hindus from Muslim tyranny. Hindu fundamentalists have appropriated this distorted colonial history and shamelessly propagate it, as it helps to create the social conditions for implementing their agenda of transforming secular India into a Hindu Rashtra.

Email: neerajj61@gmail.com

- 1 See for instance, Purshottam Agrawal, *Akath Kahani Prem Ki : Kabir ki Kavita aur Unka Samay*, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2009.
- 2 David Clingingsmith, Jeffrey G. Williamson, *India's Deindustrialisation in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Harvard University, 2005, <http://www.tcd.ie>; Professor Angus Maddison, "The World Economy (GDP): Historical Statistics", <http://www.theworldeconomy.org>.
- 3 "The Looting of India", December 10, 2016, <http://www.indialegalive.com>.
- 4 Indrajit Ray, *Bengal Industries and the British Industrial Revolution (1757–1857)*, p. 174, <https://books.google.co.in>.
- 5 Purshottam Agrawal, *Akath Kahani Prem Ki : Kabir ki Kavita aur Unka Samay*, op. cit., p. 118; "Remembering India's Forgotten Holocaust", June 13, 2014, <http://www.tehelka.com>.

Communalism and Development

Irfan Engineer

Communal politics has been viewed from different perspectives. The left primarily regards religion as opium of people, instilling false consciousness, giving them a high, and diverting their attention from their real issues related to material improvement in their lives like jobs, better wages, housing, health, access to medical facilities, quality education for the poor, and so on. However, majoritarian communal politicians promise their followers that their government would not only ensure religio-cultural adherence, further the cause of Hindu nationalism, but also that they are the best bet for the development of the nation and their material needs. They promise Hindutva with development. Hindutva, according to them, brings out dedication and commitment to the nation; the spirit of sacrifice for the nation would ensure development.

The BJP had given all sorts of promises during the 2014 general elections, including promising jobs to the youth, ensuring 50% profits for farmers above their production costs, development of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, etc., security for women, lowering of fuel prices and many other such other promises ensuring that all sections of the society would have a good life. Their tag line was "sabka saath, sabka vikas" (solidarity with all and development of all) and "achche din aanewale hai" (good times would arrive). In this article, it is not our purpose to evaluate the performance of the Central Government. We examine the situation of Aurangabad

city, where many promises were made by the Shiv Sena which has controlled the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation since about three decades. We wish to look at the performance of the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance in Aurangabad Municipal Corporation and within it, try to locate the communal violence which hit the city on 11 May 2018 just before midnight and continued through the wee hours of 12 May 2018.

Religious identity politics

Religious identity politics, which misuses religious rituals, customs, traditions and other cultural dimensions of religion, is better known in South Asia as communal politics. Communal politics exploits outer manifestations of religion, like festivals and sacred symbols, to construct an exclusive political identity that is superior to other communities, instills the followers of the religion with pride in the superiority of their religion, and constructs an ideological justification to exclude 'other' communities. The 'other' is stigmatised, demonised, dehumanised and targeted. The reasons for non-development or slower rate of development, economic crisis, joblessness and all other problems of the society are attributed to the 'other'.

Communal politics seeks to instill fear of the 'other', through exaggerated and illogical arguments. The 'other' would over populate the majority in matter of few years, or they are existential threat to the majority through their foolish and

violent means like terrorism and communal riots. They conspire to lure women from the majority community, marry them and convert them to increase their population. They resort to conversion of members of the majority community using coercion or fraudulent means or by offering inducements. They are intolerant and insensitive towards the culture and religion of the majority community. Communal politics ultimately calls upon the followers to close ranks to marginalise the 'other', establish an authoritarian cultural state that would ensure that the other is marginalised and relegated to secondary citizenship status if they do not succeed in expelling them from their territory.

A fact finding team of the CSSS and CPI recently visited Aurangabad from 19 to 21 May, 2018 to investigate the communal riots that broke out in the city on 11 May 2018 on a flimsy issue of a Muslim man denying the use of his mobile phone to two youth from the Valmiki community whom he did not know. The denial later led to the beating up of the Muslim man and triggered a communal riot that night which went on till the wee hours of the next day, until the violence was controlled by the police. During the fact finding visit, we came across a general complaint from all respondents, irrespective of their community, caste or gender, regarding the failure of the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) in discharging its statutory responsibilities. It was evident that the city of Aurangabad, ruled by the Shiv Sena for about three decades, was in utter mess.

Aurangabad Municipal Corporation

The partywise position in

the elections to the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation held in April 2015 is: Shiv Sena – 29, BJP – 22, AIMIM – 25, Congress – 8, NCP – 4, others – 24. A Shiv Sena Mayor was elected; the present Mayor is Nandkumar Ghodele. The Shiv Sena thus retained its 25 year long hold on the post of the Mayor. The city has elected Chandrakant Khaire of the Shiv Sena as its MP. Two of the three MLAs of the city belong to Hindutva parties: Atul Save of the BJP from Aurangabad East and Sanjay Sirsat of the Shiv Sena from Aurangabad West. After the winning the AMC elections, Aditya Thackeray—one of the most important Shiv Sena leaders—said that they would not sleep after winning and would work hard to fulfill all their promises.

The roads on which we were driving had large potholes and even the main city roads were in bad shape and narrow. The city, we were told, receives water once or twice a week, even though the metered water charges have been increased several times. Citizens of Aurangabad are furious as the supply of water is decreasing and charges increasing. Some of them have found an easy way out—drawing water from municipal pipelines through illegal connections. The disconnection of these illegal connections also contributed to the communal riots on 11 May. The Valmiki community in Gandhinagar alleged that their water post outside the Hanuman temple was damaged by a Muslim Maulvi to take revenge for the disconnection of water supply to the Dargah by the Municipal Corporation. The Valmiki Community members, however, could not back up their allegations with FIR or any other evidence. When we talked to the members of the Muslim community,

they told us that it was true that the water connection to the Dargah in Motikaranja was disconnected, but they had been assured that after a few days they could reconnect and continue to draw water for the Dargah, once monitoring of the illegal connections was relaxed. Therefore, the question of them targeting the water post outside the Hanuman temple did not arise, it would have been foolish on their part to seek revenge in this manner; they thus completely denied the allegation.

The water problem of the city can easily be solved by transporting water from Jayakwadi, the largest reservoir in Marathwada located 50 km south of Aurangabad. AMC has been planning to construct a pipeline connecting Jayakwadi reservoir with Aurangabad since 2008, but it has not done so till date.

It appears that the AMC is deliberating creating a water scarcity in the city to create the ground for privatisation of water supply in the city—the water scarcity would also make the people willing to pay high water charges that would obviously be charged by the private company. The Shiv Sena–BJP alliance has been seeking to hand over the water supply of the city to a private company, Essel Utilities, owned by the BJP Rajya Sabha member Subhash Chandra.

Essel Utilities has floated a subsidiary company, the Aurangabad City Water Utilities Co. Ltd. (ACWUCL). In 2014, AMC entered into an agreement with the ACWUCL, authorising it to draw water from the Jayakwadi dam and supply it to the entire area of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation and Cantonment Area which have a consumer population of 12 lakhs

and 1.25 lakh respectively, for a period of 20 years under public private partnership (PPP) model. Under the Rs 782 crore project, ACWUCL also had to lay down an internal pipeline network, build overhead water tanks at different locations, instal water meters at the doorsteps of the consumers, and collect water charges from them, which were to be increased by 10% every year. While the company delayed implementation of the project, the contractor's men started calling people every two months, asking them to pay their water charges and threatening to cut the connections otherwise. With the city's water woes worsening, and realising that the contract with ACWUCL had many loopholes, the Municipal Commissioner Om Prakash Bakoria finally terminated the contract in 2016.

Despite this bad experience with ACWUCL, the Shiv Sena MP Chandrakant Khaire and the ruling Shiv Sena–BJP combine who are in power in the AMC are trying to give it water distribution rights of the city once again.

Waste management

The AMC has utterly failed in another of its statutory duties—managing waste of the city. The AMC was dumping the city's waste for 35 years at its dumping site at Naregaon village, leading to accumulation of 10–20 lakh cubic metres of untreated waste near the village and causing severe health problems for the villagers; the AMC did not even install a waste treatment plant at the site to reduce the waste. The Naregaon waste dumping site had actually been earmarked as grazing land for cows. In 2003, the Bombay High Court

gave directions to the AMC in 2003 to stop dumping of the waste at the site, but for a good 15 years AMC made no alternative arrangement and continued to dump its waste in Naregaon. As the waste was being dumped illegally, the villagers again approached Bombay High Court and obtained a stay in mid-February 2018. The AMC thereafter began to dump 436 metric tonnes of garbage a day onto a new site at Padegaon Mitmita village. The of residents of Padegaon Mitimita witnessed the value of their property coming down drastically and burnt two AMC trucks which were dumping waste in their village. As a result, for several days, the AMC trucks could not lift the city's waste! Waste began to pile up in the city, leading to mass protests.

Communal politics

Bad roads, scarcity of water, lack of waste disposal and other problems have left the citizens of Aurangabad dissatisfied with the functioning of the Municipal Corporation. Most persons we talked to, irrespective of the community and caste they belonged to and their political affiliations, were unhappy. The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM)—a Muslim interest party and functioning as the main opposition in the AMC—and the Shiv Sena–BJP survive by communalising the crisis, especially the water scarcity. Imtiaz Jaleel, AIMIM MLA from Aurangabad Central, told us that his partymen had to seize water pipes and get them installed in Muslim dominated areas, as they were being denied their fair share. The Shiv Sena convinces its political base that even though the water supply may be scarce, the roads may be bad and the waste may

be piling up in the city, the situation of the Hindus is better than that of the Muslim community because of the Sena!

Hindu supremacists' claim that Hindutva and development go together has not proven to be true in Aurangabad. And Aurangabad may not be an isolated example. We see that promises of development and welfare of even the Hindus have proven to be jumlas at the national level as well. Communal polarisation allows the communal politicians not to worry too much about development and welfare even of their community. They unashamedly serve the interests of the elite and the super-rich, confident that the ordinary people of their community will continue to back them. But recent electoral results, like the recent Jinnah vs. ganna contest in the Kairana by-polls in UP, show that Indian people are not so gullible. They may be misled once, but they have become wiser now and would ask hard questions. In Aurangabad, the Shiv Sena usually campaigns around the theme of "Khan ki Baan" [that is, Muslims (Khan) or Shiv Sena (Baan means arrow, which is the election symbol of Shiv Sena)] and Aurangabad vs. Sambhajinagar (Shiv Sena calls Aurangabad as Sambhaji Nagar). The secular and social justice forces will have to work harder, even though their resources are scarce, to organise people around their real issues. The choice before lower classes and castes of Hindu community is Hindutva or development. But we will have to educate people and inform them about their limited choices.

The Dark Side of Humanity and Legality: A Glimpse Inside Assam's Detention Centres for 'Foreigners'

Harsh Mander

As special monitor for the National Human Rights Commission, activist Harsh Mander visited two centres in January. This is his searing account of what he found.

The people of Assam are sitting atop a smouldering volcano, one that threatens to erupt into catastrophic suffering and injustice. By July 2018 end, a tortuously extended process of updating the National Register of Citizens will conclude with the publication of the draft register, listing residents of Assam who are judged to be Indian citizens. There are nine million Bengali-speaking Muslims, and a smaller number of Bengali Hindus, in Assam, and each one of them is waiting with intense trepidation and fear for the publication of this list.

The question looming like a gathering tempest, laden with momentous legal and humanitarian concerns, is: what will be the fate of those deemed to be foreigners? These may be a few thousand women, men and children, or tens of thousands of them, or hundreds of thousands. Since there is no formal agreement between the governments of India and Bangladesh for India to deport persons they deem to be Bangladeshi foreigners, what will be their situation in a country they have treated as their home for generations? This is where they have family, friends, cultural and emotional ties, employment and, sometimes, farmlands. What will be their status, their future, their destiny if this country is now declared overnight to be for them a foreign, alien land?

There are no definite answers from the government. A law was moved by the Union government in 2016 to treat Hindu aliens as people with natural rights to the Indian nation. The majority of the people of Assam have been very hostile to any such arrangement. Assam minister and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Himanta Biswa Sarma said in December that the purpose of the National Register of Citizens is “to identify illegal Bangladeshis residing in Assam” who would “have to be deported”. He added that “Bengali-speaking Hindus” would “remain with the Assamese people, in conformity with the BJP ideology”.

One news report quoted Prateek Hajela, the officer who led the National Register of Citizens process, as saying that 4.8 million people had failed to provide appropriate legacy documents. This triggered commentary that if nearly five million people face the threat of being rendered stateless, they are being thrust into a predicament similar to that of Myanmar's Rohingyas—with India claiming they are illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and Dhaka not open to accepting deportation. But Hajela later contradicted his statement, threatening legal action against the reporter. This weekend, a report in *The Hindu* quoted Hajela as saying “the number of people who might get left out [of the register]

would be 50,000 at most”. All of this only adds to disquiet and fear.

The only other clue we have about the possible future of these persons who will be judged to be aliens is the sombre experience of the past decade of several thousand persons who have been deemed to be foreigners by the statutory Foreigners' Tribunals in Assam. These persons, both men and women, have been kept in detention centres carved out of jails, sometimes for close to a decade, in appalling conditions, with no prospect of release. Little is known even in Assam, and even less outside it, of the condition of these detainees, of the provisions under which they were detained, and how the state has treated them.

Unending human tragedy

These detention centres have not been open to human rights and humanitarian workers, so the conditions of their inmates never came to public attention. Last year, I accepted an invitation from the National Human Rights Commission to serve as their Special Monitor for Minorities. One of the first missions I sought was to make a trip to these detention centres in Assam. After many reminders, the commission finally agreed to let me visit the centres with two of its officers. We visited two detention centres in Goalpara and Kokrajhar and spoke

at length with the detainees. We were probably the first non-official human rights workers to gain access to these detention centres in the 10-odd years since they have been established. We also met jail and police authorities, district magistrates and senior officials in the state secretariat, and civil society groups in Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Guwahati. We found that these detention centres lie on the dark side of both legality and humanitarian principles.

I was profoundly dismayed by what I saw and heard at the detention camps. I submitted a detailed report, which describes the enormous and unending human tragedy of the detainees, and the extensive flouting of national and international laws, seeking urgent corrections. However, despite repeated reminders to the National Human Rights Commission, I did not receive any communication about action taken by the commission or the state and Central governments on my report. Now, with the prospect of possibly lakhs of people being deemed foreigners after the conclusion of the National Register of Citizens process, I felt the only recourse for me was to resign from the office of special monitor of the National Human Rights Commission, and bring my report to the public domain.

Condemned without a hearing

My first finding was that the majority of persons deemed to be foreigners and detained in the camps had lacked even elementary legal representation and had not been heard by the tribunals. They were mostly detained on the basis of “ex-parte orders”, or orders passed without hearing the accused person because they allegedly failed to appear before the tribunals despite

being served legal notices. Many claimed they never actually received the notices: we saw omnibus notices to large numbers of persons, sometimes naming some persons and simply adding a number for the others. Many were migrant workers working far from home, sometimes in another town or even another state, or were not at home, or for a variety of other reasons did not receive the notice.

For those who did get the notices, we learned that typically, a huge panic set in and many sold their meagre properties and took large loans to hire lawyers to steer them through this process. Many of the lawyers were poorly qualified or deliberately let them down.

As a humane democracy, we provide legal aid even to people accused of heinous crimes like rape and murder, but in this case, without even committing any crime, these people are languishing in detention centres as they cannot afford legal services.

Worse than prisoners

On our visit to the two camps—the one in Goalpara for men and the facility in Kokrajhar for women and children—we encountered grave and extensive human distress and suffering. Each centre has been carved out of a corner of a jail. Here, the detainees are held for several years, in a twilight zone of legality, without work and recreation, with no contact with their families save for rare visits from relatives, and with no prospect of release. In a jail, inmates are at least permitted to walk, work and rest in open courtyards. But the detainees are not allowed out of their barracks even in the day, because they should not be allowed to mix with the “citizen prisoners”.

A jail for women is anyway far more confined than one for men, and within the Kokrajhar jail, the women’s detention centre is even more cramped. Think of a situation in which these women—many barely literate homemakers, some aged widows—have not been allowed to move outside a confined space of maybe 500 square metres for close to a decade. In the women’s camp, in particular, the inmates wailed continuously, as though in permanent mourning.

We were informed by officials that they have no guidelines or instructions from the Centre or State about the rights of the detainees. The detention centres are therefore de facto, if not de jure, administered under the Assam Jail Manual, and the state does not make any distinction, for all practical purposes, between detainees and prisoners charged with or convicted of crimes. In the absence of a clear legal regime governing the rights and entitlements of detainees, jail authorities selectively apply the Assam Jail Manual to them, but deny them the benefits—such as parole and waged work—that prisoners are entitled to under jail rules. Thus, the detainees are treated in some ways as convicted prisoners, and in other ways deprived even of the rights of prisoners.

We found men, women and boys above six years who had been separated from their families, adding to their distress. Many had not met their spouse for years, several not even once since their detention. The detainees are not allowed legally to communicate with their family members but, occasionally, the jail authorities facilitate communication on humanitarian grounds on their mobile phones. Parole is not allowed even in the event of sickness and

death of family members. In their understanding, parole is a right only of convicted prisoners, because they are Indian citizens.

Difficulties for families to meet are compounded because only a few jails in the State have been converted into detention centres. Many family members who have loved ones in the camps but have not been detained themselves do not have the money to travel to the detention centres, especially if these are in another district.

There has been worldwide condemnation this past month of the United States government's policy to separate the children of illegal immigrants from their parents at the border. But this has been standard practice for detainees deemed to be foreigners in Assam for nearly a decade, without comment or censure by the larger human rights community.

Right to a life of dignity

My paramount recommendation to the National Human Rights Commission was the urgent establishment of a clear legal regime to govern the condition of detainees that is in conformity with Article 21 of the Constitution and international law. The state, under Article 21, must ensure a transparent procedure and respect the right to life and liberty of detainees. Their right to a life of dignity, even in detention, cannot be compromised. Detaining them as common criminals within jail compounds, without facilities such as legal representation or communication with their families, is a violation of their right to live with dignity and the right to procedural due process.

International law also explicitly lays down that immigrants cannot be

detained in jails, and that their status is not that of criminals. The UNHCR also says that detention should not be punitive in nature. The use of prisons, jails and facilities designed or operated as prisons or jails should be avoided.

Humanitarian considerations and international law obligations also require that families of persons deemed to be illegal immigrants not be separated under any circumstances. This leads to the requirement for open family detention centres not housed within jails.

Indian juvenile justice laws are also applicable here. The safety and care of children in situations in which they or their parents are deemed to be foreigners must be the direct responsibility of the state through the Child Welfare Committees established under the Juvenile Justice Act. The law applies to both children who are detained and those who are free while their parents are detained.

Also, detainees above a certain age should not be detained.

Indefinite detention is a violation of Article 21 and of international human rights standards. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention notes that detention "must not be for a potentially indefinite period of time". Guideline 4.2 of the UNHRC says detention can only be resorted to when it is determined to be necessary, reasonable in all the circumstances and proportionate to a legitimate purpose.

Needed: A clear, compassionate policy

The fundamental right to life guaranteed by the Constitution applies not only to citizens but also to those whose citizenship is

contested or denied. Their detention without due process and adequate, free legal representation violates their fundamental right to life. The Indian state must be compelled by the courts and by humane public opinion to formulate and announce a clear long-term policy on how it will treat, and what will be the consequences of, a person declared a foreigner? This is crucial, because if the National Register of Citizens declares thousands, even lakhs, of people as foreigners, does the state want to detain all of them indefinitely? The policy must also clarify what happens to those whose appeals are rejected. With Bangladesh unwilling to take them, are they then to be detained in these camps for life, with no relief? Is this lawful, constitutional and just?

On June 11, four United Nations special rapporteurs wrote to the Indian government expressing concerns similar to those I raised with the National Human Rights Commission. In their letter, they quoted an Assam minister stating that "the NRC is being done to identify illegal Bangladeshis residing in Assam" and "all those whose names do not figure in the NRC will have to be deported". They said "that local authorities in Assam, which are deemed to be particularly hostile towards Muslims and people of Bengali descent, may manipulate the verification system in an attempt to exclude many genuine Indian citizens from the updated NRC". They also observed that "members of the Bengali Muslim minority in Assam have experienced discrimination in access to and enjoyment of citizenship status on the basis of their ethnic and religious minority status. We are particularly concerned that this discrimination

is predicted to escalate as a result of the NRC”.

India’s policy must measure up to many tests. The first of these is India’s constitutional morality, and national and international laws. But it must also be compassionate. We must defend the rights to justice and public compassion of large numbers of mostly impoverished and very powerless people who may overnight find themselves treated as foreigners in their own land, and unwanted in any other. They must be protected from the possibility of being condemned to the same fate as the inmates of Assam’s detention camps have been forced to endure. Indefinite incarceration of men, women and children in conditions worse than those of convicted prisoners, only because they were unable (or not enabled) to prove their citizenship, greatly diminishes India—its government, but even more its people.

Email: manderharsh@gmail.com

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Marx@200 – Neither the beginning, nor the end

Dr. A. Raghu Kumar

Marx and Marxism remain the eternal hope of oppressed classes the world over! Marx’s theories evoke extreme reflections, from pure and uncritical love at one end, to equally uncritical hatred at another end, with mixed reactions from various other shades of thinking. Such reactions for any thinker who stands for revolutionary changes are only natural. Marx, for me, stands for the state of human thought process at a particular stage in its history, a necessary and compelling intervention at a particular point of time, in the milieu of a particular factual matrix. He interrupted the discourse of ideas, and introduced a permanent wedge in the idealistic–contemplative philosophies, and it was a powerful disjuncture! He created an inevitable presence in all the future intellectual discourse and peoples’ actions, so much so that all human discourse is today labelled as ‘pre-Marx’ or ‘post-Marx’!

But he is neither the beginning, nor the end. Several of his predecessors, the so called ridiculed ‘utopian socialists’ such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen et al, and even the so called liberal or capitalist economic theoreticians such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith and David Ricardo laid the road for understanding the idea of ‘value’ of a ‘produce’. In this process, we can’t even ignore the great contribution of an anarchist like Bakunin. Marx can definitely be credited with a very serious effort to steer through the fog

of mere idealistic pretensions, by attempting to introduce forcefully certain scientific methods in social studies. But he didn’t, by any stretch of imagination, abruptly emerge beyond context, and beyond time-space matrix. However, his disciples have created a mystique image of him in their anxiety to universalise him for all times, and for all contexts. In fact, such a process of universalising Marx, and for that matter any human being, is unscientific, and anti-Marxian.

Maybe, he is one of the greatest visionaries this world has ever produced, and a great mind which had trodden some hitherto untrodden paths. Maybe, he can be considered as one who had re-erected the upended project of philosophy on its feet. He may also be credited with the greatness of introducing the rigour of scientific methods in social sciences in general, and political economy in particular, and as the one who offered course correction to the dream project of many of his predecessors of realising an egalitarian society. But he could achieve all this, not out of any vacuum, but on the basis of the received wisdom of his time. His dedication to research is unparalleled. His effort to understand the ‘value’ of a produce in terms of the labour-time invested into it, is also radical. But his concept of the accumulation of surplus value by the capitalist only as a result of exploitation of labour or labour-time may not satisfy further enquiry. As Rammanohar Lohia,

one of the greatest contributors to the Indian thought of socialism, pointed out in his essay, “Economics after Marx”, the development of capitalist societies need also to be understood as a construction on the blood and sweat of colonial workers. The surplus of the capitalist, in a capitalist system, is not the result of pure internal, inter-systemic exploitation of labour time by the capitalist. This is one of the reasons for the absence any revolutionary action, or if any, only briefly in time, on the part of the working class of advanced capitalist societies.

When a generation recollects its past, assesses the contribution of a great thought of earlier periods, the memories can't be restricted to just writing an elegy. By eulogizing Marx, by positioning him and his thought as transcendental, by elevating his theories beyond questioning, by ridiculing the questions that continue to haunt the human mind about the correctness of some of his propositions, by quoting him out of context for every challenge that has come in the way of later human endeavour, does not do good even to Marx. If, in our enthusiasm to be called a better Marxist, we project him as impeccable—eternal truth for all situations, for all times, for all regions and for all momentous challenges, universal and transcendental, by projecting him as ‘supreme being’ and thus deifying him, we may temporarily secure some young and uninitiated minds to our side. But actually, we are rendering the greatest harm to the further development of socialist thought. It is in reaction to this that the Arthur Koestlers and Louis Fischers have written a different set of elegies, on ‘The God that Failed’.

We can't fail to see that the

systems established by, and in the name of Marx, in Russia, East Europe and China have turned out to be the centres for violation of all human rights. My intellect can't be satiated by terming these rights as bourgeoisie rights. The fall of empire after empire during the 1980s and 1990s is still fresh in my memory. As a young man growing through those days, while reading Marxism on one side, and The God That Failed on the other side, the unfolding events shook my faith in all theories. Blaming capitalist propaganda or conspiracy for their fall appeared to me unconvincing then, and continue to do so today too. There must be something internally within the main text that had caused the degradation. The element of violence, the roots of undemocratic approaches, the ideas of secrecy, the intellectual impetuosity, the condemnation of all opponents—is within, and not without. The external environment might have contributed to quicken the process, but it can't be accorded the status of primacy. Some Marxists argue that there is nothing wrong in the basic theory, but incorrectness crept into Marxist praxis because of its later practitioners. But this also doesn't quench my intellectual thirst. This is one of the oldest explanations given by every religion—“My basic texts, the Books, are always correct, and for any defect in its translation into action the blame is attributable to its interpreters and practitioners.”

Marx@200 does not only offer an opportunity to praise Marx, but also for deep reflections on the inadequacies and failures of Marxism, its limits and extent. It is the time to reflect on why it could not convince many countries and regions. Marx also cannot escape from his responsibility for all that

was realised in his name, and in the name of those who claim to have understood him better than the other lesser mortals. The suffocating citizens of the erstwhile USSR, the German Wall, the cries of Polish workers for bread and butter, the Tiananmen Square incident, etc., all ring through my memories. These are inescapable parts of the Marxist history of action, a fact which cannot be ignored or brushed aside lightly as mere aberration. The sources for these atrocious deviations are not just external.

Another question that troubled me always has been—do we have answers for all the momentous challenges that came in the way of human advancement in Marx writings? Post-Marx economies, the two World Wars, the developing and underdeveloped nations and regions, the anti-colonial struggles of India, Africa, etc., post-modernism, the consumer-oriented economic order, globalisation, the environmental degradation in the developmental models of both the capitalists and the communists, the big industries, the unbridled exploitation of nature for satisfying human greed, the advances of science culminating in the atom bomb, the researches into biotechnologies, the advent of information technology, the artificial intelligence (AI), the robots, the loss of working hands etc., challenge the very human existence on earth. But Marxists try to quote one or the other sentence from Marx to answer every challenge—a typical method followed by priests of all world religions!

In my humble endeavours, I found some solutions in Gandhi or in Nehru or in M.N. Roy or in Lohia or in Ambedkar. There are some remedies in Buddha and Jesus, and in

Hinduism and Islam. There are some explanations in the simple life of a tribal living in harmony with nature or in the Asiatic or African lives of yester years. I have, of late, found more answers in Gandhi. Man's quest doesn't end with satisfying economic needs, or social equality. The dream of spiritual realisation is not an abandoned project of human beings, despite Marx's powerful intervention or even that of many positive sciences. The need for internal peace continues to haunt human beings even after he or she reaches the peaks of materialist achievements. No single person's thought can be a final statement on human affairs. The 'Gurus' are the victims of their own disciples. They are preventing the gurus from realising their follies by constructing fortified structures around them. Marx needs to be rescued from Marxists in order to be placed in a historical context, and I hope with all sincerity at my command that it doesn't in any way reduce his greatness. By appreciating the inadequacies of a thought, it grows further. Marx had examined the conditions of working class at a particular stage of human history, made some great insights into the problem of value of a produce and the accumulation of 'surplus value', and anticipated by his theory dialectical-materialistic historical process an intensification of class antagonisms, consolidation of classes into the capitalist and the proletariat, and eventual revolutionary change in society under the vanguard of the socially advanced class—the proletariat—which would end all class contradictions. In the skillful and creative hands of Lenin and Mao, this theory saw its realisation. But history did not end. Even the

fall of communist States all over the world is not the end of history. It is neither the beginning nor the end; it is a continuum, where the wheel of history is imposing its inexorable laws, where the human nature accepts the challenges of history from time to time, irrespective of victories and defeats. The human endeavor for more equal and more and more egalitarian social order is a

relentless and ongoing process, and the solutions demand more and more innovative thinking and action from many. We have to locate Marx in this process as one of the important stages of our collective thought, neither as the beginning, nor as the end statement, or an epilogue or a curtain call.

Email: avadhanamraghukumar@gmail.com

GM Crops in India: Approval by Contamination?

Colin Todhunter

In India, five high-level reports have already advised against the adoption of GM crops:

- The 'Jairam Ramesh Report', imposing an indefinite moratorium on Bt Brinjal [Feb 2010];
- The 'Sopory Committee Report' [August 2012];
- The 'Parliamentary Standing Committee' [PSC] Report on GM crops [August 2012];
- The 'Technical Expert Committee [TEC] Final Report' [June-July 2013]; and
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment and Forests [August 2017].

Given the issues surrounding GM crops (including the now well-documented failure of Bt cotton in the country), little wonder these reports advise against their adoption. Little wonder too given that the story of GM 'regulation' in India has been a case of blatant violations of biosafety norms, hasty

approvals, a lack of monitoring abilities, general apathy towards the hazards of contamination and a lack of institutional oversight.

Despite these reports, the drive to get GM mustard commercialised (which would be India's first officially approved GM food crop) has been relentless. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has pushed ahead by giving it the nod. However, the case of GM mustard remains in limbo and stuck in the Supreme Court due to various pleas lodged by environmentalist Aruna Rodrigues.

Rodrigues argues that GM mustard is being undemocratically forced through with flawed tests (or no testing) and a lack of public scrutiny; in other words, unremitting scientific fraud and outright regulatory delinquency.

Moteover, this crop is also herbicide-tolerant (HT), which is wholly inappropriate for a country like India with its small biodiverse farms that could be affected by its application.

GM crops illegally growing

Despite the ban on GM crops, in 2005, biologist Pushpa Bhargava noted that unapproved varieties of several GM crops were being sold to farmers. In 2008, Arun Shrivastava wrote that illegal GM okra had been planted in India and poor farmers had been offered lucrative deals to plant ‘special seeds’ of all sorts of vegetables.

In 2013, a group of scientists and NGOs protested in Kolkata and elsewhere against the introduction of transgenic brinjal in Bangladesh—a centre for origin and diversity of the vegetable—as it would give rise to contamination of the crop in India. As predicted, in 2014, the West Bengal government said it had received information regarding “infiltration” of commercial seeds of GM Bt brinjal from Bangladesh.

In 2017, the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), a national farmers organisation, claimed that Gujarat farmers had been cultivating GM HT crop illegally. There are also reports of HT cotton being illegally growing in India.

CGMFI spokesperson Kavitha Kuruganti says that the regulators have been caught sleeping. It wouldn’t be the first time: India’s first GM crop cultivation—Bt cotton—was discovered in 2001 growing on thousands of hectares in Gujarat, spread surreptitiously and illegally by the biotech industry, even as field trials that were to decide whether India would opt for this GM crops were still underway. The GEAC was clearly caught off-guard. Be that as it may, the GEAC went on to approve Bt cotton for commercial cultivation in India in March 2002.

Therefore, calls are being made for probes into the workings

of the GEAC and other official bodies who seem to be asleep at the wheel or deliberately looking the other way. The latter could be the case given that senior figures in India regard GM seeds (and their associated chemical inputs) as key to modernising Indian agriculture. Even PM Modi has proclaimed that GM represents a good business-investment opportunity. Of course, Modi is only accelerating what former PM Manmohan Singh had set in motion—a politician whose pro-GMO policies were regarded by the late Arun Shrivastava as total treachery.

It doesn’t take a dyed-in-the-wool cynic to appreciate that the likes of Bayer, which has now incorporated Monsanto, must be salivating at the prospect of India becoming the global leader in the demand for GM.

Illegal GM imports

Despite reasoned argument and debate having thus far prevented the cultivation of GM crops or the consumption of GM food in India, it seems we are be witnessing GM seeds and crops entering the food system regardless.

Kuruganti says that a complaint lodged with the GEAC and a Right to Information (RTI) application seeking information regarding the illegal GM soybean cultivation in the country has stirred the apex regulatory body to bring the issue to the notice of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), months after the issue became public.

In reply to the RTI application, the GEAC responded by saying it had received no complaint about such illegal cultivation. Kuruganti says this is a blatant lie: the BKS had collected illegally cultivated GM HT

soybean samples for lab testing and the report was sent to the GEAC along with a letter of complaint. It is also understood that apart from the BKS, the Government of Gujarat also alerted the GEAC to the illegal cultivation.

Kuruganti says: “The fact that the GEAC is writing now to the DGFT to take action (on preventing the illegal GM imports), makes it clear that it lacks any real intent to take serious action about the violations of its own regulations. It also indicates that it is putting up a show of having ‘done’ something, before an upcoming Supreme Court hearing on PILs related to GMOs.”

Her assertion is supported by Rohit Parakh of India for Safe Food: “Commerce Ministry’s own data on imports of live seeds clearly indicates that India continues to import genetically modified seeds including GM canola, GM sugar beet, GM papaya, GM squash and GM corn seeds (apart from soybean) from countries such as the USA... with no approval from the GEAC as is the requirement.”

Kuruganti concludes that the regulatory system is a shambles and is not preventing GMOs from being illegally imported into the country or planted. Moreover, the ruling BJP has reneged on its election promise not to allow GM without proper protocols.

Offshoring Indian agriculture

It is not a good situation. We have bogus arguments about GM mustard being forwarded by developers at Delhi University and the government. We also have USAID pushing for GM in Punjab and twisting a problematic situation to further Monsanto’s interests by trying to get GM soybean planted

in the state. And we have regulators (deliberately) asleep at the wheel.

The fact that India is importing so many agricultural commodities in the first place doesn't help. Relying on imports and transnational agribusiness with its proprietary (GM) seeds and inputs is not a recipe for food security. In the 1960s, Africa was not just self-sufficient in food but was actually a net food exporter. Today, courtesy of World Bank, IMF and WTO interventions, the continent imports 25% of its food, with almost every country being a net food importer.

Is this what India wants? Despite its rising import bill, self-reliance and food security seems to be an anathema to policy makers. In response to the government's decision to abolish import duty on wheat in 2017, Ajmer Singh Lakhowala, head of the Punjab unit of Bharatiya Kisan Union, said sarcastically: "The import of cheap wheat will bring the prices down. It appears the government wants the farmers to quit farming."

As previously outlined, at the behest of the World Bank and courtesy of compliant politicians in India, it certainly seems to be the case.

Self-sufficiency is not to the liking of the US and the World Bank. Washington has for many decades regarded its leverage over global agriculture as a tool to secure its geostrategic goals.

Whether it involves the import of subsidised edible oils, wheat, pulses or soybean—alongside the ongoing neglect of indigenous agriculture and farmers by successive administrations—livelihoods are being destroyed, food quality is being undermined and Indian agriculture is slowly being offshored.

The Politics of Poverty in America

Ebony Slaughter-Johnson

This summer, UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty Philip Alston presented his observations on the state of international poverty to the UN Human Rights Council.

The country at the center of his most recent report wasn't a developing one—it was the United States. In one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Alston found, many Americans live without access to water and public sewage services. More alarmingly, at a time when 40 million Americans live in poverty—including over 5 million experiencing "developing world" levels of poverty—congressional Republicans and President Donald Trump are jeopardising access to the social safety net for millions, the report concluded.

Exacerbating poverty won't "Make America Great" for anyone.

For instance, health care, which is already prohibitively expensive, could become more so. A new rule allowing small businesses to buy plans without certain "essential health benefits" required by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is expected to increase insurance costs for people who need those benefits. Even now, ACA premiums are increasing thanks to the president's decision to stop sharing costs with insurers.

Rising out-of-pocket costs and premiums could either push the poor out of the market or force them to contend with even higher medical expenses. And by encouraging people to opt out of pricier plans, that leaves those who remain insured confronting higher costs,

and subsequent financial insecurity, themselves. Lack of insurance either drives the uninsured into hospital emergency rooms, where they face more expensive treatment they have no hope of affording, or promises an amplified public health crisis. In a December report, Alston recalled encountering poor Americans who had lost all of their teeth because they lacked access to dental health care.

The social safety net, which plays a crucial role in reducing poverty among children, is also under threat.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) alone kept 3.8 million children and 2.1 million children out of poverty and "deep poverty," respectively, in 2014. The Center for American Progress calculated that childhood poverty alone stunts economic output by \$170 billion each year and deprives the economy of \$500 billion each year.

More importantly, poverty is morally reprehensible, subjecting children to a lifetime of harm. It portends adverse health consequences, limited educational achievement, and lower rates of employment. Yet SNAP is on the chopping block for the House Farm Bill.

Poverty has also been shown to make communities fertile breeding grounds for abuse by law enforcement.

America's homeless have been among those most vulnerable to this abuse. Instead of addressing homelessness with increased access

to affordable housing, however, the Trump administration has suggested cuts to rental assistance programs. These cuts could push more Americans into homelessness—and then into the criminal justice system.

Across the country, homeless Americans are arrested and hit with an avalanche of fines and fees simply for trying to survive. The criminalization of homelessness deepens the poverty of the homeless and creates a criminal justice system that discriminates against the poor. No one benefits.

Fortunately, such hostility to the poor has been met with a wave of progressive activism.

Only a day after Alston presented his report, the Poor People's Campaign rallied in front of the Capitol Building to cap six weeks of anti-poverty advocacy. Lawmakers are already following the campaign's lead: Several influential senators and representatives recently heard testimony from struggling Americans.

Anti-poverty measures also featured prominently in the winning campaign of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is likely to become the next congresswoman for New York's 14th District.

As Republicans pursue policies that make American poverty a global concern, at least some progressives are preparing to fight back.



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Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
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Why Does RSS-BJP Not Like These Hindu Monks?

Sandeep Pandey

86-year-old Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand sat on an indefinite fast in Haridwar on 22 June 2018 to demand making a law on conservation of river Ganga. Nobody came to see him from the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. He was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Haridwar but continued his fast there even after a month.

He had fasted earlier in 2008 for letting Bhagirathi flow uninterrupted between Gangotri and Uttarkashi in a stretch of 175 kms. Because of this fast, the government cancelled the 380 MW Bhairon Ghati and the 480 MW Pala-Maneri hydel power projects. In 2009, when he got the feeling that government was not serious about its commitment, he started a fast again and this time got the Loharinag-Pala hydel power project cancelled.

Before becoming a saint in 2011, Swami Sanand was known as Professor Guru Das Agarwal. He had earlier taught and done research at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and served as the Member-Secretary of Central Pollution

Control Board.

He believes that just as hundreds of crores of rupees have gone down the drain in the name of Ganga Action Plan, now thousands of crores will be splurged in the name of Ganga River Basin Authority and Clean Ganga Mission by 2020. After Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, 'Namami Gange' project was launched with huge fanfare only to yield no results on the ground.

In 2011, a 34-year-old ascetic, Swami Nigamananda, died at the Jolly Grant Himalayan Institute Hospital in Dehradun on the 115th day of his fast to demand halt to illegal mining in Ganga when the Bharatiya Janata Party government was in power in Uttarakhand. It is suspected that a mining mafia considered close to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh connived with the administration and poison was injected into Swami Nigamananda's body while he in the district hospital in Haridwar, where he had been admitted earlier before being shifted to the Himalayan Institute Hospital. Otherwise, it doesn't explain why nobody on behalf of the government went to have a dialogue with him

during the course of his long fast.

Now, 79-year-old Swami Agnivesh has been thrashed and abused in Jharkhand by members of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad. Swami Agnivesh is a follower of the Arya Samaj sect, which was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and is based on the teachings of the four Vedas. The ten principles laid down by him as the philosophical basis of Arya Samaj ideology include: accept truth and reject untruth; take decision about every action based on Dharma after giving due thought to right and wrong; our objective must be the physical, spiritual and social well being of all; our conduct must be based on love, righteousness and justice; and that we must encourage knowledge and dispel ignorance.

Swami Agnivesh has fought against injustice all his life. From liberating bonded labourers, taking out a 18-day padyatra from Delhi to Deorala against Sati tradition, leading a movement for entry of Dalits in the Nathdwara temple near Udaipur, participating in campaign against female foeticide and launching a movement for ban on liquor, to constructive programmes like promotion of multi-faith harmony and establishing of Sarva Dharma Sansad (or All Faiths Parliament), he has been an activist all his life. He has not only lived according to the principles of the Hindu reformist movement of the Arya Samaj but has also served the higher goals of humanity. Swami Agnivesh is an ideal example of what a Hindu monk should be like. He is well respected within the country as well as abroad. His work for abolishing bonded labour has been recognised by United Nations as well, for which he was

made the chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. He has won several prestigious international awards for his work, including the Right Livelihood Award (also famed as the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize) in 2004 and the Freedom and Human Rights Award (Bern, Switzerland, 1994). Through him Hinduism has been projected in a good light, which is also because he has practiced Gandhian principles in his life. He has authored a book called Vedic Samajvad.

Swami Sanand and Agnivesh both put on saffron robes, are willing to take any risk for truth, and are committed to the path of non-violence, while also being celibates, vegetarians and scholarly. Both have given up comfortable lives. While Professor G.D. Agarwal quit his government job, Swami Agnivesh relinquished his Haryana assembly membership and ministership. Both have complete faith in Hinduism which guides their lives and actions. Swami Nigamananda sacrificed his life at a very young age. His faith in Hinduism is above question too.

The question then is, why don't the Hindutva organisations RSS and BJP like monks such as these? Why is it that Hindutva organisations either completely ignore such monks or feel threatened by them, to the extent that they have to engineer attacks on them? Swami Nigamanand lost his life because the Hindutva forces were dominated by commercial interests with criminal intentions.

It is because people like Swami Nigamananda, Sanand and Agnivesh are truly dedicated Hindus. They don't put up a show of being Hindus, and don't use religion for political or commercial purposes. Is it not an irony that the RSS and the Hindutva

organisations spawned by it consider such people living the ideals of Hinduism most truthfully as being opposed to them?

Swami Agnivesh and Sanand don't hate Muslims, neither are they afraid of them. They don't make provocative speeches which can trigger communal violence. They want to promote communal harmony and peace in society, not hatred, discrimination and violence. They don't identify human beings according to their caste, religion or class. For them humanity is supreme. They behave courteously even with their adversaries.

If we think about it, what have these Hindutva organisations, which project themselves as the sole torch bearers of Hinduism, got to do with either the principles or spirit of Hindu religion? In some ways, such as by giving free hand to lumpen elements, they are actually tarnishing the image of Hindu religion.

It is up to the wider Hindu society to decide whether the people who take law into their hands and indulge in mob lynching of Muslims and Hindutva organisations like RSS-BJP who give patronage to them are the real representatives of Hinduism, or people like Swami Nigamanda, Sanand and Agnivesh?

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The Making of the Mahatma

Salil Misra

Mahatma Gandhi is generally associated with India's struggle for independence. He was the unquestioned leader of this struggle for three decades from 1918 to 1947. Being its leader he formulated the strategy of the struggle. It was to be based on non-violent non-cooperation with British imperialism. In the process of the struggle, Gandhi mobilised the people. Mass participation was a major strength of the struggle. The struggle also had some interesting features. Gandhi maintained high moral standards during the course of the struggle. As he himself said, the struggle was essentially for the minds and hearts of the people, not for simple victory.

It is generally not realised that Gandhi joined the Indian freedom struggle rather late in his life, at the age of 49. Before that, he had spent most of his active years outside India, in England and in South Africa. Not much is generally known about these years. This period is treated either as a prelude to his active political life or as a kind of a pre-history to Gandhi's major involvement with the Indian freedom struggle. But, upon a closer examination, it should be clear that these years were integrally connected to Gandhi's political life. Far from being a pre-history, this period shaped Gandhi's personality and politics in fundamental ways.

From very early in his life, Gandhi seems to have decided that it was pointless to live just for the sake of living. Life did not constitute its own justification. It had to have a meaning larger than itself. Gandhi found that meaning

in a life of *service*. He of course gave importance to many individual virtues such as honesty, integrity, courage and compassion. But even these virtues were not important in themselves. You could live a life of honesty and integrity and yet be of little value to others. The important thing was to place these virtues for larger causes—service of the community. His notion of community was somewhat restricted initially—his Ashram inmates at Phoenix near Durban in South Africa, or the Indians in South Africa. But at crucial moments, his notion of community included all humanity. His struggle against British imperialism was as much for the people of India as for the people of England. He admired the British people and felt that they had been corrupted by the evil system of imperialism. It was necessary for the British people to get rid of their imperial domination. Gandhi said in an appeal to the British: "Please get off our backs so that we may all walk together."

It is important to emphasise that Gandhi was constantly growing and incorporating new experiences into his life and practices. All his previous experiences were like crucial investments for his future ventures. As he himself said in 1933: "I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I

am concerned with is my call to obey the Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he still has faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the latter of the two on the same subject." Yet even as he grew and incorporated new experiences into his practices, two major traits remained constant throughout—a primacy accorded to moral considerations in socio-political life and a deep commitment to non-violence. Apart from these two, his subsequent life underwent great changes based on his early experiences.

Both England and South Africa, where he spent his early years, shaped Gandhi's personality and politics in crucial ways. England exposed him to the great contrast between a powerful modern industrial civilisation and a traditional world of rural simplicities. Gandhi spent considerable time studying this contrast and then built his Utopia of a village republic. In South Africa, he led a struggle against discriminating laws against the Indian community and perfected his techniques of *satyagraha*. Both the Utopia and the technique stayed with him for the rest of his life.

The years spent in England affected him profoundly. He witnessed an industrial society going through rapid changes. He saw the remarkable accomplishments of the new order and the enchantment it created in human mind. He encountered the new converts to progress and also some sceptic

pessimists. The optimists saw the key to human happiness in the possibility of limitless growth. The benefits of affluence were bound to reach every society, sooner or later. The pessimists bemoaned the loss of culture and meaning, the simplicities of traditional life, the loss of cosy cocoons. They looked at the new order with distaste and concluded that the past was better than present. Industrialism had created a cold and arid world, devoid of all warmth and 'pastoral care'. Loss of culture and community was too great a price to pay for affluence.

Gandhi came into contact with both but was instinctively drawn towards the sceptics. He later read Tolstoy and Ruskin and was profoundly influenced by Ruskin's *Unto His Last*, a book he read during a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904. The book was a powerful critique of industrialisation and a plea to return to traditional social ideals. In Gandhi's own words, the book cast a "magic spell" on him. He paraphrased it into Gujarati and again re-paraphrased it back into English.

Even though Gandhi identified himself with the sceptics, there was one major difference. Both the optimists and the pessimists looked upon the new order as *fait accompli*. The optimists celebrated its inevitability and the pessimists expressed helplessness before the juggernaut of industrialism. Gandhi refused to go under. He grew more and more convinced that through collective human intervention, major wrongs could be set right. Any system, however much brutal and unjust, was in the end a sum total of the individuals who lived under it. They should be able to change it. Gandhi was determined

to demonstrate that an alternative life was possible and also desirable. He bought 100 acres of land near Durban and set up the Phoenix Ashram in 1904. Soon a community grew in the Ashram. It became a place where he could carry out his experiments in community life. If an alternative to industrialism was to be found, it had to begin by community life. The life at Phoenix was kept uncontaminated, as far as possible, from modern amenities. At Phoenix, Gandhi developed a taste for Ashram life. Later he built three more Ashrams—Tolstoy Farm outside Johannesburg in 1910, Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad in 1915, and Sevagram near Wardha in 1936, where he lived through most of the 1930s and 40s. The organising principles of social life remained the same in all the Ashrams.

The refusal to treat any unsatisfactory situation as 'given' became an important trait in Gandhi's politics and he practised it during his leadership of the freedom struggle. He was even ready to fight, at the age of 76, against the partition of India but he found very little support for his ideas.

It was however South Africa, where Gandhi lived for 21 years, that provided Gandhi with a framework for his struggle against injustice. South Africa virtually became a political laboratory where Gandhi made experiments with his techniques of *satyagraha*. Gandhi initially went there to work as a lawyer for a trading firm of an Indian Muslim. However he was soon drawn into a fight with the racial discrimination being practised there.

The South African society was in some ways similar to India and would have reminded Gandhi about the caste system in India. It was a

hierarchical society and practised graded inequality—the Whites treated Browns as inferior and the Browns treated Blacks as inferior. The inequality was also connected to class and occupation—the Indian traders were treated differently from the Indian indentured labour. Gandhi also soon discovered that equality in formal political rights was not the way out. Social recognition of equality was more effective. He also very soon realised that discrimination in South Africa was based not simply on wealth or power, but on deeply held prejudices that had taken deep roots in the mind. Gandhi therefore came to the conclusion that the fight for civic rights was bound to be more effective than simply a fight for political rights.

Gandhi formed the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 and started a campaign against anti-Indian racial laws. At the same time he also organised a volunteer force of Indians to help the British in the second Anglo-Boer War in 1899. This was clearly an attempt to put moral pressure on the British and to persuade them to take Indian demands seriously. In 1903, he started a journal *Indian Opinion* and started a press of his own, the International Printing Press (IPP), to mobilise opinion against discriminatory laws. Soon he launched a civil disobedience movement against racial laws. He visited London as part of an Indian delegation to make an appeal to the British people. It was around 1908 that he organised a mass burning of registration certificates by all Indians. These certificates were issued to Indians and were reminders of their unequal status in South Africa. This was the beginning of *satyagraha*. As his struggle intensified, imprisonments

inevitably followed. Gandhi went through three rounds of imprisonment during 1908–9. In 1913, Gandhi led a great march of over 2,000 *satyagrahi* Indian men, women and children to protest against anti-Indian legislations. He was arrested for the fourth time. Finally, there was an agreement in 1914 between Gandhi and Smuts, a British official in South Africa. The settlement ended the struggle, but it was far from a total victory for Indians. Gandhi later stated that Indians needed to continue their *satyagraha*. He defined *satyagraha* as a technique of everyday resistance. The resistance was to be peaceful and meant to restrain and convert the adversary rather than to defeat him.

On the whole, during the 21 years he spent in South Africa, Gandhi in his political life conducted many experiments—press, journal, Ashram, long marches, moral pressures, picketing, bonfire, civil disobedience, imprisonment, and preparedness for a settlement. Each one was considered by Gandhi as effective and successful. It is interesting that during the course of the Indian freedom struggle, he repeated and relived each one of those political activities as part of his package of *satyagraha*. The only element in the package that was absent in South Africa was fasting as a political weapon, which he repeatedly practised in India. During the course of the Indian freedom struggle, Gandhi fasted around 13 times, with good effect. At no time, however, was it targeted against the British. It was aimed against fellow Indians, as a kind of moral force. He first used the fast as a political weapon in Ahmedabad in 1917, during the strike by the workers of cotton textile mills. Gandhi was

leading the strike. The industrial lobby of Ahmedabad was in no mood to relent and the workers' morale was gradually sagging. It was at this point that Gandhi announced that he would undertake a fast. Gandhi's fast did help to break the stalemate and a settlement was reached, partially accepting the workers' demands for a wage increase.

Gandhi's life was a series of experiments carried out in South Africa and then in India. All that was practised in South Africa was also tried out in India with considerable success. His transformation began in South Africa in which he systematically liberated himself from the bonds of money, property, fame, sex and formal power, and gradually became more and more invulnerable to all the possible pressures and inducements that could wean him away from what he thought was the correct path. This was Gandhi's real strength and it enhanced his capacity for single-minded devotion to public causes, whether in South Africa or in India.

Gilbert Murray, an English writer, warned the British government as early as in 1918 to be "very careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes to be right. He is a dangerous and an uncomfortable enemy because his body which you can always conquer gives you so little purchase upon his soul." This warning turned out to be quite prophetic.

After practising *satyagraha* in South Africa, Gandhi decided to codify it by writing a book *Satyagraha in South Africa* in 1924 in which he presented *satyagraha* as a "priceless and matchless weapon

and that those who wield it are strangers to disappointment and defeat." Gandhi claimed that true *satyagraha* would be an effective weapon in most situations in which those holding formal power were unjust and tyrannical and their victims powerless and helpless. For all such situations, Gandhi offered his remedy of *satyagraha*. The pre-condition of course was that the practitioners had to first learn thoroughly what he called the "science of *satyagraha*". Gandhi thus liberated the idea of *satyagraha* from the constraints of time and space and established it as a universal principle, a moral framework, capable of being applied to any concrete situation desiring it. It is significant that after Gandhi's death, his techniques of *satyagraha* were creatively applied in South Africa and the USA by Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, respectively. Both the leaders openly expressed their debt to the Mahatma. There is therefore nothing uniquely Indian about *satyagraha*. It is not patentable and Gandhi did not patent it.

Satyagraha is Gandhi's gift to all legitimate and just protesters. And Gandhi is India's gift to the world.

Email: salil@aud.ac.in

The Unemployment Crisis: Reasons and Solutions

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The Era of 'Teaching Lessons'

Prem Singh

Although the recent attack on social activist Swami Agnivesh is being widely and strongly condemned, there are many people who, citing some earlier incidents involving Swami ji, perceive the attack as an inevitable and normal culmination. This is definitely most unfortunate. Those who do not agree with his earlier or present views and actions were, and are, absolutely free and within their rights to disagree. They are also not wrong in trying to oppose him in a democratic manner. However, before doing so, they could possibly take a moment to look at the background of Swami Agnivesh.

Distressed by the continuous violent attacks by Sangh Brigade's 'Hindutva lumpen' elements, some people are calling for organising a united movement of the Dalits, other backward classes (OBCs), Adivasis and the minorities, in order to teach the Hindutva groups a fitting lesson. Such sentiment is also present in their response to the recent incident of the attack on Swami Agnivesh. Some friends are confident that if the Dalits, OBCs, Adivasis and minorities unite and come together, the Hindutva brigade will have to look for escape routes. One such friend recently went to the extent of claiming on the social media that the only lesson that can be taught to the lynchers would be to lynch them in the same manner. The Hindutva of the RSS and the pride associated with it is born out of the frustration of an insecure and defeated mindset. That is why it is forever cursed to remain a negative voice. However,

seeking to teach a lesson to these Hindutva lumpen elements through a unity of the Dalits, OBCs, Adivasis and minorities is not a positive option. It is actually nothing more than a short-lived, temporary and immature indignation.

My first submission in this context is that the Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis are presently not too far distanced from the RSS/BJP; the RSS/BJP has succeeded in winning over large sections of them, and this solidarity is continuing well. The RSS/BJP's integration with neo-liberalism/neo-imperialism has become full-fledged and complete; the Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis have been supportive of these policies of the RSS/BJP. As far as the minority Muslims are concerned, how long will they remain in alienation and oppose the RSS/BJP? After all, they are also Indians, like the rest of the citizens. Apart from their religious identity, they too need some kind of support in terms of political power. In any case, a Muslim knows well that he cannot even think of thrashing the Hindutva lumpen elements. In case he dares to do so, even the Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis will teach him a lesson! It is also well known that the RSS is working hard to influence the Shia Muslim community in the country. It cannot be denied that the RSS work's consistently and eventually delivers results, even though they may take time in coming. It is its patient work of many decades that has brought us to this juncture when all streams of scientific, progressive and revolutionary thought are being

bashed and beaten up by the RSS!

My second submission is that if the intellectuals of this country are planning to unite the Dalits, OBCs, Adivasis and minorities to teach a lesson to the Hindutva lumpen elements, then, we have to remember Lohia's more democratic suggestion—'Live communities do not wait for five years'. In order that identity discourse and politics are not co-opted by right-wing forces, Lohia gave a formula for unity between the Dalits, OBCs, adivasis, women and minorities, based on social justice. Behind this was his dream of building a new Indian civilisation which would create its special place in the modern world. In his plan, this largest part of India's population has been, more or less, non-conformist, that is, freed from the clutches of the pre-colonial Brahminical order and the colonial capitalist ideology. By building solidarity with these marginalised groups, it is possible to democratically win political power and establish a new system of equality, different from Brahminism and capitalism, a new socialism which can be an example before the whole world. Lohia had a great dream to integrate this marginalised yet non-conformist mind-bank of India for the building up of socialism vis a-vis capitalism and communism. In order to proceed in this direction, he gave the principle of special opportunity (reservation). However, today, this formula of Lohia is being used by the so-called champions of social justice only for capturing power in order to implement neoliberal policies. The

RSS/BJP too has used the same tactics, imitating the other leaders and parties.

If intellectuals in this country are suggesting that the solidarity of these marginalised groups should be directed towards teaching a lesson to the Hindutva lumpen elements, then,

it can only be called a backward step, even within the limited frame of vote-bank politics. The corporate capitalist forces are not only making the country's leaders dance to their tunes, but also the intellectuals. Let me remind here that the intellectuals who call for the unity of the Dalits,

OBCs, Adivasis and minorities to teach a lesson to the Hindutva lumpen elements, had also joined the 'crowd' in support of the anti-reservationist group of Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal!

Email: drpremsingh8@gmail.com

Dismantling India: A 4 Years Report

John Dayal , Leena Dabiru & Shabnam Hashmi

Four years of NDA's governance with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister has been reviewed and compiled in a report called 'Dismantling India'. This report was launched on 14 July 2018 at Constitution Club, New Delhi. In this detailed report, there are 24 articles by eminent writers critiquing this government's actions, policies and directives. Some of the writers came together with the editors of the book to discuss and speak on these issues, which has and will change the picture of the nation if this government continues to remain in power. The report is supported by a series of tables which has recorded four years of mis-rule by the Modi government, including a list of hate speeches he and his party members delivered in these four years.

The first session, "Rising Hate and Irrationalism", had four speakers—Gauhar Raza, Souradeep Roy, Subhash Gatade and V.B. Rawat. Gauhar Raza said that this government is attacking scientific institutions in a way which will be irreversible, and the country will be taken back many years. This government not only propagates unscientific and irrational views, but in these four years has slowly reduced the publication of scientific

journals. Souradeep Roy, speaking on 'Unmaking Indian Culture', said that the attack on culture is not only on artists and writers but on the common man of India. Talking about the rise of Hindutva in these years, Subhash Gatade said that the right-wing which used to work covertly has now started working openly and defiantly. The trishuls have changed into swords. The hatred seeded deep inside the common man is at its height. Having failed to fulfill their promises, the RSS is now working on strategies to polarise communities to win the 2019 elections, he said. Vidya Bhushan Rawat talked about cow-politics, which has created a huge problem for the small and medium farmers; this fear of cows and its protectors is ruining the village economy.

The second session, "Dispossessed India & Fading Rights", had four speakers—Karen Gabriel, Kavita Krishnan, Usha Ramanathan and Vijoo Krishnan. Prof. Karen Gabriel showed how this government has silently introduced many things in higher education. For instance, it has introduced four modern Indian languages as well as Sanskrit. But there are no teachers for four languages, while they have teachers for Sanskrit.

So students have no option but to opt for Sanskrit. The Sanskrit department has been asked to teach the distorted Hindutva version of history. Speaking on Aadhaar, Usha Ramanathan said that this ruling party when in opposition had strongly opposed Aadhaar, but when it came into power it not only took a U-turn but implemented ADHAAR in such a way that it has created havoc in the country. Vijoo Krishnan said that the BJP had promised that farmers' lands will be protected, but within 6 months they brought in the Land Ordinance. Massive protests were organised across the country, forcing the government to withdraw the ordinance. Now the BJP is implementing these land acquisition bills in the States where it is in power. It had made several other promises to the farmers during the 2014 elections, but when it came to power it declared that these were only chunavi jumla. Kavita Krishnan said that the worst kind of attacks on women's autonomy and rights have taken place under the present government. This government has diluted many laws related to women. On the issue of triple talaq, women rights group fought and won a favourable order from the Supreme Court. But this government is now

bringing a law which will give powers to the police and the state to criminalise Muslim men.

The third session, which gave an overview of 4 years, saw speeches by Prof Arun Kumar, Ashok Vajpeyi, Harsh Mander, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Dr. Syeda Hameed. Prof Arun Kumar spoke on the impact of the two attacks on the informal economy by this present government, demonetisation and the GST. Harsh Mander gave first hand account on the horror of the numerous incidents of mob lynching across India, several of which he visited during Caravan-e-Mohabbat. He also talked about the great examples of communal harmony shown by fathers of two boys, one in Delhi and another in Asansol. In both the cases they appealed to the political leaders and the masses to shed communal hatred and preserve harmony. Mani Shankar Aiyar spoke on policies of the present government with regards to our neighbouring countries, and how India's relations with its neighbours have deteriorated under this regime.

Dr Sayeeda Hamid highlighted the issue of being a Muslim under this present political and social scenario. She said that it was only during this government that she came to realise that she was a Muslim woman. Ashok Vajpeyi spoke on the onslaught on the cultural institutes launched by the present government by appointing such people as their heads who don't have any knowledge of culture. Ashokji said that Hindutva is nothing but a big threat to Hinduism, and if the leaders of Hindus have to protect their religion then they will have to fight the Hindutva forces.

All the writers and editors released the report in the afternoon, which was followed by comments on the book by the editors. Dr John

Dayal thanked all the writers and the publication house for getting this book printed and published on time. He spoke of the challenges faced in getting the book published, and said it was difficult to even decide the name of the book. One prominent lawyer advised them to keep a neutral sounding title for the book, or there could be criminal action. It was fortunate that Media House came forward to publish the book. Leena Dabiru spoke on the tables and how the web links were removed from the internet. She said that it

is important that this book reaches distant corners of the country. She also thanked the interns who helped in collecting the data. Shabnam Hashmi spoke on the need to have such a document. The difference between earlier governments and the present government is that they have reached the 50% mark on the 14 points that define fascism, and if they win power again, then fascism will be at its peak. She said at the present time where the spaces of dissent are receding, it is important that we keep doing such programs and to preserve the democratic spaces.

FCRA Amended to Condone Illegal Foreign Funding to BJP, Congress; Challenged in Supreme Court

Neeraj Jain

(Based on articles in The Wire by Anuj Srivas and Gaurav Bhatnagar)

The Modi government used Budget 2018 to once again give the BJP and Congress a get-out-of-jail card for having illegally accepted funding from foreign companies.

The parties got a free pass for violations of the law going back 40 years.

In 2016, finance minister Arun Jaitley inserted a surreptitious amendment in that year's finance bill which shielded both political parties from having violated the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010 (FCRA) when they accepted donations from London-based multinational Vedanta.

The amendment was a thinly disguised attempt to overturn a 2014 Delhi High Court order that found both the Congress and BJP guilty of violating the FCRA and ordered the government and Election Commission to act against them.

The move came even as the government was cracking down on NGOs for allegedly violating the FCRA, freezing the bank accounts of Greenpeace and Citizens for Justice and Peace and even instituting criminal proceedings against the anti-communal activist Teesta Setalvad.

However, the 2016 amendment—which changed the FCRA to redefine foreign companies as “Indian” if their ownership in an Indian entity was within the foreign investment limits prescribed by the government for that sector—was made retrospective only from 2010, which is when the latest version of the FCRA was introduced. The original Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act commenced in 1976; it was repealed and re-enacted as a separate piece of legislation in 2010 with minor changes.

This meant that donations received from foreign companies prior to 2010 were not covered by the retrospective amendment. Ironically, the impugned Vedanta donation itself was from before 2010.

Jaitley probably realised the limitation of the 2016 amendment only later, and so sought to make amends by inserting a new amendment in the Finance Bill 2018 that sought to amend that 2016 amendment so that the BJP and Congress are off the hook for any donation received after August 5, 1976—the date of the commencement of the original FCRA Act. On March 30, 2018, the Ministry of Finance notified the Finance Act, 2018 amending FCRA 2010 with effect from 1976.

The new amendment has let both political parties off the hook

for receiving foreign donations from companies before 2010 as well.

There are at least 20 instances of the Congress and the BJP receiving funding from the ‘Indian’ subsidiaries of various foreign companies before 2010. As the table below, compiled by Association for Democratic Rights, shows, the parties have received funding in the range of Rs 5 lakh to Rs 5 crore from the Indian subsidiaries of Vedanta, Dow Chemicals and Switzerland-based Win Pharma over the course of six years from 2004 to 2010.

Activists Challenge Amendments in the SC

On July 2, acting on a petition filed by founder-trustee of ADR Jagdeep S. Chhokar and former bureaucrat E.A.S. Sarma challenging these amendments to the FCRA, a Supreme Court bench comprising

Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud issued notice to the Centre on July 2 seeking its response. Represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan, Kamini Jaiswal and Pranav Sachdeva, the petitioners alleged that the amendments to the FCRA through the Finance Act, 2016 and the Finance Act, 2018 were introduced in order to overturn the judgment passed by the Delhi High Court in March, 2014, holding the two major political parties (the BJP and the Congress) guilty of taking foreign funding in violation of the FCRA Act.

The petition stated that this also went “against settled principle of separation of powers since it has overruled the Delhi high court judgment.” Elaborating on the issue, it said: “It is a settled law the legislature cannot over-turn any

<i>Company</i>	<i>Amount (In Rupees)</i>	<i>Year of Donation</i>	<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Parent Company</i>
Hyatt Regency	5,00,000	FY 04-05	INC	American Origin Company
Sterlite Industries Ltd	100,00,000	FY 04-05	INC	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	12,00,000	FY 04-05	INC	Vedanta
Adani Wilmer Ltd	2,50,000	FY 05-06	INC	A 50:50 joint venture between the Adani Group and Wilmar International Limited
Sesa Goa Ltd	10,00,000	FY 05-06	INC	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	2,00,000	FY 06-07	INC	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	15,00,000	FY 07-08	INC	Vedanta
Adani Wilmer Ltd	50,00,000	FY 08-09	INC	Adani – Wilmer JV
Solaris Holdings Ltd	100,00,000	FY 09-10	INC	Avantha Group
Sterlite Industries Ltd.	5,00,00,000	FY 09-10	INC	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	30,00,000	FY 09-10	INC	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	5,00,000	FY 05-06	BJP	Vedanta
Win Medicare (P) Ltd	25,00,000	FY 05-06	BJP	Swiss origin company
Sesa Goa Ltd	2,00,000	FY 06-07	BJP	Vedanta
Dow Chemical Int (P) Ltd	1,00,000	FY 06-07	BJP	Union Carbide acquirer
Sesa Goa Ltd	27,50,000	FY 07-08	BJP	Vedanta
Adani Wilmar Ltd	50,00,000	FY 08-09	BJP	Adani – Wilmer JV
The Madras Aluminum Ltd	3,50,00,000	FY 09-10	BJP	Vedanta
Sesa Goa Ltd	60,00,000	FY 09-10	BJP	Vedanta
Win Medicare (P) Ltd	25,00,000	FY 09-10	BJP	Swiss origin company

court judgment; it can only remove the basis of the judgment.” The petition argued that “it is a settled principle of law that the legislature can pass an amendment to an existing law to cure the defect in that law.” Therefore, it said, “when the Court held BJP and INC guilty of accepting donations from ‘Financial Source’ as prohibited in FCRA, 1976, then in no circumstance whatsoever can any political party in power use the powers vested in the legislature to cure the guilt on its part by bringing any law or amendment to an existing law.”

The ADR had challenged the amendment made in FCRA 2010 through the Finance Act 2016 in a petition filed by it before the Supreme Court, on which the Court had issued notice on October 3, 2017. Despite this matter being sub-judice, the petition noted, “the parliament has now made the amendment with retrospective effect from 1976 vide Finance Act, 2018 which has come into force from 1st April 2018.”

The petition recalled that “in 1976, the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976 was enacted by the parliament to serve as a shield in legislative armoury, in conjunction with other laws like the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973, and insulate the sensitive areas of national life—like journalism, judiciary and politics—from extraneous influences stemming from beyond our borders. It imposed prohibition on candidates for election from accepting foreign contribution from foreign sources.” Though the Parliament repealed the earlier FCRA 1976 and enacted FCRA 2010, the petition said that however, the definition of ‘foreign source’ remained unchanged.

The petitioners further contended before the Supreme Court that the amendments introduced in FCRA 2010 by Finance Act, 2016 and

Finance Act, 2018 be declared “void, illegal and unconstitutional” as they have “opened the floodgates to unlimited corporate donations to political parties and anonymous financing by Indian as well as foreign companies which can have serious repercussions on the Indian democracy.”

Asserting that these “amendments pose a serious danger to the autonomy of the country and are bound to adversely affect electoral transparency, encourage corrupt practices in politics and have made the unholy nexus between politics and corporate houses more opaque and treacherous and is bound to be misused by special interest

groups and corporate lobbyists,” the petition had also claimed that they were “in violation of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India.”

The petition further cautioned that “if the recent amendments are not set aside, foreign countries and corporate houses and extremely wealthy lobby groups can have a stranglehold on the electoral process and governance. Such activities, if allowed, can result in a situation that legislation, regulations etc. can be ultimately be passed and laws brought in to favour of these corporates and lobby groups at the expense of the common citizens of the country.”

Email: neerajj61@gmail.com

Nicaragua Defeats the Not-So-Soft Coup

Tortilla Con Sal and Luis Varese

The July 19, 2018 demonstration in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, is a massive celebration of the coup's defeat and a categorical vindication of President Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government's efforts for peace in the country.

On July 19, hundreds of thousands of people from across Nicaragua converged on the capital Managua to celebrate the 39th anniversary of their historic 1979 defeat of the Somoza dictatorship. It signalled the defeat of the soft-coup launched by the USA in association with the Nicaraguan opposition to unseat the socialist government of Sandinista National Liberation Front, or FSLN, headed by President Daniel Ortega. Speaking during the celebrations, Ortega told thousands of supporters that right-wing opposition groups, believed to be financed by the United States, are

trying to destabilize the country and end the peace that had existed during the last 11 years of his administration.

Similarities with 1979

There exist several similarities between the situation existing today in Nicaragua and back in 1979, when the revolution had first triumphed. Then too, the USA had launched a three pronged attempt to strangle the Sandinistas and force them out of power, including (i) economic strangulation through the economic embargo and associated U.S.-imposed trade and credit blockades that ruined the Nicaraguan economy and pushed most Nicaraguans to suffer significant misery; (ii) financed a terrorist military force known as the Contras that caused widespread suffering and damage across the entire country through

ambushes, assassinations of various community leaders, kidnappings and disappearances of other important citizens, and attacks on cooperatives—tens of thousands of Nicaraguans were killed in the bloody campaign launched by the contras; and (iii) through the CIA and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), financed a number of Nicaragua's opposition parties and pushed them to unite into the United Nicaragua Opposition (UNO). Eventually, in 1990, weary of war and hyper-inflation, the Nicaraguan electorate voted the Sandinista Party out of office, and the UNO came to power.

Seventeen years later, in 2007, the Sandinistas came back to power and Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinistas, became the President. The atmosphere in Latin America had changed, several countries were now successfully opposing US intervention and chalking out independent, socialist agendas. With Venezuelan help, the Sandinistas too began implementing social welfare programs designed to help the poorest of the poor and advance socialism, and Ortega won two consecutive re-election victories in 2011 and 2016.

During the last few years, the right wing has made a come back in some countries of Latin America. Enthused by right wing victories in Ecuador and Brazil, in April 2018, the US intelligence agencies, together with the NED and USAID, have once again launched an offensive through the right wing opposition in Nicaragua to destabilise the FSLN government by arming the opposition and imposing an economic embargo. The Catholic Church too openly came out in support of the opposition. The

opposition staged armed roadblocks, bring road movement to a halt, pushing the economy into a deep crisis. Simultaneously, it launched a violent campaign, burning down and destroying hundreds of families' homes, public buildings and small- and medium-sized businesses, as well as attacking Sandinistas, government officials and police officers, in which several people and even police officers were murdered. The overall aim was to create conditions for complete breakdown of institutionality, thereby creating a beachhead from where the country could be infiltrated with "multinational" forces to support an insurrection against the government. It was a strategy that had succeeded several times in various countries of Latin America in the past.

Fake News

Simultaneously, the political opposition used social media to misrepresent and exaggerate events, create incidents that never happened and obliterate their own criminal terrorist attacks. For example, it claimed that the crisis in Nicaragua began with a fake 'student massacre', that actually never took place. The opposition also faked attacks on a church in Managua, exaggerated casualties during the clearance of opposition thugs from the national university, and covered up their own deliberate murders of police in the towns of Morrito and Masaya as well as their gratuitous attacks on peaceful Sandinista demonstrators. It expertly staged phony scenes of students taking cover from gunfire and used those images to justify their own savage attacks, like those in which they burned down pro-government *Nuevo Radio Ya* and the rural cooperatives' savings and

loan institution CARUNA.

Although the extreme violence of the armed opposition activists has been responsible directly and indirectly for almost all the loss of life and injuries during the crisis, international news media such as the Washington Post, New York Times, BBC and CNN, and 'human rights organisations' such as Amnesty International have continued to publish fake photographs of opposition activists being attacked and falsely blame the government for virtually all the deaths and people injured.

Soft Coup Defeated

Ever since the opposition began its violent campaign to bring down the democratically elected Sandinista government, President Ortega called for a process of National Dialogue to peacefully resolve opposition demands. But Nicaragua's political opposition and their allies were never really interested in a dialogue, and so they sabotaged all the talks. Nevertheless, the government always attended the dialogue table, even when it meant listening to absurd proposals such as early elections or even worse, Ortega's resignation. The serenity demonstrated by Ortega and his government won massive support from the people, and the FSLN gradually channelised this into a return towards stability.

While the opposition blamed the police for the violence and bloodshed, the fact is, the Nicaraguan police force is considered to be one of the most efficient ones in Latin America. It has been developed by the Sandinistas as a community force, with great insertion in the neighborhoods and communities. It has controlled drug trafficking

and the Maras (the very violent Central American gangs whose origin is linked to the US) have never managed to enter the country. The Nicaraguan National Police was founded by Tomas Borge (FSLN revolutionary commander) as "the sentinels of the people's joy" and has inherited the best Sandinista ideals.

Early in July, the opposition reneged on an agreement to dismantle the roadblocks their armed supporters have used since late April to try to destroy the country's economy and intimidate the general population. The government then declared on July 9 that it would no longer permit the opposition to abuse the population's basic rights to peace and security, and ordered the police to dismantle the roadblocks.

Subsequently, Nicaragua's national police have worked with local communities around the country to clear the opposition roadblocks. In Jinotepe, they set free hundreds of trucks and their drivers held hostage by opposition gangs for over a month. In many places, they successfully negotiated agreements to remove the roadblocks peacefully. Elsewhere, the process has involved violence and casualties, provoked by very well-armed activists and associated paid criminals. On July 12, opposition activists attacked a police post and the local municipal office, murdering four police officers and a primary school teacher, wounding four municipal workers and kidnapping nine police officers; on July 13, in Managua, two opposition activists were killed during the clearance of blockades in and around the National Autonomous University.

A desperate political opposition, finding their counter-revolution failing, have been desperately trying to keep up their violence so as

to sabotage efforts at National Dialogue and project the false image of a repressive government without popular support. However, large demonstrations across the country supporting the government's efforts for peace show exactly the reverse is true. Majority national opinion in Nicaragua is well aware of the opposition's propaganda ploys and false claims.

Need to Consolidate Popular Power

The huge public demonstrations in Managua and other cities prove the ability of the government and FSLN party to summon people to the defence of the revolution. Those who thought that there would be a triumphant counter-revolutionary government by the end of July have been left wringing their hands in dangerous frustration.

But the right-wing will not give up its efforts to seize power. The government must deepen measures to consolidate popular democracy, both as regards citizen participation and in the construction of an effective popular power, as well as in speeding up the redistribution of resources and the improvement of living conditions for the still disadvantaged sectors. Moving forward in these two areas simultaneously is the only way to guarantee the continuity of revolution.

The history of the revolutions in South America have shown us the fragility of our triumphs. These become vulnerable to defeat by capitalist forces when popular power is not consolidated and when the alliances with the capitalist sectors are not properly managed. It must not be forgotten that the latter are only fragile alliances, we cannot allow the capitalist sectors to dominate the economy and the government, and

we must gradually make attempts to expand the socialist sectors of production. It is an extremely complex task and in that difficulty, the "Cantos de Sirena" (mermaid's call or siren songs, a seductive or deceptive call) of corruption and using the resources of the state for personal enrichment are always present.

Brazil and Ecuador are the most recent examples of the right-wing's ability to overthrow socialist governments and reverse socialist advances. The high cost in lives in Nicaragua and Venezuela, during the attempt "to return to the dark neoliberal night," should lead us to a deep self-critical reflection about the role of the different political parties, about the transition towards a culture of solidarity and about the need to consolidate and make more effective the mechanisms for participation of people in the running of the government and the economy, or participatory democracy as they call it in Venezuela.

Today, in Nicaragua, people from the right-wing thought they would be able to celebrate the defeat of the FSLN Government but they were defeated in every single battlefield—the political one, the economic one, on the streets.

The ease with which the coup was defeated can be understood by the fact that the government did not find it necessary to call out the army; the triumph was achieved with the help of the National Police and organised Sandinistas. However, we can not claim victory yet, we cannot let down our guard. We need to consolidate and deepen popular and participatory democracy, street by street, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community.

Are Africans Made to Feel Unwelcome in India?

Chandra Bhal Tripathi

The Madras Courier of July 17, 2018 carried an article with the above caption giving the first hand experiences of some Africans. In response to that article I felt like writing my comments.

In a historical–anthropological perspective, people with an African background have been living in India since prehistoric times. In Andaman–Nicobar islands, four Negrito communities—Great Andamanese, the Jarawa, the Onge and the Sentinelese—living in the Stone Age have drawn the attention of anthropologists and ethnographers from all over the world for more than a hundred years. The Great Andamanese have already vanished due to a high degree of miscegenation, especially during the Japanese occupation in WWII. Due to the wrong policies of the administration like opening of a Grand Trunk Road through the Jarawa territory despite opposition by anthropologists, it is a matter of time before the remaining three Negrito tribes, none of which number more than 500 or so (the Onge are around 100 only and till the other day the Sentinelese were totally unapproachable), also vanish ethnically, linguistically and culturally. Their destiny is controlled by the IAS and other generalist officials who consider themselves to be all knowing and have no idea of the history of vanishing tribes in the various continents.

It is a shame that barring the administrators, anthropologists and tourists (who have limited

access to them), the Indian people on the the mainland are not aware of the existence of these Negrito tribes. A man named Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, imprisoned in the infamous Cellular Jail at Port Blair and on whom his bhaktas endow the title 'Veer Savarkar', has written cock-and-bull stories about the Jarawa without ever coming into direct contact with this beautiful Negrito tribe whom he falsely accuses of being ferocious. In early 1980s, I found them to be one of the most friendly people and described my experiences in a radio talk from Port Blair station of All India Radio. I should add here that a gentle police officer, Sardar Bakhtawar Singh, who retired as the Deputy Superintendent of the Andaman & Nicobar Police, was responsible for establishing contact with the Jarawa through sign language in 1974. The saga of that expedition, organised by the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), is well documented in a documentary captioned Man in Search of Man produced by the AnSI. The Sentinelese were still untouched till then. The political ignoramus of both the Congress and the BJP, including the Prime Ministers, the Home Ministers, the Culture Ministers. etc., are blissfully unaware of these facts.

On the mainland, nearly a hundred years ago the famous anthropologist Dr. B.S. Guha, who had a Ph. D. from Harvard and was the Director of AnSI, discovered Negrito elements in the Kadar tribe of Perambicullum hills. But they too are one of the smallest adivasi

communities in the country.

In the 17th century, the Nawab of Junagadh and the Sultan of Mysore imported some Siddis from East Africa. In Gujarat, these tall Negroes are called Siddi Babas and live in the Gir forest reserved for Indian lions in Junagadh district. I saw some of them walking on the streets of Ahmedabad in 1966. There was absolutely no animosity towards Siddis, who are included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes.

Coming to modern times, drawing inspiration from the freedom struggle of India and the internationalism of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru several big countries of Africa gained independence from European colonial powers and some of their leaders were well-known and respected in India in 1950s and 1960s. There was a spirit of bonhomie between Indians and Africans in those days. For instance, Jomo Kenyatta, one of the leaders of the Kenyan anti-colonial struggle, became the first President of independent Kenya in 1964. Dr A. Aiyappan, a veteran general anthropologist who studied anthropology with Jomo Kenyatta at SOAS, London, told me in Madras that he was invited by Jomo Kenyatta to attend the inauguration of the free Kenyan Government. In Delhi there were a few African students, all serious scholars, studying at Sapru House which later developed into the School of International Studies and became a famous faculty of JNU. At Delhi University, the International Student Hostel housed some African students along with other foreign

students, and they studied in the Department of African Studies. During the last few decades, as more and more African countries became independent, due to the lack of educational facilities there due to

their colonial past, the number of African students studying in India has considerably increased.

It is indeed unfortunate that despite having such ancient links with India, these African students

are today being subjected to racial discrimination and violence in our country today. Such behaviour of the average uninformed and 'uneducated' Indians is deplorable.

Email: tripathicb@gmail.com

Neo-Liberalism and the Retreat of Democracy

David Schultz

Democracy across the world is under siege. The latest Freedom House report that documents this for 2017 says, "democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades", as seventy-one countries experienced declines in freedom or fair government, including the United States, and only thirty-five an improvement. This was the twelfth consecutive year of decline in democracy worldwide.

The question is why? Why has confidence in democracy retreated? Freedom House does not provide an answer, but there is a reason. It is democracy's marriage to neo-liberal capitalism that has fostered the conditions leading to its own undoing, similar to the 'gravedigger thesis' given by Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto ("What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave diggers") wherein he wrote that capitalism would produce the conditions that would undermine its own existence.

From the 1960s until the early 1990s, democracy was in the upswing internationally. African de-colonisation initially produced popularly elected governments. In South America the demise of dictatorships led to a wave of democratic regimes. And the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the USSR in 1991 produced the dismantling

of communist authoritarian or totalitarian governments that made it possible for Francis Fukuyama to proclaim that democracy had won and emerged as the last grand global political meta-narrative.

Yet, several problems upset this rosy picture. Most prominently, it was the marriage of these new emerging democracies with free market capitalism, resulting in the victory of neo-liberalism. Internationally, as post-colonial and post-communist countries emerged, international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF forced them to adopt market reforms, often pushing them into what was then called "shock therapy". Shock therapy involved rapid privatisation of state owned enterprises and rapid dismantling of welfare states. This shock therapy was often accompanied by significant corruption as a few rich oligarchs emerged who came to own these newly privatised state enterprises.

Simultaneously, emerging democracies were rapidly pushed into what sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein would call the world capitalist system. This system turned politically to the right in the 1970s and 1980s as Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States pushed neo-liberalism or market

fundamentalism as an alternative to the Keynesian welfare state that had dominated the West since the 1930s. It was adopted both for ideological reasons and because of what political economist James O'Connor would call the fiscal crisis of the state that affected economics across the world in the 1970s. This was a crisis of declining profit among private businesses and therefore declining revenue for states to fund welfare programs. Something had to give, and it was the welfare state.

Neo-liberalism is a political economic theory of the state committed to the laissez-faire market fundamentalism ideology that traces back to Adam Smith and David Ricardo. It includes a belief in comparative advantage, a minimalist state, and market freedom, and is, as articulated in the 1990s and 2000s, driven by finance capital. At the state level, neo-liberalism defines a theory of public administration. If neo-liberalism includes a commitment to market fundamentalism, then that also means that it is dedicated to a politics of limited government. This includes privatisation, deregulation, and a scaling back of many traditional functions that capitalist and communist states had performed since at least World War II. But neo-liberalism as a theory transcends the state, providing also an international

economic theory committed to free trade and globalism.

This emergence of neo-liberalism in the 1970s and its linkage to democracy is central to the crisis affecting the latter. As neo-liberalism retrenched the welfare state and pushed globalism, it was accompanied by a dramatic increase in economic inequality in the world, as Thomas Piketty has pointed out. This occurred in the US and much of the Western world. But it also impacted newly emerging democracies in Africa, Eastern Europe and South America. Pressures for shock therapy market reforms, austerity and open borders meant export of jobs to other countries, dismantling of social safety nets and other economic pressures placed on governments and ruling parties.

Politically voters turned on globalism and free trade. This happened not only in the USA with Trump voters in 2016, but also in Brexit in the UK. But many voters also blamed immigrants for the loss of jobs or social unrest in places ranging from France to Italy to Hungary. The increasing economic gap between rich and poor and, more importantly, the erosion of the economic conditions of the working class soured them on democracy. This paved the way for the emergence of strongmen as political leaders, the rise of far-right nationalist parties, and disenchantment with democracy and democratic structures to deliver the economic goods.

Therefore, what we see today in terms of the decline in support for democracy across the world is a product of its marriage to neo-liberalism. Capitalism and democracy always had an uneasy

co-existence, but the neo-liberal democracy variant demonstrates the powerful contradictions in them. Either their linkage is producing outright rejection of democracy or a populist, rightist version that is merely democracy in form but not in substance.

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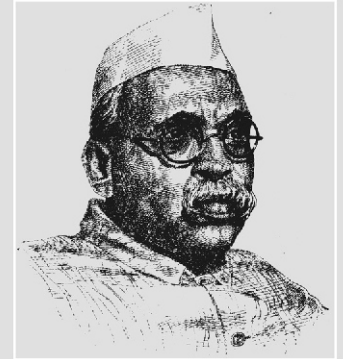
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Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
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What Our Children Will Inherit

Bharat Dogra

Almost every one appears to be in agreement that providing a safe and secure future to our children (and grandchildren) is a matter of very high priority for them, perhaps the highest priority. Even people who may not have their own children are likely to have the same concern for the generations to come. Yet unintentionally and unwittingly we have become part of a systematic, relentless ecological destruction which, unless corrected in time, will almost certainly inflict grave harm on crucial life-nurturing conditions of earth.

We often think of a secure future for our children in terms of property and bank balance, but these in themselves can never provide protection if clean/ safe air, water and food are not ensured.

The United Nations Environment Programme issues periodic reports on the state of world's environment, recent trends and future prospects. The latest of these—*Global Environment Outlook 5 (GEO-5)* has presented “undeniable evidence that the world is speeding down an unsustainable path.” This report shows that already air pollution is among the main causes of premature deaths and health problems,

especially in children. Water quality remains the largest cause of human health problems. The number of coastal dead zones has increased dramatically in recent years. This report has voiced a clear warning that urgent changes are needed “to avoid exceeding critical thresholds beyond which abrupt and generally irreversible changes to the life support functions of the planet could occur.”

This issue of critical significance has been taken up in greater detail in the work of scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC). Johan Rockstrom, director of SRC, says "The human pressure on the Earth System has reached a scale where abrupt global environmental change can no longer be excluded. To continue to live and operate safely, humanity has to stay away from critical 'hard-wired' thresholds in the Earth's environment, and respect the nature of the planet's climatic, geophysical, atmospheric and ecological processes."

Summarising the results of this work, the SRC says, “The group of scientists including Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Will Steffen, Katherine Richardson, Jonathan Foley and Nobel Laureate Paul

Crutzen, have attempted to quantify the safe biophysical boundaries outside which, they believe, the Earth System cannot function in a stable state, the state in which human civilisations have thrived. The scientists first identified the Earth System processes and potential biophysical thresholds, which, if crossed, could generate unacceptable environmental change for humanity. They then proposed the boundaries that should be respected in order to reduce the risk of crossing these thresholds. Nine boundaries were identified, including climate change, stratospheric ozone, land use change, freshwater use, biological diversity, ocean acidification, nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the biosphere and oceans, aerosol loading and chemical pollution. The study suggests that three of these boundaries (climate change, biological diversity and nitrogen input to the biosphere) may already have been transgressed. In addition, it emphasises that the boundaries are strongly connected—crossing one boundary may seriously threaten the ability to stay within safe levels of the others.”

In this context a key research paper titled “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operations Space for Humanity” authored by Johan Rockstrom and 26 other scientists has been published in the journal *Ecology and Society*. This paper says “Anthropogenic pressures on the Earth System have reached a scale where abrupt global environmental change can no longer be excluded. We propose a new approach to global sustainability in which we define planetary boundaries within which we expect that humanity can operate safely. Transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may

be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental- to planetary-scale systems. . . . The exponential growth of human activities is raising concern that further pressure on the Earth System could destabilise critical biophysical systems and trigger abrupt or irreversible environmental changes that would be deleterious or even catastrophic for human well-being. This is a profound dilemma because the predominant paradigm of social and economic development remains largely oblivious to the risk of human-induced environmental disasters at continental to planetary scales. . . . There is ample evidence from local to regional-scale ecosystems, such as lakes, forests, and coral reefs, that gradual changes in certain key control variables (e.g., biodiversity, harvesting, soil quality, freshwater flows, and nutrient cycles) can trigger an abrupt system state change when critical thresholds have been crossed.”

What this paper says about air and chemical pollution has specific references to children. On air pollution, it says that its various health effects “convert to about 800,000 premature deaths and an annual loss of 6.4 million life years, predominantly in developing Asian countries. Mortality due to exposure to indoor smoke from solid fuels is about double that of urban air pollution (roughly 1.6 million deaths), and exposure to occupational airborne particulates accounts for roughly 300,000 deaths per year, mainly in developing countries.”

On a concluding note, this paper says about the inadequacy of

existing efforts to cope with new and extremely serious problems, “Transgressing one boundary may, furthermore, seriously threaten the ability to stay within safe levels for other boundaries. This means that no boundary can be transgressed for long periods without jeopardising the safe operating space for humanity. Humanity thus needs to become an active steward of all planetary boundaries—the nine identified in this paper and others that may be identified in the future—in order to avoid risk of disastrous long-term social and environmental disruption. The knowledge gaps are disturbing. There is an urgent need to identify Earth System thresholds, to analyse risks and uncertainties, and, applying a precautionary principle, to identify planetary boundaries to avoid crossing such undesired thresholds. Current governance and management paradigms are often oblivious to or lack a mandate to act upon these planetary risks, despite the evidence of an acceleration of anthropogenic pressures on the biophysical processes of the Earth System.”

Thus, from the point of view of our future generations, the most important issue is the many sided ecological crisis which is now assuming the form of a survival crisis. If we are truly concerned about the future of our children (and their children), then we should start giving the topmost priority to these issues. When we compare this need with the petty issues which dominate the current discourse, then we realise the urgency of genuine reforms. We owe it to our children and the next generation to initiate necessary changes and reforms before it is too late.

Email: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

Lynching to Nowhere

Kuldip Nayar

More gruesome details about the Alwar lynching have come to light. Rakbar Khan, the victim, could have been saved if the police had acted in time. In fact, the force stopped for tea and wasted three and a half hours in reaching the victim to the hospital. He bled to death. If one were to put all the pieces together, one would come to the conclusion that the police delay was deliberate.

The religion of the victim—he was a Muslim—has been his undoing. Inquiry would give details but there is no doubt that the police were keener on recovering the two cows from him than saving his life. The cows were taken to a gaushala (cow shed) 10 kilometres away, a good one hour before Khan was brought to the community health centre, a six-kilometer drive from the attack site.

According to data available for some time now on blood-thirsty mobs striking fear in the hearts of minorities, 86 percent of those dead in cow-related violence since 2010 are Muslims and 97 percent of the attacks took place after 2014. Whenever such happenings took place, including lynching or attacking people, invariably the Muslims and Dalits had borne the brunt in the name of so-called cow protection.

This is a sad commentary on our efforts to have the society pluralistic. Mahatma Gandhi would emphasise on Hindu-Muslim unity all the time during his prayers. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, too stressed on the same point and strengthened the argument for unity

through steps such as abolishing the column of religion from application forms for admission to institutions and employment.

The line drawn on the basis of religion is haunting us all the time. Muslims in India, although 17 crore, do not matter in the affairs of government administration. Over the years, their habitation also has become separate and even though they have become slums they feel safe in living together. There are separate schools for each community. The madrasa cult has got deepened in the community because the Muslims want to save their identity.

Not long ago, there was a riot in Delhi. I was helping the community as an activist. One sitting judge preferred to stay in the slums and told me that he felt safe there. He found the police contaminated. The question we should ask ourselves is why the protectors of law are becoming violators themselves. For a long time, the government kept out mosque, temple or gurudwara from the police line. But leaders from different political parties saw people only in terms of religion and catered to their parochial tendencies. Now the temple, mosque and gurudwara are allowed in the places where they live and they blare their propaganda all the time.

I raised all these points in the Rajya Sabha when I was nominated to the house in the 90s. My criticism was directed at the Congress which had ruled the country since independence. Instead of giving reply to what I had mentioned,

Pranab Mukherjee, then a top Congress leader, went out of the house to register his lack of interest on the issue. Probably, this was his reply to my pointed criticism of the Congress for having failed to galvanise the nation.

Secularism is the ideology which we have chosen in contrast to Pakistan's Islamic order. Unfortunately, the Muslim community in India stays distant. It feels as if it is somewhat responsible for the partition. This is not entirely true. The Hindus failed to instill confidence among the Muslims. Hindu fundamentalists were openly propagating their communal propaganda.

The ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has no connection with the national struggle. Its ideology remains what Shyama Prasad Mookerji, a tall leader at that time, propagated. The philosophy was to establish a Hindu rashtra.

Jayaprakash Narain was able to bring even the fanatic Hindus into the Janata Party and act at his bidding. They gave up their caps which was typical. The sticking point, however, was the relationship with the RSS. When JP asked the then Jan Sangh leaders to sever their ties with the RSS, they preferred to constitute their own party. L.K. Advani founded the BJP.

That is the time when Atal Behari Vajpayee emerged as the leader because he was acceptable to all. He kept their confidence intact because the bus he took to Lahore had members of all political parties. The speech he made at the civic

reception was so appealing to the Pakistanis that some of them came to me to seek my services to request Nawaz Sharif not to speak because the mood was pro-Vajpayee. Nawaz Sharif said he was not a fool to speak after Vajpayee. Instead, he said that if Vajpayee were to contest elections today in Pakistan, he would sweep the polls.

The BJP has come a long way since then. Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks trying to be another Vajpayee but not succeeding in his efforts. Though Modi is emphasizing on *sabka saath, sabka vikas*, but RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat seems to have initiated a parallel campaign to have as many candidates in the Lok Sabha as possible so that when the time

comes to choose the Prime Minister, the RSS would have its own stamp. Instances like Alwar lynching are going to pull down both the RSS and the BJP because the country's mood does not tally with the intentions of RSS. The nation wants to stay pluralistic.

Email: kuldipnayar09@gmail.com

MSP as a Legal Right

Rudra Deosthali and Sandeep Pandey

In a programme on 23 June 2018 at Lucknow, when the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was extolling the virtues of his government and boasting about how much his government had done for the farmers, Anil Mishra, a farmer associated with Ram Manohar Lohia Kisan Sabha from neighbouring Unnao District and invited by the Department of Horticulture to the meeting, stood up to say that mango farmers were able to get only Rs 300 a box compared to Rs 800 last year and demanded that the government pay at least the cost of irrigation. He was whisked out of the meeting and then had to spend three hours at the Vibhuti Khand Police Station of Gomti Nagar, Lucknow. The incident highlights two things—uncertainty farmers face with regard to price of their produce and government's unwillingness to be held accountable.

On 5 July 2018, the current BJP government approved a hike in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for some kharif crops. This announcement comes in the background of general elections which are scheduled to take place

next year as well as elections before that in some states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The BJP hailed this move claiming that the Modi government actually delivers on the promises made by it and that *acche din* are just around the corner. But almost all major farmers' organisations termed it as another *jumla* of the current ruling government. The criticism was mainly centered around the method of calculation of MSP which was adopted by the government. More importantly, the question of rate of MSP is secondary for most farmers. The reason is the absence of 'Right to MSP', which implies that the farmers will have a right to obtain at least the MSP for their produce, and if that right is not realised for any reason, they can approach the court for enforcement of it. But, in the absence of such a right, the farmers are left at the mercy of procurement officials and unscrupulous traders. In such a scenario, the guarantee of the government to not let prices of crops drop below a pre-determined limit and to conduct open-ended procurement of these crops falls flat. This article seeks to give a legal

justification to the demand of 'Right to Sell at MSP'.

The procurement mechanism of the targeted public distribution system (TDPS) is riddled with difficulties. There is a huge shortage of procurement centers in various parts of country, due to which the farmers are forced to sell their produce to traders. These traders in turn sell this produce at MSP to the procurement centers, thereby earning a huge profit, at the cost of poor farmers. It is pertinent to note that in some instances, the officers at procurement centers have to be bribed just to make sure that their produce is purchased at the MSP. Apart from these implementation difficulties, the planning of the scheme is also faulty. It has been noticed that majority of produce is procured from states like Punjab and Haryana, where there exists a robust procurement mechanism, while the North-Eastern states are completely ignored.

The main body responsible for procuring produce at MSP all over the country is the Food Corporation of India (FCI). This was established under the Food Corporation Act,

1964. One of the objectives of FCI is to implement 'effective price support operations for safeguarding the interests of the farmers'. According to the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act 2006, it is a duty of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee to prevent sale or produce below MSP.ⁱ Along with that, it is an obligation on FCI to implement open ended procurement of produce at MSP. These provisions have placed enough obligations on the government agencies to ensure that no farmer is forced to sell his produce at a price below the MSP. But, without a simultaneous provision conferring a right to sell at MSP on farmers, there is no mechanism in place to enforce the obligations stated under the act. Without the enforcement mechanisms, the obligations are merely toothless directives. This situation can only be compared to one that would have existed if our Constitution would have had a whole chapter of fundamental rights without Article 32, a provision that Ambedkar described as the heart of the Constitution!

Farmers have been demanding since long that MSP must have legal backing. However, no steps have been taken by any government in the past or even the judiciary. This is quite surprising considering the fact that, post-Maneka Gandhi,ⁱⁱ the court has mentioned that the right to life and liberty enshrined in Art. 21 of the Indian Constitution means more than merely an animalistic existence. It includes the right to live with human dignity and bare necessities like adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, facilities for reading and writing, etcⁱⁱⁱ Also, the jurisprudence related to Art. 21 has shown that the court has not

hesitated while recognizing new rights under Article 21, according to changing political, social and economic situations.^{iv} It has even made some of the provisions under 'Directive Principles' justifiable and enforceable, time and time again.^v Under Article 39 (a) the state has been directed to provide adequate means of livelihood to all its citizens, and under Articles 39 (b) and (c), the state is mandated to ensure equality of wealth and welfare. According to Articles 46 and 47, the state is supposed to protect the economic interests of weaker sections of society and strive to improve health and nutrition of its citizens. The state is also supposed to organise and improve the conditions of agriculture and animal husbandry in India.^{vi}

Amongst the Directive Principles mentioned above, the right to adequate means of livelihood and remuneration has already been read into Article 21, as early as 1986.^{vii} It has also been recognized that Article 21 imposes a positive obligation on the state and not just a negative obligation, meaning that the state is also mandated to strive to protect the rights under Article 21, and not just refrain from infringing them.^{viii}

The question of MSP is a matter of life and death for most farmers in India. Without this protection from the government, the power to decide the prices of the crops is transferred from the state to the open market. In this process, the local traders and middlemen earn superprofits at the cost of the farmers. By not providing legal protection to MSP for farmers, the state is endangering the fundamental rights of its citizens, and is violating the mandate given to it by the Constitution.

The opportune time for making MSP a legal right has long passed, but better late than never. The Committee for Agricultural Cost and Prices (CACP) has recently in its report made a recommendation for making MSP a right. The Communist Party of India is scheduled to table a private member's bill on this issue in the ongoing parliamentary session. Also, a divisional bench of Uttarkhand High Court, has recently in unequivocal terms recognized the need to give MSP a legal backing.^{ix}

These recent developments in this field look quite promising, and raise the hope that at least now, even though it is long over-due, the farmers receive their right to a life with dignity!

**Email: rrdeosthali@gmail.com and
asha ashram@yahoo.com**

- i §29(2)(ix) of the APMC Act, 2006.
- ii *Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India*, AIR 1978 SC 597.
- iii *Francis Coralie vs. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi*, AIR 1981 SC 746.
- iv *Indian Constitutional Law* (Vol. 1), M.P. Jain, 7th edition.
- v Ibid.
- vi Article 47 of the Constitution of India.
- vii *Olga Tellis vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, AIR 1986 SC 180.
- viii *P. Rathinam vs. Union of India*, AIR 1994 SC 1844.
- ix *Ganesh Upadhayay vs. Union of India*, W.P No. 105 of 2017.

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GST: A Broken Tax Chain

Arun Kumar

A year ago, at a special midnight session in Parliament, the launch of the goods and services tax (GST) was heralded as the new freedom. A year on, what has the GST achieved?? One should not expect instant results. There will be many short comings when a complex reform is rolled out. But the question is this: is the economy headed in the right direction?

Arguments in favour of the GST were that it would lead to ease of doing business, make markets efficient, yield higher tax collections, and lead to lower prices. With higher tax collection, the government would be able to deliver better services. Thus, the GST was presented as a win-win situation for everyone.

From the start

Businesses have not yet experienced 'ease of doing business' though some have adjusted to it. To begin with, the GST rates were fixed rather late. Industry could not fix prices well in time and difficulties grew right from day one. The IT functioning of the Goods and Service Tax Network (GSTN) has been unsatisfactory due to problems or inordinate delays in access because of the volume of traffic. Per month, a few billion returns had to be processed.

The complexity of the system became apparent when businesses had to file one form by the 10th of the month, check the next form by the 15th and file the third form by the 20th. The form to be filed by the 15th was to be auto populated

on the basis of returns filed by the suppliers to the business. If some suppliers delayed filing or did not file, one had to chase them or one could not file one's return. This proved to be insurmountable for many. For each State one was operating in, three returns had to be processed every month. Then there was an annual return to be filed. So for each State, a business had to file 37 returns in a year. Even though it was computerised, accounting was difficult. So, even though 17 taxes were replaced by one tax made up of many parts, simplification did not follow.

The small businesses operating under the Composition Scheme (turnover between ₹20 lakh and ₹75 lakh; later the limit was raised to ₹1.5 crore) had their own woes. They could not give input tax credit (ITC) and if anyone bought from them, then the buyer had to pay the tax that the small business should have paid. This was the reverse charge mechanism (RCM). These small businesses were not permitted to make inter-State sales so that their market became limited in case they were at the border of the State. Thus, not only big but also small businesses faced severe difficulties.

Taking cognisance of these problems, the government made rapid changes during the year through the GST Council (the body set up to govern GST). But this only added to the confusion. Some components of the GST which were considered essential to its design were suspended or altered permanently. For example, the

e-way bill (to track goods being transported) was postponed to April 2018. The RCM was suspended and may resume now. The tax rate for businesses under the Composition Scheme was brought down. Restaurants were brought under the Composition Scheme with a 5% tax rate but no ITC. For a year now, there have been reports every day of new problems cropping up and clarifications being sought from the authorities. In some cases, court cases are being filed.

Prices have not fallen. Of course, there are many factors underlying inflation, such as rise in prices of petroleum goods, the weather and so on. But the GST has also contributed to inflation because services are now taxed at a higher rate—the rate has risen to 18% from 15%. It is also true that the ITC which was supposed to lower the cost to businesses and reduce cascading effect (and thereby lower final prices) has not worked. In fact, in the case of restaurants, the ITC was withdrawn and replaced by a different scheme. The government's concern about the misuse of the ITC prompted it to legislate the anti-profiteering clause. But it is proving hard to implement; industry is resisting it.

Even though essential goods are exempt under the GST, as prices of basic goods and services rise, all prices increase. For instance, if diesel or truck prices rise, transport costs increase. This leads to an increase in prices for all goods across the board, even if they are exempt under the GST, examples being cereals and vegetables.

Tax structure

The tax rate structure (0%, 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%) also adds to the complexity. Then there are different rates for gold and jewellery. Some petro-goods and alcohol (for human consumption) are not a part of the GST. Electricity and real estate are also out of the GST. The multiplicity of tax rates and exemptions means that the cascading effect continues.

India does not have a full GST which is applicable from raw material to the final good/service. The chain is broken in many places. This partial GST is a result of trying to fulfil many policy objectives. For instance, small businesses which cannot cope with its complexity and goods consumed by the poor are exempt. As the Finance Minister said, "A BMW and hawai chappal can't have the same tax."

Prime Minister Modi has touted the GST as being India's biggest economic reform. This is of course an exaggeration. The introduction of the GST is a much smaller economic reform as compared to the policy changes introduced in 1991, that have totally altered the orientation of the Indian economy. Be that as it may, the claims being made about its benefits to the economy have also proven to be an exaggeration. The GST is not yielding more revenue to enable governments to spend more on services for the poor. Further, by damaging the unorganised sectors, it has set back output and employment in the economy rather than leading to a higher growth rate. These problems emanate from introducing a very complex tax in a complex economy. In brief, while there are a few gains, the economy is not headed in the right direction because of the faulty design of the GST.

Email: nuramarku@gmail.com

Press Release

National Register of Citizens in Assam: Need for Responsibility, Caution and Restraint

Dr. Prem Singh, President, SPI

The problem of presence of illegal Bangladeshi nationals in Assam is quite complex and old. When the students began a movement against Bangladeshi infiltration in Assam in the eighties, they were supported by socialists and Gandhians of the country. Then that movement was secular and its emphasis was on Assamese citizens identity. Although there was opposition to Bangla-speaking population, but people of all sections of Assamese society took part in the movement. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi tried to give it a communal color. When she went to address a rally in the Brahmaputra Valley, a slogan 'hath men bidi muhn men paan, asam banega pakistan' (having bidi in hand and betel leaf in mouth Assam will become Pakistan) was raised. That was a vote bank of the Congress. The intrusion continued due to lose security arrangements on Bangladesh border. Meanwhile the Nelly massacre of women and children of minority community highlighted the communal and gruesome face of that movement. After her, Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister and signed the Assam Accord in 1985. The concept of National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam is the result of that process. According to this, those whose names are not registered in the NRC will not be considered as citizens of India. It was decided to identify

foreign nationals and exclude them from the NRC. But due to lack of political will and no such agreement with Bangladesh, that work could not be done.

The NRC issued on Monday by the present government excludes names of over 40 lakh people. If their families are added then this number will be more than one crore. It is being said that most of the 4 million people out of the National Citizen Register are Indian citizens. These include both Hindus and Muslims. Putting such a large number of people in one state of insecurity shows that the duty to prepare the NRC has not been fulfilled properly. It seems that the government was quick to issue a NRC for electoral gains rather than a proper solution to the problem. This essential work of national interest should have been done in a non-political manner. But the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership did not act with maturity.

The BJP president Amit Shah is presenting the publication of the National Citizen Register as bravery. The BJP in-charge of West Bengal, Kailash Vijayvargiya, has given a statement saying that after Assam, West Bengal would be the next stop. He has alleged that the number of illegal immigrants into West Bengal could run into crores. Amit Shah has made an unsubstantiated statement to link the whole issue with national security in the Parliament. With this

kind of irresponsible statements of BJP leaders, the initial balanced statement given by Home Minister Rajnath Singh on this issue has become meaningless. The ruling party and its president should understand that the threat to national security rather lies in their intention of making communal polarisation across the country in the name of the National Register of Citizens in Assam. In fact, the BJP had an eye on this long-standing and complex problem for long. After getting power at the Centre and the state, it has used the Office of the Registrar General of India and the Census Commissioner in such a way that it can play politics of communal polarisation for a long time to come. The BJP's immediate target on the path of communal polarisation is the Lok Sabha elections 2019. The BJP has lost mid-term elections due to the unity of opposition parties in the Hindi region. Therefore it wants to compensate the loss from the Northeast and West Bengal.

The work of identifying genuine citizens is being supervised by the Supreme Court, and the court has stated that this list is not final and no action should be taken on its basis. The Election Commission has also said that the National Register of Citizens will not disrupt voter rights of the people. But how can the court prevent politics on this sensitive issue? Even the Chief of Army Staff General Bipin Rawat has intervened in this issue and given a political statement.

In view of the Socialist Party, the leadership of all the parties, including the ruling party, must behave responsibly on this issue. The Socialist Party urges the country's political leadership to ensure that instead of doing vote politics on

this sensitive issue, make sure that no single Indian citizen is left out of the National Register of Citizens, whether he/she belongs to any religion, caste or state. While preparing the National Register of Citizens, it was the responsibility of the citizens themselves to prove that they are citizens of India. However, the United Nations puts the responsibility on the state too. Secondly, the leadership should decide the fate of Bangladeshi citizens living illegally, whether they are Hindus or Muslims, in the light of the Indian Citizenship laws and the provisions of the United Nations (UNO).

The Socialist Party believes that India has the right to identify the people who have entered the country illegally. If possible, send them back to their country, and if not possible, then consider granting them permits or giving citizenship. The provisions

made in the proposed Indian Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 only allow giving citizenship to non-Muslims, but not to Muslims. India is a member of the United Nations. The goal of the United Nations is to eliminate the statelessness of citizens from the world by 2024. If such a large number of people will be made stateless then this will create an international problem. The excluded population is 10 percent of Assam state. Therefore, those who claim to be 'Vishwaguru' and who chant the mantra of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', instead of considering it from a communal perspective, should think in a sensitive human way. Opinion of all the political parties should be considered and the Supreme Court should make decisions according to the Constitution and United Nations Charter in order to solve the problem.

Email: drpremsingh8@gmail.com

UN Raises Concerns Over xclusion of People from NRC in Assam Citizens for Justice and Peace

The much-awaited final draft of the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published on Monday, July 30, in Guwahati, Assam. Out of total 3,29,91,385 people who applied for inclusion in the updated NRC, 2,89,83,677 have been admitted, while 40,07,708 people have been excluded from the draft list.

The government has assured that all those whose names have not appeared in the NRC will be given one last opportunity to prove their Indian Citizenship, and they will have to file their claims by

September 28, 2018. The Registrar General of Citizen Registration has issued a notification that puts December 31, 2018 as the date to complete updation of the NRC.

About the NRC

The National Register for Citizens (NRC), a record of 'legitimate' Indian citizens living in Assam, is being updated for the first time since 1951. The ostensible objective is to weed out 'Illegal Bangladeshi immigrants'. However, the numbers tell a chilling story . . . one of a conspiracy of 'othering' and

exclusion. 40 lakh people have been excluded from the draft NRC.

Preliminary reports from the ground suggest that though it was assumed that the updated NRC would largely affect the Muslim minority, ground reports indicate that large numbers of Bengali Hindus, especially from Dalit communities, some Indigenous Koch Rajbanshis, some sections of Nepali and other Indian labour and business class hailing from northern, western and southern India, as well as large numbers of Muslims have been excluded from the updated draft NRC.

The issue is so serious that it has even caught the attention of the United Nations. Four Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations—Fernand de Varennes (Special Rapporteur on minority issues), E. Tendayi Achiume (Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance), David Kaye (Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression) and Ahmed Shaheed (Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief)—wrote a letter to Sushma Swaraj, Minister of External Affairs, on June 11, 2018, that is, more than a month before the final draft NRC was published, voicing their concerns with respect to the update to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam. The rapporteurs have raised questions about possible discrimination against the Bengali Muslim minority, the controversial May 2 order of the NRC State Co-ordinator that asked the names of family members of a declared foreigner to be kept pending from the NRC, as well as a host of other issues.

The Bengali Muslim and the Bangladeshi Bogyman

On the subject of Bengali Muslims, the letter says,

There is no official policy outlining the implications for those who will be excluded from the final NRC. It is reported that they will be treated as foreigners and that their citizenship rights may be revoked in the absence of a prior trial. They may subsequently be asked to prove their citizenship before so-called Foreigners' Tribunals. In December 2017, a local government minister in Assam was quoted as stating that "the NRC is being done to identify illegal Bangladeshis residing in Assam" and that "all those whose names do not figure in the NRC will have to be deported." In this context, the NRC update has generated increased anxiety and concerns among the Bengali Muslim minority in Assam, who have long been discriminated against due to their perceived status as foreigners, despite possessing the necessary documents to prove their citizenship. While it is acknowledged that the updating process is generally committed to retaining Indian citizens on the NRC, concerns have been raised that local authorities in Assam, which are deemed to be particularly hostile towards Muslims and people of Bengali descent, may manipulate the verification system in an attempt to exclude many genuine Indian citizens from the updated NRC.

It further highlights the plight of Bengali Muslims and raises concerns about the matter saying,

Bengali Muslims continue to be disproportionately affected and targeted by Foreigners' Tribunals as most persons asked to prove their citizenship before Tribunals reportedly lack the necessary means to do so. Even in cases when individuals produce the required documentation to prove their citizenship, many Bengali Muslims appear to be declared as foreigners based on technical reasons. The Tribunals are governed by the Foreigners Act 1946, which places the burden of proof on the accused to demonstrate his or her citizenship status. Officials of these Tribunals are empowered to find persons to be foreigners, on the basis of minor technical discrepancies in their citizenship documents, such as misspelling of names and age inconsistencies. In this regard, it is also alleged that there has been a notable and significant increase in the Tribunals' findings of foreigner status as a result of the new Government coming into power. It is alleged that the Tribunals have been declaring large numbers of Bengali Muslims in Assam as foreigners, resulting in statelessness and risk of detention.

Finally, it is alleged that the potential discriminatory effects of the updated NRC should be seen in light of the history of discrimination and violence faced by Muslims of Bengali origin due to their status as ethnic, religious and linguistic minority and their perceived foreignness. Although the Bengali origin Muslims in Assam descend from peasant workers

brought from the former Bengal and East Bengal starting in the 19th century under colonial rule, they have long been portrayed as irregular migrants. As a result of this rhetoric, Bengali Muslims have historically been the target of various human rights violations, including forced displacement, arbitrary expulsions and killings.

Family members of Declared Foreigners

On May 2, Prateek Hajela, State Coordinator for the NRC had issued an order to all Deputy Registrars of Citizen Registration (DRCR) and Local Registrars of Citizen Registration (LRCR) stating

As per this Judgement, the Superintendent of Police (B) are required to make references of such persons, namely, brothers, sisters and other family members of Declared Foreigners (DF) to the Foreigners Tribunals and their names are accordingly not be included in the NRC until finalisation of such references. LRCRs will have to keep eligibility status of all such persons pending till decision on their Indian Citizenship is confirmed by the concerned Foreigners Tribunal similar to the procedure for D-voters. As such LRCRs will have to record their decisions as "Hold" with LRCR Remarks recorded as "DFS". DFS will mean Siblings and other Family Members of Declared Foreigners (DFs).

However, on May 25, a clarification was issued saying, *With reference to the subject cited above and in continuation with the letter under reference, it*

is hereby clarified that recording of decision as 'Hold' by Local Registrar of Citizen Registration (LRCRs) for any such person, namely, brothers, sisters and other family members of Declared Foreigners (DF) will be taken only after receipt of information from respective SP (Border) that reference has been made of such person to the Foreigners Tribunals.

The controversial order was challenged in the Guwahati High Court, but the court dismissed the writ petition and upheld the NRC State Coordinator's order. The letter by the UN Special Rapporteurs is dated June 11 and therefore came before the Guwahati HC decision. This is what the letter states:

These concerns have been heightened by the alleged misinterpretation of a High Court judgement of 2 May 2017 (Gauhati High Court, WP(C) 360/2017). In this judgement, the Court directs the Assam Border Police to open inquiries concerning the relatives of persons declared as foreigners and to subsequently refer them to the so-called Foreigners' Tribunals. Based on this judgement, the State Coordinator of the NRC reportedly issued two orders dated 2 May 2018 (memo No. SPMU/NRC/HF-FT/537/2018/15-A) and 25 May 2018 (memo no. SPMU/NRC/HC-FT/537/2018/23). Pursuant to the orders, border police authorities are required to refer family members of "declared foreigners" to the Foreigners' Tribunals. The duty to conduct a prior inquiry is not mentioned in the orders. Once relevant NRC authorities have been informed

about the referral of a case, the concerned family member will automatically be excluded from the NRC. Their status will be recorded as "pending" until their citizenship has been determined by a Foreigners' Tribunal. It is therefore alleged that these orders may lead to the wrongful exclusion of close to two million names from the NRC, without a prior investigation and trial.

Sudden increase in 'Foreigners'

The UN Special Rapporteurs have also brought up that there has been a sudden spike in the number of people being declared foreigners. They have also expressed concerns about the functioning of Foreigners' Tribunals. The letter says,

Concerns about the implementation of the NRC update have also been heightened by the increasing number of persons declared to be foreigners by Foreigners' Tribunals. Out of a total of 468,934 referrals to the Tribunals between 1985 and 2016, 80,194 people were declared foreigners. This figure increased drastically in 2017, reaching 13,434 in just eleven months. In this context, it is reported that members of Foreigners' Tribunals in Assam experience increasing pressure from State authorities to declare more persons as foreigners. On 21st June 2017, 19 members of the Foreigners' Tribunals in Assam were dismissed on ground of their under-performance over the last two years. More than 15 additional Tribunal members were issued with a strict warning to increase their efficiency. Considering that

tribunal members serve on a contractual basis for two years, which may be extended on a needs and performance basis, these actions were perceived to be a thinly veiled threat to other Tribunal members.

Other issues

The letter also brings up the issue of ‘doubtful’ or D-Voters and expresses concerns over the allegedly arbitrary processes followed by Election Commission officials in declaring people D-Voters. It also raises questions about human rights violations, arbitrary detention and deportation, the exclusion of Muslims from the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 as well as a host of other subjects. It has also asked for clarifications vis a vis the treatment of those who are deemed stateless and steps taken to uphold rights of minorities.

Letter to Editor

BJP President, Shri Amit Shah is reported to have said that his party does not polarise. The following are three statements of BJP representatives made almost on the same day.

- BJP MP from UP Hari om Pandey claims that the rising population of muslims in India is responsible for terrorism and rape and murder cases.
- MLA from Karnataka Basanagouda Patil said that the biggest danger to the nation is from intellectuals and secularists. If he were the Home Minister he would issued orders to finish all of them by shooting them.
- BJP MLA Surendra Singh stated that Hindu couples should have at least 5 children or they will become a minority.

These are comparatively small fry in the party. Many senior ministers in the central government have been much more strident, both in their speeches and action.

It is reassuring that most BJP leaders have condemned lynching and violence related to cow vigilance. But this condemnation has never been unqualified. It is significant that both the perpetrators and victims of these violence have been treated similarly, the victims often bearing the brunt.

But as the honourable BJP President says there is no polarisation.

You can fool some people all the time, all the people for sometime. But you cannot fool all the people all the time!

Anil Bagarka, Mumbai

Email: apeebee@gmail.com

On the 170th Anniversary of the Communist Manifesto Paul M. Sweezy, John Mage and John Bellamy Foster

The Crises of Capitalism

Eighteen forty-eight, when the Manifesto was written, was a crisis year in Europe. Twenty-eight is the tenth year of an endless crisis for a now fully globalised capitalist economy. What Karl Marx and Frederick Engels said about “the commercial crises [that] by their periodic return, put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society” is just as applicable to our own time. And so is the diagnosis of the basic cause: “In these crises,” they wrote, “there breaks out an epidemic that in all earlier epochs would have seemed an absurdity, the

epidemic of overproduction.” Today this might be better formulated to read “an epoch of overproduction of the means of production.” Bourgeois economics still does not get it, and probably never will.

The Great Financial Crisis and the Great Recession began in the United States in 2007–08 and quickly spread across the globe, marking what appears to be a turning point in world history. Although this was followed within two years by an extended recovery phase, the weakest in the last century, the world economy ten years after the onset of the crisis is still in the doldrums. The United States, Europe, and Japan

remain caught in a condition of slow growth and financial instability, with new economic tremors appearing all the time and the effects spreading globally. The one bright spot in the world economy, from a growth standpoint, has been the seemingly unstoppable expansion of a handful of emerging economies, particularly China. Yet the continuing stability of China is now also in question, especially insofar as it depends on a high degree of integration with global capitalism. Hence the general consensus among informed economic observers is that the world capitalist economy is facing the threat of long-run economic stagnation

(complicated by the prospect of further financial deleveraging), sometimes referred to as the problem of “lost decades.” It is this issue of the stagnation of the capitalist economy that has emerged as the big question worldwide (setting aside the issue of the environment), even for all serious bourgeois economists.

The Manifesto’s analysis of the succession of crises that “put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society” remains central to any attempt to predict the events of the coming years. The long weak recovery was made possible only by an unprecedented global expansion of debt, both public and private, itself made possible only by the forced reduction of interest rates to levels similarly without precedent. This flood of new debt went not into productive investment, as shown by the great stagnation in growth, but into a global inflation of asset prices. The result was the capture of almost all such gains as were produced in this last decade by that very small percent of the world’s population who owned the world’s assets, whether real estate or securities. But global capitalism remains caught in the contradiction posed by the necessity of continuous expansion of profits through the capture of surplus value from the exploitation of labor, and the necessity of the valorisation of that surplus value through either consumption or new investment. New investment in productive capacity, in a global capitalism plagued by excess capacity, is increasingly more a problem than a solution for the system. And the maintenance of workers’ consumption, given the ever-increasing downward pressure on wages worldwide (and upward pressure on rents caused by asset

inflation), has occurred only through a massive increase in working-class debt; in the United States today a majority of wage workers have in effect no net savings at all. The commercial cycle identified by the Manifesto is still very much a certainty in an uncertain world. The recovery from the 2007–08 great crisis is in its final phase, and the techniques of new debt and interest rate suppression that enabled the last recovery are no longer available. The immediate prospect can only reinforce the continuing salience of the Manifesto’s phrase “each time more threateningly.”

Where Are We Going?

Marx and Engels were dedicated revolutionaries and firmly believed that the inherent and ineradicable contradictions of capitalism would generate a growing and ultimately successful revolutionary struggle to overturn the system and put in its place a more humane and rational one. But did their analysis allow for, or perhaps even imply a different historical outcome? The answer, we think, is unequivocally yes. Early on in the Manifesto, indeed on the first page of the first section entitled “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” an oft-quoted passage reads:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending

Nothing more is said about “the common ruin of the contending

classes” in the Manifesto, most likely because Marx and Engels did not consider it a likely outcome of the class struggle under capitalism. But if we look around us in the world today—and take into account the extent to which capitalism is destroying or undermining the natural foundations of a sustainable economy—we must surely reinstate “the common ruin of the contending classes” as a very realistic prospect in the historically near future.

What Should We Be Trying to Accomplish?

We should be trying to impress on the peoples of the world the truth about capitalism, that it is not, as bourgeois ideologists want us to believe, the “end of history,” but that its continued existence can really bring the end of history. Does the Manifesto offer any help in this respect? Perhaps—if we read it carefully and interpret it imaginatively. In a too-often neglected passage, Marx and Engels introduce a new theme into their analysis.

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a section of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.

For Marx this reflected what

he understood (see especially his discussion of “Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations” in the Grundrisse) as “the age of dissolution” of class-property relations that brought down feudal society. A similar age of dissolution, we believe, would bring down capitalism in turn—although the dissolution of capitalist relations would necessarily take a different form.

Today we can see more and more within present-day capitalism, particularly in the wealthiest countries, the emergence of acute contradictions that are accelerating the breaking-up of the system, visible in the extremes of the polarisation of income and wealth in all nations and globally, the corrosive interface of stagnation, financialisation and neoliberal globalisation, and—most of all—the accelerating planetary crisis that threatens all of humanity. These historical developments are behind “the dissolution [presently] going on within the ruling class,” evident in the growing instability of the state. Notwithstanding the continuing ideological role performed by bourgeois economics, there is no hiding the acute contradictions of our age, which every child can see. As the unfolding of capitalism’s deadly consequences proceed, more and more people, including not only revolutionary movements throughout the globe, but also “bourgeois ideologists who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole,” will come to see what has to be done, if our species is to have any future at all. Our job is to help bring about this recognition in the shortest possible time—while there still is time.

Caracas International Solidarity Meeting Declares: “Venezuela Is Not Alone, We Are All with Her!”

Janata has been regularly publishing articles on the ongoing socialist experiments in Latin America whose remarkable achievements have been completely blanked out in the mainstream media. Neither has the media given any coverage to the attempts being made by the US and global capital to undermine, sabotage and overthrow these revolutions. We had received this international solidarity declaration with the Venezuelan revolution two months ago, but had not been able to publish it so far due to lack of space. We are publishing it now.

On March 7, 2018, the ‘Todos Somos Venezuela’ (We Are All Venezuela) international solidarity of more than 800 social leaders, journalists, politicians and activists from 95 countries culminated in Caracas. Apart from representatives from nearly all countries of Latin America, there were 48 delegates from North America, 19 from Africa and 34 from Europe.

Amongst the high-profile delegates were Bolivian President Evo Morales and his Foreign Minister Fernando Huanacuni.

The event also had the backing of more than 500 representatives of Venezuelan social movements, press outlets, political parties, and organised community groupings.

The gathering was held in the background of the US government increasing its threatening rhetoric against Venezuela. On March 2,

US President Trump renewed an executive order declaring Venezuela to be an “extraordinary threat” to US national security.

At the closing of the gathering, delegates read a joint declaration, in which they expressed their full solidarity with the Venezuelan people, rejected US sanctions, and warned the world of the dangers of what they called imperialist efforts to sabotage Venezuela’s democratic process.

In addition, delegates paid homage to late President Hugo Chavez, visited numerous examples of community organisation in Caracas, and were treated to a cultural event.

Full Text of the ‘Todos Somos Venezuela’ Declaration of Caracas

We, citizens from distinct countries, social movements and organisations, political parties, women, youths, workers, creators and intellectuals, peasants, and religious leaders, gathered here in Caracas on the 5, 6 and 7th March 2018, reaffirm our solidarity and militant support of the Venezuelan people, the Bolivarian Revolution and its popular government, which is headed by Nicolas Maduro Moros.

We energetically reject the grave escalation of aggressions against Venezuela’s democracy and sovereignty by the war-like government of Donald Trump, global corporate powers, and the American imperialist military-industrial apparatus, which looks

to overthrow the legitimate government of Venezuela, destroy the project of Bolivarian democracy and expropriate the natural resources of the Venezuelan nation.

We denounce that this operation against Venezuela forms part of a global strategy of neo-colonialization in Latin America and the Caribbean which seeks to impose a new era of servitude and looting through the resurrection of the shameful Monroe Doctrine, a plan which has already begun in numerous countries across the continent.

We reject the threat of Donald Trump of a potential military intervention in Venezuela and we alert that such declarations by him are not mere charlatanism. The military option against the Bolivarian Revolution forms part of the strategic and geopolitical doctrine of the US for the 21st Century. The world must know that a military aggression against Venezuela would provoke a crisis in the region of historic dimensions and uncountable and unpredictable human, economic, and ecological impact.

We warn imperialism and their elites lackeys that play this game: the peoples of Latin America, the Caribbean and the world will never allow that Venezuela be touched by the ambitions of the American military boot! If, in their crazy obsession, the hawks of Washington dare attack Venezuela, the homeland of Simon Bolívar, as it was more than 200 years ago, will again be the tomb of an empire.

We denounce the blatant pressure of US imperialism on the region's governments to involve them in political, diplomatic, and even military operations against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

With these actions, they seek to destroy regional integration and bring about the de-facto abolition of the principle of the founding charter of the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States which declares the region as a zone of peace.

We reject the shameful and historical opposed attitude of governments in the region that have caved in to Washington's politics through the creation of illegal and spurious organisms such as the so-called Group of Lima. The shameful regional elites who today lead the plundering of their peoples, hand over their sovereignty to the transnational corporations, and increase poverty, inequality and violate human rights, lack any moral and political authority to question Venezuelan democracy.

We reject the unilateral and illegal sanctions of the US Government and the European Union against the Venezuelan people, which seek to destroy its economy and break their democratic will. Blockades and sanctions are crimes against humanity carried out by the international capitalist system, and are severely hurting the Venezuelan people by sabotaging their productive, commercial and financial processes, preventing access to food, medicines and essential goods.

We reject the perverse U.S. sabotage of the process of dialogue developed in the Dominican Republic and reiterate that only the absolute respect for the sovereignty of Venezuela, non-interference in their internal affairs, sincere dialogue and electoral processes based on Venezuelan legislation can define the path to recover the political coexistence between Venezuelans.

In this regards, we welcome

the call for presidential, regional legislators and councilor elections for May 20, a result of a political agreement with a sector of the Venezuelan opposition. In these absolutely constitutional and legitimate elections, the Venezuelan people in a transparent and sovereign way will decide the course of their homeland.

We alert the peoples of the world to the counterproductive intentions of international governments and organizations that are directly involved in the war against Venezuela to not recognize the results of the elections on May 20, and accelerate attacks after what - no doubt - will be a real democratic expression of the Venezuelan people.

We welcome and support the declaration of the presidential summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America ALBA-TCP that categorically rejects the exclusion of Venezuela from the next Summit of the Americas, to be held in the city of Lima, Peru. Similarly, we support all diplomatic and political actions that governments, countries and peoples take to defend plurality and political diversity in the continent and to safeguard the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples.

We recognize the heroic resistance of the people of Venezuela when confronted by the ravages of economic aggression, the financial blockade and all the forms of sabotage that Venezuela is suffering from, and support the economic, financial, political and diplomatic strategy that the Bolivarian Government and President Nicolas Maduro are carrying out to overcome the problems and construct the humanist model of Bolivarian socialism.

We are committed to continue

the battle for the truth, peace and the sovereignty of Venezuela, to expand the ties of friendship, solidarity and revolutionary commitment to the Venezuelan people. The peoples of the world, the consciousness of all those who struggle for the just cause of mankind, accompanies at this time and always the Bolivarian revolution, its leadership and its people.

We are convinced that Venezuela will be able to – through dialogue, respect for the Constitution, and the indefatigable democratic will of his people – overcome the problems that besets it, and that the Bolivarian revolution will remain a beacon of hope for the peoples of the world who search for a worthy and just destination for humanity.

In commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the physical passing of Commander Hugo Chávez, historical leader of the Venezuelan people, from Caracas we say to the world: Venezuela is not alone, we are all with her!

We are all Venezuela!

We will win!

Caracas, March 7 2018

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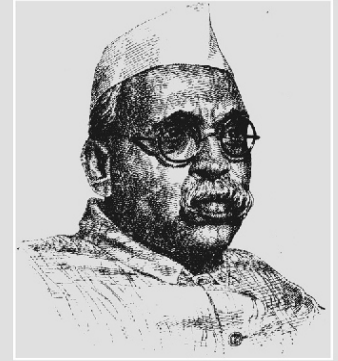
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From the Editor's Desk

India is at Crossroads

As the nation prepares to celebrate its 72nd Independence Day, we need to ponder over an important issue that is being repeatedly raised by several prominent members of the ruling BJP–RSS regime, and that is their aversion to the word “secular” in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. Their argument is that this introduced in the Preamble by the government of Indira Gandhi through the 42nd amendment in 1976, and that it is not a fundamental feature of our Constitution.

This controversy was first stoked by the BJP soon after it came to power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. On January 26, 2015, an advertisement issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting carried a picture of the Preamble without the words “secular” (and “socialism”). When critics questioned the government’s intentions, the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore defended the deletion saying that the original Preamble did not have this word. The Union Telecom Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, was more forthright and asked the question: “What is wrong if there is a debate on these two words? Let us see what the nation wants.” A Member of Parliament of the Shiv Sena, an ally of the BJP, welcoming the deletion of the word “secular” from the Republic Day advertisement, demanded its deletion from the Constitution.

Since then, this issue has been hotly debated in the country. Various commentators, ranging from politically important people to scribes in newspapers and social media, have stated that Dr B.R. Ambedkar was opposed to the inclusion of the word “secular” in the Constitution of India.

What are the facts? It is indeed true that during the Constituent Assembly debates, on November 15, 1948, Dr K.T. Shah had moved an amendment

to incorporate the words “secular, federal, socialist” in Clause 1 of Article 1 of the Constitution. Dr Shah had argued that though the major constitutions of the world do not proclaim their secular credentials, in the case of India, the “secularity of the state must be stressed” as the nation was still struggling to come out of the trauma of partition and it was important to prevent such internecine violence in future.

It is also true that Dr Ambedkar had opposed this amendment. While opposing Dr Shah’s proposal, it is important to note that Ambedkar did not say anything about secularism in particular. He presented his views on rejecting the entire amendment moved by Dr Shah. But while doing so, Ambedkar did not at all say that he was opposed to secularism or socialism. The crux of his argument was that the amendment was superfluous as these principles were already incorporated in the section on Fundamental Rights in the draft Constitution.

A thorough reading of the Constitution makes it clear that for the framers of our Constitution, the principle of secularism was unquestionable. The rights granted to all citizens in the section on Fundamental Rights of equality before law and equal protection of law, freedom of expression, right to life with dignity, freedom to practice, profess and propagate any religion of one’s choice, and freedom to manage one’s religious affairs, all within reasonable restrictions, establish beyond doubt the secular character of the Indian state.

BJP ideologues are deliberately misrepresenting Dr Ambedkar’s views to further their agenda of transforming secular India into a Hindu Rashtra. Ambedkar had unequivocally opposed the Two-Nation Theory and Jinnah’s espousal of it; in a speech to the Constituent Assembly on December 15, 1946, he said that he hoped that some day the light would dawn upon Muslims and “they, too, would begin to think that a united India was better for everybody.” Likewise, Ambedkar was firmly opposed to the concept of Hindu raj too, ““If Hindu raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt be the greatest calamity for this country. . . . Hindu raj must be prevented at any cost.” That Ambedkar was an uncompromising secularist is evident from his forceful espousal of the concepts of justice and equality and his eloquent articulation of the principle

of fraternity in his last address to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, “Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians—of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life. . . .” He went on to say that “without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint.” He in fact went on to state that if we wish to become a nation in reality, we need to uphold this principle.

Nevertheless, top leaders of the Hindutva brigade, from RSS ideologue K.N. Govindacharya to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, have publicly voiced their demand for changing the Constitution of India. BJP MP and Union Minister Anantkumar Hegde has in fact publicly stated that the BJP had come to power to “change the Constitution” and would do so in the “near future”.

There is little room for doubt. India is at crossroads. As we celebrate our 72nd Independence Day, we need to seriously ponder over and be concerned about the future of our country . . .

—Neeraj Jain

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The Prophet Betrayed: Gandhi and Partition

Salil Misra

How is one to understand the attitude of Gandhi to the partition of India in 1947? Much like other facets of Gandhi's politics, this too is nothing short of an enigma. Gandhi was the first to concede the idea of Pakistan in principle, soon after the demand was made by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. It was in March 1940 that Jinnah declared that Indian Muslims were not simply a religious community but a nation and therefore entitled to their own separate, representative, sovereign nation-state. Most Indian leaders responded to this demand with disbelief. Some were dismissive. Gandhi too called the Pakistan idea a "basic untruth", perhaps the strongest term in his dictionary. Yet he added that he could not think of a non-violent method of "compelling the obedience of eight crore Muslims to the will of rest of India... The Muslims must have the same right to self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division."

Interestingly Gandhi was also the last of the nationalist leaders to finally accept the reality of Pakistan. He kept denying it till the very end and tried everything possible to prevent the partition. In between the early acceptance of the principle in 1940 and the late reconciliation with the reality of Pakistan in 1947, Gandhi kept exploring a whole range of political options to preserve and maintain national unity. So what was partition all about and why did national unity prove to be so fragile and elusive?

India was a large country, one of the largest in the world. India was also an old civilisational society, marked by a remarkable continuity of its social traditions through many centuries. It was also one of the most plural societies in the world. Multiple cultures, languages and religious communities had flourished on the land without any great conflict

or friction. All these features put together—large society, old civilisation, continuity of traditions and remarkable plurality—really constituted the essence of Indian society. Since around the middle of the 19th century, a new process began in which diverse Indian people began to coalesce together on a common platform. In other words, the old civilisational society began to be gradually transformed into a modern Indian nation. Diverse groups and people began to be connected with one another at the level of thought and consciousness.

One important feature of this nationalisation process was that it encouraged diversity and enabled people to retain their culture and language while joining the national platform. Unlike in Europe, national homogenisation did not amount to cultural or linguistic homogenisation also. The new and nascent Indian nation remained remarkably plural. In fact plurality was the very essence of the new nation. Indian nationalists celebrated this diversity. Jawaharlal Nehru in his epic *Discovery of India*, written in jail in 1944, gave it an evocative name—Unity in Diversity.

Gandhi was convinced that it was absolutely essential for the Indian nation to retain these features, inherited from the past, in its journey towards the future. He realised the enormous complexities in achieving national unity for a diverse society such as India. In a statement made in 1940, Gandhi said: "India is a big country, a big nation, composed of different cultures which are tending to blend with one another, each complementing the rest. If I must wait for the completion of this process, I must wait. It may not be completed in my day. I shall love to die in the faith that it must come in the fullness of time." India had started its transformation from a civilisational society to a full-fledged nation. This journey was bound to be long, uneven, complex and

tortuous. What challenges and predicament were to be confronted by India during this transition?

The process went reasonably smoothly till the 1930s when the onward journey of the emergent Indian nation met a major collision. It was almost as if the big ship, which had weathered the storm very well, hit upon a huge rock which blocked its march forward.

The rock that blocked the march of the Indian nation was a claim, a novel political claim, made by Jinnah. He denied the possibility, even the very existence, of a single Indian nation. Instead, he claimed, there were two separate nations in India—Muslim and Hindu. In complete contrast to the imagination of the Indian nation that was inclusive, territorial and plural, Jinnah defined the new ‘breakaway’ nation in religious terms. He declared: “The difference between Hindus and Muslims is deep-rooted and ineradicable. We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, attitudes and ambitions, in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law, we are a nation.” Gandhi could not have disagreed more.

The claim that Indian Muslims constituted a separate nation was indeed novel, almost bizarre. There had been no compelling evidence of the existence of anything even remotely resembling a ‘Muslim nation’ in Indian history. Muslims constituted nearly 25% of the population and were scattered throughout the country. In some pockets, such as Sind, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Provinces, they constituted an overwhelming majority. In Punjab and Bengal, they had a slender majority of a little over 50% with numerically large minorities of Hindus and Sikhs. In the rest of the country, they were in a minority ranging from 5% to 14%. Muslims had a presence in nearly every district of the country. Instances of Hindu–Muslim violence, so characteristic of our times, were rare prior to 19th century. Many of the rituals and religious practices of Muslims resembled the rituals perfumed by Hindus and other. Indian Muslims were internally divided—just as Hindus were—by region, culture and language. There was hardly anything in common between a Muslim from Malabar and one from

Punjab or Bengal. Could such a diverse and scattered religious community be considered a nation? If at all this ‘nation’ was to have its own separate nation-state, what territory would be controlled by such a state? Given the entangled nature of cultural lives, it was simply not possible to physically segregate Muslims from non-Muslims, so as to carve out a separate Muslim territory within India. It was clear that such a project, if it was undertaken with seriousness, was fraught with the most dangerous repercussions.

The Pakistan proposal confronted Gandhi with the strongest political challenge of his life. How was he to meet it? Non-violence and non-coercion was a creed with Gandhi. So was national unity. Could a national unity be imposed from the top? If not, should Indian nationalists sit quietly and be mere spectators to the prospect of a physical division of the country? Both national unity and non-violence were important creeds with Gandhi. The dilemma was: if it was not possible to achieve national unity through consensus and non-violence, which of the two major values—unity or non-violence—was to be sacrificed?

The dilemma was all the more acute, given the role of the British colonial state. The British government always treated religious differences, particularly the ones between Hindus and Muslims, as natural and did everything possible to perpetuate this division. They introduced modern electoral politics in India but completely segregated it along religious lines. They created separate Muslims voters, Muslim constituencies and also Muslim candidates. Thus India’s experiment with democracy began by perpetuating Hindu–Muslim divide. The British also encouraged communalism and used it as an instrument to discredit the Indian national movement.

Indian nationalist movement, under Gandhi’s leadership, pursued a very different agenda. At a time when the British were perpetuating and legitimising Hindu–Muslim divide as part of their strategy of combating the national movement, Gandhi was trying to achieve national unity in the process of the struggle against the alien state. A political unity of Hindus and Muslims was an integral component of national unity. The British and Congress were thus involved in projects that ran contrary to each other. The success of one necessarily meant the failure of

the other.

The contest between the two went on during the first four decades of the 20th century without any definite signs of which project was likely to succeed in the end. However, by around 1940, after the Pakistan resolution, there were definite signals that Gandhi's project of national unity had run into a serious roadblock. The national movement had scored crucial victories against British imperialism and damaged it considerably. It was becoming increasingly clearer since the early 1940s that the British might not be able to hold out for long, and would have to leave sooner or later. But it was also becoming clear that Gandhi's dream of national unity had entered a rough terrain.

In 1942, Congress formally recognised the possibility of a partition of Indian territory. Around 1944, when Gandhi came out of jail, he began to openly concede the prospect of Pakistan. He tried to make sense of the Pakistan proposal through the traditional metaphor of a family or a clan. He likened the Indian nation to a large family. In a prolonged correspondence with Jinnah, Gandhi virtually conceded Pakistan but refused to concede that Hindu and Muslims were two separate nations. Indian people were one nation, but they might, through agreement and accommodation, divide themselves into different territories, Gandhi argued.

It was around 1945–46 that the partition plan got a big boost, much to Gandhi's consternation. He realised it and became even more helpless. Partition began to look imminent for many reasons. The British had accepted the idea and supported it. At the general elections held in March 1946, the Muslim League received an overwhelming support for the idea of Pakistan from the Muslim voters. Jinnah had succeeded in weaving his magic and mobilised a large number of Muslims around Pakistan. It was some kind of a collective hallucination engendered by the leader and indulged in by the followers. Yet another factor which would certainly have tormented Gandhi was Jinnah's readiness to use violence as a political weapon in his crusade for Pakistan. When in August 1946, both British and Congress decided to go ahead with the Cabinet Mission plan without conceding Jinnah's demands, he gave a call for Direct Action and made it clear that this was a call for violence. He made a public statement: "Today we have forged a pistol and are in a position to use it."

For the next few days Calcutta witnessed the worst form of communal violence in which over 5,000 people died within four days. The Calcutta violence was followed by a chain of communal frenzy. Soon communal violence erupted in Noakhali, Bihar, UP, Bombay and eventually reached Punjab. Never before, and certainly never after, had the country come so close to a civil war-like situation. For Gandhi, it was a situation of "India temporarily gone mad." He now realised that it would be very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to prevent partition. Communal hatred had penetrated deep down to the psyche of the Indian people, both Muslims and Hindus. Jinnah had cast a spell on Indian Muslims and had temporarily hypnotised them. At this point, his popularity among Muslims easily matched that of Gandhi among the Indian people. And Jinnah was absolutely determined to have his Pakistan at all costs. Once asked if his appeal to Muslims for action would be violent or non-violent, Jinnah replied: "I am not going to discuss ethics." Gandhi understood that his only weapon of political struggle—a non-violent Satyagraha with peoples' support—will not work against the forces that were demanding partition. He also knew that the British—already in a mood to retreat—might not be very interested in preserving national unity.

There was only one way in which the partition could be prevented. Only Jinnah could do it. Gandhi therefore favoured reaching out to Jinnah with an offer that would give him the substance of Pakistan without entailing the risk of partition. *Any* form of Pakistan *without* partition seemed to be Gandhi's formula. So convinced was he about the disastrous nature of the Pakistan scheme, that he was ready to support *any* proposal which could avoid the catastrophe of partition. Gandhi proposed to Mountbatten, the new Viceroy, that he should form a new national government at the Centre, headed by Jinnah. Gandhi hoped that the responsibility of national power would restrain Jinnah and make him look at the entire country as his own. His followers would do likewise.

The proposal could not be tried out. Too many people were opposed to it. Jinnah himself did not seem to be inclined. Between partial control over a large India and a total control over a small Pakistan, he obviously wanted latter. He also knew that his politics and ideology had alienated non-Muslims

to such an extent that they would not accept him as their leader even for a day. The only alternative left was the partition of India. Given the presence of substantial non-Muslim minorities in Punjab and Bengal, these two provinces too had to be partitioned. Earlier, in a meeting with Mountbatten, Jinnah had made it clear that he did not mind a Pakistan smaller than originally proposed, so long as he got it completely.

It was under these circumstances that Gandhi gave in and decided to accept the partition of India, even though he was the last to accept it. It shattered his dream of national unity. The partition was also nothing short of a catastrophe for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike. Gandhi understood it better than anyone else. Almost immediately after the decision to partition India was taken, he gave vent to his feelings: "We may not feel the full effect immediately, but I can see clearly that the future of independence gained at this price is going to be dark. I shall, perhaps, not be alive to witness it, but should the evil I apprehend overtake India and her independence be imperilled, let posterity know what agony this old soul went through thinking of it. Let it not be said that Gandhi was a party to India's vivisection."

Some leaders, including Jinnah, had hoped that after partition India and Pakistan would live as friendly neighbours. Gandhi thought otherwise. In a statement that should be remembered for its prophetic quality, he said in July 1947: "The Pakistanis will say that they must increase their armed forces to defend themselves against India. India will repeat the argument. The result will be war. . . . [Shall] we spend our resources on the education of our children or on gunpowder and guns?"

The statement reflected the predicament the two independent nation states found themselves in. The partition happened in 1947 but its legacy is far from over. It continues to be a big factor in governing the relations between the two countries as was predicted by Gandhi. Both India and Pakistan are still living in the dark shadows that were cast upon the land of South Asia by the partition in 1947.

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Freedom Movement, Savarkar and RSS

Ram Puniyani

The rise to dominance of the RSS in the political sphere has been accompanied by its claim of being most patriotic organisation and that it has contributed to nation building and to the freedom movement. It has also been trying to act as an aggressive judge, classifying people as patriots or otherwise. It has propagated that minorities are not patriotic and have not contributed to the freedom movement. Lately, all those disagreeing with its politics are being labeled as anti-nationals (*desh drohi*).¹ At the same time, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the major Hindutva ideologue, has been adorned as veer (brave), *swatantryaveer* (brave freedom fighter), his statues have been raised at several places and roads named after him in different cities. During the BJP led NDA (1998–2004), his portrait was put up in the central hall of parliament. This government also named the Port Blair airport in his name. The word of mouth propaganda has been eulogising him as the real ‘Father of the Nation’.²

With the change of regime at the Centre (2004), the new petroleum minister Mani Shankar Aiyer replaced his plaque at Andaman's with that of Mahatma Gandhi. This again became a matter of controversy. The BJP–Sena alliance tried to capitalise on this during the elections in Maharashtra, where Savarkar has been projected as a great revolutionary and efforts have been made to show that he was the guiding figure for all the great freedom fighters apart from being a progressive person of sorts. Those opposing Savarkar being given these honours have been insulted. Similarly Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP's mask, also claimed that he participated in the freedom movement. Where does the truth lie?

Freedom Movement

India's freedom struggle is acknowledged to be

world's greatest mass movement ever. It assumed a mass character after the efforts of Gandhi from 1920, before which it had more of an elite character. This movement primarily aimed at throwing away the British rule. Parallel to this, there were several other phenomena taking place in society, and they were affecting the entire network of social equations and life pattern of society. All this was taking place in the backdrop of process of industrialisation and the introduction of modern education. These twin processes resulted in the emergence of a new business industrial class, an educated middle class and the working class. These twin processes also resulted in the change of social hierarchy of caste and gender. Women and Dalits began to have access to education as well as were participating in the social and political movements as equal beings. This whole process of change was captured in the phrase, ‘India as the Nation in the making’. The Indian National Congress, majority of sections of the left and the Dalits leaders articulated the need for democratic values, the values of liberty, equality and fraternity, which became the slogans of India's struggle for independence.

In contrast to these emerging classes and the concept of India as a nation in the making, those associated with declining classes, that is, the landlords, the kings and the associated clergy, stuck to the pre-modern values of birth-based inequality of caste and gender. They believed in the existence of a Muslim Nation from the 8th century onwards, and a Hindu nation since times immemorial, in contrast to the concept of India as a united nation in the making. The political streams coming out of this section were the Muslim league, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, amongst others. These groups never participated in the freedom movement. The major reason for this was that the freedom

movement aimed at democratic values, while these groups believed in birth based inequality. Here, it should be clear that those Hindus and Muslims who believed in democracy and in the concept of India being a 'nation in the making' participated in the freedom movement, while those who belonged to the declining classes remained aloof from the freedom movement and indirectly contributed to the implementation of the British policy of divide and rule. While most Hindus participated in the freedom struggle, the followers of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS kept aloof. Likewise, while most Muslims participated in this movement, the followers of Muslim League did not do so. Incidentally the Maulanas of Bareilly and Deoband did associate with the struggle for independence of India.³

Savarkar and Freedom Movement

Savarkar was the founder of Hindutva ideology, the base of Hindu right-wing feudal values. One needs to look at the trajectory of his life to understand his transition from an anti-British revolutionary to the ideologue of Hindutva. Savarkar was initially an anti-British revolutionary. Later, his life underwent a major transition during his confinement in Andaman jail. He was a changed man after the period of his jail life. He was an anti-British revolutionary prior to his deportation to the Andamans, but later he never associated with anything even remotely sounding as anti-British.

Savarkar had gone to study law in London in 1906. While pursuing his studies there, he formed the 'Free Indian Society' committed to overthrowing British rule in India. For this and other anti-British activities, he was denied barristership. When he appealed against this decision, the authorities offered him a call to the bar if he gave an undertaking not to participate in politics. He rejected this offer.

His group had learnt the art of bomb making from a Russian revolutionary in Paris. One member of the group killed a top-ranking official in India Office (London) and was sentenced to death. For involvement in this and for other charges on him in Indian courts, Savarkar was arrested and deported to India for trial on July 1, 1910. The ship carrying him stopped at Marseilles, where he jumped into the sea and swam to the shore to claim asylum on French soil. He was captured and was brought to India. In

India, he faced two cases, one in Nasik and one in Bombay, and was sentenced to a total of 50 years in prison in the Cellular Jail in the Andamans.

The conditions in the Andaman jail were very painful. The political prisoners were tortured badly. He could not bear the torture, unlike most other inmates in the prison. It seems that the conditions of jail life broke his spirits. Within a month after arriving in the Andamans, Savarkar submitted his first mercy petition to the British, on August 30, 1911. The petition was rejected. He submitted fresh petitions in November 1913 and then again in 1917 and March 1920. In these petitions, he pledged that "if the government in their manifold beneficence and mercy release me, I for one cannot but be the staunchest advocate of constitutional progress and loyalty to the English government . . ." He further stated, "My conversion to the constitutional line would bring back all those misled young men in India and abroad who were once looking up to me as their guide. I am ready to serve the government in any capacity they like, for as my conversion is conscientious so I hope my future conduct would be."

Unaware of Savarkar's clemency petitions, the Indian National Congress in the early 1920s agitated demanding his unconditional release.

After these repeated mercy petitions and promises, the British moved Savarkar to a jail in Ratnagiri in May 1921, and finally released him on January 6, 1924. The British imposed stringent conditions for his release; Savarkar not only accepted them, but also made the statement: "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 the constitution 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."⁴ The reforms he is referring to here are the Montague Chelmsford proposals of 1919, which did not satisfy the nationalist movement's demands and were rejected by it.

The British Government released him under the condition that he will stay in Ratnagiri district in Bombay province and will seek permission of the government to leave the district, and also that he will not engage in any public or private political activities without the consent of the government.

The period of these conditions lasted till 1937, when the Congress ministry was sworn in. Subsequent to this, he assumed the office of the President of Hindu Mahasabha. This aspect of his total surrender is completely hidden by the Hindutva forces when they confer on him the epithet of 'Veer Savarkar'.

Why did British government release him? How is it that after his release the track of his politics totally changed and he came to adorn the mantle of the ideologue of *Hindu Rashtra*? Why is it that he never undertook any anti-British agitation after his release? Why is it that he never joined and supported the major movements of those times, like the Quit India movement? Why is it that instead of being a part of the freedom struggle, he chose to help the British in recruiting Indians for their army? His compromise with the British hides a lot of messages about the nature of his politics from then on. He emerged as the undisputed leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. After 1937, for most of the time, his politics was the polar opposite of the national movement led by Gandhi and 'no support to Congress move' was his basic dictum. This can be best exemplified by the 1942 Quit India movement, when Gandhi gave the call for people to leave government jobs. Opposing it, Savarkar issued the edict: "I issue this definite instruction to all Hindu Sanghathanists in general holding any post or position of vantage in the government services, should stick to them and continue to perform their regular duties".⁵ The edict was dutifully followed. Indeed, the Mahasabha's working committee passed a resolution on August 31, 1942 asking all Mahasabhaites to remain at their jobs.

Savarkar has the 'honour' of brewing Brahmanical Hinduism with nationalism, and he was the first exponent of the doctrine of Hindutva. While his initial anti-British struggles were impressive, after his release from the Andamans he assumed the role of the proponent of Hindutva, and all his energy was directed towards strengthening the politics of hate, strengthening the communal Hindu Mahasabha and helping RSS from a distance.

As an aside, we should note here that Savarkar's anti-British struggles and anti-British activities totally ceased after his release by the British, and from then on all his guns were to be targeted against the Muslims. In his work, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, first published in Nagpur in 1923, Savarkar argued

that the Aryans, who settled in India at the dawn of history, very early formed a nation, now embodied in the Hindus. He writes, "Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affection warm, but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilisation—our Hindu culture."⁶

According to Savarkar, Hindutva rests on three pillars: geographical unity, racial features and common culture. He further went on to elaborate the criterion for who is a Hindu? According to him all those who regard this land as their fatherland and holy land are the only ones who are Hindus, and this land belongs only to them. This leads to the automatic interpretation that Christians and Muslims, whose holy places are in Jerusalem and Mecca respectively, are not at par with the 'Hindus' who 'own' this country. Savarkar thus initiated the idea of 'doubting of patriotism of Muslims'. He says, "Besides culture, the tie of common holy land has at times proved to be stronger than the chains of a motherland. Look at Mohammedans: Mecca to them is a sterner reality than Delhi or Agra."

Savarkar's politics was in direct opposition to Gandhian politics. Gandhi—the representative of Indian nationalism—was branded by Savarkar as a conciliator and appeaser of Muslims. Savarkar propounded that struggle for supremacy would begin after the British left and that Christians and Muslims were the real enemies who could be defeated only by "Hindutva". It is also worth remembering that the murderer of Gandhi, Godse, was his ardent follower. Savarkar himself was the co-accused in Gandhi murder, but was let off for lack of corroborative evidence and as Godse took the whole responsibility of this murder totally on his own self.

Today, in order to eulogise Savarkar, his followers are suitably misinterpreting events and his writings, and attributing many anonymous things to him. That he wrote anti-British articles after his release is a pure figment of their imagination. A 'Savarkar mythology' is being created to replace factual history, which is available through his actual writings and authentically published works and documents from impeccable sources. One argument being given is that he knew India was in any case going to get independence, so why waste energies in

fighting against British. This is an absurd argument. No political movement ends its agitation till its goals are achieved and this is true for the Indian freedom struggle led by Gandhi and Nehru too—the struggle, the negotiations and the manoeuvrings continued till India actually won independence. Some of his followers also claim that his apology to British was a clever strategy on the part of Savarkar. The falseness of this argument can be understood by comparing his mercy petitions with those of Bhagat Singh. Bhagat Singh in fact reprimanded his father when he wanted to plead with the British to release his son. Furthermore, not only does history tell us that Savarkar stood by the promise he made to the colonial government that if released, he would give up the fight for independence and be loyal to the colonial government, after his release from jail he propounded the ideology of Hindutva which destabilised the freedom movement by deepening the divisions along sectarian lines and thus helped the British

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Coming to the RSS, the RSS combine claims to have contributed substantially to the process of ‘nation building’ and freedom struggle. History textbooks introduced in schools wherever BJP governments have come to power delve at great length about the contribution of their ideologues to the national movement.

The fact of the matter is, RSS as an organisation was never a part of the anti-British movement. Its founder Dr K.B. Hedgewar, had been sentenced to jail before he founded the RSS, in the wake of Khilafat movement. This was on the charge of giving a provocative speech. The second and last time he was sentenced to jail was during the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement, when Gandhi called upon the people to break the law. Hedgewar told the RSS that the organisation will not participate in this movement, and that those who want to participate in their personal capacity can do so. He himself was jailed during this *satyagraha*. His biographer clarifies that his main goal in participating in this movement was, “Dr Saheb had the confidence that with a freedom loving, self sacrificing and reputed group of people inside with him there, he would discuss the Sangh with them and win them

over for its work.”⁷ The aim was therefore not to participate in the movement but to get contacts for building the divisive politics of RSS. From 1931 onwards, Hedgewar dissociated himself from the Civil Disobedience Movement and never again was he a part of any national movement.

The non-participation of the RSS in the freedom struggle was ideologically formulated by M.S. Golwalkar, according to whom fighting against the British was reactionary and he accused the Congress for reducing the national struggle to ‘mere’ anti-British movement. Golwalkar writes, “Being anti-British was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view had disastrous effect upon the entire course of the independence struggle, its leaders and the common people.”⁸ With this being its ideological formulation, the Sangh Parivar obviously did not and could not fight against the British. The RSS equated its nationalism with fighting Muslims, and hence its constant harping against the national leadership for ‘appeasement of Muslims’. “The Hindu Mahasabha and RSS combine even kept away from supporting the Naval revolt because they (mutineers) used guns against the British and the Sangh Parivar considered fighting against British as “disastrous” and “reactionary”.

Anderson and Damle (*Brotherhood in Saffron*) point out that “Golwalkar believed that the British not be given any excuse to ban the RSS. When the British banned military drill and the use of uniforms in all non-official organisations, the RSS complied. On April 29, 1943, Golwalkar distributed a circular to senior RSS figures . . . (that said) ‘We discontinued practices included in the Government’s early order on military drill and uniforms . . . to keep our work clearly within bounds of law, as every law abiding institution should . . .’”⁹

Our description of the role of the RSS in the freedom struggle is necessarily brief, as one cannot describe a non-phenomenon beyond a point. The RSS not only consciously abstained from participating in the freedom movement, on the contrary, it opposed the various movements launched during the freedom struggle (especially the Quit India movement). During those days too, it was active as a communal body, boosting the impact of Muslim communalism and participating in the process of mutual supplementation of Hindu and Muslim communalism.

Vajpayee and Freedom Movement

Much is also made of the 'participation' of BJP's *mask*, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in the Quit India movement. This was the time when young Vajpayee was a recruit of RSS. In an article put out on the internet (it also appeared in the newspapers) *The Sangh is my soul* for the consumption of NRIs and for soliciting their support for the Sangh Parivar, he says, "When I wrote *Hindu Tan-Man Hindu Jeevan*, I was a student of class X. . . . Till 1947 I did the RSS work at *shakha* level . . . I also participated in the *Quit India movement in 1942 and was jailed*. I was then studying for my Intermediate examination. I was arrested from my native village Bhatেশwar in Agra district (italics added)."

This claim by him has been investigated in detail and the findings published in the fortnightly *Frontline* of February 20, 1998.¹⁰ This investigation nails the lie of his participation in the Quit India Movement. Vajpayee had made a confessional statement before the magistrate on September 1, 1942, in which he says that although "I along with my brother followed the crowd" which attacked the forest outpost and demolished it, and witnessed the event, "I did not cause any damage. I did not render any assistance in demolishing the government building." In effect, Vajpayee therefore stated: I was part of the crowd, but I did not share its objectives and I did not participate in any culpable act. In a tape-recorded interview with *Frontline's* editor N. Ram in January 1998, Vajpayee admitted that he had indeed made this statement.

This makes it clear that Vajpayee did not participate in the Quit India movement as a "freedom fighter" in his home village of Bateshwar. Despite this, many decades later, the Sangh Parivar has been seeking to lionise Vajpayee for the heroic role he played in 1942—a role he explicitly denied then and has denied again, in his January 1998 interview to *Frontline*.

Freedom Movement: Democratic Values

It should be apparent that only those people participated in the freedom movement who stood for democratic values. These were the ones who held aloft the tricolour, while those who were for the saffron flag or the green flag had no role to play in this mass movement, which built the multicultural,

multi-religious plural India that we are today. Unfortunately, today, the retrograde ones, those who kept aloof, criticised and opposed the freedom movement, are claiming to be the custodians of nationalism. Their nationalism is not Indian nationalism; theirs' is a sectarian, religion-based one, a total anti-thesis to what India actually is!

Email: ram.puniyani@gmail.com

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Cultural Pluralism, Social Cohesion and Development in the Context of India Today

Anand Kumar

Introduction

When we examine the realities of cultural plurality, demands of social cohesion and imperatives of development in the context of India and its people today, there is little point in denying the growing ethnocentrism and increasing socio-cultural tensions and conflicts in the country. It contains trajectories of religious nationalism, linguistic nationalism and secessionism. What is ethnocentrism? It is a tendency in socio-cultural communities of any society to use the prevalent values and norms as the basis for evaluating and judging other people. An ethnocentric person is puzzled with diversities and multiculturalism. Such a person feels justified in asking and demanding: “Why can’t everyone else be just like us?” It is the opposite of cultural pluralism where there is systemic provision and scope for a variety of peoples, opinions and practices. It is an impediment in the progress of civic nationalism which is based upon constitutional values, ideals and rules. It has the potential of promoting ethnic nationalism which causes marginalisation of other ethnic groups through social dominance. It ultimately encourages discrimination against ‘the others’. Discrimination in a democracy breeds alienation, leading to separatism. Therefore, it has become meaningful to ask why there is increasing visibility of anxiety, fear and anger about cultural pluralities within both the dominant communities as well as the vulnerable communities all over our country, which is fuelling the problems of social cohesion and development.

From the perspective of political sociology, ethnocentrism and ‘identity politics’ are twins. Their togetherness is behind the increasing significance and appeal of ‘historical fractures

caused by religious plurality’ and ‘traditional social cleavages due to the caste system’ in the everyday life of Indian people. They are overshadowing basic issues of economy, employment, energy, education and environment. It has introduced distortions in the process of representative democracy where common good is giving way to sectarian interests. The social base of democracy is expanding but there is shrinking of space for effective role of the marginalised groups and communities. There is also change in the composition and orientation of the political elite and political parties. The processes of horizontal mobilisations are being replaced by the initiatives of vertical mobilisation. It is challenging our constitutional set-up more than untrustworthy neighbours like China and Pakistan. The police and judicial system are quite stressed in maintaining social cohesion in such a setting. These two issues of sustaining cultural pluralism and strengthening democratic ways of social cohesion and sustainable inclusive development are intimately related with the major deficits in the post-colonial socio-political and economic set up after seven decades of democratic transformations.

There is no use of getting divided about who is to be blamed for it—the model of ‘mixed economy’ and state-centric political economy or the LPG (Liberalisation–privatisation–globalisation) paradigm and market-mediated priorities and programmes. Today our nation is suffering due to six significant deficits: i) Development deficit (ranked 131 in a total of 188 countries); ii) Governance deficit (high level of corruption and low level of efficiency in governance apparatus); iii) Legitimacy deficit (increasing pollution of the election system and party system due to black money and crime–politics nexus); iv) Democracy deficit (declining

representation of working population (particularly women and the working poor) in legislative bodies, limited democratisation of public sphere and key institutions of society and use of extra-constitutional ways in power conflicts); v) Nation-building deficit (increasing pressures of ethnic and parochial considerations in the democratic discourse of power); and vi) Citizenship-building deficit (low incentives for citizenship-building in the face 'identity politics', primordial identities based mobilisations, and diminishing scope for active citizenship). We need systemic changes for a better tomorrow as our society and polity have arrived at a new cross-road in the journey of democratic nation-building. Addressing the questions associated with cultural pluralism, social cohesion and development may be useful in understanding the present situation and its demands for moving forward to meet the needs of unity in diversity which is a systemic imperative for our society with deep civilization roots and plurality of religions, languages, memories and customs.

II. Some conceptual points

We sociologists consider a society as a social organisation of people who share a history, a culture, a social structure, a set of institutions, a territory and a civilisational identity. Societies differ with each other in terms of degree of 'we-feeling' among its members. 'We-feeling' grows on the basis of shared values, institutions, processes and memories, which gets developed and evolves into nationhood with increasing social cohesion and political unity. Loyalty and affinity to the idea of 'nation' in a democracy is a direct and cumulative consequence of political representation, socio-economic justice and cultural unity.

A nation-state is the political organisation of a cohesive society and its people, which has a government, laws, citizenship, physical boundaries and a sense of nationhood. Any nation evolves on the basis of a cultural framework. Culture has been conceptualised as a configuration of: (a) learned patterns for behaviour, and (b) shared understanding about the meaning and value of things, ideas, emotions and actions acquired as a member of society. Historically speaking, the system of nation-states first came into existence in Europe on the basis

of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, and then in the rest of the modern world.

Cultures may be understood with help of two metaphors—culture as a tree, and culture as a river. It is rooted in a specific space like a tree. It has branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. Like a tree, it grows from a seed. Then it blooms and gives fruits. It may also decay or get uprooted. On the other hand, it has a point of origin in time and space and a course of flow like a river. The flow of culture takes place in a way where the two banks for its journey are one, the societal values, institutions and processes, and two, the folk beliefs and customs. Like a river, a culture has tributaries and distributaries also. Like a river, it may get polluted or silted or impacted by other related factors.

We find that 'culture' and 'civilisation' are used synonymously. But they are different from each other. In this context, a civilisation presents the sum total of what the members of a society have in terms of economy, polity, technology and material resources to organise their life conditions and fulfil their needs and aspirations. In a setting of rapid social changes, which is the case with India since independence, societies become victim of 'cultural lag' because of a gap between technological and cultural changes—humans need more time to change their cultural values and orientation as compared to adopting to changes in technological and material aspects of their life.

Sociologists have suggested that all human beings, as members of a given society, particularly a nation-state, share certain a civilisational heritage and a cultural framework.

Social cohesion is an outcome of natural and logical connections among the members of a society. It is based upon a system of values, institutions and processes which help the citizens to be together to form a whole. A democratic society is most suitable for a cohesive social order because democracy makes us learn to be a citizen of a nation-state with a defined set of rights and duties. It assures the following to all citizens irrespective of caste, class, creed, gender, age, race, region and religion: i) identity; ii) dignity; iii) rights; and iv) representation. It asks us to be dialogical, competitive, cooperative and tolerant of diversities and socio-cultural differences. Recognition of cultural pluralism and commitment for social cohesion are two essential

characteristics of a healthy democratic nation-state. But all democratic nation-states are not always healthy and cohesive. The citizens are not found to be capable of staying together to form a whole because of a variety of reasons. There are three 'D's which need to be avoided by any democratic nation-state to maintain critical minimum fraternity and cohesion among its citizens: discrimination, deprivation and destitution.

Development, as a concept, has at least four facets—social, economic, political and spiritual. The United Nations has identified seventeen dimensions which should be included in the agenda of development in the 21st century. Two important preconditions required for any social change to be recognised as 'development' are inclusion and sustainability

III. Diversities and pluralities in India: From disharmony to constitutional coherence

Let us now take a look at the diversities and disharmonious features of our society in order to recognise the challenges and opportunities before India today.

Process of 'reservations' for the SCs, STs, OBCs, women and physically challenged

In real terms, there have been four major kinds of pluralities and diversities which demanded social and political engineering to enhance social coherence and promote development in a democratic nation-state: 1) castes and tribes; 2) Indian languages; 3) ethnic regions; and 4) existence of several religious communities, including the legacy of age old coexistence of Hindu–Muslim–Sikh–Christian–Buddhists–Jains and other faith communities. Our society is indebted to the nation-builders like Gandhi and Ambedkar found ways to tackle the challenges of caste system based disharmony, and extreme vulnerability of the tribal (Adivasi) communities. Their initiatives created a suitable background for the makers of Constitution of India to institutionalise the revolutionary provisions of special protection and reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in legislative bodies, education and government jobs. The caste atrocities

have not ended through these provisions. But they have made it clear in a decisive way that there is no legitimacy to caste based discriminations and that the age-old practice of caste-based and tribes related discriminations must be severely punished by the democratic state. Of course, this has also contributed to elite formation among these vulnerable communities, which has created in them the capability of resistance and raising their voice.

Social cohesion through 'social justice'

The legal validity of these arrangements and impact of 'reservation policies' later encouraged the Indian state to offer similar support to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) which are found in all religious communities. There is provision of 'reservation' to create opportunities for the physically challenged citizens and facilitate their education and employment. This approach has also been used to meet the challenge of under-representation of women of all communities at the level of grassroots democracy in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The reservation policy system has changed the discourse of Indian politics by expanding the spaces and enlarging the scope for the representation of the weaker sections. Establishment of separate statutory commissions for the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes, who include every fourth Indian citizen, indicates growing self consciousness and increasing systemic space for these two of the most marginalised and resourceless sections of the Indian people. There is increasing emphasis upon empowerment for meaningful participation in the affairs of state, economy and society.

The problem of coordinating linguistic nationalisms and linguistic plurality

It was a burning problem during the last decades of the British Raj and the first two decades after independence. It created basis for linguistic nationalism. There was fear among the southern states of 'Hindi imperialism'. There was prediction of Balkanisation of India after the departure of the British rulers. But linguistic re-organisation of Indian states seems to have created satisfactory space and protection to most of the Indian languages. It was found prudent to create linguistic homogeneity, as far as possible, in re-drawing the boundaries of

our provinces on the basis of the recommendations of the States' Re-organisation Commission. There was an understanding to create one state for each major Indian language except Hindi. In the last two decades, the process of re-organising states has been used to address the complaints of 'internal colonialism' and 'regional deprivation'. It has resulted in the emergence of 4 new states—one each out of the large states of Andhra Pradesh (Telangana), Bihar (Jharkhand), Madhya Pradesh (Chhattisgarh) and Uttar Pradesh (Uttarakhand). It may be argued that the time has come for setting up another national commission for reorganisation of states to have a comprehensive approach towards the prevailing movements for 'statehood'. But the issue of linguistic pluralism is no more a disruptive factor for social cohesion or development initiatives.

The alienation and 'secessionism' of ethnic communities

The alienation of ethnic communities has been most pronounced in the north-eastern parts of India. The situation in the Punjab and Kashmir is also similar to the ethnic complexities of the north-east India. They all belong to frontier areas and there is a unique and different language–religion–culture mix there as compared to the rest of India. This complex issue was made worse in the initial years after freedom by treating it as 'a threat to national integration and security' and handing it over to army for a military solution. The alienation of the north-eastern communities needed a democratic perspective for changing the terms of engagement. The dialogues have yielded positive results in most cases of insurgencies in the north-east region. Progress of constitutional federalisation in conjunction with carving out new provinces on the basis of ethnic diversities has helped in reducing the trust deficit prevailing among the ethnic communities. The increasing significance of regional parties in the national coalitions at the centre has been an additional incentive for the proponents of ethnic nationalism to move away from 'politics of separatism'.

Politics of 'competitive communalism'

Religious plurality has been an old feature of Indian civilisation from the post-Vedic period

and the Buddhist–Jain epoch. Indian history is marked by oscillation between religious harmony and communal strife. The rule of Ashok (268–232 BC, Magadh) and Akbar (1556–1605 AD, Delhi) represented cultural pluralism and religious harmony based regimes. Shashank (590–625 AD, Bengal) and Aurangzeb (1658–1707 AD, Delhi) are remembered for their religious intolerance and cultural discrimination. In modern times, the British Raj is blamed for the policy of 'divide and rule' and conspiring with communal forces for the partition of British India at great human cost. It contributed to the creation of two mutually hostile nation-states out of the Indian civilisation. It got hundreds of thousands killed and several million men and women from all religions brutally uprooted because of communal mistrust, fear, hatred and violence. Even after seven decades of existence of India and Pakistan, there seems to be no easy way out of the politics of competitive communalism.

IV. Memories of medieval 'episodes' and contemporary wave of identity politics

There is increasing legitimacy for the programs of identity politics among the larger religious communities of India since the 1980s. Using the religious card is also fashionable in areas of concentrated presence of two or more faith communities in certain regions. Some observers, using the framework of religion–politics nexus, argue that the period between 8th century and 18th century has been an era of deep disruption and consequently rapid decline of Indian culture due to destruction by Muslim invaders and discrimination and atrocities by the Muslim rulers. This perspective focuses on the dynamics of power around the Delhi Sultanate and presents this period as a 'Muslim period' which started with the 'Muslim conquests by Ghazni, Ghori and Khalajis' and ended with fall of the Mughal empire. This narrative covers the period from 1194, when Muhammad of Ghor came as invader, to 1760 when the East India Company became the effective regulator of the affairs of Mughal India. It is claimed that the Muslim kings committed numerous atrocities on Hindus. Use of Persian as official language of governance, imposition of jizya tax, destruction of pilgrim centres and forceful conversion from Hinduism to

Islam are cited as the examples of such atrocities. This cultural fracture is held responsible for Hindu–Muslim riots and communal polarisation which was finally formalised with the partition of India and creation of Pakistan on the demand of Muslim League and supported by educated and affluent sections of the Muslim population, by the British Raj before its departure in 1947.

Thus, for instance, Aurangzeb, the sixth ruler of the Mughal empire who ruled for 49 years and expanded the Mughal empire to its greatest extent, is considered to be amongst the most anti-Hindu of the Muslim kings. From historian Jadunath Sarkar to the symbol of secularism Jawaharlal Nehru to Hindutva icon Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, all have the same evaluation of Aurangzeb. According to Nehru, he was a ruler who ‘tried to put back the clock, and in this attempt stopped it and broke it.’ He is considered a ‘Hindu loathing bigot’ by others. The evidence given for this is that he changed the policy of pluralism and tolerance by imposing the *jizya* tax on Hindus, conducted wars in western and southern Indian regions, executed the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, and destroyed temples in Kashi and Mathura. However, there is also considerable evidence to show that he patronised many temples in the major pilgrim centres of Hindus and Jains, including Shiva temple of Jangamari (Varanasi), Mahakal temple (Ujjain), Someshwarnath Mahadev temple (Prayag), Balaji temple (Chitrakoot), Kamakhya Devi temple (Guwahati) and Jain temples at Dilwara and Junagarh. But such evidence has been completely ignored while evaluating Aurangzeb.

The propagation of such distorted history has served to completely erase from public mind the lessons and achievements of the last 5,000 years of Indian civilisation and its multi-layered composition. It has enabled the proponents of cultural nationalism to create an image ‘the enemy who needs to be revenged’. While the reality is that the advent of Islam and Muslims led to the intermingling of the diverse indigenous culture of the Indian subcontinent with Islamic culture, leading to the birth of a new syncretic culture and resulting in great advances in the realms of art, literature, music, architecture, painting and the crafts, these developments are completely obfuscated and the entire period is simplified as a period of Hindu humiliation by Muslim rulers.

One needs to be aware that there were at least two more tendencies parallel to the Hindu vs. Muslim line. They were Muslim vs. Muslim and Hindu vs. Hindu. They also made a great impact upon the course of events and episodes, policies and practices of medieval India around Delhi and other significant centres of political and economic power. For instance, in this narrative of this period being one of strife between Hindus and Muslims, it is forgotten that Babur established the Mughal empire after the victory in the first battle of Panipat (1526) defeating Ibrahim Lodi and putting an end to the Lodi dynasty (1451–1526), or that Aurangzeb became the sixth Mughal emperor after defeating and killing his elder brother Dara Shikoh—a scholarly Mughal prince who learnt Sanskrit from pandits at Varanasi and got many of the Hindu religious texts translated in Persian, or that the Shah of Persia Nader Shah attacked and looted Delhi in 1739 and made the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah surrender and took away the famous Peacock Throne and Kohinoor.

This discourse ignores the plurality both within the Hindus as well as the Muslims. It needs to interrogate the complexity of Hindu–Muslim co-existence beyond the role of Akbar and Aurangzeb, and Jinnah and Jawaharlal. Like all world religions, there are numerous ethnic groups, sects and castes among the followers of Islam in India and elsewhere. First of all, there are four major sects with separate norms, laws and practices: Shias, Sunnis, Kharijites and Ahmadiyahs. The Shias and Sunnis are further distributed among several sub-sects. From the perspective of the caste system, there are three major categories (and several sub-castes) among the Indian Muslims—Asharafs (descendants of the founder of Islam), Ajlaf (converts from ‘clean’ Hindu castes, and Arzal (Muslims with ‘un-clean occupations’).

Moreover, it treats the Muslim invasions as invasion of India by Islam. There is need to separate these political wars between kings of various kingdoms from religious campaigns. The invaders came to plunder the wealth and occupy territories, not for spreading spirituality. It ignores that this period mostly witnessed clashes between foreign invaders and the rulers of Delhi and both sides were Muslims by religion. The armies of Delhi based Muslim rulers had a good proportion of Hindu generals and soldiers. There is strong

evidence to suggest that most of the Muslim rulers adopted policy of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism. There was strong presence of Hindus in the administration, trade and commerce as well as the army of most Muslim rulers and vice versa. Here are some examples to clarify this issue. Tilak, a Brahmin, was one of the commanders of Mahmud Ghaznavi's army. Muhammed bin Tughluq had appointed Ratan, a Hindu, as governor of Sindh. The army of Sher Shah Suri (1538–1545) had several Hindu commanders. One of his famous commanders was Brahmajit Gaur, who fought with him in the successful battles of Chausa and Bilgram against Humayun; Sher Shah also sent him to pursue Humayun when he fled India. In the battle of Mewar, the Mughal army of Emperor Akbar was led by Raja Maan Singh and one of the commanders of the army of Rana Pratap was Hakim Khan Soor. Akbar fought against the Kingdom of Mewar for the expansion of his empire, just as he waged wars against Sultan Baz Bahadur of Malwa, Sultan Muzaffar Shah III of Guajrat, Sultan Daud Khan of Bengal, Sultan Mirza Jani Beg of Sindh and Sardar Yusuf Shah Chak of Kashmir. Jaswant Singh and Jai Singh were commanders in the army of Aurangzeb and led the campaigns against the Maratha King Shivaji. On the other hand, several of Shivaji's ablest commanders were Muslims; Shivaji also had deep spiritual bonds with Baba Yakut, a Muslim fakir of Ratnagiri. Tipu Sultan's prime minister Purnea and army commander Krishna Rao were both Brahmins. Most of the Muslim ruled provinces, including Bengal, Golkunda, Ahmednagar and Bijapur, had appointed Hindus as in-charge of their treasury.

This discourse of seeing a continuous conflict between Muslims and Hindus in medieval India also ignores the strong current of syncretisation which was manifested in arts and culture, architecture, languages, music, food and dress patterns. As a result, several changes took place in Indian society, such as: i) Islamisation of Indian polity and society; ii) Hinduisation and Indianisation of Muslims; and iii) hybridisation of Indian culture. There were also two complimentary spiritual-literary waves—the Bhakti Movement and the Sufi Silsila. This was reflected in the poetry and teachings of saint-reformers like Kabir, Ravidas, Nanak, Chaitanya and Namdev. Their followers came from all castes of Hindus and Muslims. Emperor Akbar is well known

for his enthusiasm to engage in inter-faith dialogues which ultimately culminated in the establishment of a new spiritual platform during his reign—*Sulah-e-Kul*. Several other Muslim rulers and their advisors made attempts to understand the Hindu tradition and its spiritual-philosophical heritage. They got all classical texts of Indian civilisation translated into Persian, including the *Upanishads*, *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, *Bhagvad Gita*, *Dharma Shastras*, *Puranas* and *Yoga Vashistha*. Mughal prince Dara Shikoh is well known for his passion about India's ancient cultural heritage. The foundation of Swarna Mandir at Amritsar was laid by a Muslim fakir Sai Miyan Mir on the urging of the fifth Sikh Guru. Guru Govind Singh had a good number of Muslims in his army. He was helped by Nabi Khan, Gani Khan and Sayyad Beg in critical hours. Several Muslim rulers created marital alliances with neighbouring Hindu royal families, including Akbar. The Sultans of Bengal, particularly Husain Shah and Nusrat Shah, were great patrons of Bangla language. Malik Muhammad Jayasi contributed immensely to the progress of Awadhi language. Rahim Khan-e-khana provided valuable support to Sant Tulsi Das whose Ramacharitmanas made a most profound impact upon the Hindu society and Awadhi language. Similarly, the Muslim rulers of the Deccan region contributed to the growth and popularisation of Marathi by making it the language of their administration.

V. Continuity and change: Arrival of Islam, the Bhakti Movement and re-inventing Indian values

It is important to mention that Islam did not enter India through invaders with sword and fire as suggested in some narratives. It first came to India by peaceful methods, often with the encouragement of Hindu rulers. The settlements of Arab and Persian migrants on the western and southern coast have been there since 8th century AD. New communities came into existence because of the union between these newly arrived migrant Muslims and non-Muslim women like the Nawait or Natia of Konkan, Mappilla or Moplah of Malabar and Labbais of Tamil Nadu.

Then there was the impact of itinerant preachers who started arriving in the Indian continent from

the eleventh century onwards. These first set of messengers of Islam included Shaikh Ismail of Bukhara came to Lahore in about 1005 AD, Moulai Abadullah of Yemen who came to Gujarat in about 1067, Sayyid Jalal-ud-Din of Bukhara who settled in Sindh in 1244, Khwaja Muin-ud-Din Chishti who came to Ajmer from Persia in 1192 and died there in 1236, and Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki from Kyrgyzstan who came to Delhi during the reign of Iltutmish (1211–1236) and died there in 1235, to name a few. There were many more such inspiring saints in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Baba Farid-ud-Din and Ahmad Kabir (Makhdum-i-Jahaniyan) in the Punjab, Bulbul Shah in Kashmir, Hazrat Khwaja Banda Nawaz Gesu Daraz and Pir Mahabir Khamdayat in the Deccan, and Nizamuddin Auliya, one the most famous of all the Sufi saints, whose shrine is in Delhi.

That medieval India was not a period of decay and witnessed a huge flowering of cultural pluralism and a new phase in growth of diversity is also seen in the rise of many sects between the 9th and 17th centuries. Three of the greatest Hindu acharyas representing this phenomenon were Shankara (proponent of Advait monism; born in 788 AD), Ramanuja (founder of Vishistadvait; born in 1017) and Madhav (founder of dualism; born in 1238). This period also saw the birth of several influential saint-reformers, including: Basav (founder of Lingayat sampradaya in the 12th century), Namdev (1270–1309, Maharashtra), Dnyaneshwar (1275–1296, Maharashtra), Ramanand (1299–1411, UP), Ravi Das (1398–1540, Varanasi), Kabir (1440–1510, UP), Shankar Dev (1449–1569, Assam), Chaitanya (1468–1533, Bengal), Nanak (1469–1538, Punjab), Vallabhacharya (1479–1531, UP and Rajasthan), Meerabai (1498–1563, Rajasthan), Surdas (1483–1563, UP), Tulasi (1532–1623, UP), Dadu Dayal (1544–1603, Rajasthan) and Maluk Das (1574–1682, U.P.)

VI. Moving forward

Sociologists look at cultural pluralism as a historically inherited social reality which has to be coordinated within the democratic discourse of social cohesion by recognising the relative significance of four factors: i) language; ii) religion; iii) caste system; and iv) class relations. They

recognise the impact of at least six momentous phases of integrative and disintegrative changes in the making of Indian culture and civilisation: 1) Vedic–Aryan; 2) Buddhist–Jain influences; 3) Gupta period; 4) Harsh and Vikramaditya; 5. Mughal era; and 6) Interface with Western influence, the British Raj and the Indian national movement.

The Indian society is considered to be the most stratified and diversified of all existing societies in the modern world-system. Several levels of social evolution co-exist in contemporary India, from hunters and food gatherers and nomads to settled agriculturalists, artisans, industrial towns and post-industrial centres. We are 1.3 billion people, of whom 31% live in urban areas and 69% in rural, spread over a territory of more than 2.97 million sq km.

According to physical anthropology, we are classified into six major racial categories—Negrito, Proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean, Western Brachycephal and Nordic. The political geography of India was divided into 17 provinces and 500 principalities in 1947. Today it is re-organised as a ‘union of states’, comprising of 29 provinces and 7 union territories. Most of the major religions of the world—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism and animists are found in the country, along with wide variety of cults and sects. According to the Census of 2001, there were 122 major languages and 1,599 other languages in use among the people. The Anthropological Survey of India has identified a total of 4,635 communities in all the states and union territories of India. The innumerable forms of superiority and subordination of our caste system is a major basis of cultural plurality and social fractures. Castes are found among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists. There are 3,000 general castes (with 2500 sub-castes), 5013 castes in the national list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and 1108 castes in the list of Scheduled Castes. Then, there are 744 Scheduled Tribes. There are also 190 communities totalling 70 million people who belong to ‘de-notified’ tribes. According to one estimate by Prof. Ganesh Devy, out of all of us 1.3 billion citizens, 6% belong to DNT communities, 8% are from the Scheduled Tribes, 20% are from non-Hindu faith communities, 22% are from the Dalit castes and 38% are from linguistic minorities.

Excepting the elite of these sections, all of them are living in a situation of near exclusion. This is taking place through a number of mechanisms, including the use of English as the language of better skills and opportunities, and restricting the effective participation of masses in the architecture of representative democracy. In other words, we are a nation where the overwhelming majority comprises of marginalised and the vulnerable sections, while the dominant sections consist of a very thin minority, probably not more than ten per cent. It is the latter who are in command of the democratic institutions in both the economy and polity, and enjoy unbridled power.

How can all of us find a conflict free set-up to engage in pursuit of happiness, both personal as well as collective freedom for cooperative development? Gandhi once said that his vision of freedom from foreign rule will mean establishment of a 'square of Swaraj', whose four sides will include i) political independence; ii) economic independence; iii) moral-social component; and iv) spiritual component. The ground realities of today suggest complementing this vision with another square based upon cohesive interlinking of four groupings: i) religious; ii) linguistic; iii) castes and tribes; and iv) class based. This demands inclusion of all these groupings in the discourse of power and effective participation in the decision-making institutions. But we have to achieve it in an environment which is presently influenced by a set of new departures in our polity and society. They are: 1. From nation as religion to religion as nation; 2. From representative democracy as the promised land of political, economic and social justice to democracy becoming a playground for nepotism and crime-politics nexus; and 3. Elections and political parties as instruments of citizenship and nation-building becoming dominated by money power, muscle power and media power. These departures or 'deviations' are not good news for cultural pluralism, social cohesion or development.

First things first

If we are a democracy with an emancipatory Constitution, then we have to aim for harmonious and sustainable development through togetherness of cultural pluralism and social cohesion. It needs

a concerned citizenship with commitment to the Constitution of the Republic of India. This can create peoples' pressure, particularly from aspirational younger Indians who today comprise the majority of our republic, to persuade the political class to take steps to reform our election system and the party system and make them free from control by money power. It is the first basic reform which can create capacity in the political class to build three new compacts for harmonious and holistic development of our nation in all areas, of economy and ecology, education and empowerment, and principles and politics. Rest of the challenges will get resolved with help of these developments.

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Why Pluralism and Secularism Are Essential for Our Democracy

Hamid Ansari

In his final address as vice president, Hamid Ansari spoke at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, on August 6, 2017. Reproduced below is the text of his speech (slightly shortened).

I

The people of India gave themselves a republic that is sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic and a constitutional system with its focus on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. These have been embodied in a set of institutions and laws, conventions and practices.

Our founding fathers took cognisance of an existential reality. Ours is a plural society and a culture imbued with considerable doses of syncretism. Our population of 1.3 billion comprises of over 4,635 communities, 78% of whom are not only linguistic and cultural but social categories. Religious minorities constitute 19.4% of the total. The human diversities are both hierarchical and spatial.

It is this plurality that the Constitution endowed with a democratic polity and a secular state structure. Pluralism as a moral value seeks to “transpose social plurality to the level of politics, and to suggest arrangements which articulate plurality with a single political order in which all duly constituted groups and all individuals are actors on an equal footing, reflected in the uniformity of legal capacity. Pluralism in this modern sense presupposes citizenship.”¹

Citizenship as the basic unit is conceptualised as ‘national–civic rather than national–ethnic’ “even as national identity remained a rather fragile construct, a complex and increasingly fraught ‘national–civic–plural–ethnic’ combination.”² In the same vein, Indianness came to be defined not as a singular or

exhaustive identity but as embodying the idea of layered Indianness, an accretion of identities.³

Modern democracy “offers the prospect of the most inclusive politics of human history.” By the same logic, there is a thrust for exclusion that is a byproduct of the need for cohesion in democratic societies; hence the resultant need for dealing with exclusion ‘creatively’ through sharing of identity space by “negotiating a commonly acceptable political identity between the different personal and group identities which want to/have to live in the polity.”⁴ Democracy “has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the people can actually be heard.” Its “raison d’etre is the recognition of the other.”⁵

II

Secularism as a concept and as a political instrumentality has been debated extensively.⁶ A definitive pronouncement pertaining to it for purposes of statecraft in India was made by the Supreme Court in the *Bommai* case and bears reiteration:

Secularism has both positive and negative contents. The Constitution struck a balance between temporal parts confining it to the person professing a particular religious faith or belief and allows him to practice profess and propagate his religion, subject to public order, morality and health. The positive part of secularism has been entrusted to the State to regulate by law or by an executive order. The State is prohibited to patronise any particular religion as State religion and is enjoined to observe neutrality. The State strikes a balance to ensue an atmosphere of full faith and confidence among its people to

*realise full growth of personality and to make him a rational being on secular lines, to improve individual excellence, regional growth, progress and national integrity. . . . Religious tolerance and fraternity are basic features and postulates of the Constitution as a scheme for national integration and sectional or religious unity. Programmes or principles evolved by political parties based on religion amount to recognising religion as a part of the political governance which the Constitution expressly prohibits. It violates the basic features of the Constitution.*⁷

Despite its clarity, various attempts, judicial and political, have been made to dilute its import and to read new meaning into it. Credible critics have opined that the December 11, 1995 judgment of the Supreme Court bench⁸ “are highly derogatory of the principle of secular democracy” and that a larger bench should reconsider them “and undo the great harm caused by them”.⁹ This remains to be done; “instead, a regression in consciousness (has) set in” and “the slide is now sought to be accelerated and is threatening to wipe out even the gains of the national movement summed up in *sarvadharmasambhav*.”¹⁰

It has been observed, with much justice, that “the relationship between identity and inequality lies at the heart of secularism and democracy in India.”¹¹ The challenge today then is to reiterate and rejuvenate secularism’s basic principles: equality, freedom of religion and tolerance, and to emphasise that equality has to be substantive, that freedom of religion be re-infused with its collectivist dimensions, and that toleration should be reflective of the realities of Indian society and lead to acceptance.¹²

III

Experience of almost seven decades sheds light on the extent of our success, and of limitations, on the actualisations of these values and objectives. The optimistic narrative is of deepening; the grim narrative of decline or crisis.¹³

Three questions thus come to mind:

- How has the inherent plurality of our polity reflected itself in the functioning of Indian democracy?
- How has democracy contributed to the various dimensions of Indian pluralism?

- How consistent are we in adherence to secularism?

Our democratic polity is pluralist because it recognises and endorses this plurality in (a) its federal structure, (b) linguistic and religious rights to minorities, and (c) a set of individual rights. The first has sought to contain, with varying degrees of success, regional pressures, the second has ensured space for religious and linguistic minorities, and the third protects freedom of opinion and the right to dissent.

A question is often raised about national integration. Conceptually and practically, integration is not synonymous with assimilation or homogenisation. Some years back, a political scientist had amplified the nuances:

*In the semantics of functional politics the term national integration means, and ought to mean, cohesion and not fusion, unity and not uniformity, reconciliation and not merger, accommodation and not annihilation, synthesis and not dissolution, solidarity and not regimentation of the several discrete segments of the people constituting the larger political community . . . Obviously, then, Integration is not a process of conversion of diversities into a uniformity but a congruence of diversities leading to a unity in which both the varieties and similarities are maintained.*¹⁴

How and to what extent has this worked in the case of Indian democracy with its ground reality of exclusions arising from stratification, heterogeneity and hierarchy that often “operate conjointly and create intersectionality”?¹⁵

Given the pervasive inequalities and social diversities, the choice of a system committed to political inclusiveness was itself ‘a leap of faith.’ The Constitution instituted universal adult suffrage and a system of representation on the First-Past-the-Post (Westminster) model. An underlying premise was the Rule of Law that is reflective of the desire of people “to make power accountable, governance just, and state ethical.”¹⁶

Much earlier, Gandhiji had predicted that democracy would be safeguarded if people “have a keen sense of independence, self respect and their oneness and should insist upon choosing as their representatives only persons as are good and true.” This, when read alongside Ambedkar’s apprehension that absence of equality and fraternity

could bring forth “a life of contradictions” if the ideal of “one person, one vote, one value” was not achieved, framed the challenge posed by democracy.

Any assessment of the functioning of our democracy has to be both procedural and substantive. On procedural count the system has developed roots with regularity of elections, efficacy of the electoral machinery, an ever increasing percentage of voter participation in the electoral process and the formal functioning of legislatures thus elected. The record gives cause for much satisfaction.

The score is less emphatic on the substantive aspects. Five of these bear closer scrutiny: (a) the gap between ‘equality before the law’ and ‘equal protection of the law’; (b) representativeness of the elected representative; (c) functioning of legislatures; (d) gender and diversity imbalance; and (e) secularism in practice.

- *Equality before the law and equal protection of the law:* “The effort to pursue equality has been made at two levels. At one level was the constitutional effort to change the very structure of social relations: practicing caste and untouchability was made illegal, and allowing religious considerations to influence state activity was not permitted. At the second level the effort was to bring about economic equality although in this endeavour the right to property and class inequality was not seriously curbed... Thus the reference to economic equality in the Constitution, in the courts or from political platforms remained basically rhetorical.”¹⁷
- *Representativeness of the elected representative:* In the 2014 general election, 61% of the elected MPs obtained less than 50% of the votes polled. This can be attributed in some measure to the First-Past-the-Post system in a fragmented polity and multiplicity of parties and contestants.¹⁸ The fact nevertheless remains that representation obtained on non-majority basis does impact on the overall approach in which politics of identity prevails over common interest.¹⁹
- *Functioning of legislatures, accountability and responsiveness:* The primary tasks of legislators are legislation, seeking accountability of the executive, articulation of grievances and discussion of matters of public concern. The three often overlap; all require sufficient time being made available. It is the latter that is now a

matter of concern. The number of sittings of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha which stood at 137 and 100 respectively in 1953 declined to 49 and 52 in 2016. The paucity of time thus created results in shrinkage of space made available to each of these with resultant impact on quality and productivity and a corresponding lessening of executive’s accountability. According to one assessment some years back, “over 40 percent of the Bills were passed in Lok Sabha with less than one hour of debate. The situation is marginally better in the Rajya Sabha.”²⁰ *A study on Indian Parliament as an Instrument of Accountability* concluded that the institution is “increasingly becoming ineffective in providing surveillance of the executive branch of the government.”²¹ The picture with regard to the functioning of the state assemblies is generally much worse. Thus while public participation in the electoral exercise has noticeably improved, public satisfaction with the functioning of the elected bodies is breeding cynicism with the democratic process itself. It has also been argued that “the time has come to further commit ourselves to a deeper and more participatory and decentralised democracy—a democracy with greater congruence between people’s interests and public policy.”²²

- *Gender and diversity imbalance:* Women MPs constituted 12.15 percent of the total in 2014. This compares unfavourably globally as well as within SAARC and is reflective of pervasive neo-patriarchal attitudes. The Women’s Reservation Bill of 2009 was passed by the Rajya Sabha, was not taken up in Lok Sabha, and lapsed when Parliament was dissolved before the 2014 general elections. It has not been resurrected. Much the same (for other reasons of perception and prejudice) holds for Minority representation. Muslims constitute 14.23 percent of the population of India. The total strength of the two Houses of Parliament is 790; the number of Muslim MPs stood at 49 in 1980, ranged between 30 and 35 in the 1999 to 2009 period, but declined to 23 in 2014. An Expert Committee report to the government some years back had urged the need for a Diversity Index to identify ‘inequality traps’ which prevent the marginalised and work in favour of the dominant groups in society and result in unequal access to political

power that in turn determines the nature and functioning of institutions and policies.²³

- *Secularism in actual practice:* Experience shows that secularism has become a site for political and legal contestation. The difficulty lies in delineating, for purposes of public policy and practice, the line that separates them from religion. For this, religion per se, and each individual religion figuring in the discourse, has to be defined in terms of its stated tenets. The 'way of life' argument, used in philosophical texts and some judicial pronouncements, does not help the process of identifying common principles of equity in a multi-religious society in which religious majority is not synonymous with totality of the citizen body. Since a wall of separation is not possible under Indian conditions, the challenge is to develop and implement a formula for equidistance and minimum involvement. For this purpose, principles of *faith* need to be segregated from contours of *culture* since a conflation of the two obfuscates the boundaries of both and creates space to equivocalness.²⁴ Furthermore, such an argument could be availed of by other faiths in the land since all claim a cultural sphere and a historical justification for it.

In life as in law, terminological inexactitude has its implications. In electoral terms, *majority* is numerical majority as reflected in a particular exercise (eg: election), does not have permanence and is generally time-specific; the same holds for *minority*. Both find reflection in value judgments. In socio-political terminology (eg: demographic data), 'majority' and 'minority' are terms indicative of settled situations. These too bring forth value judgments. The question then is whether in regard to 'citizenship' under our Constitution with its explicit injunctions on rights and duties, any value judgments should emerge from expressions like 'majority' and 'minority' and the associated adjectives like *majoritarian* and *majorityism* and *minoritarian* and *minorityism*? Record shows that these have divisive implications and detract from the Preamble's quest for 'Fraternity'.

Within the same ambit, but distinct from it, is the constitutional principle of equality of status and opportunity, amplified through Articles 14, 15 and 16. This equality has to be substantive rather

than merely formal and has to be given shape through requisite measures of affirmative action needed in each case so that the journey on the path to development has a common starting point. This would be an effective way of giving shape to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policy of *Sab Ka Saath Sab Ka Vikas*.

It is here that the role of the judicial arm of the State comes into play and, as an acknowledged authority on the Constitution put it, "unless the Court strives in every possible way to assure that the Constitution, the law, applies fairly to all citizens, the Court cannot be said to have fulfilled its custodial responsibility."²⁵

IV

How then do we go about creating conditions and space for a more comprehensive realisation of the twin objectives of pluralism and secularism and in weaving it into the fabric of a comprehensive actualisation of the democratic objectives set forth in the constitution?

The answer would seem to lie, firstly, in the negation of impediments to the accommodation of diversity institutionally and amongst citizens and, secondly, in the rejuvenation of the institutions and practices through which pluralism and secularism cease to be sites for politico-legal contestation in the functioning of Indian democracy. The two approaches are to be parallel, not sequential. Both necessitate avoidance of sophistry in discourse or induction of personal inclinations in State practice. A more diligent promotion of fraternity, and of our composite culture, in terms of Article 51A (e) and (f) is clearly required. It needs to be done in practice by leaders and followers.

A commonplace suggestion is advocacy of tolerance. Tolerance is a virtue. It is freedom from bigotry. It is also a pragmatic formula for the functioning of society without conflict between different religions, political ideologies, nationalities, ethnic groups, or other us-versus-them divisions.

Yet tolerance alone is not a strong enough foundation for building an inclusive and pluralistic society. It must be coupled with understanding and acceptance. We must, said Swami Vivekananda, "not only tolerate other religions, but positively embrace them, as truth is the basis of all religions."

Acceptance goes a step beyond tolerance. Moving from tolerance to acceptance is a journey that starts within ourselves, within our own understanding and compassion for people who are different to us and from our recognition and acceptance of the 'other' that is the *raison d'être* of democracy. The challenge is to look beyond the stereotypes and preconceptions that prevent us from accepting others. This makes continuous dialogue unavoidable. It has to become an essential national virtue to promote harmony transcending sectional diversities. The urgency of giving this a practical shape at national, state and local levels through various suggestions in the public domain is highlighted by enhanced apprehensions of insecurity amongst segments of our citizen body, particularly Dalits, Muslims and Christians.

The alternative, however unpalatable, also has to be visualised. There is evidence to suggest that we are a polity at war with itself in which the process of emotional integration has faltered and is in dire need of reinvigoration. On one plane is the question of our commitment to Rule of Law that seems to be under serious threat arising out of the noticeable decline in the efficacy of the institutions of the State, lapses into arbitrary decision-making and even 'ochlocracy' or mob rule, and the resultant public disillusionment; on another are questions of fragility and cohesion emanating from impulses that have shifted the political discourse from mere growth centric to vociferous demands for affirmative action and militant protest politics. "A culture of silence has yielded to protests." The vocal distress in the farm sector in different states, the persistence of Naxalite insurgencies, the re-emergence of language related identity questions, seeming indifference to excesses pertaining to weaker sections of society, and the as yet unsettled claims of local nationalisms can no longer be ignored or brushed under the carpet. The political immobility in relation to Jammu and Kashmir is disconcerting. Alongside are questions about the functioning of what has been called our "asymmetrical federation" and "the felt need for a wider, reinvigorated, perspective on the shape of the Union of India" to overcome the crisis of "moral legitimacy" in its different manifestations.²⁶

V

I have in the foregoing dwelt on two 'isms', two

value systems, and the imperative need to invest them with greater commitment in word and deed so that the principles of the Constitution and the structure emanating from it are energised. Allow me now to refer to a third 'ism' that is foundational for the modern State, is not of recent origin, but much in vogue in an exaggerated manifestation. I refer here to nationalism.

Scholars have dwelt on the evolution of the idea. The historical precondition of Indian identity was one element of it; so was regional and anti-colonial patriotism. By 1920s a form of pluralistic nationalism had answered the question of how to integrate within it the divergent aspirations of identities based on regional vernacular cultures and religious communities.²⁷ A few years earlier, Rabindranath Tagore had expressed his views on the "idolatry of Nation".²⁸

For many decades after independence, a pluralist view of nationalism and Indianness reflective of the widest possible circle of inclusiveness and a 'salad bowl' approach characterised our thinking. More recently an alternate viewpoint of 'purifying exclusivism' has tended to intrude into and take over the political and cultural landscape. One manifestation of it is "an increasingly fragile national ego" that threatens to rule out any dissent however innocent.²⁹ Hyper-nationalism and the closing of the mind is also "a manifestation of insecurity about one's place in the world."³⁰

While ensuring external and domestic security is an essential duty of the State, there seems to be a trend towards sanctification of military might overlooking George Washington's caution to his countrymen over two centuries earlier about "overgrown military establishments which, under any form of government, are inauspicious to liberty."³¹

Citizenship does imply national obligations. It necessitates adherence to and affection for the nation in all its rich diversity. This is what nationalism means, and should mean, in a global community of nations. The Israeli scholar Yael Tamir has dwelt on this at some length. Liberal nationalism, she opines, "requires a state of mind characterised by tolerance and respect of diversity for members of one's own group and for others;" hence it is "polycentric by definition" and "celebrates the particularity of culture with the universality of human rights, the

social and cultural embeddedness of individuals together with their personal autonomy.” On the other hand, “the version of nationalism that places cultural commitments at its core is usually perceived as the most conservative and illiberal form of nationalism. It promotes intolerance and arrogant patriotism.”³²

What are, or could be, the implications of the latter for pluralism and secularism? It is evident that both would be abridged since both require for their sustenance a climate of opinion and a state practice that eschews intolerance, distances itself from extremist and illiberal nationalism, subscribes in word and deed to the Constitution and its Preamble, and ensures that citizenship irrespective of caste, creed or ideological affiliation is the sole determinant of Indianness.

In our plural secular democracy, therefore, the ‘other’ is to be none other than the ‘self’. Any derogation from it would be detrimental to its core values.

Jai Hind.

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The Maratha Agitation for Reservations

Neeraj Jain

The Marathas, one of the dominant castes of Maharashtra, who constitute probably around 32–35% of the State’s population (this is only an estimate, as there has been no caste based census in India since 1932), are agitating for reservations once again. Earlier, during 2016 and 2017, they had organised 52 silent marches. This time, the agitation has been violent, and the agitators have attacked buses, stopped train services and blocked highways.

Over the last few years, several other dominant castes in other states, like the Patels (or Patidars) of Gujarat, the Jats of Haryana and the Gujjars of Rajasthan, have raised similar demands. They are all demanding that they be included in the ‘Other Backward Classes’ category and be given reservations.

Reservations in the Constitution

Because of competitive populism and electoral calculations, no major political party in any state has opposed this demand, even though this demand changes the entire logic for reservations on the basis of which this policy measure was specifically included in the Constitution by our Constitution framers. The Constitution of India, in its Article 15 (4) and 16 (4), clearly allows the state to make special provisions, including reservation in any post in the services under the state, “for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes”. Elaborating on these provisions, the Supreme Court of India has ruled (*State of Kerala v. N.M. Thomas*) that they are not exceptions to the equality guaranteed under Articles 14, 15(1) and 16(1), but rather are aimed at achieving the equality guaranteed under these articles.¹ The Mandal Commission in the late

1980s too had adopted the criterion of “social and educational backwardness” as the basis for making its recommendations.²

Dr Ambedkar and our Constitution framers had, therefore, envisioned reservations as a scheme to foster social inclusion, social equality and social justice. It was a programme to cement the notion of citizenship. As Dr Ambedkar explained in his final speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, political equality, the principle of one person one vote, does not automatically bring about social equality. And the fact is, there is complete absence of social equality; there is no fraternity (the sense of brotherhood amongst all Indians) in Indian society. This is because of the presence of castes in India, which bring about separation in social life. Without overcoming this, without genuine fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint, the idea of citizenship cannot truly be realised, and in fact, we will not even become a nation in reality.

The policy of reservation was thus a scheme to realise this larger dream of Indian democracy. It was neither thought of as a poverty alleviation programme nor as an employment generation scheme by our Constitution framers.

Unfortunately, the demand for reservations by the Marathas, Patels and Jats completely negates this perspective on the basis of which the policy of reservations has been sanctioned in the Constitution. It is a sad commentary on the democratic consciousness of Indian society that even seven decades after independence, there is no powerful social movement in the country demanding an end to the humiliating hierarchical setup that continues to pervade Indian society. Instead of that, massive rallies are taking place and *bandhs* are being called to voice the demand for reservations on the

logic of present economic backwardness, and the major political parties, for political expediency, are trying to come up with all kinds of schemes to somehow fulfil this demand.

Limitation of the Reservation Demand

One of the demands being raised by these dominant castes is that they be given reservation in higher educational institutions. One becomes eligible for reservation in these institutions only after passing Class XII. This is also the minimum eligibility if one wants to take the benefit of reservation in government jobs. However, in India, only 16% of all children enrolling in Class I cross the Class XII threshold, the majority (84%) drop out before that.

This implies that even if the government somehow finds a way to give reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to these dominant castes, and the courts too allow it, only a small percentage of the population of these castes is going to be eligible for this 'benefit'. [This is true, actually more true, for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Other Backward Classes too. Barely 10% of the OBC students, 8% of the SC students and 6% of the ST students (out of those admitted to Class I) cross the Class XII barrier. This means that the social justice provisions of the Indian Constitution continue to elude the overwhelming majority of these most marginalised sections of the Indian society even today.]³

Therefore, if the Maratha / Jat / Patel / Gujjar youth are genuinely concerned about uplifting their caste brethren, the demand that they should first raise is that the government should take steps to ensure genuine universalisation of school education. This would require the government to: i) ban all forms of commercialisation of school education; ii) ensure genuinely free education of equitable quality to all children up to Class XII, and gradually improve the quality of all government schools to at least the level of Kendriya Vidyalayas; iii) scrap the policy of appointing contract teachers, and ensure that all teachers are well qualified and trained and given decent salaries and social security; and, for this, iii) increase its educational spending (Centre + states combined) to at least 6% of GDP as mandated by the Kothari Commission, of which the Centre

should spend 25%. This is actually a demand that should be raised / supported by all people of this country, across all castes, which would also increase fraternity amongst all Indian people.

About the Maratha Community in Maharashtra

Let us however keep aside these arguments about the faulty and limited logic behind the Maratha demand for reservations, and try and understand the reasons behind the mobilisation of lakhs of Maratha youth for reservations in educational institutions and government jobs.

The Marathas are undoubtedly one of the most dominant communities in Maharashtra State. They have a stranglehold on state politics. From 1962 to 2004, of the total of 2,430 MLAs, 1,336 or 55% were Maratha. Of Maharashtra's 18 chief ministers since the state was formed in 1960, 10 have been Marathas. Economically too, the Marathas are one of the most dominant castes in the state. This has been established by several studies and commissions. More than 75% of the land in the state is owned by the community. Nearly 54% of the educational institutions in the state are controlled by them. Of the 105 sugar factories, 86 are headed by Marathas, while 23 district cooperative banks have Marathas as chairpersons. Marathas dominate the universities in the state, with 60 to 75% presence in the management. About 71% of the cooperative institutions are under the control of this community. In addition, all the milk cooperatives and cotton mills are either owned or controlled by them.⁴

Why is such a dominant community, which had once opposed caste-based reservations during the late 1980s at the time of the anti-Mandal Commission agitation, now trying to seek it for itself?

Growing Economic Crisis

The reason for this is that it is only a small section of the Marathas who are rich and control the sugar factories, cooperative banks, milk cooperatives and educational institutions. The majority of the Marathas are small and marginal farmers. A survey by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) found only 3% rich Marathas among the sampled families in 2014. On the other hand, around

20% of the sampled Maratha respondents were landless labourers and 15% had less than three acres each. Another survey by two prominent political scientists—Rajeshwari Deshpande and Suhas Palshikar of Savitribai Phule Pune University—found that “land ownership patterns suggest nearly 65% of Marathas are poor, whereas hardly 4% own more than 20 acres of land and thus may be classified as rich farmers.”⁵

These small and marginal Maratha farmers, who constitute the overwhelming proportion of the Maratha population of the State, are finding themselves facing severe livelihood concerns because of the neoliberal economic policies being implemented in the country over the past nearly three decades. In 1991, the Indian government signed an agreement with the IMF–World Bank, international financial institutions controlled by the USA and the European Union, pledging to a thoroughgoing restructuring of the Indian economy in return for a huge foreign loan. The conditionalities imposed on India, and accepted by the Indian Government, included:⁶

- i) Allowing foreign corporations unrestricted entry into each and every sector of the Indian economy;
- ii) Privatising public sector corporations and public sector financial institutions, and even welfare services like education and health;
- iii) Reducing subsidies to the poor, including agriculture, health, education and nutrition subsidies.

Thus began what has come to be known as the globalisation of the Indian economy. It has pushed agriculture into a severe crisis. Because of this, the youth in the villages, the children of small and marginal farmers, are no longer interested in staying in the villages and doing farming for a livelihood. They are migrating to the cities in search of jobs. But there are no jobs in the cities too! The very same neoliberal economic policies that have pushed agriculture into crisis have also resulted in a drying up of jobs. Employment generation in the private sector has virtually collapsed. There are very few jobs available in manufacturing and other private sectors—and the few jobs available are insecure, contractual jobs offering very low salaries.

Therefore, the youth believe that the only

way out of this employment crisis is to try and get a government job, which is the only secure job available today with a decent salary. Of the government jobs available, around 50% are reserved, for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Other Backward Classes. And so, the Maratha youth are out on the streets, demanding reservation in government jobs, in the belief that if they are given reservations, many of them will be able to get these secure, good quality jobs.

This is the reason behind the agitations for reservations in jobs by not just the Marathas in Maharashtra, but also by the dominant caste groups of other states, such as Patels (also known as Patidars) in Gujarat, Jats in Haryana, Gujjars in Rajasthan and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh. The governments of the respective states as well as the Central government have extended support to this demand, and are trying to find a way of circumventing orders of the Supreme Court rejecting the demand for reservation for these dominant castes and imposing a cap on total reservations at 50%. The opposition too has gone along with the reservation discourse, as it too is not willing to question the economic policy orientation that has led to this massive unemployment crisis.

In this article, we first discuss the agricultural crisis in the country, and then the worsening unemployment crisis. Finally, we examine the demand being raised by Maratha youth for reservation in government jobs.

Agricultural Crisis

While the contribution of agriculture to the country’s GDP has come down by half over the period 1983–84 to 2010–11,⁷ from the point of view of livelihoods, this continues to be the most important sector. Of the total workforce in the country, 53% people depend on this sector for their livelihoods (in 2009–10).

For the past nearly three decades, as a part of the neoliberal policies, successive governments at the Centre have been gradually eliminating subsidies given to agriculture and ‘freeing the market’. They have reduced public investment in agriculture, cut subsidies given on major inputs needed for agriculture (such as fertiliser, electricity and irrigation subsidies), gradually eliminated output support to agriculture (in the form of public procurement of agricultural produce), gradually

phased out subsidised credit given to agriculture (by public sector banks) and allowed imports of heavily subsidised agricultural produce from the developed countries into India.⁹ This multi-pronged onslaught on Indian agriculture has pushed this sector into deep crisis. In all important indicators that measure the performance of agriculture, be it area or production or yield, of foodgrains or non-foodgrains, the contrast between pre-globalisation and post-globalisation periods is quite stark (see Table 1).

Table 1: Average Growth Rates of Area, Production & Yield Under Foodgrains, Non-Foodgrains & All Crops⁸

	<i>Foodgrains</i>			<i>Non-foodgrains</i>			<i>All crops</i>		
	<i>Area</i>	<i>Prod.</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Prod.</i>	<i>Yield</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Prod.</i>	<i>Yield</i>
1950–51 to 1989–90	0.61	2.61	1.60	1.22	2.97	1.08	0.79	2.66	1.37
1990–91 to 2004–05	-0.07	1.64	1.27	1.03	2.81	1.39	0.25	1.96	1.29

The net result of these anti-small farmer policies is that for nearly 70% of Indian farmers who have land holdings of less than 1 hectare, total income from all sources (cultivation, farming of animals, non-farm business and wages) has fallen to less than consumption expenditure.¹⁰ This, in turn, has led to a huge increase in rural indebtedness.

According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), in 2012–13, 52% of the total agricultural households in the country were in debt. The average debt was Rs 47,000 per agricultural household, in a country where the yearly income from cultivation per household was only Rs 36,972.¹¹

Under the Modi Government, the implementation of neoliberal policies has accelerated. It has led to a severe worsening of the agricultural crisis. The Modi Government has made a complete U-turn on its 2014 election promise to provide farmers Minimum Support Prices (MSP) that would ensure them a 50% profit over cost of production. There is complete silence on the issue of

strengthening public procurement of farm produce. At the same time, input subsidies to agriculture, such as fertiliser subsidy, have been further reduced.¹² Despite the worsening debt crisis, the Central government has refused to waive farm loans (finally, farmers' movements across the country forced some states to waive these loans). It would have cost the government at the most Rs 3 lakh crore,¹³ while benefiting crores of farmers across the country. As we show later, it is not that the government does not have money for this; it is a question of priorities.

The total budget allocation for the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in Union Budget 2018–19 is miniscule—only Rs 57,600 crore, a mere 2.36% of the total budget outlay, for a sector on which more than 50% of the population depend for their livelihoods. Further, government spending on all agriculture related sectors

(agriculture, rural development, water resources and fertiliser subsidy) as a percentage of GDP has actually fallen—from an already low of 1.43% during the last year of the previous government and the first year of the Modi Government to 1.34% in the 2018–19 BE (Table 2).

Table 2: BJP Government Allocation for Agriculture Related Sectors, 2014–18¹⁴ (Rs crore)

		2014–15 BE (a)	2018–19 (b)
1	Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare	31,917	57,600
	(1) as % of Budget Outlay	1.92%	2.36%
2	Total Agriculture Spending*	1,78,225	2,51,500
	Total Agricultural Spending (2) as % of Budget Outlay	10.71%	10.30%
	Total Agricultural Spending (2) as % of GDP	1.43%	1.34%

* Includes Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Water Resources and Department of Fertilisers

Three decades of battering by hostile policies and the worsening debt crisis have pushed the hardy Indian peasants into such despair that they are being driven to commit suicides in record numbers. More than three lakh farmers have committed suicide in the country since 1995. It is the largest recorded wave of such deaths in history.¹⁵

Because of the worsening agricultural crisis, employment generation in this sector has virtually collapsed. Total employment in agriculture during the 16-year period 1993–94 to 2009–10 has risen by a miniscule 2.4 million, or just 1% (Table 3).

Table 3: Agricultural Employment, Pre- and Post-Reform Years¹⁶ (in million)

	<i>Agricultural Employment</i>
1983	207.23
1993–94	242.46
1999–2000	237.67
2004–05	258.93
2009–10	244.85

No Jobs in Cities

As a part of the conditionalities imposed on the country by the World Bank, successive governments at the Centre since 1991 have gradually been removing all restrictions on the entry of foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) into the Indian economy. During the four years it has been in power, the *swadeshi* Modi Government has announced such a huge liberalisation of rules governing foreign investment in the country that it has proudly declared that India has become the most open country in the world! Not only that, the entire economic policy is now being re-oriented to suit the profit maximisation of big corporations. For instance, the government is relaxing all labour laws so that big corporations can employ contract workers in place of permanent workers, hire and fire them at will, and pay them rock bottom wages. This has worsened the quality of the few jobs available in the country.

Big corporations don't create jobs. They employ the latest labour saving technologies, and employ the minimum possible workers.¹⁷ And with the government dismantling labour laws, even the few

jobs being created by them are low wage, contract jobs. On the other hand, because they are so big, these companies destroy many more jobs than they create, as their entry forces many small companies to close down or merge with them.

This is precisely what is happening in India too. While three decades of globalisation has led to a huge entry of foreign corporations into the country, the country has rapidly industrialised, and the GDP growth rate has significantly increased, it has not led to the creation of jobs. To illustrate, the total employment (workers plus sales and supervisory and managerial staff) in all of India's registered factories (both small and large scale industries combined) increased by only 3.01 million during the 16-year period 1993–94 to 2009–10. This means that only 1.5 percent of the total people who entered the job market during these 16 years (3 million out of 208 million) got any kind of factory jobs. In other words, despite the massive entry of foreign corporations into the country since the beginning of globalisation in 1991, very few factory jobs have been created. The total number of people working in factories after two decades of globalisation, in 2010, was only 11.72 million, or 2.5 percent of the total official workforce in the country of 460 million.¹⁸

The net consequence is that ever since globalisation began, there has been a slowdown in employment growth rate in the country. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of employment in the country fell from 2.44% during the period 1972–73 to 1983 and 2.04% during the period 1983 to 1993–94, to only 1.3% per annum for the entire post-globalisation period of 1993–94 to 2009–10. Employment growth during 1999–2000 to 2009–10 was 1.49% per annum, lower than any previous ten-year period. This slowdown has taken place despite a sharp acceleration in the country's GDP growth rate (Table 4).

It is estimated that in India, the total number of new people who enter the job market every year in search of jobs is around 13 million.²⁰ That means that during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10, a total of 130 million people entered the job market. The NSSO data given in Table 4 indicate that of these, only 63.5 million or 48.8% got any kind of jobs.

Worse, all these jobs were only informal jobs—jobs with low wages, probably even below

Table 4: Total Employment, Employment Growth Rate and GDP Growth Rate, 1983 to 2009–10¹⁹

	<i>Total Employment (in million)</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>CAGR</i>	<i>GDP Growth Rate (at constant 1999-2000 prices)</i>
1983	302.76	1972-73 to 1983	2.44%	4.7%
1993–94	374.45	1983 to 1993-94	2.04%	5.0%
1999–2000	396.76	1993-94 to 2004-05	1.84%	6.3%
2004–05	457.46	2004-05 to 2009-10	0.12%	9.1%
2009–10	460.22	1999-2000 to 2009-10	1.49%	
		1993-94 to 2009-10	1.30%	

the minimum wage, insecure jobs, and with little or no other benefits like compensation in case of injury, paid leave, sick leave, and so on. None of the jobs created during the decade 2000–10 were formal sector jobs—where workers have at least some legal rights such as security of employment, minimum wages, sick leave, compensation for work-related injuries and right to organise—because of the contractualisation of jobs taking place in the economy due to the deliberate dismantling of labour laws in the country by the government. According to the Planning Commission of India, during the decade 1999–2000 to 2009–10, the total number of formal jobs in the economy actually fell from 35 million to 33 million (Table 5)!

Table 5: Formal and Informal Employment in India²¹ (in million)

	<i>1999–2000</i>	<i>2009–10</i>
<i>Formal Employment</i>	35.0	33.0
<i>Informal Employment</i>	361.7	427.22
<i>Total Work Force</i>	396.8	460.22

The result is that the total number of formal sector workers in the country, who have what the Economic Survey of the Government of India calls ‘good jobs’²², constitute just 7.2% of the total work force.²³ The remaining 92.8% workers are in informal jobs—such as fruit sellers selling a few dozen bananas on hand carts, peanut sellers hawking peanuts and other such snacks on bicycles, roadside hawkers

selling clothes or other sundry items, scrap collectors collecting old newspapers and scrap from homes, graduates running tiny telephone recharge shops or driving autorickshaws for 12 hours every day, sales boys and girls going from house to house selling cosmetics / sarees / books, unorganised sector construction workers working in

dangerous conditions at construction sites, farmers toiling day and night in an attempt to extract the maximum possible from their tiny holdings.

The acceleration of neoliberal policies under the Modi Government has led to a further worsening of the employment crisis. According to a recent study, there was an absolute decline in employment during the first two years of the Modi Government (2014–16), possibly the first time this has happened since independence.²⁴

As if this was not enough, the Modi government then announced two economic policies that directly assaulted the informal sector that provides employment to more than 90% of the workforce—first, demonetisation (announced in November 2016), and then the rollout of the GST (in July 2017). Both these policies had a devastating impact on the informal sector, resulting in closure of thousands of small scale units and loss of lakhs of jobs. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has estimated that post-demonetisation, roughly 1.5 million jobs were lost during the four month period from January to April 2017.²⁵

And so, the Demand for Reservations

While globalisation has led to a sharp increase in wealth of the rich, especially the top 1%—and to a lesser extent the top 10%—of the population,²⁶ for the vast majority of the people, these economic reforms have destroyed employment and livelihood opportunities and pushed crores of people into destitution. Amongst the worst hit have been the farming communities, such as the Maratha

community in Maharashtra, the Patels in Gujarat and Jats in Haryana. The youth of these hitherto dominant castes, who earlier either took to agriculture, or were absorbed in industry / services on moving to cities, are now facing a huge crisis of unemployment. Crafty politicians have channelised this disenchantment of the youth into raising the demand for reservation in government jobs.

The gullible youth have come to believe that government jobs are available in significant numbers, and if their castes are included in the category of OBCs and become eligible for reservations in government jobs, then large numbers of them would get decent jobs.

The reality is that there are no government jobs too! As it is, total public sector employment in the country is only around 4% of the total employment in the country.²⁷ Furthermore, as a part of the neoliberal economic reforms being implemented in the country, on the one hand, the Indian Government has been privatising public sector enterprises and welfare services such as education and health, and on the other hand, it has been reducing public employment in all areas—the vacancies arising out of retirement are not being filled (the government admitted in the Rajya Sabha a few days ago that nearly 24 lakh posts are lying vacant with the Central and state governments²⁸), employment is being forcibly reduced by ‘Voluntary Retirement Schemes’, and several jobs are being contractualised. This has led to a drastic fall in public sector recruitment. Public sector employment in the country continuously increased in the decades after independence, from 70.5 lakh in 1961 to 190.6 lakh in 1991. But with the beginning of globalisation, this has got reversed. Public sector employment [including every form of government—Central, state, local government as well as quasi-government (public sector enterprises, electricity boards, road transport corporations, etc.)] over the period 1991–2012 has fallen in absolute

terms, from 190 lakh to 176 lakh (Table 6). This decline has taken place in every sphere of economic activity, from manufacturing, construction and transport to community, social and personal services.

Had employment generation continued at same pace as 1981–91, public sector employment would have risen to 295 lakh in 2012, implying the creation of 1.04 crore jobs. Instead, the total number of jobs declined, by 14.5 lakh.

To conclude, even if the Central/State government finds a way of giving the Maratha youth reservation in government jobs, it will in actuality not result in creation of any significant job opportunities for these youth. The demand for reservation in government jobs is nothing but a mirage. The reason why the upper caste youth, like the Maratha youth in Maharashtra, are facing such a huge crisis of joblessness is not because there is reservation for the Dalits and OBCs, but because there are no jobs, and reason why there is stagnation in job creation is because of the neoliberal economic policies being implemented in the country. If the youth of Maharashtra are serious about finding solutions to the employment crisis, they will need to think more deeply about the real reasons for the unemployment crisis, challenge the economic model being implemented in the country, and raise meaningful demands that will genuinely lead to the creation of a large number of jobs.

We now discuss some of these demands that need to be raised for meaningful job creation in the country.

Some Proposals for Creating Jobs

i) Increase Spending on Agriculture

As discussed above, Indian agriculture is in crisis because of the neoliberal economic reforms. Because of this crisis, which is pushing thousands of farmers to commit suicide every year, employment generation in agriculture has fallen to near zero. To bring the agricultural sector out of this crisis and stimulate job creation in this vitally important sector, the government needs to make farming profitable by:

- reducing input costs by increasing subsidies on fertilisers, electricity, water, etc.;
- providing output price support;
- increasing public investment in agriculture—which is absolutely essential for agricultural

Table 6: Total Government Employment (Centre+State+Local Govt.+Quasi Govt.)²⁹ (in lakh)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Employment</i>
1981	154.8
1991	190.6
2012	176.1

growth; and

- waiving all farm debts, including debts to private moneylenders, and ensuring availability of institutional credit to farmers at subsidised rates.

In other words, the government needs to increase public investment in all agriculture related sectors. It needs to be at least doubled or trebled. Where will the money come from for this? We discuss this issue later in this essay.

This will reverse the decline in Indian agriculture and bring back employment generation to at least the pre-globalisation levels. Had employment generation in agriculture during the post-reform years continued at the same rate as during the period 1983 to 1993–94 (when CAGR was 1.51%, see Table 3), total employment in agriculture would have gone up to 308 million by 2009–10 instead of 245 million. In other words, instead of the net 2.4 million jobs created during the 16-year period 1994–2010, 65.5 million jobs would have been created in the agricultural sector—an additional 63 million jobs!

ii) Provide Incentives for the Small Scale Sector

As discussed above, the overwhelming proportion of employment in the country is provided by the informal sector, including what the government calls the Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs). The Modi government has announced a scheme known as Mudra Yojana. Under this, the government provides a loan of between Rs 50,000 to Rs 10 lakh to people wishing to be entrepreneurs and setting up micro enterprises. According to official statistics, over the last three years since the scheme was launched in 2015, nearly 13 crore people have been sanctioned a total of Rs 6 lakh crore under this scheme till May 25, 2018 (of which Rs 5.81 lakh crore has been disbursed). A simple calculation shows that the average of sanctioned loans under this Yojana comes to Rs 46,530 while the disbursed amount is Rs 45,034.³⁰ While the Modi Government has been claiming that this scheme has helped create several crore jobs, this is obviously another of its big lies; the amount of loan being disbursed under this scheme is too inadequate for setting up any kind of small scale business.

The government must substantially boost the financial incentives it provides for entrepreneurs

interested in setting up MSMEs, including both the amount of loan and the interest subsidy for this loan, as well as provide other incentives, such as reserving production of several items for this sector and banning imports of these items to protect this sector from unfair competition with subsidised imports by recession hit automated plants of multinational corporations. The money for this is there—we discuss this later in this essay.

iii) Create More Government Jobs

Lakhs of youth are mobilising across the country demanding reservations for their castes—when there are no government jobs! They are all fighting for a slice of the public employment ‘cake’, when there is no cake on the table.

Instead, we all need to unite, across castes and communities, and demand more government jobs. To make an estimate of how many government jobs can possibly be created in India, let us compare the number of government jobs in India with that in the USA and other developed countries, per lakh of population.

Unlike the propaganda being daily fed to us by our politicians and bureaucrats, public sector employment in India is not high; on the contrary, it is very low when compared to the developed countries, all of whom are unabashedly free market economies (see Table 7). An important reason why public sector employment in the developed countries is high is because of their high social sector expenditures. Most developed countries spend substantial sums on providing social security for their citizens, including universal health coverage, free school education and free or cheap university education, old age pension, maternity benefits, disability benefits, family allowance such as child care allowance, and much more. This obviously requires that they employ a large number of people in the social sectors to provide these services to their population.

The USA has one of the lowest levels of public sector employment (per lakh of population) among the developed countries. Even if we take this as the level that India should reach, that is, if India is to have the same number of public sector employees per lakh of population as the USA, then India’s public sector employment would have to increase to at least 88.9 million.³¹ Presently, there are only

17.6 million public sector employees in India. This means an additional 71.3 million or 7.13 crore jobs would be created—that too, decent, formal jobs!

Table 7: Public Sector Employment per Lakh of Population³²

Sweden	15,070
France	8,760
USA	7,220
India	1,430

Therefore, instead of fighting amongst ourselves on the basis of caste, religion, region and so on, let us unite and demand that the government should increase its social sector spending, and create more public sector jobs. That would create at least a few crore jobs! Creation of such a large number of public sector jobs will lead to the creation of at least as many private sector jobs if not more, as the creation of so many well-paid jobs in the public sector will give a big boost to demand and will therefore lead to a huge increase in private sector production—as Keynes had pointed out several decades ago.

For instance, if in Maharashtra State alone, the government decides to take urgent and decisive steps to send all children compulsorily to school, and provide them free and good quality education (of Kendriya Vidyalaya standards) up to Class XII, this would require the opening of thousands of schools and recruitment of a very large number of teachers. How many? We have estimated that for this, the government would need to recruit an additional 19 lakh teachers in the minimum!³³

And if so many school teachers are recruited, that would call for a big increase in the number of associate staff, from clerks to laboratory assistants to peons and so on. So many schools would need to be constructed, furniture made, school textbooks printed, and so on. This would lead to a big increase in jobs in all these industries. The recruitment of so many school teachers and associate staff in schools would lead to a big increase in the demand for consumer goods and so there would be much job creation in these industries too. So much job creation, in just a single state in the country, only by investing in providing compulsory, good quality education to all children!

And it is not just education, but all welfare

services, that are in a terrible state in our country. Therefore, we are not at all exaggerating when we estimate that if the government indeed decided to provide good quality essential services to all people in the country, it would lead to the creation of several crore jobs.

But Where Will the Money Come From?

Our readers will say—that is all ok, but where will the money come from for all this? India is a poor country, the government does not have enough money to implement this.

That the Indian Government has no money is a myth, propagated by the government and its propagandists. The reality is, the Indian Government has been doling out subsidies to the rich to the tune of several lakh crore rupees every year. To give two stunning examples:

- Successive governments at the Centre have been giving tax concessions to the country’s corporate houses and super-rich every year, for the last several years, ever since the economic reforms began. Over the 13-year period 2005–06 to 2017–18, these tax write-offs total a mind-boggling Rs 58.6 lakh crore!³⁴
- Over the 15-year period 2004–18, Indian public sector banks have written off a whopping Rs 4.6 lakh crore worth of loans given to big corporate houses. Of this amount, Rs 3.1 lakh crore has been waived by the Modi Government during its four years in power.³⁵ Apart from this, during this period, banks have also restructured loans—which is a more roundabout way of writing off loans—given to these high and mighty, probably to the tune of Rs 10 lakh crore or so.³⁶

Apart from this, other concessions being given to the rich include handing over control of the country’s mineral wealth and resources to private corporations in return for negligible royalty payments, transferring ownership of our profitable public sector corporations to foreign and Indian private business houses at throwaway prices, direct subsidies to private corporations in the name of ‘public-private-partnership’ for infrastructural projects, and so on. These transfers of public wealth to private coffers also total several lakh crore rupees.³⁷

If the government reduces these concessions / transfers of public money to the country's uber rich, it can substantially increase its expenditure on agriculture and the social sectors.³⁸ That would lead to a big increase in agricultural jobs, as well as create several crore government jobs.

To Conclude

Friends, the reason why there are no jobs, the reason why there is such acute joblessness in the country, is not because of the 'other'—unemployment is not because reservation for Dalits and STs and OBCs has snatched away jobs. The reason is that there are simply no decent, formal sector jobs. And that is because of globalisation, because of the neoliberal economic policies being implemented in the country. Once we well and truly realise this, only then, instead of mobilising against the 'other', 'we' will unite with the 'other' and unitedly raise demands that challenge the economic policy orientation in the country and will truly lead to job creation and enough decent jobs for all.

Email: neerajj61@gmail.com

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Linking Aadhaar to Bank Accounts will Destroy the Banking System

Anupam Saraph

Unique ID is not unique, does not certify anything, says UIDAI

In a shocking admission, the UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India) has admitted, in response to a RTI (Right to Information) query, that it does not certify the identity, address, date of birth, resident status or existence of any individual or any Aadhaar number.

The admission that the UIDAI does not certify anything is a blow to every organisation and process that relies on the UIDAI for certifying the identity, address, date of birth, resident status or existence of any individual. It is now evident that not only is nothing identified, nothing is certified by the UIDAI.

The UIDAI also admitted that the biometric data of an individual does not pull up a unique record. This is an admission that the biometrics does not uniquely identify any person. This completely demolishes the myth of providing a unique identity to Indians.

The UIDAI has no idea about the identification documents used to assign an Aadhaar number to enrolment packets submitted by the enrolment agencies. This has damning repercussions for the genuineness of the entire Aadhaar database. In a previous RTI the UIDAI had admitted that the Aadhaar database or the processes of de-duplication had never been subject to verification or audit. Now an admission that even the data about the documents submitted for enrolment are not known to the UIDAI. Private agencies were paid for each enrolment packet they submitted. Private agencies also benefit by being able to use ghost identities that they may have created to claim subsidies, park black money, do benami (accounts and transactions undertaken using a ghost or a duplicate identity)

transactions, and launder money.

The RTI replies call to question the very basis of using the Aadhaar as a means to identify anyone, to use it to establish age, resident status, address or even existence of a person. It calls to question the use of Aadhaar in governance and financial systems.

The UIDAI has refused information about the enrolment operators and supervisors registered with the UIDAI. Only 8 state governments and 12 PSUs (public sector undertakings) have been authorised by UIDAI to act as registrars for the purpose of enrolling individuals. These 20 registrars had hired enrolment agencies who hired these operators. The 20 Registrars put together do not have a geographical reach to the 707 districts, 600,000 villages and 5,000 towns and cities of India. With the information of enrolment operators being withheld, the entire enrolment process to create the world's largest biometric database is called to question.

The Supreme Court of India is hearing more than 22 PILs challenging the use of Aadhaar. The RTI replies make it evident that two successive governments have been taken for a complete ride by private interests controlling the Aadhaar ecosystem. The entire Aadhaar database is not worth the cost of the media used to store it and is the biggest technology scam since the invention of computers. It possesses the biggest risk to national security as every database in the country capable of identifying the citizens and beneficiaries is being replaced or destroyed by the Aadhaar database. Linking, seeding or using Aadhaar to construct or replace existing databases will make it impossible to protect the country's economic, social, security and governance processes as they fail to identify threats, frauds, corruption, money laundering, and cyber war.

Destroying the banking system

Despite this fundamental defect with Aadhaar, on June 1, 2017, India's Department of Revenue (DoR) issued a Notification mandating the linking of every bank account with an Aadhaar number before December 31, 2017. While lawyers have pointed out several illegalities, including the scope, of the notification of this subordinate legislation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the failure of the DoR to consistently protect national interest is unbelievable.

This latest notification will enable the creation of *benami* bank accounts and allow benami transactions on such a huge scale that it will destroy the Indian banking system and hence the Indian economy. Aadhaar is the best state sponsored enabling mechanism for money launderers to enable *benami* bank accounts. Aadhaar can even help the money launderer to take over your bank accounts. Aadhaar is also the enabling mechanism to scale *benami* transactions.

Here are just 4 ways in which linking the Aadhaar to PAN or a bank account will hurt you, destroy the Indian economy:

1. The innocent will lose money, reputation and access to justice, dignity and livelihood as their Aadhaar numbers can act as mules for money laundering, their subsidy and other Aadhaar enabled payments can be easily compromised, their access to their own bank accounts be denied, or they can be framed for economic offences. Helpless citizens and businesses may also find themselves at the receiving end of covert human rights violations as even their access to money and existence is disabled by deactivation or blocking of Aadhaar leaving no recourse to survival.
2. Linking Aadhaar to bank accounts or PAN converts India into the new tax haven for money launderers as it becomes easy to remotely create *benami* accounts and operate benami transactions while claiming complete legitimacy. This will destroy India's economy and governance.
3. Corruption will increase as it becomes easier when proceeds will not be traceable to the corrupt. It will be increasingly difficult to restore swarajya and impossible to ensure suraiya.
4. Banks will not be able to contain non-performing-assets, fraud and financial misappropriation

as the real users of banking services will be untraceable. The economy will be completely out of control as the black and white economies become indistinguishable.

We are in a policy vacuum as the NITI Aayog and the bureaucracy have failed to recognise the Trojan horse and protect national interest. Unless the RBI de-licenses the payments systems based on Aadhaar (AEPS) immediately and the government stays linking Aadhaar to PAN and bank accounts, our leadership will have failed to protect India from this fast colonisation of India by the private interests driving Aadhaar.

Enabling *benami* bank accounts

Benami accounts get created when banks fail to identify the real customers who own the accounts. The Panama Papers exposed data of thousands of benami accounts created through a Panamanian law firm, Mossack Fonseca. The Panama Papers exposed one modus operandi of hiding the real owners of the assets in tax havens.

Prudent bankers recognise the importance of knowing who they bank with. Before it bowed to pressure from the Ministry of Finance in January 2011, the RBI had warned that the Aadhaar enrolment process does not have due diligence. It pointed out that for Aadhaar enrolment verification is not compulsory, as confirmed by the UIDAI in the Demographic Data Standards and Verification Procedure, and does not require document based verification. The RBI also highlighted that such use of Aadhaar as third party identification is against Prevention of Money Laundering Act. While resisting the use of Aadhaar, the RBI also raised the issue of the perceived misuse of such accounts for terrorist financing.

Under pressure from the UIDAI and the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, the RBI, through its circular dated January 27, 2011, allowed bank accounts to be opened exclusively on the basis of Aadhaar number. However the RBI required such accounts to be put to restrictions and be subjected to conditions and limitations prescribed for small accounts, so as to prevent money laundering.

Not happy with the restrictions, the UIDAI pressed the RBI to lift these restrictions placed on accounts opened with Aadhaar numbers. On

September 28, 2011, the UIDAI succeeded in getting the RBI to backtrack and suspend the restrictions of the PMLA on bank accounts opened solely through Aadhaar. The UIDAI also succeeded in causing the RBI further to accept eKYC (the electronic version of KYC administered by UIDAI) or remotely using information associated with an Aadhaar number as KYC.

To put the problem in perspective, Aadhaar enrolment was completely outsourced to private parties by the UIDAI with the sole aim of building the worlds largest biometric database. No one in the Aadhaar enrolment process was required to identify anyone. At best they had to merely verify documents that were submitted for enrolment. Needless to say anyone in possession of your documents could enrol with minor changes in any demographic information or with different biometrics. Field stories of enrolments are full with descriptions of biometric jugaad including using combination of persons, use of biometric masks, biometric modifications, and other ingenious methods to maximise registrations.

According to the IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, 34,000 operators who tried to make fake Aadhaar Cards have been blacklisted. Even if each operator worked for a year before being blacklisted, assuming that each of them made about 100 cards a day, this amounts to over a billion cards. That is more than 95 percent of the database. The Aadhaar enrolment has been unlike that of any other identity document, easily scaling the creation of duplicate and ghost identities.

While there is widespread belief that biometric authentication at time of opening a bank account prevents benami, it ignores the field realities of mobile phone SIM cards being issued on Aadhaar photocopies and used to open bank accounts, of having remotely “downloadable” accounts, and also plain simple use of photocopies of Aadhaar or parallel Aadhaar databases to open bank accounts. With Aadhaar, banks do not have any trace of the real customer. The real customer is simply masked by a benami owner using an Aadhaar number.

Even your Aadhaar can be used, without your knowledge, by a perpetrator to open multiple accounts in order to use it to collect bribes, park black money, or siphon your subsidies. In the eyes of law enforcement, if these accounts are discovered, you will be the criminal.

To compound the problem, UIDAI has no liability for benami bank accounts opened with Aadhaar. After the introduction of the Aadhaar to open bank accounts, the accounts and deposits have doubled in 5 years. No one knows who really controls these accounts.

Enabling *benami* transactions

Even when it had no mandate to develop banking platforms, in 2009, the UIDAI signed an MoU with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), a non government company, to develop an Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS). In this MoU the UIDAI has no responsibility for your banking transactions and the NPCI has no obligation to the RBI. The payment system uses the Aadhaar linked to a bank account as a financial address to do electronic money transfers from one Aadhaar number to another.

Unless an Aadhaar is linked to the account, the AEPS cannot access the bank account. Linking a PAN to the Aadhaar will have the same effect as linking the Aadhaar to a bank account as the PAN is already linked to the bank account. Such accounts become Aadhaar enabled. Aadhaar enabled bank accounts are ready to be used by the AEPS for Aadhaar to Aadhaar money transfers.

Linking an Aadhaar to a bank account is done through a process called as ‘seeding’ an Aadhaar number to a bank account. After receiving the Aadhaar number from the customer, the bank uploads such numbers’ into a ‘NPCI mapper’ or a repository of Aadhaar numbers and Institution Identification Number (IIN) numbers used for the purpose of routing transactions to the destination banks. The IIN is a unique 6-digit number issued by NPCI to the participating bank.

If you ‘seed’ your Aadhaar with another bank account, the NPCI mapper is overwritten with the IIN of this new bank. But what is not realised is this: someone else can also do this. And this facilitates a money launderer to launder money, using your account. All that he has to do is, ‘seed’ your Aadhaar with another bank account. After that, when he transfers money to your Aadhaar number, using the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System, this money gets transferred to this new bank account in this new bank as the IIN recognises this new bank account as being linked to your Aadhaar number.

Then, the money launderer can transfer this money via the AEPS to whichever account he wants, and then re-seed the NPCI's mapper with the original IIN for the Aadhaar number, completely wiping out any trace of money to the alternate IIN. Like transactions of bearer shares in Panama, such money transfers becomes no different from a hawala (an alternative or parallel remittance system that works outside formal banking systems) transaction between real parties who remain anonymous or benami.

Your Aadhaar number can be used to facilitate such benami money transfers. If these money transfers linked to your Aadhaar number are detected by investigation officers or tax authorities, you and not the real operator will be held on suspicion of economic offences.

The NPCI's idea of Aadhaar to Aadhaar banking itself is fundamentally flawed. It is surprising that the RBI has licensed this payment system under the Payment and Settlements Act.

All money is ultimately stored in bank accounts and not in the name of a person. Nowhere in the world does one transfer money to a person, you transfer it to a person's account. Money transfers to and from a bank account makes every money transfer traceable from source to destination making money laundering difficult, if not impossible. Hawala schemes make money transfers untraceable by eliminating the bank accounts. Money transfers that, like the hawala, are based on the premise that you do not share an account number, with someone transferring money to you, are inherently flawed in auditability as they wipe out the money trail.

The idea of a mapper, as used by NPCI's AEPS, does not allow for instructions from sender but relies on periodic update of IIN in the NPCI's table mapping Aadhaar numbers from banks. As multiple banks have to upload the Aadhaar numbers seeded with accounts held by them, this cannot guarantee desired results.

Perhaps the worst aspect of the mapper is that it slices the business process and outsources parts. This destroys the responsibility of the payment system from any single party as was in the case of NEFT or RTGS. Neither the NPCI, the UIDAI or the banks are responsible in such money transfers. They merely provide "look-up" services. In this system, a single compromised or rogue bank branch, or the perpetrator's ability to exploit a good one, is

enough to siphon off subsidy, park black money or take bribes.

Such money transfers would be difficult, if not impossible, to trace without a whistleblower. A few cases have been reported that suggest the large scale play of this scenario already. For example more than 40,000 erroneous transfers were reported through AEPS in DBT transfers meant as part of drought relief for farmers in Karnataka. The government allegedly blamed the banks for failure to seed the correct Aadhaar numbers with the beneficiaries.

Governments across India had been using the RBI's own payment system, the NEFT or RTGS, to undertake electronic money transfers. There is absolutely no reason to switch public payments from NEFT to AEPS, run by a non-government company.

Preventing disaster

If the government and the Supreme Court implement the wisdom of the three orders of the Supreme Court of India on the use of Aadhaar, they can yet save the country from disaster resulting from the private interests driving Aadhaar.

In its first order of September 23, 2011 the Supreme Court had indicated that "no person should suffer for not getting the Aadhaar card in spite of the fact that some authority had issued a circular making it mandatory and when any person applies to get the Aadhaar Card voluntarily".

On August 11, 2015, the 3 member bench restricted the use of Aadhaar and indicated that it may not be used for any other purpose.

On October 15, 2015, a 5 member bench led by the Chief Justice had emphasised that "the Aadhaar card Scheme is purely voluntary and it cannot be made mandatory till the matter is finally decided by this Court". It had restricted the voluntary use of Aadhaar to public distribution system (PDS) Scheme, the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) distribution scheme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Social Assistance Programme (Old Age Pensions, Widow Pensions, Disability Pensions), Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).

In the meantime, following Mahatma Gandhi's footsteps and refusing to link Aadhaar to anything may be the only option left for you.

Email: anupamsaraph@gmail.com

Citizen's Right to Health

Radhey Shiam

India is going to celebrate its 72nd Independence Day. This is the time to introspect about the progress made after establishment of a democratic setup and transformation of society from backward to prosperous India. The fact remains that while India has a wide ambit of Fundamental Rights, it still lacks in providing certain fundamental facilities and infrastructure for all citizens, Citizen's Right to Health being one of them. This is the call of the time to take newer directions and lessons from all developed countries in the world that have given priorities to make health as a Fundamental Right in their country.

Citizen Right to Health: What Does it Mean?

The Right to Health extends not only to timely and appropriate healthcare but also to the underlying determinants of health, such as access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition and housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions and access to health-related education and information, including pertaining to sexual and reproductive health.

According to the General Comment of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Right to Health contains four elements:

- 1) Availability: Functioning public health and health care facilities, goods and services, as well as programmes in sufficient quantity.
- 2) Accessibility: All health facilities, goods and services accessible to everyone. Accessibility has four overlapping dimensions:
 - i. Non-discrimination;
 - ii. Physical accessibility;

- iii. Economical accessibility;
- iv. Information accessibility.
- 3) Acceptability: All health facilities, goods and services must be respectful of medical ethics and culturally appropriate, as well as sensitive to gender and life-cycle requirements.
- 4) Quality: Health facilities, goods and services must be scientifically and medically appropriate and of good quality.

International Bodies on Citizen's Right to Health

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

WHO Constitution states: "The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamentals rights of every human being without the distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition."

The Right to Health or the Right to Healthcare is recognized in at least 115 constitutions of the world. This includes several small and economically weak countries, such as Sri Lanka, Cuba and Bangladesh.

Fulfilling the Right to Health is not just about money. Despite its status as a 'less-developed' country, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and others have achieved impressive results in health, nutrition and family planning with levels of public health expenditure lower than in countries with similar incomes whose health outcomes are considerably worse. Current life expectancy of Sri Lanka is

73 years, Cuba 78 and Bangladesh 71 years, as compared to a regional average of only 61 years.

Cuba is one of the best performers on the American continent and in the Third World, achieving results like those of most developed nations. Cuba's healthcare system is based on preventive medicine and the results achieved are outstanding.

Citizen Right to Health in the Indian Constitution

Right to Health is not included as an explicit fundamental right in the Indian Constitution. Most provisions related to health are in Part IV (Directive Principles). These are:

- Article 38 says that the State will secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people. Providing affordable healthcare is one of the ways to promote welfare.
- Article 41 calls upon the State to make effective provision for providing public assistance in case of sickness and disablement.
- Article 47 make it the duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition, and improve public health as among its primary duties. It also calls upon the State to bring about prohibition of consumption of intoxicating drinking and drugs that are injurious to health.
- Article 48A says that the State shall endeavour to provide a pollution-free environment for good health.

Apart from Directives Principle of State Policy, some other provisions related to health come under the 11th and 12th Schedule as subjects of Panchayats and Municipalities respectively. These include drinking water, health and sanitation, family welfare, women and child development, social welfare etc.

The above description makes it clear that most provisions related to health come under the Directive Principles in the Constitution, and therefore are nonjusticiable and no person can go to court for non-fulfilment of these directives. However, the judiciary has expanded the scope of the above mentioned articles by reading them along with Article 21 (right to life) and has thus established Right to Health as an implied fundamental right. Not only Article 21 but also other articles under Part III have been linked

to Right to Health.

Challenges

Low Public Expenditure on Healthcare

According to the Draft National Health Policy, 2015, 63 million people are pushed into poverty every year as they are unable to bear their healthcare costs, and many lose their lives due to their inability to bear these expenses. As per the 2017 Health Survey, even India's best performing state of Kerala had a per person disease burden that is 2.7 times higher than China, indicating major room for improvement. India ranks 145th among 195 countries in terms of quality and accessibility of healthcare, behind its neighbours like China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, according to a *Lancet* study.

An important reason for this is India's low public expenditure on healthcare. WHO recommends that countries should spend 5% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on health. The advanced countries spend more than this; public healthcare spending as a percentage of GDP in 27 advanced economies rose from 5% to more than 7% over the period 1990–2008, with spending in 2008 ranging from 5.5% for Australia to 8.7% for France. Public healthcare spending in several emerging economies is between 3–5% of GDP—especially in East European countries and several Latin American countries like Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In contrast, India spends barely 1% of its GDP on health. India's public health expenditure is amongst the lowest in the world, even lower than sub-Saharan Africa.

Consequently, the public health system is in a bad shape. The rural healthcare infrastructure is a three tier system—a sub-centre, primary health centre (PHC) and community health centre (CHC). Even by standards set by the government, there is a shortfall of about 20% in sub-centres, about 23% in PHCs and about 32% in CHCs. Where these health centres exist, a majority of them are deficient in infrastructure, with even doctors not available. PHCs in India are short of more than 3,000 doctors, with the shortage being 200% over the last 10 years. Furthermore, there is an 83% shortage of specialist medical professionals (surgeons, physicians, etc) in CHCs across India, with many States having no specialists at all. This dismal state of public

healthcare has forced citizens to depend upon the private sector for treatment; of the total health spending in the country, public health spending accounts for only 30.5%, households undertake the rest. The dismal state of public health services and the high costs of healthcare in the private sector are responsible for pushing crores of people into poverty every year.

Taking cognisance of this crisis, the Prime Minister's Office announced in 2012 that the government had decided to triple its outlay for the health sector in the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–17), and would increase it from an average of 0.9% of GDP in the five years ending March 31, 2012 to 2.5% by 2017. After coming to power, the BJP too reiterated this spending target in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 released by it, stating that the Centre would spend 1% of GDP on this (the remaining would be spent by the States); however, it shifted the target year to 2025. Health experts have pointed out that considering the appalling state of public healthcare services in the country, such a low level of public health expenditure is inadequate to make available decent quality affordable public healthcare services for the entire population.

Even if we ignore this, and take the promise of the Central government that it will increase its allocation on health to 1% of GDP by 2025, a simple back-of-the-envelope calculation shows that for achieving this target, government spending on health needs to grow by at least 20% a year. However, the allocation for Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has increased by only a miniscule amount, from Rs 53,294 crore in last year's revised estimate to Rs 54,600 crore this year, an increase of only 2.45%, implying a cut in real terms. As a percentage of GDP, it has declined from 0.32% in 2017–18 RE to 0.29% in 2018–19.

Scarcity of medical institutes and doctors

India has 10.4 lakh allopathic doctors and 7.6 lakh AYUSH doctors. Including both categories, India has one doctor for every 921 people, as of December 2017, which is way ahead of the doctor–population ratio of 1:1000 prescribed by the World Health Organisation. If allopathy doctors alone are considered, the ratio soars to 1:1596. These ratios appear to be quite good, but they hide a dismal

statistic.

The majority of doctors in India are in the private sector. As per recent statistics released by the health ministry under National Health Profile-2018, of the total 10.4 lakh allopathic doctors in the country, only 1.15 lakh are in government service, which works out to a doctor–population ratio of 1:11,082

One out of 10 medicines in India 'fake'; may cause severe illness: WHO

The drugs prescribed by the doctors to cure a person's disease are unfortunately adulterated most of the times. An estimated one in 10 medical products circulating in low- and middle-income countries like India are either "substandard or falsified", says a new research report from the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to WHO, these medicines not only fail to treat or prevent diseases but can also cause serious illness or even death.

Most counterfeit medicines are taken unknowingly, as detecting counterfeit medicines is difficult, even for health care professionals.

How doctors and private hospitals are fleecing patients

Most Indians consider doctors as next to God if not God. However, with the private sector dominating the healthcare sector in India, and with this sector entirely oriented towards profit making, unethical practices are on the increase, such as:

- Prescribing more tests than necessary.
- Prescribing expensive medicines/vaccines when cheaper and quality substitutes are available.
- Use of stent in heart disease treatment or similar other procedures even if not needed.
- Gynaecologists at private hospitals are well-known to force pregnant women to go for C-section which pays better than normal deliveries.
- Luring poor and uneducated people to agree to donate organs, kidney, for which there is no dearth of high paying customers and more.

Suggestions for Implementing Right to Health

1. India should increase its expenditure on

Healthcare to 5% of the GDP, of which the Centre's share should be 40%.

2. This increased allocation for healthcare must initially be focussed on improving public primary healthcare, by taking steps to eliminate shortfalls in sub-centres, PHCs and CHCs, and ensuring availability of doctors, nurses and other para-medics in all these health centres. Ensure adequate numbers of trained healthcare providers and technical health care workers at different levels to achieve WHO norms of at least 23 health workers per 10,000 populations (doctors, nurses and midwives).
3. In all these health centres, there should be availability of free medicines, and facilities for free medical tests. This would also require that diagnostic facilities be made available in all public hospitals.
4. There is a need to integrate AYUSH practitioners into the public healthcare system in the country, and a high-level committee of experts must be set up to go into this.
5. The Essential Drugs List should be revised and expanded, and rational use of drugs ensured. Public sector should be strengthened to protect the capacity of domestic drug and vaccines industry to meet national needs.
6. In India, The Drugs and Cosmetics Act (1940) amended in 2008 increased the punishment for offenders, but there are still certain challenges, including inconsistent application of laws across states, weak drug quality investigation systems, and weak prosecution of counterfeit medicine manufacturers. More effective adherence to existing laws and adopting stricter laws has the potential to improve the fight against counterfeiting.
7. Many fresh doctors go abroad in search of good jobs and settle there. So, there should be a policy or provision that a doctor must practice at least 5 years in India, out of which 2 years must be in rural areas.
8. Ensure provision of important social services that are essential for improving health of citizens, such as food security, clean and safe drinking water, and sanitation for all citizens. Also give emphasis to improving availability of playgrounds and sports facilities for all children and youth.

Conclusion

The present policy of Government of India for providing health facilities to maximum people through its schemes is a positive step. However, it is not enough the country needs to have Citizen Right to Health a part of legislation, to provide the health facility to the entire population of the country living in urban & Rural areas.

Right to Health is an internationally recognised fundamental human right. But the current national health apparatus in India is an out-of-pocket one. Millions of poor patients have access to a doctor only if they can pay the bill at the time of treatment or if they are sick enough to be admitted to a public hospital's emergency ward. If Article 21B is introduced in the Indian Constitution, the failure to provide health care will have legal consequences. Moving forward, India should look to evolve its healthcare system beyond the current assurance-based approach. In view of the potential dynamic spin offs of a strong health sector, public opinion needs to be mobilised through Civil Society participation in order to have Right to Health as a Fundamental Right and make it a part of constitutional apparatus.

The right to health is fundamental, since it enables an individual to enjoy all the other rights—for example, education, employment and so on. If implemented, it could bring an overhaul to the health care sector. For this, the public sector must be strengthened. A properly framed right to health could enable courts to take a close look at policy measures that are clearly retrogressive and push the policymakers towards a commitment to universal public health care.

A country which boasts of being a global superpower, of sending a rocket to Mars, and of being among the largest producers of both doctors and medicines in the world, should be able to ensure good quality, rational health care for everyone in the country.

Citizen Right to Health is the key for the emergence of a strong and prosperous nation—a lesson of contemporary history for the progress of a democratic & strong nation of the world.

Email: bhartiyaektaparishad@gmail.com

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WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS

FROM

TRANSPORT & DOCK WORKERS' UNION, MUMBAI.

P.D'mello Bhavan, P.D'mello Road, Carnac Bunder, Mumbai - 400 038.

Tel. No.

022 - 22616951 / 52 & 22641283

E-mail

dockunion1@rediffmail.com

dockunion2010@gmail.com

Fax No.

022 - 22659087

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Correcting the Record: What is Really Happening in Nicaragua?

Kevin Zeese and Nils McCune

There is a great deal of false and inaccurate information about Nicaragua in the media. Even on the left some have simply repeated the dubious claims of CNN and Nicaragua's oligarchic media to support removal of President Ortega.

This article seeks to correct the record, describe what is happening in Nicaragua and why. As we write this, the coup seems to be failing, people have rallied for peace (as the massive march held on July 19, the 39th anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, showed) and the truth is coming out. It is important to understand what is occurring because Nicaragua is an example of the types of violent coups the US and wealthy use to put in place business dominated, neoliberal governments. If people understand these tactics, they will become less effective.

Mixing up the Class Interests

The coup attempt brought the class divisions in Nicaragua into the open. Piero Coen, the richest man in Nicaragua, owner of all national Western Union operations and an agrochemical company, personally arrived on the first day of protests at the Polytechnical University in Managua, to encourage students to keep protesting, promising his continued support.

The traditional landed oligarchy of Nicaragua, politically led by the Chamorro family, publishes constant ultimatums to the government through its media outlets and finances the roadblocks that have paralyzed the country for the last eight weeks.

The Catholic Church, long allied with the oligarchs, has put its full weight behind creating and sustaining anti-government actions, including its universities, high schools, churches, bank accounts, vehicles, tweets, Sunday sermons, and a one-sided

effort to mediate the National Dialogue. Bishops have made death threats against the President and his family, and a priest has been filmed supervising the torture of Sandinistas.

A common claim is Ortega has cozied up to the traditional oligarchy, but the opposite is true. This is the first government since Nicaraguan independence that does not include the oligarchy. Since the 1830s through the 1990s, all Nicaraguan governments—even during the Sandinista Revolution—included people from the elite “last names,” of Chamorro, Cardenal, Belli, Pellas, Lacayo, Montealegre, Gurdíán. The government since 2007 does not, which is why these families are supporting the coup.

Ortega detractors claim his three-part dialogue including labor unions, capitalists and the State is an alliance with big business. In fact, that process has yielded the highest growth rate in Central America and annual minimum wage increases 5–7% above inflation, improving workers' living conditions and lifting people out of poverty. The anti-poverty Borgen project reports that poverty fell by 30% between 2005 and 2014.

The Ortega government is implementing economic policies that are the opposite of neoliberalism. The government has increased investment in infrastructure and transportation, maintains water and electricity within the public sector, and has moved perviously privatised essential services such as health care and primary education into the public sector. This has ensured a stable economic structure that favors the real economy over the speculative economy.

What liberal and even leftists commentators overlook is that unlike the Lula government in Brazil, which reduced poverty through cash payouts to poor families, Nicaragua has redistributed productive

capital in order to develop a self-sufficient popular economy. The FSLN model is better understood as an emphasis on the popular economy over the State or capitalist spheres.

While the private sector employs about 15% of Nicaraguan workers, the informal sector employs over 60%. The informal sector has benefitted from \$400 million in public investments, much of it coming from the ALBA alliance funds to finance micro-loans for small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises. Policies to facilitate credit, equipment, training, animals, seeds and subsidized fuel further support these enterprises. The small and medium producers of Nicaragua have led the country to produce 80–90% of its food and end its dependence on IMF loans.

Workers and peasants—many of whom are self-employed having benefited from productive capital given to them after the Sandinista Revolution—have been the most important beneficiaries of the social developments of the last decade. This includes the hundreds of thousands of peasant farmers who have received land title, and the indigenous people who have been granted nearly one-quarter of the national territory—this has been collectively given to them, as territory of indigenous nations. The social movements of workers, peasants and indigenous groups were the popular support base that brought the FSLN back into power in 2007.

The grant of land titles and assistance given to small businesses have also emphasized equality for women, resulting in Nicaragua having the lowest level of gender inequality in Latin America. In gender equality, Nicaragua is ranked 12 out of 145 countries in the world, just behind Germany.

Over time, the FSLN government has incorporated the massive self-employed sector as well as the maquiladora workers (i.e. textile workers in foreign-owned plants located in free trade zones created by previous neoliberal governments) into the healthcare and pension system. This has resulted in an increase in its financial expenditures, which required new steps to ensure fiscal stability. The government therefore proposed reforms to social security contributions by employers and workers. The government proposed increasing employer contributions to pension and health funds by 3.5%, while only slightly increasing worker contributions by 0.75%, and shifting 5% of pensioners' cash

transfers into their healthcare fund. The reform also ended a loophole which allowed high-income individuals to claim a low income in order to access health benefits. The business lobby called for protests against this reform, and this triggered the private sector and student protests on April 18th that led to a three-month attempt at counter-revolution that was finally defeated in July.

The Ortega government proposal was a counter-proposal to the IMF proposal to raise the retirement age and more than double the number of weeks that workers would need to pay into the pension fund in order to access benefits. That the government felt strong enough to deny the austerity demands of the IMF and the business lobby is a sign that the bargaining strength of private capital has declined in Nicaragua. The main reason behind this is that Nicaragua's impressive economic growth, a 38% increase in GDP over the period 2006–2017, has been led by small-scale producers and increased public spending. However, the opposition used manipulative Facebook ads that presented the reform as an austerity measure, plus spread fake news of a student death on April 18th, to generate protests across the country on April 19th. Immediately, the regime change machine lurched into motion.

The National Dialogue shows the class interests in conflict. The opposition's Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy has as its key figures: José Adan Aguirre, leader of the private business lobby; Maria Nelly Tellez, director of Cargill in Nicaragua and head of the US–Nicaragua Chamber of Commerce; the private university students of the April 19th Movement; Michael Healy, manager of a Colombian sugar corporation and head of the agribusiness lobby; Juan Sebastian Chamorro, who represents the oligarchy dressed as civil society; Carlos Tunnermann, 85-year-old ex-Sandinista minister and ex-chancellor of the National University; Azalea Solis, head of a US government-funded feminist organization; and Medardo Mairena, a 'peasant leader' funded by the US government, who lived 17 years in Costa Rica before being deported in 2017 for human trafficking. Tunnermann, Solis and the April 19th students are all associated with the Movement for Renovation of Sandinismo (MRS), a tiny Sandinista offshoot party that nonetheless merits special attention.

In the 1980s, many of the Sandinista Front's top

level cadre were in fact the children of some of the famous oligarchic families, such as the Cardenal brothers and part of the Chamorro family, in charge of the revolutionary government's ministries of Culture and Education and its media, respectively. After FSLN's election loss in 1990, the children of the oligarchy staged an exodus from the party. Along with them, some of the most notable intellectual, military and intelligence cadre left and formed, over time, the MRS. The new party renounced socialism, blamed all of the mistakes of the Revolution on Daniel Ortega and over time took over the sphere of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nicaragua, including feminist, environmentalist, youth, media and human rights organizations.

Since 2007, the MRS has become increasingly close to the extreme right-wing of the US Republican Party. Since the outbreak of violence in April, many if not most of the sources cited by Western media come from this party, which has the support of less than 2% of the Nicaraguan electorate. This allows the oligarchs to couch their violent attempt to reinstall neoliberalism in leftist-sounding discourse of former Sandinistas critical of the Ortega government.

It is a farce to claim that workers and peasants are behind the unrest. La Vía Campesina, the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers, the Association of Rural Workers, the National Workers' Front, the indigenous Mayangna Nation and other movements and organizations have been unequivocal in their demands for an end to the violence and their support for the Ortega government. This unrest is a full-scale regime change operation carried out by media oligarchs, a network of NGOs funded by the US government, armed elements of elite landholding families and the Catholic Church, and has opened the window for drug cartels and organized crime to gain a foothold in Nicaragua.

The Elephant in the Room

Which brings us to US government involvement in the violent coup.

Several years ago, the US government decided that rather than finance opposition political parties, which have lost enormous legitimacy in Nicaragua, it would finance the NGO civil society sector. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) gave more than \$700,000 to build the opposition to the

government in 2017, and has granted more than \$4.4 million since 2014. The overarching purpose of this funding was to provide a coordinated strategy and media voice for opposition groups in Nicaragua.

NED founding father, Allen Weinstein, described NED as the overt CIA, saying, "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA." In Nicaragua, rather than the traditional right-wing, NED funds the MRS-affiliated organizations which pose left-sounding critiques of the Sandinista government. Most of the groups in the opposition's Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy, even the April 19th students, have received funding from the NED. The regime change activists use Sandinista slogans, songs and symbols even as they burn historic monuments, paint over the red-and-black markers of fallen martyrs, and physically attack members of the Sandinista party. Apart from most of the prominent leaders of the opposition, there is a network of over 2,000 young people who have received trainings with NED funds on topics such as social media skills for democracy defense. This battalion of social media warriors was able to immediately shape and control public opinion in Facebook in the five days from April 18th to 22nd, leading to spontaneous violent protests across the country.

On the Violence

One of the ways in which reporting on Nicaragua has ventured farthest from the truth is calling the opposition "nonviolent." The violence script, modelled on the 2014 and 2017 guarimba protests in Venezuela, is to organize armed attacks on government buildings, entice the police to send in anti-riot squads, engage in filmed confrontations and publish edited footage online claiming that the government is being violent against nonviolent protesters.

Over 60 government buildings have been burned down, schools, hospitals, health centres attacked, 55 ambulances damaged, resulting in at least \$112 million in infrastructure damage. Several small businesses have shut down and 200,000 jobs lost, causing devastating economic impact during the protests. Violence has included, in addition to thousands of injuries, 15 students and 16 police officers killed, as well as over 200 Sandinistas

kidnapped, many of them publicly tortured. Violent opposition atrocities were misreported as government repression.

The National Police of Nicaragua has been long-recognized for its model of community policing (in contrast to militarized police in most Central American countries), its relative lack of corruption, and its mostly female top brass. The coup strategy has sought to destroy public trust in the police through egregious use of fake news, such as the many false claims of assassinations, beatings, torture, and disappearances in the week from April 17 to 23. Several young people whose photos were carried in opposition rallies as victims of police violence have turned out to be alive and well.

Since May, the opposition further intensified its offensive, building roadblocks across the country. These roadblocks, usually built with large paving stones, were manned by between 5 and 100 armed men with bandannas or masks, the vast majority of them being paid men who come from a background of petty crime.

These roadblocks have been the centres of violence. Workers who need to pass through roadblocks were often robbed, punched, insulted, and, if suspected of being Sandinistas, tied up, stripped naked, tortured, painted in blue-and-white, and sometimes killed. There have been several instances of people dying in ambulances unable to pass roadblocks, and one case of a 10-year-old girl being kidnapped and raped at the roadblock in Las Maderas.

The Nicaraguan government initially largely kept the police off the streets, to prevent encounters and accusations of repression. At the same time, rather than simply arrest violent protestors, which certainly would have given the opposition the battle deaths it craves, the government called for a National Dialogue, mediated by the Catholic Church, in which the opposition could bring forward any proposal for human rights and political reform. The government created a parliamentary Truth and Peace Commission and launched an independent Public Ministry query.

As a result, a process of organizing self-defense developed. Families who have been displaced, young people who have been beaten, robbed or tortured and veterans of the 1979 insurrection and/or the Contra War, held vigil round the Sandinista Front

headquarters in each town. In many places they built barricades against opposition attacks. In the towns that did not have such community-organized barricades, the human toll from opposition violence has been much greater. The National Union of Nicaraguan Students has been particularly targeted by opposition violence, and several student leaders have been brutally assaulted and even killed.

There have been four major opposition rallies since April, directed toward mobilizing the upper-middle class Nicaraguans who live in the suburbs between Managua and Masaya. These rallies featured a who's-who of high society, including beauty queens, business owners and oligarchs, as well as university students of the April 19th Movement, the moral high-ground for the opposition.

Three months into the conflict, none of the mortal victims have been from the upper classes. All have come from the popular classes of Nicaragua. Despite claims of total repression, the richer classes feel perfectly safe to participate in public protests by day. The night time armed attacks have generally been carried out by people who come from poor neighbourhoods, many of whom are paid two to four times the minimum daily wage for each night of destruction.

Unfortunately, most Nicaraguan human rights organizations are funded by NED and controlled by the Movement for Sandinista Renovation. These organizations have accused the Nicaraguan government of dictatorship and genocide throughout Ortega's presidency. International human rights organizations, including Amnesty International have been criticized for their one-sided reports, which include none of the information provided by the government or individuals who identify as Sandinistas.

Finally, in July, the government moved to dismantle the roadblocks. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in rallies called by the government demanding peace and an end to violence. While sporadic incidents of sadistic violence have continued, clearly, the strategy of the coup-mongers to force out the government has failed.

Why Nicaragua?

Ortega won his third term in 2016 with 72.4 percent of the vote with 66 percent turnout, very

high compared to US elections. Not only has Nicaragua put in place an economy that treats the poor as producers, with remarkable results raising their standard of living in 10 years, but it also has a government that consistently rejects US imperialism, allying with Cuba, Venezuela, and Palestine, and voices support for Puerto Rican independence and a peaceful solution to Korean crisis. Nicaragua is a member of member of Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, a Latin American alternative to the OAS; neither organisations include the US or Canada. It has also allied with China for a proposed canal project and Russia for security cooperation. For all of these reasons the US wants to install a US-friendly Nicaraguan government.

More important is the example Nicaragua has set for a successful social and economic model outside the US sphere of domination. Generating over 75% of its energy from renewable sources, Nicaragua was the only country with the moral authority to oppose the Paris Climate Agreement as being too weak (it later joined the treaty one day after Trump pulled the US out, stating “we opposed the Paris agreement out of responsibility, the US opposes it out of irresponsibility”).

In 2017, the US House of Representatives unanimously passed the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act (NICA Act), which if passed by the Senate will force the US government to veto loans from international institutions to the Nicaraguan government. This US imperialism will cripple Nicaragua’s ability to build roads, update hospitals, construct renewable energy plants, and transition from extensive livestock raising to integrated animal-forestry systems, among other consequences. It may also signify the end of many popular social programs, such as subsidized electricity, stable bus fares, and free medical treatment of chronic diseases.

The US Executive Branch has used the Global Magnitsky Act to target the finances of leaders of the Electoral Supreme Court, the National Police, the city government of Managua and the ALBA corporation in Nicaragua. Police officers and public health bureaucrats have been told their US visas have been revoked. The point, of course, is not whether these officials have or have not committed acts that merit their reprimand in Nicaragua, but whether the US government should have the jurisdiction to

intimidate and corner public officials of Nicaragua.

An Upside Down Class War

It is important to understand the nature of US and oligarch coups in this era and the role of media and NGO deception because it is repeated in multiple Latin American and other countries. We can expect a similar attack on recently elected Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, if he seeks the changes he has promised.

The US has sought to dominate Nicaragua since the mid-1800s. The wealthy in Nicaragua have sought return of US-allied governance since the Sandinistas rose to power. This failing coup does not mean the end of their efforts or the end of corporate media misinformation. Knowing what is really occurring and sharing that information is the antidote to defeating them in Nicaragua and around the world.

Nicaragua is a class war turned upside down. The government has raised the living standards of the impoverished majority through wealth redistribution. The oligarchs and the United States, unable to install neoliberalism through elections, created a political crisis, highlighted by false media coverage to force Ortega to resign. The coup is failing, the truth is coming out, and should not be forgotten.

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How US Military Bases Abroad Undermine National Security and Harm Us All

David Vine

Most Americans are unaware that hundreds of US bases and hundreds of thousands of US troops encircle the globe. Although few know it, the United States garrisons the planet unlike any country in history, and the evidence is on view from Honduras to Oman, Japan to Germany, Singapore to Djibouti. To the extent that Americans think about these bases at all, they generally assume they're essential to national security and global peace. US leaders have claimed as much since most of them were established during World War II and the early days of the Cold War.

There are now around 800 US bases in foreign countries. Seventy years after World War II, there are still 174 US "base sites" in Germany, 113 in Japan, and 83 in South Korea, according to the Pentagon. Hundreds more dot the planet in around 80 countries, including Aruba and Australia, Bahrain and Bulgaria, Colombia, Kenya, and Qatar, among many other places. The United States likely has more bases in foreign lands than any other people, nation, or empire in history.

Oddly enough, however, the mainstream media rarely report or comment on the issue. Rarely does anyone ask if we need hundreds of bases overseas or if, at an estimated annual cost of perhaps \$156 billion or more, the US can afford them. Rarely does anyone wonder how we would feel if China, Russia or Iran built even a single base anywhere near our borders, let alone in the United States.

The Base Nation's Scale

Our 800 bases outside the 50 states and Washington, D.C., come in all sizes and shapes. Some are city-sized "Little Americas"—places like Ramstein Air Base in Germany, Kadena Air

Base in Okinawa, and the little known Navy and Air Force base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. These support a remarkable infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, power plants, housing complexes, and an array of amenities often referred to as "Burger Kings and bowling alleys." Among the smallest US installations globally are "lily pad" bases (also known as "cooperative security locations"), which tend to house drones, surveillance aircraft, or pre-positioned weaponry and supplies. These are increasingly found in parts of Africa and Eastern Europe that had previously lacked much of a US military presence.

Other facilities scattered across the planet include ports and airfields, repair complexes, training areas, nuclear weapons installations, missile testing sites, arsenals, warehouses, barracks, military schools, listening and communications posts and a growing array of drone bases. Military hospitals and prisons, rehab facilities, CIA paramilitary bases, and intelligence facilities (including former CIA "black site" prisons) must also be considered part of our Base Nation because of their military functions. Even US military resorts and recreation areas in places like the Bavarian Alps and Seoul, South Korea, are bases of a kind. Worldwide, the military runs more than 170 golf courses.

The Pentagon's overseas presence is actually even larger. There are US troops or other military personnel in about 160 foreign countries and territories, including small numbers of marines guarding embassies and larger deployments of trainers and advisors like the roughly 3,500 now working with the Iraqi Army. And don't forget the Navy's 11 aircraft carriers. Each should be considered a kind of floating base, or as the Navy tellingly refers to them, "four and a half acres of

sovereign US territory.” Finally, above the seas, one finds a growing military presence in space.

The United States of course isn't the only country to control military bases outside its territory. Great Britain still has about seven bases and France five in former colonies. Russia has around eight in former Soviet republics. For the first time since World War II, Japan's "Self-Defence Forces" have a foreign base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, alongside US and French bases there. South Korea, India, Chile, Turkey, and Israel each reportedly have at least one foreign base. There are also reports that China may be seeking its first base overseas. In total, these countries probably have about 30 installations abroad. This means that the United States has approximately 95% of the world's foreign bases.

“Forward” Forever?

Although the United States has had bases in foreign lands since shortly after it gained its independence, nothing like today's massive global deployment of military force was imaginable until World War II. In 1940, with the flash of a pen, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a “destroyers-for-bases” deal with Great Britain that instantly gave the United States 99-year leases to installations in British colonies worldwide. Base acquisition and construction accelerated rapidly once the country entered the war. By 1945, the US military was building base facilities at a rate of 112 a month. By war's end, the global total topped 2,000 sites. In only five years, the United States had developed history's first truly global network of bases, vastly overshadowing that of the British Empire upon which “the sun never set.”

After the war, the military returned about half the installations but maintained what historian George Stambuk termed a “permanent institution” of bases abroad. Their number spiked during the wars in Korea and Vietnam, declining after each of them. By the time the Soviet Union imploded in 1991, there were about 1,600 US bases abroad, with some 300,000 US troops stationed on those in Europe alone.

Although the military vacated about 60% of its foreign garrisons in the 1990s, the overall base infrastructure stayed relatively intact. Despite additional base closures in Europe and to a lesser

extent in East Asia over the last decade and despite the absence of a superpower adversary, nearly 250,000 troops are still deployed on installations worldwide. Although there are about half as many bases as there were in 1989, the number of countries with US bases has roughly doubled from 40 to 80. In recent years, President Obama's “Pacific pivot” has meant billions of dollars in profligate spending in Asia, where the military already had hundreds of bases and tens of thousands of troops. Billions more have been sunk into building an unparalleled permanent base infrastructure in every Persian Gulf country save Iran. In Europe, the Pentagon has been spending billions more erecting expensive new bases at the same time that it has been closing others.

Since the start of the Cold War, the idea that our country should have a large collection of bases and hundreds of thousands of troops permanently stationed overseas has remained a quasi-religious dictum of foreign and national security policy. The nearly 70-year-old idea underlying this deeply held belief is known as the “forward strategy.” Originally, the strategy held that the United States should maintain large concentrations of military forces and bases as close as possible to the Soviet Union to hem in and “contain” its supposed urge to expand.

But the disappearance of the Soviet Union made remarkably little difference to the forward strategy. Two decades after the Soviet Union's demise, support for the forward strategy has remained the consensus among politicians of both parties, national security experts, military officials, journalists and almost everyone else in Washington's power structure. Opposition of any sort to maintaining large numbers of overseas bases and troops has long been pilloried as peacenik idealism or the sort of isolationism that allowed Hitler to conquer Europe.

Costs of Garrisoning the World

There are many reasons to question the overseas base status quo. The most obvious one is economic. Garrisons overseas are very expensive. According to the RAND Corporation, even when host countries like Japan and Germany cover some of the costs, US taxpayers still pay an annual average of \$10,000 to \$40,000 more per year to station a member of the military abroad than in the United States. The expense of transportation, the higher cost of living

in some host countries, and the need to provide schools, hospitals, housing and other support to family members of military personnel mean that the dollars add up quickly—especially with more than half a million troops, family members, and civilian employees on bases overseas at any time.

By my very conservative calculations, maintaining installations and troops overseas cost at least \$85 billion in 2014—more than the discretionary budget of every government agency except the Defence Department itself. If the US presence in Afghanistan and Iraq is included, that bill reaches \$156 billion or more.

While bases may be costly for taxpayers, they are extremely profitable for the country's privateers of twenty-first-century war like DynCorp International and former Halliburton subsidiary KBR. As scholar and former CIA consultant Chalmers Johnson noted, "Our installations abroad bring profits to civilian industries," which win billions in contracts annually to "build and maintain our far-flung outposts."

Meanwhile, many of the communities hosting bases overseas never see the economic windfalls that US and local leaders regularly promise. Some areas, especially in poor rural communities, have seen short-term economic booms touched off by base construction. In the long-term, however, most bases rarely create sustainable, healthy local economies. Compared with other forms of economic activity, they represent unproductive uses of land, employ relatively few people for the expanses occupied, and contribute little to local economic growth. Research has consistently shown that when bases finally close, the economic impact is generally limited and in some cases actually positive—that is, local communities can end up better off when they trade bases for housing, schools, shopping complexes, and other forms of economic development.

Meanwhile for the United States, investing taxpayer dollars in the construction and maintenance of overseas bases means forgoing investments in areas like education, transportation, housing, and healthcare, despite the fact that these industries are more of a boon to overall economic productivity and create more jobs compared to equivalent military spending. Think about what \$85 billion per year would mean in terms of rebuilding the country's crumbling civilian infrastructure.

Human Toll

Beyond the financial costs are the human ones. The families of military personnel are among those who suffer from the spread of overseas bases given the strain of distant deployments, family separations and frequent moves. Overseas bases also contribute to the shocking rates of sexual assault in the military: an estimated 30% of servicewomen are victimised during their time in the military and a disproportionate number of these crimes happen at bases abroad. Outside the base gates, in places like South Korea, one often finds exploitative prostitution industries geared to US military personnel.

Worldwide, bases have caused widespread environmental damage because of toxic leaks, accidents, and in some cases the deliberate dumping of hazardous materials. GI crime has long angered locals. In Okinawa and elsewhere, US troops have repeatedly committed horrific acts of rape against local women. From Greenland to the tropical island of Diego Garcia, the military has displaced local peoples from their lands to build its bases.

In contrast to frequently invoked rhetoric about spreading democracy, the military has shown a preference for establishing bases in undemocratic and often despotic states like Qatar and Bahrain. In Iraq, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, US bases have created fertile breeding grounds for radicalism and anti-Americanism. The presence of bases near Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia was a major recruiting tool for al-Qaeda and part of Osama bin Laden's professed motivation for the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Although this kind of perpetual turmoil is little noticed at home, bases abroad have all too often generate grievances, protest and antagonistic relationships. Although few here recognise it, our bases are a major part of the image the United States presents to the world—and they often show us in an extremely unflattering light.

Creating a New Cold War, Base by Base

It is also not at all clear that bases enhance national security and global peace in any way. In the absence of a superpower enemy, the argument that bases many thousands of miles from US shores are necessary to defend the United States—or even its allies—is a hard argument to make. On the contrary,

the global collection of bases has generally enabled the launching of military interventions, drone strikes and wars of choice that have resulted in repeated disasters, costing millions of lives and untold destruction from Vietnam to Iraq.

By making it easier to wage foreign wars, bases overseas have ensured that military action is an ever more attractive option—often the only imaginable option—for US policymakers. As the anthropologist Catherine Lutz has said, when all you have in your foreign policy toolbox is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. Ultimately, bases abroad have frequently made war more likely rather than less.

Proponents of the long-outdated forward strategy will reply that overseas bases “deter” enemies and help keep the global peace. Few have provided anything of substance to support their claims. While there is some evidence that military forces can indeed deter imminent threats, little if any research suggests that overseas bases are an effective form of long-term deterrence. Studies by both the Bush administration and the RAND Corporation—not exactly left-wing peaceniks—indicate that advances in transportation technology have largely erased the advantage of stationing troops abroad. In the case of a legitimate defensive war or peacekeeping operation, the military could generally deploy troops just as quickly from domestic bases as from most bases abroad. Rapid sealift and airlift capabilities coupled with agreements allowing the use of bases in allied nations and, potentially, pre-positioned supplies are a dramatically less expensive and less inflammatory alternative to maintaining permanent bases overseas.

It is also questionable whether such bases actually increase the security of host nations. The presence of US bases can turn a country into an explicit target for foreign powers or militants—just as US installations have endangered Americans overseas.

Similarly, rather than stabilising dangerous regions, foreign bases frequently heighten military tensions and discourage diplomatic solutions to conflicts. Imagine how US leaders would respond if China were to build even a single small base in Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean. Notably, the most dangerous moment during the Cold War—the 1962 Cuban missile crisis—revolved around the construction of Soviet nuclear missile facilities in

Cuba, roughly 90 miles from the US border.

Placing US bases near the borders of countries like China, Russia and Iran, for example, increases threats to their security and encourages them to respond by boosting their own military spending and activity. US officials may insist that building yet more bases in East Asia is a defensive act meant to ensure peace in the Pacific, but tell that to the Chinese. That country’s leaders are undoubtedly not “reassured” by the creation of yet more bases encircling their borders. Contrary to the claim that such installations increase global security, they tend to ratchet up regional tensions, increasing the risk of future military confrontation.

In this way, just as the war on terror has become a global conflict that only seems to spread terror, the creation of new US bases to protect against imagined future Chinese or Russian threats runs the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. These bases may ultimately help create the very threat they are supposedly designed to protect against. In other words, far from making the world a safer place, US bases can actually make war more likely and the country less secure.

Behind the Wire

In his farewell address to the nation upon leaving the White House in 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warned the nation about the insidious economic, political, and even spiritual effects of what he dubbed “the military–industrial–congressional complex,” the vast interlocking national security state born out of World War II. Our 70-year-old collection of bases is evidence of how, despite Ike’s warning, the United States has entered a permanent state of war with an economy, a government and a global system of power enmeshed in preparations for future conflicts.

America’s overseas bases offer a window onto our military’s impact in the world and in our own daily lives. The history of these hulking “Little Americas” of concrete, fast food, and weaponry provides a living chronicle of the United States in the post-World War II era.

We may think such bases have made us safer. In reality, they’ve helped lock us inside a permanently militarised society that has made all of us—everyone on this planet—less secure, damaging lives at home and abroad.



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D-15, Ganesh Prasad,
Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Mumbai - 400 007.

Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
Website: www.janataweekly.org

71 Years On, Frosty Relations Continue

Kuldip Nayar

Senior journalist and author Kuldip Nayar died at Escorts hospital in New Delhi at 12.30 am on August 23. Nayar was a human rights activist, had served as High Commissioner to the UK in 1990 and was also nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

The veteran journalist who began his career as an Urdu reporter also served as the editor of the Delhi edition of The Statesman and was the Editor of The Indian Express. A syndicated columnist, he has written around 15 books, including well known works like India after Nehru, Emergency, Emergency Retold, Without Fear: The Life and Trial of Bhagat Singh and his autobiography, Beyond the Lines.

Nayar was among the journalists who had staunchly opposed the Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and was jailed under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) for leading a protest against the excesses of the administration.

Kuldip Nayar was a great supporter of Janata and used to send us his pieces regularly for printing. Below is an article that he sent us just a few days before his death.

It was August 12, 1947, three days before India became free. My father, a practicing doctor, summoned us, three brothers and asked what our programme was? I told him that I wanted to stay in Pakistan just as the Muslims would in India. My elder brother, who was studying medicine at Amritsar, intervened to say that Muslims would ask the Hindus to vacate our house in West Punjab just as the Muslims living in East Punjab would be asked to leave. I asked how that could be possible if the Hindus did not agree to quit. He replied that we would be forcibly ousted.

This was precisely what happened. On August 17, two days after independence, some Muslim gentlemen came to us and made the request to leave the house. I asked one of them where do we go? He gave the keys of his house at Jalandhar and said that we would not have to do anything because his house was well furnished and ready for occupation. We declined the offer.

But after they left, all of us sat around the dining table to decide on the future. I told them that I was staying back in Pakistan and

they said they would be going to Amritsar and would come back once the disturbances were over. We agreed that even though the scenario was dismal, we would be back, at the most after a month. My mother remarked when she was locking the house that she had a strange feeling as if we were not coming back. My elder brother agreed with her.

I packed one traveler and a shirt in a blue canvas bag and parted, saying that we would meet at our maternal uncle's place in Darya Ganj in Delhi. My mother gave me Rs 120 to sustain myself until we met in Delhi. My father had made my journey easier. He told a Brigadier, who was his patient, to take his three sons across the border. He said he had no space in his Jonga and he could accommodate only one of us. The following morning I was pushed into his vehicle. I could not conceal my tears and wondered whether we would all meet again.

The journey from Sialkot to Sambrawal was uneventful. But from there the caravans of people from either side, the Hindus moving to the Indian side and the Muslims to the Pakistani part, were on the move. Suddenly, our Jonga was stopped. An old Sikh stood on the way and begged us to take his grandchild to India. I told him politely that I was still studying and would not be able to carry his grandson, however fair his request was.

The old man said that he had lost all his family members and the only survivor was his grandson. And he wanted him to live. I still recall his tearful face but I had told him the facts. How would I bring up the child when I myself was not sure about my future? Then we moved on. And, as we travelled, we could see the scattered luggage all over but

the bodies had been removed by the time. The stench, however, was very much in the air.

At that time I promised myself that I would try to foster good relations between the two countries. That was the main reason why I started lighting candles on the Wagah border, a process that began some 20 years ago. It was a small movement with just 15-20 people to begin with. Now roughly one lakh people on this side have also joined the cause and the people of Pakistan, though in limited number, have followed suit.

Peoples' enthusiasm knows no bounds. But the governments are in the way. There is curfew in the entire area and one has to take a permit to reach the border. I have written to Home Minister Rajnath Singh to instruct the authorities, both Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force, to allow us to reach the zero point, where the steel gates check the movement into either side, for lighting candles.

This exercise is confined to a few individuals. I wish that the border could be made soft and the situation became calm so that enmity between the two countries is banished. I was on the bus that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee rode to Lahore. There was bonhomie on both sides and I thought that the trip would resume a regular exchange of trade, joint ventures and people-to-people contact between the two nations.

But I feel disappointed with the barbed wires on either side of the border preventing people's passage into each other's country and with so many visa restrictions. In the past, intellectuals, musicians and artists could meet and hold joint programmes. But today, even that has stopped, with the governments

showing rigidity in issuing visas. There is practically no contact on official and even non-officials sides.

New Prime Minister-designate Imran Khan has said in an interview that he would ensure trade and business. My only worry is that his proximity to the army may not allow him to carry out his promises. In Pakistan, the army has the last word. But, maybe, the army angle is being exaggerated. It also wants to have peace because it's their men who have to fight the war and all that it entails.

New Delhi should make an effort. But it has adopted a harsh stand not to negotiate with Islamabad until Pakistan stopped providing shelters to the terrorists and punishing those who were instrumental in Mumbai blasts. Imran Khan should take the initiative, keeping in view India's demands, to build cordial relations between the two countries.

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Obituary: Socialist Party (India)

Kuldip Nayar Passes Away: A Burning Torch in the Darkness Has Gone Out

Dr. Prem Singh

Kuldip Nayar was one of the strongest symbols of trust in the Indian civil society. He was among the few persons who could not compromise on basic constitutional and human values even in front of biggest troubles or temptations. His demise is to extinguish a burning torch in today's dark phase for Indian society and polity.

At the time of the re-establishment of the Socialist Party

in 2011 Kuldip Nayar stated that this is the toughest period in the Indian politics after the independence. If the party is revived then do not close it for the sake of future India. He was a special invitee to the National Executive of the Socialist Party since its re-establishment. He used to attend most of the meetings, conferences, conventions and programs of the party and would give his views and suggestions.

He was in complete agreement with Socialist Party's belief that secularism and democracy cannot be saved after abandoning the socialist goal of the Constitution for neo-liberal policies.

Kuldip Nayar's demise is an irreparable loss to the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party offers humble tributes and the last salute to its special member and guide.

Why is the Central Government Silent on Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand's Fast?

Sandeep Pandey

86 years old Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand is on a fast unto death since 22 June, 2018 in Haridwar demanding a law for conservation of river Ganga but the Central government has not taken a step to convince him to give up his fast. This raises question on the intention of government. It appears that the government is deliberately ignoring Swami Sanand's fast. Let us not forget that young seer Swami Nigmanand died on the 115th day of his fast demanding halt to illegal mining in Ganga in 2011.

Swami Sanand is not merely a religious person. He was known as Professor G.D. Agarwal before he became a saint. He has served at Indian Institute of Technology,

Kanpur and as Member-Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board and is responsible for putting into place a number of pollution related norms.

Ganga couldn't be cleaned after Rs 500 crores were spent as part of Ganga Action Plan. The present government has proposed a budget of Rs 20,000 for the Namami Gange project, of which Rs 7,000 have already been spent. Swami Sanand says that Ganga will not be cleaned because the present government is following a similar programme as the past governments.

The capacity of Common Effluent Treatment Plants and Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) to clean industrial waste and sewage produced by cities, respectively,

is simply not enough to handle all the wastes generated and whatever capacity has been built is not always functional. For example, against the 400 million litres per day of sewage generated in Varanasi city, the built capacity of STPs is only one-fourth. Bhagwanpur plant, near Banaras Hindu University, has a capacity of 8 MLD, Deenapur plant has a capacity of 80 MLD and Konia plant has a capacity of 150–200 MLD but works at only 30–40% of its capacity. Among these, the Bhagwanpur plant works best but its capacity is minuscule compared to the total sewage generated. Two more STPs are now under construction. When the plants are out of order or there is no electricity, the waste flows

directly into the river untreated.

Assi river, which looks more like a drain, discharges 80 MLD of untreated sewage and Varuna river with 80–90 MLD of sewage discharges 75–80% of it untreated into Ganga. Parts of these two rivers, from whom the city Varanasi derives its name, are also used by the Nagar Nigam as landfills. Seepage from these garbage heaps also pollutes the rivers.

Kanpur city produces 600 MLD of sewage and industrial waste whereas the built capacity to treat waste is hardly 200–250 MLD.

Corruption also has a role to play in this pollution. Employees of Municipal Corporation or State Pollution Control Boards, responsible for looking after the CETPs, allow the industrial waste to directly flow into the river bypassing the treatment plants by accepting bribes. When the companies increase their production capacity they don't inform the PCBs officially. The extra waste generated is also allowed to join the river in exchange for bribes.

For example, none of the CETPs built in Ahmedabad are functional, reason for the extremely polluted water of Sabarmati river downstream of the city. The water itself comes from Narmada canal as upstream from the city the river has dried up.

Only the contractors benefit from construction of STPs and CETPs. Government's motivation to clean Ganga seems lacking and therefore Swami Sanand has sat on a fast unto death to demand a law for conservation of the river.

It is shocking that the government is not taking Swami Sanand's fast seriously and neither is the media giving coverage to the fast, most likely at the behest of the government. This is in spite of the

fact that Narendra Modi declared when he went to contest the election from Varanasi that he had got a call from mother Ganga. After he took over as prime minister, the name of Water Resources Ministry was changed to include 'Ganga Rejuvenation' in it, as if there were no other rivers in the country.

Is this the famed Indian culture which Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh boasts off that just as the Narendra Modi–Amit Shah duo has marginalised senior leaders of Bhartiya Janata Party, they are now

undervaluing Swami Sanand's fast and will not have any qualms if he dies? Does the government, so worried about saving cows' lives, not give priority to saving a Sadhu's life?

Acquaintances of Swami Sanand are appalled at the way he has been left to die. If there is any sensitivity left in the government, it should immediately enter into dialogue with Swami Sanand to end his fast and agree to make a law for conservation of not just Ganga but all water bodies of the entire country.

E-mail: ashaashram@yahoo.com

Let Us Not Forget the Glimpse We Got of the Real Vajpayee When the Mask Slipped

Siddharth Varadarajan

Perhaps the most significant elaboration of the Golwalkar–Savarkar thesis of India as a Hindu nation beset by Muslim trouble-makers in recent times was that provided by Atal Bihari Vajpayee in his speech to the BJP national executive meeting in Goa on 12 April 2002. The speech is remarkable for the manner in which a prime minister attempts to justify the murder of Muslim citizens in Gujarat by referring to Godhra and contrasting the supposed “traditional tolerance” of Hindus with the alleged ‘intolerance’ of Muslims.

Like Golwalkar, who believed only Hindus were true Indians, Vajpayee uses “us”, “our”, “Hindus” and “Indians” interchangeably throughout his speech. He begins by making an observation about Hindu kingdoms in ancient Cambodia: “No king destroyed a temple or damaged the deities’ idols at the time of

attacking another king. This is our culture. This is our outlook, which treats all faiths equally.” India, he added, was secular before Muslims and Christians set foot on her soil. Once they came, they had freedom of worship. “No one thought of converting them with force, because this is not practiced in our religion; and in our culture, there is no use for it.”

Here, Vajpayee was trying to contrast the “tolerance” of Hindus and Hinduism, which he described as “our religion”, with the supposed intolerance of Muslims and Christians. The reference to the destruction of idols and conversion “with force” is a standard part of the RSS arsenal. At the root of major incidents of violence, he said, was “growing intolerance”. Since Hindus are, by definition, tolerant, the obvious inference is that this “growing intolerance” is

on the part of the Muslims. Turning immediately to the burning issue of the day, he asked:

What happened in Gujarat? If a conspiracy had not been hatched to burn alive the innocent passengers of the Sabarmati Express, then the subsequent tragedy in Gujarat could have been averted. But this did not happen. People were torched alive. Who were those culprits? The government is investigating into this. Intelligence agencies are collecting all the information. But we should not forget how the tragedy of Gujarat started. The subsequent developments were no doubt condemnable, but who lit the fire? How did the fire spread?

Here, in as unsophisticated a fashion as Narendra Modi had stated it earlier, we find Vajpayee presenting his own version of Newton's Third Law. There is no remorse about the killing of hundreds of innocent people, no apologies for the failure of the government to protect its citizens. He makes no attempt to distinguish between the criminal perpetrators of the Godhra attack and the innocent victims of the "subsequent tragedy in Gujarat". For him, Muslims are an amorphous, undifferentiated lot who collectively "lit the fire". They were to blame, not his party men who took part in the "subsequent developments".

Going from the specific to the general, Vajpayee then launched a frontal attack on Muslims. He asserts that "For us, the soil of India from Goa to Guwahati is the same, all the people living on this land are the same. We do not believe in religious extremism. Today, the threat to our nation comes from terrorism."

Who is this "we" and where exactly does this "threat to our

nation" come from? The Hindi text provides a clue. Vajpayee deliberately uses the Urdu word *mazhabi* for "religious" (rather than the Hindi word *dharmik*) when he says "religious extremism". We do not believe in religious extremism; it is the Muslims. His exact words were "*Hum mazhabi kattarta mein vishwas nahin karte*". The fact that *mazhabi* is the only Urdu word used in the sentence is not accidental. In Sangh parivar literature and propaganda, whenever a positive reference to religion is made, the word used tends to be *dharm*, implying Hinduism; when the reference is negative, the word used tends to be *mazhab*. And terrorism, of course, is synonymous with Islam, or "militant Islam", as Vajpayee chose to put it. But having first made a distinction between militant Islam and tolerant Islam, he then makes a sweeping generalisation about all Muslims:

Wherever Muslims live, they don't like to live in co-existence with others, they don't like to mingle with others; and instead of propagating their ideas in a peaceful manner, they want to spread their faith by resorting to terror and threats. The world has become alert to this danger.

The statement is classic hate speech, but after it generated a huge controversy, Vajpayee claimed his remarks were aimed not at all Muslims but only "militant Muslims".

The Prime Minister's Office subsequently issued a doctored version of the speech in which the word "such" was inserted between "Wherever" and "Muslims live". Many newspapers subsequently printed this version. It was not until

a privilege motion was raised in Parliament—for Vajpayee had made the mistake of claiming on the floor of the House on May 1, 2002 that the doctored version of the speech was the true version—that he was forced to admit the word "such" had been deliberately interpolated. However, he reiterated that "no one who reads my entire speech and takes note of the tribute I have paid to the tolerant and compassionate teachings of Islam, can be in any doubt that my reference . . . is only to the followers of militant Islam".

The allegation of Muslims not living in co-existence with others and not mingling with others is such a standard trope in RSS propaganda that Vajpayee's claim of intending to refer only to militant Muslims does not seem very convincing. Earlier in his speech, he had equated militant Islam with terrorism. "Not mingling with others" is a peculiar charge to level against terrorists. In any case, it was a bit odd for the prime minister to talk about terrorism and militancy as if they were the preserve of the adherents of Islam—especially at a time when his own Sangh parivar was heavily involved in acts of terror in Gujarat. But there was a deeper level of dishonesty in the charge against Muslims, for it is precisely the policy of the RSS to ghettoise and isolate the Muslim community. As sociologist Dhirubhai Sheth has argued, it was not accidental that the Muslims who bore the brunt of the Sangh parivar's violence in Gujarat were those who chose to live in Hindu-majority areas. The communal killings in the state, he says, have exposed the dishonesty of the 'Hindutvavadis' who reproach Muslims for not entering the 'national mainstream' but then beat them back into their

ghettos whenever they do emerge.

In another attempt to soften the impact of his Goa remarks, Vajpayee told parliament that he was as opposed to militant Hinduism as he was to militant Islam. "I accept the Hindutva of Swami Vivekananda but the type of Hindutva being propagated now is wrong and one should be wary of it." Having said this, however, he went back to square one by adding that although there were laws to deal with such an eventuality, he was confident no Hindu organisation would become a danger to the country's unity. In other words, only Muslim (or Christian or Sikh) organisations have the potential of endangering the country's unity. After maligning Vivekananda—who never spoke of Hindutva but of Hinduism—Vajpayee went straight back to the teachings of Golwalkar and Savarkar.

Apart from reverting to the usual chauvinist line of the Sangh parivar, Vajpayee was also diverting the debate into a dead end. The issue is not whether he personally opposes militant Islam or Hinduism but whether, as prime minister, he is prepared to defend the constitutional rights of all Indians. Regardless of his own views and beliefs, a prime minister cannot speak for only a section of citizens. Do the Muslims of Gujarat have the right to physical security? Is he prepared to punish those who have committed crimes regardless of their political or ideological affiliation? Rather than dealing with these questions, Vajpayee is trying to cover up his own political failure and culpability.

It is remarkable that Vajpayee's first televised address to the country was only on March 2, 2002—after the seventy-two hours of apparent

freedom enjoyed by the Sangh parivar in Gujarat expired—and even then, all he could do was appeal for calm and tolerance. In fact, his attempt to blame the ordinary people of Gujarat—and their supposed lack of "harmony"—for the mass killings in their state was a disingenuous manoeuvre aimed at absolving himself, his party colleagues and the state machinery they control, of any responsibility for the crimes. Like Rajiv Gandhi in November 1984 and Narasimha Rao in January 1993, Vajpayee will go down in history as a prime minister who preached the virtues of tolerance even as he turned a blind eye to the massacre of innocent citizens. Instead of using national television to tell the people of Gujarat that the genocidal mobs would be put down with a firm hand—and that policemen failing to protect the life and liberty of all would be punished—Vajpayee delivered a sermon on the need for religious *sadbhavna*.

There was little passion or feeling in what he said, no words of succour for the victims, no anger or opprobrium for the killers. He said the violence was a "black mark on the nation's forehead" but he couldn't bring himself to say that retaliatory attacks on Muslims for what happened at Godhra would attract the same punishment as the burning of the train. Here was a violent disturbance that had made a mockery of state power as it is supposed to operate, yet the prime minister issued no dire warnings to those who were challenging his authority and power as chief executive. In the US, President George W. Bush and his senior aides publicly warned citizens against attacking Muslims, Arabs and other immigrants following the

World Trade Centre terrorist strike. In less than a year since 9/11, a man in Texas was sentenced to death for the 'retaliatory' murder of a Sikh immigrant. To date, however, Vajpayee has yet to even publicly acknowledge that Muslim citizens of India were victimised in Gujarat or to threaten the attackers with the severest consequences.

Indeed, Vajpayee was later to demonstrate that he was so loyal to his party and parivar that he didn't mind undermining the majesty of the state and his own office. On April 17, 2002, he said that if only parliament had condemned Godhra, the subsequent massacres would not have happened. The fact is that he is leader of the House and could have ordered a discussion and condemnation of Godhra on the day it happened—instead of the scheduled presentation of the budget.

In early May, he made another curious statement, this time on the floor of the Rajya Sabha: That he had decided to remove Modi in April but didn't act fearing a backlash in Gujarat. "I had gone to Goa making up my mind on changing the ruler in Gujarat but according to my own assessment, I felt that the change in leadership will only worsen the situation." At the time, the only people opposed to a change in leadership were the RSS and VHP. Removing Modi may or may not have provided temporary relief for Gujarat's beleaguered Muslims but it was odd for the prime minister to admit being held hostage to the threats of criminals and goons. "Vajpayee," wrote B.G. Verghese, "placed the diktat of the mob above his oath of office . . . the emperor has no clothes, stripped of the last shred of moral authority."

Letter to Editor:

Activist Who Brought Hope to Bundelkhand Villages is No More

Bharat Dogra

Bhagwat Prasad, a leading social activist of Bundelkhand region, breathed his last on August 8. As director of a leading voluntary organization of this region named Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthan (ABSSS), Bhagwat Prasad was closely associated with several welfare programs relating to welfare of Kol tribals and other weaker sections of this region. In particular he will be remembered for the important contribution he made in the execution of several successful water conservation and water harvesting projects. These brought

considerable relief to a drought prone region experiencing frequent water scarcity. His organization very recently received a prestigious award for its water conservation work. This work of the ABSSS was known and appreciated widely for achieving good and enduring results at a low cost.

At a time when land reforms were being widely neglected, Bhagwat Prasad and his colleagues received considerable success in land distribution work. This combined with earlier work for rehabilitation of bonded workers brought new

hope in many poor households, most of them Kol tribals or dalits. When this in turn was followed up with water conservation work, many households who had never thought of growing adequate food to meet their needs were able to harvest bountiful harvests.

In his last days Bhagwat Prasad was involved in improving rural school education. To sustain and continue his unfinished work other activists and organisations should surely lend a helping hand.

E-mail: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

From Eugenics, Biometrics to Jurimetrics: Supreme Court Judges on Trial

Gopal Krishna

In the moment of Uber-isation and Ola-isation of services, wherein an app links a supplier with a consumer via a platform and the app provider may be based in one country, the supplier in another and the consumer in a third, the imminent verdict on the unjustness of Aadhaar Act has put the five judges of the Constitution Bench of Supreme Court on trial. It has emerged that the problem that beset the trial judges also engulfs the appellate judges. Allowing present and future presidents, prime ministers, judges, military personnel, citizens and even non-citizens to be biometrically

“profiled to the nth extent for all and sundry to know” by 12-digit Unique Identification (UID) / Aadhaar number for Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) is indefensible.

The trust which the lawyers of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)'s Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and its proponents wish the judges of the Constitution Bench to place in the certainty and guidance of UID technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, computer prediction and statistical inquiries tantamount to predicting human judicial behavior

through jurimetrics. This non-human turn ends up promoting use of symbolic logic, behavior models, mechanical aids for prediction of both individuals and groups to eliminate personal element from judicial, administrative and political decisions.

A decision in favour of UIDAI will imply accepting infallibility of computer prediction without factoring in the “Heisenberg feedback effect” and the alchemy of machine learning. While judges work in the open (having learnt that sunlight is the best disinfectant), the computer programmers and

their visible and invisible beneficial owners work behind the scene. If 24x7 identification and authentication of citizens and residents is deemed constitutionally permissible by electronic and biometric systems, then the possibility of trial by these very fallible systems too cannot be ruled out in the immediate future. The fact remains that these systems have beneficial owners and these technologies are not class and caste neutral as they reflect the prejudices of the programmers of all shades. This will add up yet another layer of automated inequality amidst continuation of gross rampant historical inequality.

Attempts at predicting human behavior including judicial behavior through these technologies will have unprecedented collateral damage. It is destined to fail.

The Record of the Proceedings before the Supreme Court's 5-Judge Constitution Bench for 10 May, 2018 reads "Hearing concluded. Judgment reserved" in the case related to the world's biggest Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) of 12-digit biometric UID/Aadhaar numbers. Now the second judgment in the UID/Aadhaar case can be pronounced on any of the coming days. The final hearing began on 17 January 2018. The original case was filed on 18 October 2012. The first verdict in this case was pronounced on 24 August 2017 by a 9-Judge Constitution Bench. The 5-Judge Bench comprises of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A.K. Sikri, A.M. Khanwilkar, D.Y. Chandrachud and Ashok Bhushan. The 9-Judge Bench comprised of Chief Justice Jagdish Singh Khehar and Justices J. Chelameswar, S.A. Bobde, R.K. Agrawal, Rohinton Fali Nariman, Abhay Manohar Sapre,

D.Y. Chandrachud, Sanjay Kishan Kaul and S. Abdul Nazeer.

As part of his joint order in the right to privacy, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud dwelt on the flawed verdict of the four judges of Supreme Court's 5-Judge Constitution Bench in *ADM Jabalpur v Shivakant Shukla* delivered on the black day of 28 April 1976. The submission of the detainees in the Court was that the suspension of the remedy to enforce Article 21 does not automatically entail suspension of the right or the rule of law and that even during an emergency the rule of law could not be suspended. A majority of four judges of this Court (Justice H.R. Khanna dissenting) held that: "Liberty is confined and controlled by law, whether common law or statute. It is in the words of Burke a regulated freedom. It is not an abstract or absolute freedom. The safeguard of liberty is in the good sense of the people and in the system of representative and responsible government which has been evolved. If extraordinary powers are given, they are given because the emergency is extraordinary, and are limited to the period of the emergency." Justice Chandrachud has held: "The judgments rendered by all the four judges constituting the majority in *ADM Jabalpur* are seriously flawed. Life and personal liberty are inalienable to human existence." The fact is that it was not just seriously flawed; it was profoundly immoral, unpardonable, sinful and monstrous. The verdict in *ADM Jabalpur* case was authored by the evil personified.

Justice Chandrachud observed: "When histories of nations are written and critiqued, there are judicial decisions at the forefront of liberty. Yet others have to be

consigned to the archives, reflective of what was, but should never have been." In order to compare this highly questionable verdict of Chief Justice A.N. Ray and Justices M. Hameedullah Beg, Y.V. Chandrachud and P.N. Bhagwati, drawing from Siddhartha Mukherjee's *The Gene: An Intimate History*, Justice Chandrachud recalled that the decisions like the one of the US Supreme Court in *Buck v Bell* ranks amongst those which should never been delivered. In the *Buck v Bell* case of 1927, Justice Oliver Wendel Holmes Jr. opined that: "three generations of imbeciles is enough" and accepted the forcible sterilisation of Carrie Bucks as part of a programme of state sponsored eugenic sterilisation. Bucks's abdomen was opened. A section of both fallopian tubes of her was removed by John Bell, the doctor. He tied the ends of the tubes, and sutured them shut. With this the chain of heredity was broken under a law which presumed that imbecility can be inherited. Holmes wrote, "The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the fallopian tubes" under the influence of junk science called eugenics which was promoted because American and European White people were worried about the contamination of their gene pool if interracial marriages and marriages with African slaves and White immigrants is allowed.

British colonial power had suspect identification offices in Egypt and India after the development of biometric identification by Sir Francis Galton, an English eugenicist who supported slavery, that compiled data of suspects. In the book *Imprint of the Raj: How Fingerprinting was born in Colonial India*, Chandak

Sengoopta reveals how biometric identification technique was fine-tuned by the Bengal Police. Eugenics and slavery has long been abandoned, the scientific claims of biometrics too have been found to be dubious by reputed official institutions. Yet, the Biometric UID / Aadhaar project assumes every resident of India to be a suspect. The proponents of UIDAI's project are treating residents and citizens worse than prisoners who are regulated by Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920, an Act that authorises the taking of measurements including finger-impressions and foot-point impressions and photographs of convicts and others. It a sister Act of the Prisons Act, 1894.

UIDAI's report titled *Analytics: Empowering Operations* states, the "Data can be considered as the equivalent of water. There are a number of processes involved before the actual consumption of water and data. The journey begins with data, like water, being generated at multiple sources. These are then brought together into one central location." The simile of water flow for data flow reveals the sensitivity of the controller and owner of the grids—be it water grid, power grid or data grid. There are economic and military forces at work that seem to seek centralisation of every conceivable resource, unmindful of its cognitive consequences and civilisational cost. Despite colonial experience, the far reaching ramifications of such free flow of human data in one direction remains to be fathomed in its entirety. The fact remains that one of the key factors for colonisation was information asymmetry between the occupiers and the occupied, between the conqueror and the vanquished, and

between the money lenders, bankers and their clients.

The second verdict in the UID / Aadhaar case is going to be significant, as it will be coming after the verdict on right to privacy, in the context of 360 degree surveillance of citizens and their activities. The Privacy Bill, 2011 defines "surveillance as covertly following a person or watching a person, placing secret listening or filming devices near him, or using informants to obtain personal information about him." This Bill has been referred to in the privacy verdict.

The provisions of Aadhaar Act must be read with the provisions of Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 which defines "informant" in Section 2 (c). "Informant" can be any person who supplies or is required to supply statistical information and includes an owner or occupier or person in-charge or his authorised representative in respect of persons or a firm registered under the Indian Partnership Act, 1932 or a co-operative society registered under any Co-operative Societies Act or a company registered under the Companies Act or a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or any association recognised or registered under any law for the time being in force. Unlike the 1953 version of Collection of Statistics Act, the 2008 Act provides for collection of data from "economic, demographic, scientific and environmental aspects." The Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 makes it compulsory for individuals, households and companies to share information required by government through data collectors which it has hired on contract. If one fails to do so, then one will have to face a maximum penalty of Rs 1,000 in

case of individuals and Rs 5,000 for companies.

This makes individuals and households totally transparent, devoid of even an iota of privacy. But donations to political parties from foreign and Indian companies have been made anonymous by the amendments made through the Finance Bills of 2017 and 2018!

Given the fact that Aadhaar Act is one of two e-commerce laws, it is germane to recollect that at the 11th ministerial of World Trade Organisation (WTO) which concluded in December 2017, India had submitted a written position on e-commerce opposing the demand for negotiations on e-commerce by US and its allies. As per their written submission, the latter are demanding access to citizens' database for free. The WTO has a 1998 Work Programme on e-commerce. This Work Programme provides for the discussion of trade-related issues relating to e-commerce to take place in the relevant WTO bodies like the Council for Trade in Services and the Council for Trade in Goods.

In recent times, proposals are being pushed by some developed countries to negotiate new rules in addition to the existing ones in the WTO Agreements with regard to e-commerce amidst vehement opposition by many developing countries including India, because it goes beyond the 1998 mandate. Since the 1998 WTO Ministerial Conference when members adopted a temporary moratorium of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions, this moratorium has been renewed at subsequent WTO Ministerial Conferences. Global trade remains open and closed for strategic reasons. It is increasingly evident that trade in services and

non-agricultural products is going to acquire electronic route in the near future in a dramatic manner. It emerges that WTO's Work Programme of 1998 is linked to India's e-commerce and privacy related legislations like Aadhaar Act, IT Act, Collection of Statistics Act and Consumer Protection Bill. As per Consumer Protection Bill, 2018, e-commerce means "buying or selling of goods or services including digital products over digital or electronic network". Aadhaar Act defines "service". Service means any provision, facility, utility or any other assistance provided in any form to an individual or a group of individuals and includes such other services as may be notified by the Central Government. This implies that "service" can be impregnated with more meaning than it currently has. In the light of submissions in World Trade Organisation (WTO), it is increasingly becoming apparent that "goods" can be made to mean "services".

The Constitution Bench on UID/Aadhaar matter is all set to deliver its verdict amidst the possibility of civilian and non-civilian military applications of UID being bulldozed by commercial entities in order to store and read biometric and DNA script of present and future Indian citizens in the aftermath of the sequencing of human genome for epigenetics, vested interest of pharmaceutical industry, big data entities, social control technology companies and inhuman aspects of inheritance, eugenics and genetic determinism. The cumulative effect of these efforts has the potential to make digital colonisation fool proof through data colonisation in what is being called the Fourth Revolution by the World Economic

Forum which has also launched a Global Redesign Initiative to make nation states appear like medieval residues or redundant. The verdict on Aadhaar Act, the e-commerce law will come in a backdrop of Henry Kissinger's observations in his book *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* wherein he claims that "Cyberspace has colonised the physical space and, at least in major urban centres, is beginning to merge with it." It is not a coincidence that all the proponents and supporters of UID / Aadhaar are city folks.

Meanwhile, in a seemingly related development India's National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), University of Maryland and University of Michigan have established a National Data Innovation Centre (NDIC) for enhancing methodological research on data collection techniques. The main objective of NDIC is to serve as a laboratory for experiments in data collection, interfacing with partners in think tanks, Indian and international universities, and government.

The core issue is: how do concerns emerging from data nationalism and resource nationalism get reconciled when the Union of India collaborates with foreign entities whose national interest may not necessarily converge with India's supreme national interest. Deliberations in WTO on e-commerce issues have already revealed that there is no convergence in the national interests of these countries and India.

Prof Nicholas Negroponte, author of *Being Digital* has already explained how world trade has traditionally consisted of exchanging atoms, not bits. Bits form the basis of cyber world. He predicts that

"Like a mothball, which goes from solid to gas directly, I expect the nation-state to evaporate without first going into a gooey, inoperative mess, before some global cyber state commands the cyber ether. Without question, the role of the nation-state will change dramatically and there will be no room for nationalism than there is for small pox". Arguments of Negroponte and Kissinger imply that national law is beginning to become irrelevant for the cyber world given the fact that cyber law is essentially global law.

This creates the possibility of the country getting colonised yet again by the asymmetry of information created through information, communication, identification, AI and surveillance technologies because it is now realised that all empires have been information and communication based regimes. Notably, it has been accepted that aadhaar number data is entered in various applications. In order to enter quality data of aadhaar numbers, UIDAI felt the need to validate the entered Aadhaar number. Therefore, "UIDAI has recommended Verhoeff algorithm for validating the same. Based on the same, component has been developed to validate the Aadhaar number entered in an application." AI based machine learning algorithms, in which computers learn through trial and error has been deemed to be a new form of "alchemy" by AI researchers who admittedly "do not know why some algorithms work and others don't, nor do they have rigorous criteria for choosing one AI architecture over another". This assumes significance given the fact that Rakesh Dwivedi, UIDAI's lawyer, has admitted in the Court that "UIDAI is using matching

algorithm.”

Countries like USA, UK, China, Australia and France have rejected biometric profiling based identification projects like Aadhaar. This is open declaration of war against citizens' sensitive personal information like biometric data by transnational entities and governments captured by them and paves the way for the enslavement of generations to come through Aadhaar database that lies on cloud beyond Indian jurisdiction. This creates a compelling logic to factor in the findings of Julian Assange and Edward Snowden who have put their lives at risk to tell Indian government, Indians and others that they are being spied upon by foreign governments, banks and transnational surveillance technology companies. Unless judges factor in the ungovernability of these technologies and their beneficial owners, present and future presidents, prime ministers, judges, legislators and officials handling sensitive assignments may become redundant with regards to their age old roles for securing “national resources and assets”.

If jurimetrics is not a wise and certain way of decision making in legal disputes, if eugenics is now a discredited science, how can AI and biometrics be deemed sane in the matters of life and death of present and future generation of Indians. Galton advocated three things: slavery, eugenics and biometrics. Two of his beliefs have been debunked. The Constitution Bench has the choice of joining the ranks of eugenicists like him, Justice Holmes, Doctor Bell and the bench of ADM Jabalpur to promote biometrics, or to declare Aadhaar Act as a black Act.

E-mail: 1715krishna@gmail.com

Does Raising Questions on the Rights of Adivasis Make Me a ‘Deshdrohi’?

Stan Swamy

This short note was written by Fr Stan Swamy after the Jharkhand authorities filed a case of sedition against him for supporting the adivasi Pathalgadi movement.

Over the last two decades, I have identified myself with the Adivasi people and their struggle for a life of dignity and self respect. As a writer, I have tried to analyse the different issues they face. In this process, I have clearly expressed my dissent over several policies and laws enacted by the government in the light of the Indian Constitution. I have questioned the validity, legality and justness of several steps taken by the government and the ruling class.

As for the Pathalgadi issue, I have asked the question, “Why are Adivasis doing this?” I believe it is because they have been exploited and oppressed beyond tolerance. The rich minerals which are excavated in their land have enriched outsider industrialists and businessmen and impoverished the Adivasi people to the extent that people have died of starvation. They have had no share in what is produced. Also, the laws and policies enacted for their well being are deliberately left unimplemented. So they have reached a situation where they realise ‘enough is enough’ and are seeking to re-invent their identity by empowering their gram sabhas through Pathalgadis. Their action is understandable.

Some of the questions I have raised are:

1) I have questioned the non-

implementation of the 5th Schedule of the Constitution, Article 244(1), which clearly stipulates that a ‘Tribes Advisory Council’ (TAC), composed solely of members from the Adivasi community, will advise the governor of the state about anything and everything concerning the protection, well-being and development of the Adivasi people in the state.

The governor is the constitutional custodian of the Adivasi people and he/she can make laws on his/her own and can annul any other law enacted by the parliament or state assembly, always keeping in mind the welfare of the Adivasi people. Whereas the reality is that in none of the states, during all these nearly seven decades, has any state governor ever used his/her constitutional discretionary power to reach out to the Adivasi people, proffering the excuse that they have to work in harmony with the elected government of the state. The meeting of the TAC takes place rarely, and it is convened by and presided over by the chief minister of the state and is controlled by the ruling party. TAC has thus been reduced to a toothless body. Verily a constitutional fraud meted out to the Adivasi people.

2) I have questioned why the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996,

has been neatly ignored which for the first time recognised the fact the Adivasi communities in India have a rich social and cultural tradition of self-governance through the gram sabha. Whereas the reality is this Act has deliberately been left unimplemented in all nine states. It means the capitalist ruling class does not want Adivasi people to self govern.

- 3) I have questioned the silence of the government on Samatha Judgment, 1997, of the Supreme Court which came as a huge relief to the Adivasi communities in Scheduled Areas. It came at a time when consequent to the policy of globalisation, liberalisation, marketisation and privatisation, national and international corporate houses started to invade Adivasi areas in central India to mine the mineral riches. The government machinery gave its full cooperation to these companies. Any resistance by the Adivasi people was put down with an iron hand. The judgment was meant to provide some significant safeguards for Adivasis to control the excavation of minerals in their lands and to help develop themselves economically.

In reality, the state has ignored this verdict of the highest court. Several cases have been filed by affected communities, but the 'law of eminent domain' of the colonial rulers is invoked to alienate Adivasi land and to loot the rich mineral resources.

- 4) I have questioned the half-hearted action of the government on the Forest Rights Act, 2006. 'Jal, jungle, jameen', as we

know, are the basis of the economic life of the Adivasi people. Their traditional rights in the forests have been infringed upon systematically over the decades. At long last, the government realised that a historic injustice has been done to the Adivasis and other traditional forest-dwellers. To correct this anomaly, it enacted this Act.

The reality is far from desirable. From 2006 to 2011, about 30 lakh applications were made all over the country for title deeds. Of these, 11 lakh applications were approved but 14 lakh were rejected and five lakh were left pending. Of late, the Jharkhand government is trying to bypass the gram sabha in the process of acquiring forest land for setting up industries.

- 5) I have questioned the inaction of the government in carrying out the SC order that the 'owner of the land is also the owner of sub-soil minerals'. In its order, the court said, "We are of the opinion that there is nothing in the law which declares that all mineral wealth sub-soil rights vest in the State, on the other hand, the ownership of sub-soil/mineral wealth should normally follow the ownership of the land, unless the owner of the land is deprived of the same by some valid process."

The rich minerals in their lands are being looted by the government and private companies. The Supreme Court has declared 214 out of the 219 coal blocks in the country illegal and ordered their closure and levied a fine on them for their illegal mining. But the Central

and state governments have found a way out by re-allotting these illegal mines through auction to make it look legal.

- 6) I have questioned the reasons why the SC observation is being ignored that "mere membership of a banned organisation will not make a person a criminal unless he resorts to violence or incites people to violence or creates public disorder by violence or incitement to violence". The court rejected the doctrine of 'guilt by association'.

It is common knowledge that many young men and women are held in prison on the suspicion of being "helpers of Naxalites". After arresting them, other penal clauses are added on. It is an easy label that can be put on any one whom the police wants to catch. It does not require any proof or witness. The Supreme Court says even membership in a banned organisation does not make a person a criminal. How far removed are the law and order forces from the judiciary?

- 7) I have questioned the recently enacted amendment to the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, by the Jharkhand government which sounds a death knell for the Adivasi community. This does away with the requirement for "social impact assessment" which was aimed at safeguarding the environment, social relations and cultural values of affected people. The most damaging factor is that the government can allow any agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes. So any and every thing can be included.
- 8) I have questioned the 'land bank' which I see as the most recent

plot to annihilate the Adivasi people. During ‘Momentum Jharkhand’ in February 2017, the government announced that 21 lakh acres are in the land bank, of which 10 lakh acres is ready for allotment to industrialists.

“Gair-majurwa” land (uncultivated land) can be ‘khas’ (private) or ‘aam’ (common). As per tradition, individual Adivasi families or communities have been in possession and use this land (jamabandi). Now the government has shockingly cancelled all ‘jamabandi’ titles and claims that all ‘gair-majurwa’ land belongs to the government and it is free to allot it to anybody (read industrial houses) to set up their small and big industries.

People are in the dark that their land is being written off. The TAC has not given its approval as is required by the Fifth Schedule. The respective gram sabhas have not given their consent as required by the PESA Act. Affected Adivasi people have not given their consent as required by Land Acquisition Act.

These are the questions that I have consistently raised. If this makes me a ‘deshdrohi’ then so be it!

Email: stan.swamy@gmail.com

The Atomic Plague

Wilfred Burchett

On August 6, 1945, the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima; three days later, Nagasaki was hit. General Douglas MacArthur promptly declared southern Japan off-limits, barring the press. Over 200,000 people died in the atomic bombings of the cities, but no Western journalist witnessed the aftermath and told the story. Instead, the world’s media obediently crowded onto the USS Missouri off the coast of Japan to cover the Japanese surrender.

A month after the bombings, independent journalist Wilfred Burchett defied MacArthur and after riding a train for 30 hours and walked into the charred remains of Hiroshima.

For Burchett, that experience was a turning point, “a watershed in my life, decisively influencing my whole professional career and world outlook.” The story which he typed out on his battered Baby Hermes typewriter, sitting among the ruins, remains one of the most important Western eyewitness accounts, and the first attempt to come to terms with the full human and moral consequences of the United States’ initiation of nuclear war.

Burchett’s article, headlined The Atomic Plague, was published on September 5, 1945 in the London Daily Express. The story caused a worldwide sensation, and was a public relations fiasco for the US military. The official US narrative of the atomic bombings downplayed civilian casualties and categorically dismissed as “Japanese propaganda” reports

of the deadly lingering effects of radiation.

US authorities tried to counter Burchett’s articles by attacking the messenger. MacArthur ordered Burchett expelled from Japan (the order was later rescinded), his camera mysteriously vanished while he was in a Tokyo hospital, and US officials accused him of being influenced by Japanese propaganda.

Then the US military unleashed a secret propaganda weapon: they deployed their very own Timesman. It turns out that William L. Laurence, the science reporter for the New York Times, was also on the payroll of the War Department. For four months, while still reporting for the Times, Laurence had been writing press releases for the military explaining the atomic weapons program; he also wrote statements for President Truman and Secretary of War Henry Stimson. He was rewarded by being given a seat on the plane that dropped the bomb on Nagasaki, an experience that he described in the Times with religious awe.

Three days after publication of Burchett’s shocking dispatch, Laurence had a front page story in the Times disputing the notion that radiation sickness was killing people. His news story included this remarkable commentary: “The Japanese are still continuing their propaganda aimed at creating the impression that we won the war unfairly, and thus attempting to create sympathy for themselves and milder terms . . . Thus, at the beginning, the Japanese described ‘symptoms’ that did not ring true.”

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Laurence won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the atomic bomb, and his faithful parroting of the government line was crucial in launching a half-century of silence about the deadly lingering effects of the bomb. It was only in the 1990s, around the 50th anniversary of the bombing, that there was significant print and media coverage about the actual impact of the atomic bomb on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We print below Burchett's dispatch published in The Daily Express on September 5, 1945. It is a piece of journalism that should be read over and over again—"as a warning to the world"—because like no other account, it brings home the inhuman reality of a nuclear holocaust.

"I Write This as a Warning to the World"

The Daily Express, London, September 5, 1945.

Express Staff Reporter Peter Burchett was the first Allied staff reporter to enter the atom-bomb city. He travelled 400 miles from Tokyo alone and unarmed carrying rations for seven meals—food is almost unobtainable in Japan—a black umbrella, and a typewriter. Here is his story from—

HIROSHIMA, Tuesday.

In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly—people who were uninjured by the cataclysm—from an unknown something which I can only describe as atomic plague.

Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write these facts as dispassionately as I can in the hope that they will act as a warning to the world. In this first testing ground of the atomic bomb I have seen the most terrible and frightening desolation in four years of war. It makes a blitzed Pacific island seem like an Eden. The damage is far greater than photographs can show.

When you arrive in Hiroshima you can look around and for 25, perhaps 30, square miles you can hardly see a building. It gives you an empty feeling in the stomach to see such man-made devastation.

I picked my way to a shack used as a temporary police headquarters in the middle of the vanished city. Looking south from there I could see about three miles of reddish rubble. That is all the atomic bomb left of dozens of blocks of city streets, of buildings, homes, factories and human beings.

Still They Fall

There is just nothing standing except about 20 factory chimneys—chimneys with no factories. I looked west. A group of half a dozen gutted buildings. And then again nothing.

The police chief of Hiroshima welcomed me eagerly as the first Allied correspondent to reach the city. With the local manager of Domei, a leading Japanese news agency, he drove me through, or perhaps I should say over, the city. And he took me to hospitals where the victims of the bomb are still being treated.

In these hospitals I found people who, when the bomb fell, suffered absolutely no injuries, but now are

dying from the uncanny after-effects.

For no apparent reason their health began to fail. They lost appetite. Their hair fell out. Bluish spots appeared on their bodies. And the bleeding began from the ears, nose and mouth.

At first the doctors told me they thought these were the symptoms of general debility. They gave their patients Vitamin A injections. The results were horrible. The flesh started rotting away from the hole caused by the injection of the needle.

And in every case the victim died.

That is one of the after-effects of the first atomic bomb man ever dropped and I do not want to see any more examples of it. But in walking through the month-old rubble I found others.

The Sulphur Smell

My nose detected a peculiar odour unlike anything I have ever smelled before. It is something like sulphur, but not quite. I could smell it when I passed a fire that was still smouldering, or at a spot where they were still recovering bodies from the wreckage. But I could also smell it where everything was still deserted.

They believe it is given off by the poisonous gas still issuing from the earth soaked with radioactivity released by the split uranium atom.

And so the people of Hiroshima today are walking through the forlorn desolation of their once proud city with gauze masks over their mouths and noses. It probably does not help them physically. But it helps them mentally.

From the moment that this devastation was loosed upon Hiroshima the people who survived have hated the white man. It is a hate the intensity of which is almost as

frightening as the bomb itself.

“All Clear” Went

The counted dead number 53,000. Another 30,000 are missing, which means “certainly dead”. In the day I have stayed in Hiroshima – and this is nearly a month after the bombing – 100 people have died from its effects.

They were some of the 13,000 seriously injured by the explosion. They have been dying at the rate of 100 a day. And they will probably all die. Another 40,000 were slightly injured.

These casualties might not have been as high except for a tragic mistake. The authorities thought this was just another routine Super-Fort raid. The plane flew over the target and dropped the parachute which carried the bomb to its explosion point.

The American plane passed out of sight. The all-clear was sounded and the people of Hiroshima came out from their shelters. Almost a minute later the bomb reached the 2,000 foot altitude at which it was timed to explode – at the moment when nearly everyone in Hiroshima was in the streets.

Hundreds upon hundreds of the dead were so badly burned in the terrific heat generated by the bomb that it was not even possible to tell whether they were men or women, old or young.

Of thousands of others, nearer the centre of the explosion, there was no trace. They vanished. The theory in Hiroshima is that the atomic heat was so great that they burned instantly to ashes – except that there were no ashes.

If you could see what is left of Hiroshima you would think that London had not been touched by

bombs.

Heap of Rubble

The Imperial Palace, once an imposing building, is a heap of rubble three feet high, and there is one piece of wall. Roof, floors and everything else is dust.

Hiroshima has one intact building – the Bank of Japan. This in a city which at the start of the war had a population of 310,000.

Almost every Japanese scientist has visited Hiroshima in the past three weeks to try to find a way of relieving the people’s suffering. Now they themselves have become sufferers.

For the first fortnight after the bomb dropped they found they could not stay long in the fallen city. They had dizzy spells and headaches. Then minor insect bites developed into great swellings which would not heal. Their health steadily deteriorated.

Then they found another extraordinary effect of the new terror from the skies.

Many people had suffered only a slight cut from a falling splinter of brick or steel. They should have recovered quickly. But they did not. They developed an acute sickness. Their gums began to bleed. And then they vomited blood. And finally they died.

All these phenomena, they told me, were due to the radio-activity released by the atomic bomb’s explosion of the uranium atom.

Water Poisoned

They found that the water had been poisoned by chemical reaction. Even today every drop of water consumed in Hiroshima comes from other cities. The people of Hiroshima are still afraid.

The scientists told me they have noted a great difference between the effect of the bombs in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki.

Hiroshima is in perfectly flat delta country. Nagasaki is hilly. When the bomb dropped on Hiroshima the weather was bad, and a big rainstorm developed soon afterwards.

And so they believe that the uranium radiation was driven into the earth and that, because so many are still falling sick and dying, it is still the cause of this man-made plague.

At Nagasaki, on the other hand, the weather was perfect, and scientists believe that this allowed the radio-activity to dissipate into the atmosphere more rapidly. In addition, the force of the bomb’s explosion was, to a large extent, expended into the sea, where only fish were killed.

To support this theory, the scientists point out to the fact that, in Nagasaki, death came swiftly, suddenly, and that there have been no after-effects such as those that Hiroshima is still suffering.

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Naushir Bharucha Marg,
Mumbai - 400 007.

Email : janataweekly@gmail.com
Website: www.janataweekly.org

Joint Statement Condemning Arrest of Activists and Public Intellectuals

We, the undersigned, are shocked by the serial raids across the country on the homes of activists and public intellectuals who are critical of the government and the ruling party at the Centre. The arrests of prominent activists and intellectuals Sudha Bharadwaj, Vernon Gonsalves, Gautam Navlakha, Varavara Rao, Arun Ferreira, Kranthi Tekula and others, are nothing but an attempt by the government to strike terror among those who are fighting for justice for the marginalised. This is also an attempt by the BJP to invent a false enemy and engage in scaremongering in order to polarise the 2019 elections in its favour. Already, the government and the media houses close to the BJP have been trying to spin a false narrative of a Maoist conspiracy since June 2018. Terms like “urban naxals” are invented in order to stifle any criticism of the government. We have learnt that the Delhi Police, after having arrested Sudha Bharadwaj, waited for Republic TV to arrive before taking her to the court. This simply shows that the arrests are incomplete without the accompanying sensationalist media propaganda to demonise activists, human rights defenders and

intellectuals.

The so-called raids carried out on the houses of these activists are aimed at creating a spectacle, as the writings and views of these intellectuals are already publicly known and are well documented. This seems like a conspiracy to divert attention from the gravity of the Sanatan Sanstha conspiracy to carry out serial bomb attacks on Eid and Ganesh Chaturthi! The same Sanatan Sanstha was also involved in the murder of Gauri Lankesh, as per the ongoing investigations by Karnataka police. Today’s arrests have been carried out in order to give cover to the murderers of Gauri Lankesh. People like Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha and others who have been arrested are friends of the people who have dedicated their entire lives to the betterment of the Indian public. By arresting them, the BJP is only exposing its insecurities and its intolerance to any dissent or criticism of its policies.

The arrests should be seen in continuation with the recent attacks on pro-justice voices such as Swami Agnivesh, Umar Khalid and many other activists from Delhi to Lucknow. A BJP lawmaker

from Karnataka even advocated the murder of “intellectuals.” Both the arrests and the physical attacks on justice loving people must be seen as a part of a series of attempts to stifle dissent and deny social justice.

We demand immediate release of the arrested individuals, dropping of all false and malicious charges, as these arrests are politically motivated and unjustified.

Statement signed by:

Admiral Ramdas, Shabnam Hashmi, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, Jignesh Mevani, Nivedita Menon, Kavita Krishnan, Teesta Setalvad, Ram Puniyani, Swami Agnivesh, Mallika Sarabhai and hundreds of other citizens from all over the country.

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Flood Havoc in Kerala

B.Vivekanandan

For twelve days, between 8th and 20th August this year, Kerala has suffered a devastating flood disaster. The last time the state suffered a similar flood disaster was 94 years ago, in 1924. The intensity of floods in the state this time was so severe because all 44 rivers in the state were in spate due to continual torrential rain, and all 42 major dams and most of the 40 minor dams in the state had to lift their sluice gates to prevent more serious disasters. Almost all districts of the state have suffered severe losses of multiple dimensions. It is estimated that at least 322 people have lost their lives due to the floods.

The flood has left countless families without a shelter. Thousands of pets dogs and other domestic animals and birds, trapped in floods, perished. 10.4 lakh people, including children, women and the aged who were entrapped in their flooded homes and backwoods under trying circumstances (many did not have anything to eat or drink, except the rain water, for four days consecutively), were rescued and housed in 5,645 relief camps, which were set up in all parts of Kerala.

Rescue and Relief Operations

The rescue and relief operations in the state during the floods have been exemplary. In the wake of the disaster, people of Kerala have displayed a commendable sense of unity, compassion and solidarity. Indeed, they rose in unison, and together did everything possible to rescue the victims marooned in their homes, charity institutions and

elsewhere. There was a tremendous display of solidarity among people, young and old, cutting across all dividing lines. The goodness of man was in full expression, strengthening the hope for the construction of a new world of equality and solidarity in future.

The rescue and relief operations have been carried on by the state and central administrative machineries, and the public. Besides the state administrative machinery, like the police, revenue officials, medical staff, motor vehicles department, fire force, rapid action force, etc., there has been full participation of the central forces, including the army, navy and air force, National Disaster Response Force, Coast Guard, BS and CRPF, in the rescue and relief operations.

Role of Fishermen Volunteers

In the rescue operations, the most commendable was the selfless devotion displayed by the fishermen of the Kerala coast, who voluntarily jumped in the fray, with their small mechanised boats, their only means of livelihood. (Many boats and their engines have actually got damaged due to their operations in the uneven terrains of the flooded areas in the interior parts of the state). 420 fishermen volunteers from Trivandrum and Quilon rushed to the flooded areas in Alleppy and Pathanamthitta districts with their fishing boats and joined the rescue operations. They ventured to reach impenetrable areas where even the well-trained central and state rescue forces could not tread, and rescued

the entrapped victims. During the operations, one of them was found helping some aged persons to step into the boats by kneeling in the muddy waters and making himself a stepping stone. That was the spirit of sacrifice the fishermen volunteers have shown during the crisis. Their humble and dare-devil actions during the rescue operations have been widely acclaimed, and won people's hearts. No wonder, they were given a hero's welcome when they triumphantly returned to their native fishing villages after their rescue operations. They are being honoured at specially organised public functions for their valour, chivalry and solidarity action.

Support from Centre and States and Abroad

A complementary development is the spontaneous display of solidarity and flow of support for the flood victims from the Centre and other states of India, and also from abroad. India's Prime Minister visited Kerala to see for himself the severity of the situation and promised a support of Rs 500 crore as an interim relief measure from the Centre. Many state governments have also offered generous support of several crores of rupees. The spirit of the unity of India is visible in all these spontaneous responses from the states.

From the international community, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has offered a donation of Rs 700 crore for the victims of floods in Kerala. Japan and Thailand too have indicated their intention to send their donations. Many other governments have shown their readiness to send similar support. They are reaching out this way in

tune with the well-established social democratic principles and norms of international solidarity actions for the victims of natural calamities in any part of the world. But the Narendra Modi Government, which is not familiar with the principle of international solidarity, has taken a narrow view of it and has not allowed such international support from reaching the victims of the floods in Kerala. It has issued a statement saying that it would not accept any foreign aid for providing relief for natural calamities in India! This is petty, indecent, uncivil and disgraceful. The Government of India should immediately lift its opposition to the flow of foreign aid to help the victims of Kerala. Needless to say, the rehabilitation of nearly 2 million flood victims would need enormous resources. It is estimated that for post-flood reconstruction and rehabilitation of victims, Kerala would need at least Rs 25,776 crore, for which the state government, reportedly, has decided to go in for a loan of Rs 10,500 crore. As the state is already deep in debt, this new loan would put the state finances in a tizzy in the years ahead.

Loss Estimate

It is going to take considerable time to make proper assessments of losses due to the floods. However, it is undeniable that the victims have suffered heavy losses. For many, all their household items, including all electronic and clothing items, have been rendered useless by the muddy floodwaters which filled their homes. Preliminary estimates indicate that at least 57,000 houses need to be rebuilt or repaired.

The floods have damaged about 10,000 kms of PWD roads, and many bridges. Nearly 2 lakh farmers

have suffered crop losses worth Rs 681 crore due to the floods.

Since the torrential rains have stopped now, and the water is receding, people have started their struggle to resume their normal lives in their old slush-filled houses. Losses apart, just cleaning the houses to make them livable itself is bound to be a herculean task. Rehabilitation is also going to be a big and long-drawn-out task. For most people, they will have to start their lives all over again, from scratch.

Man-Made Disaster

What was the reason for the severe intensity of the floods? One factor is the failure of the administration to grasp the seriousness of the recommendations contained in the 2011 report of the environmental expert committee headed by Madhav Gadgil for the protection of the ecologically fragile areas of the Western Ghats, including Kerala. The Gadgil Committee had recommended that practically the entire Western Ghats region be designated as ecologically sensitive area (ESA). Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their existing condition and nature of threat. It suggested that ESZ1 and ESZ2 would be largely 'no-go' zones for mining and polluting industries as well as large-scale development activities, including new railway lines. It also objected to new dams, thermal power stations or massive windmill farms or new townships in ESZ1. The Gadgil Committee had specifically called for notifying 17 areas in Kerala, including Munnar, as ecologically fragile areas. But vested interests opposed this recommendation,

and the then political leadership was 'persuaded' to support the vested interests. In order to bypass Gadgil recommendations and re-draw the recommendations in favour of vested interests, a new Kasturirangan Committee was first appointed, to be followed by another committee headed by Prof. Oommen V. Oommen, to make tailor-made recommendations. These committees totally diluted the Gadgil Committee recommendations. Vested interests were allowed to encroach and build resorts and tourism centers and carry out other construction activities in the ecologically fragile areas, in violation of the Gadgil Committee recommendations. Now, it is clear that had the state government implemented the Gadgil Committee recommendations during the last seven years, the scale of the disaster this year would not have been as severe as has taken place.

Thus, for instance, during the 12 days of rain and floods in Kerala, there took place 537 landslides, mostly in the foothills of Western Ghats. This was largely due to the large-scale stone quarrying activities in the foothills, in violation of the letter and spirit of the Gadgil Committee recommendations. The stone mafia gangs have come up in large numbers everywhere to quarry stones and supply them for construction activities and for the large-scale widening of roads taking place in the state, and most recently, to supply the 88 lakhs tonnes of stones needed for building a Container Transshipment Terminal Port in Vizhinjam, near Trivandrum, a useless and wasteful project. The impact of mining activities in these quarries on the ecologically fragile areas of Western Ghats is instant. When the rocks in the foothills are

mined using powerful dynamites, it shakes the ecologically fragile areas at the top and in the neighbourhood. Most of the 537 landslides in the Western Ghats during those traumatic 12 days took place due to these mining activities. In a way, therefore, this disaster is partly man-made. The people affected by these landslides are also aware of this, which is why many evacuees from these landslide areas are refusing to go back to these places, as they are genuinely afraid of the recurrence of such landslides in future. They want to be rehabilitated in safer areas in the planes.

A systematic failure to protect the traditional paddy fields in Kerala is another factor that aggravated the flood situation in the state. Falling under the 'influence' of the real estate businessmen, governments, through various enactments, have allowed large-scale filling of paddy fields for the construction of high rise multi-storeyed flats, resorts, convention centres, malls, etc., and changed the natural ecological balance in Kerala. Traditionally, paddy fields in the state absorbed and stored substantial quantity of rain water. The usual water percolation into the ground during the rains has been considerably blocked now by a large-scale use of cement and paver blocks to construct roads and circulating areas in housing areas following the construction boom in the state, heralded by Gulf money. Besides, the large-scale road-widening taking place all across the state—from 9 metre-wide 2-lane roads to 45 to 60 meters-wide 4-lane and 6-lane roads—with World Bank loans for the promotion of the sales of luxury cars of big multinational car companies of Europe, America and Japan has

also reduced the percolation space. When natural outlets are blocked by upstarts for luxury and pleasure, water will find its own way to flow, which cumulatively can only take the form of floods.

We may also note that these floods are a spill over effect of global warming. In fact we are yet to acknowledge that global warming and climate change are current realities. Scientists have analysed, in great detail, how human activities are causing global warming which is leading to more and more frequent and severe extreme weather events such as heavy rains and floods. like the one that gripped Kerala in August this year.

Building a New Kerala

In the circumstances, what the Kerala government should do immediately is go back to the Gadgil committee recommendations and implement them faithfully, and stop all environmentally destructive activities in the ecologically fragile areas of the Western Ghats.

The floods also provide an opportunity to lay the foundations for building a new Kerala, including building a welfare state system based on equality and equal justice—which would give to every person in Kerala state-guaranteed protection from cradle-to-grave, including free healthcare and free education. This would necessarily require the public sector to play a dominant role.

Email: bvivekanandan@yahoo.com

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Are Immigrants in Assam a Security Threat?

Ram Puniyani

A Pandora's box has been opened with the release of the preliminary draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam. This list leaves out nearly 40 lakh people from the draft list of citizens. Till the final list is published after reviewing the appeal of the 'left out' people, an uncertainty will hang over their heads. Amit Shah, the president of the ruling BJP, stated that those left out are *ghuspaithiyas* (infiltrators), they are a threat to our security and that due to them there is competition for the limited resources of the state and the natives are suffering due to that. The perception is that those not finding a place in the NRC are Bangladeshi Muslims. The primary anger of Amit Shah is against this group of people.

Those not finding their names in the list are a diverse group and there are reports that a large number of these are Hindus as well, from Nepal, West Bengal and other parts of the country. Interestingly, many families have been torn apart by the NRC, as some members find themselves in this list, while names of others are missing. The chief minister of the neighbouring state, Mamata Banerjee, has come out heavily against the NRC.

The understanding being percolated is that apart from being a security threat and a drain on the states' resources, this group of people is a threat to the ethnic and linguistic composition of the state. Voices are now being raised that such an NRC should be initiated

in other parts of India also. Ethnic and linguistic aspects apart, the communal forces have been raising the issue of Bangladeshi immigrants time and again. For instance, in Mumbai this was raised in the wake of the Mumbai carnage of 1992–93. In Delhi too this issue has occasionally been brought up; in a related instance, only recently, there took place the burning of a Rohingya Muslims colony in Delhi.

So far as Assam is concerned, the core issue with regards to the religious linguistic composition of Assam is the influx of immigrants due to many historical and political reasons. One recalls that the first time this took place was during the colonial period, when the British introduced their 'Human Plantation program'. This program encouraged people from overpopulated Bengal to migrate to Assam and till the land. It had a dual aim, of releasing the population pressure on overpopulated Bengal, and increasing the production of foodgrains to solve food shortage by utilising the vast tracts of land in Assam. Those migrating included both Muslims and Hindus. At the time of partition, Assam had a large Muslim population, so much so that at the time of partition of the country, Jinnah demanded that Assam should be part of Pakistan. Later, with the genocide launched by Pakistan army in East Bengal, many people migrated to Assam to escape persecution by the army. After the formation of Bangladesh, probably

people have continued to migrate to Assam for economic reasons.

As regards the documents on which the NRC is basing itself, it is interesting to note that while some legitimate people may not have proper documents, some non 'citizens' might have forged the documents. The argument that migration has been encouraged for vote bank politics may only be partly true; largely, people choose to stay or migrate under extreme situations; it is a matter of their entire life. We need to remember that there is no social security in India, and most of those who have migrated to Assam make their living by doing the most menial jobs and live in extreme poverty. These children of 'lesser gods' are also human beings trying to make their living in this cruel world, where the haves can buy citizenship with their money, or some can escape from India with a large booty and choose from a number of countries which welcome such people for their wealth. The 'Poor of the World' have no choice!

India has so far been a country with compassion and heart. We have accepted the Tamil speaking Sri Lankans and the Buddhists from Tibet. The proposal to treat Hindus coming from Afghanistan and Bangladesh as refugees and Muslims as infiltrators is very inhuman. Even if we are able to advance the exercise of NRC to making the final draft, what will we achieve? The social-economic indices of Bangladesh today are higher than those of India.

Bangladesh states that these people are not from Bangladesh and it will not accept their repatriation. So what will we achieve by identifying those not having proper documents? Put them in camps? At the moment they are making their meagre living doing the hardest work at the lowest level in society, so what will be the net achievement?

And the talk of extending this exercise to other states of the country is meaningless. What is needed is the revival of compassion for these people which was in existence when Tamil speaking people were accommodated or Buddhists from Tibet were accepted. India has seen changes in its population profile after partition due to massive translocations of people as well as economic migrations. We claim to believe in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (world is one family). We need to remember that only those polices will succeed which are based on compassion for weaker sections of society. To think that they pose is threat to our security is a misplaced way of seeing the issue. We need to evolve the principles where exclusivism gives way to empathy.

Email: ram.puniyani@gmail.com

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Saint-Engineer Stakes His Life to Save Ganga

Sandeep Pandey

This article was written after conversation with Swami Sanand at Matre Sadan, Haridwar on the 62nd day of his fast on 22 August 2018.

Matre Sadan, on the bank of river Ganga, is no ordinary ashram in Haridwar and Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, fasting since 22 June 2018, demanding a law for conservation of Ganga, is no ordinary sadhu. Earlier Swami Shivanand, head priest of the ashram, and his disciples Swamis Nigmanand, Dayanand, Yajnanand and Purnanand have observed long fasts to prevent illegal mining in Ganga in Haridwar. Nigmanand died on the 115th day of his fast in 2011 after he was poisoned with organophosphate while in hospital during the regime of Bhartiya Janata Party government in Uttarakhand at the behest of a mining mafia Gyanesh Agarwal associated with Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh.

Now Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand, formerly known as Professor Guru Das Agrawal, is on fast and appears committed to laying down his life for the sake of Ganga. He says his well wishers should worry more about the health of Ganga than his health. Swami Sanand thinks that it is too late now to redeem the situation. He is critical of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. He doesn't think that a few people picking up brooms can clean local areas. The pollution is a result of flawed developmental policies. A pro-ecology development policy is necessary for sustainable development. But the Narendra Modi government has not even uttered the phrase of 'sustainable

development' once in its four and a half years regime. Development for government means construction. Recently the Uttarakhand government has taken a decision to construct a road through the Jim Corbett National Park, posing a threat to the forest and wildlife. The government has also undertaken an ambitious all weather Char Dham road project connecting Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri at an estimated cost of Rs 12,000 crore. Swami Sanand thinks this is a disastrous project as it'll involve cutting large number of trees, creating instability by cutting hilly slopes, muck of which will come down into the rivers. He expressed astonishment that Nitin Gadkari can hold both ministries of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping as well as Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation at the same time. It requires the ingenuity of Prof. G.D. Agrawal to see this contradiction. The 285 projects undertaken under National Mission for Clean Ganga which is also popularly known as Namami Gange are mostly related to construction of sewage treatment plants and riverfront development, which has nothing to do with conservation. Similarly he points out that the Ministry of Environment and Forests counts approving of projects as among its achievements, all of which involve clearing of forests!

Swami Sanand thinks the present idea of development is an enemy of environment and doesn't think that Ganga can be saved unless the task is given to people who are sensitive towards it. On 20 August 2018, the Uttarakhand High Court ordered the state government that no untreated sewage should be dumped in Ganga. The sewage received by the sewage treatment plant (STP) at Haridwar is more than double of its installed capacity of 45 millions litres per day (MLD), and so the rest flows into Ganga untreated. Swami Sanand asks what has the Pollution Control Board and National Green Tribunal being doing till now? He also raises a question on how these sewage flows are measured. Most likely it is not the maximum flow. It is the flow on the particular day when it was measured. Sometimes the flow estimate is derived by simply assuming sewage generation of 50 litres per day, and then multiplying it by the population.

As an example of bad planning, he points to the pumping station at Assi drain in Varanasi, which pumps the sewage upstream to the 35 MLD capacity STP in Ramana. What is the logic of pumping sewage upstream of river? He also narrated an incident when the environment minister in the United Progressive Alliance government, Saifuddin Soz, visited the Rajendra Prasad Ghat sewage pumping station in Varanasi, only to be told that it had not been functioning for the last month and a half. With such callous attitude, he is not sure how Ganga can be made clean. He feels that the commitment as well as competence to even operate the STPs is missing. North India has no good consultants in this area.

Nitin Gandkari in his letter

requesting Swami Sanand to end his fast has mentioned that in Kanpur, 80 MLD sewage out of 140 MLD flowing through Sisamau drain is now being diverted to Bingawan STP. Swami Sanand questions why a STP with a capacity of only 80 MLD was built? When the city was expanding, a STP with a higher capacity should have been planned. But the approach of the government is to build whatever capacity can be created from the available funds. The nature of planning is adhoc.

Swami Sanand is also quite critical of activities like Kawanriya Yatras and Ram Kathas in the name of religion and culture which create more pollution. He gave the example of how people treat Kanwariyas with Chole-Bhature and other eatables from road side stalls, and entire area gets littered with waste. Morari Bapu delivered a Ram Katha at Gangotri Dham, Uttarkashi from 18 to 26 August, 2018. Swami Sanand questioned the wisdom of conducting Ram Katha at this location which would have put additional burden on the local ecology.

Swami Sanand went on fast from 13 to 30 June, 2008, 14 January to 20 February, 2009 and 20 July to 23 August, 2010 against three hydroelectric projects—Bhairon Ghati, Lohari Nagpala and Pala Maneri—and was able to stall them all, even though the tunnel in Lohari Nagpala was complete. He even managed to get the government to declare 125 kilometres of Bhagirathi as eco-sensitive zone. His fourth fast was from 14 January to 16 April, 2012. It was done in stages—on fruits in Allahabad, on lemon water in Haridwar, and finally without water in Varanasi, after which he had to be admitted to the All India

Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi. In 2013, he fasted from 13 June to 13 October, of which he spent 15 days in jail. The general secretary of Ganga Sabha, Jitendranand, delivered a letter to him from the then BJP President Rajnath Singh committing that when Narendra Modi government comes to power, it will accept all the demands of Swami Sanand related to Ganga. However, the Modi government has been a big let down. Swami Sanand feels that Manmohan Singh–Jairam Ramesh–Jayanthi Natarajan team was more sensitive than Narendra Modi–Nitin Gadkari–Uma Bharti towards caring about Ganga. He has special praise for Jairam Ramesh, who got the making of Ganga Master Plan by foreign experts with United States funds cancelled. On Pranab Mukherjee's suggestion, this task was given to Indian Institute of Technology Consortium.

Swami Sanand wrote a letter to Nitin Gadkari on 4 July and to the Prime Minister on 5 August, 2018. But there has been no reply from either. Swami Sanand is disappointed with the government as well as civil society including IIT Consortium, and has therefore put his life at stake. Are we going to let this Seer simply die fasting?

Email: ashaashram@yahoo.com

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Kandhamal Without Closure

Apoorvanand

Kandhamal is yet another milestone in the journey of the Independent India. It reminds us that we are moving towards the normalisation of a genocidal mindset. For the last ten years, it has only been the Christians who remember this atrocity. The majority community does not seem to feel the need to share of suffering, pain, humiliation and sense of injustice of their Christian compatriots. We are turning into a nation of fractured sensibilities with little sense of justice.

The Archbishop of Cuttack–Bhubaneswar Mgr. John Barwa has appealed for a holy mass on 25 August which marks the 10th anniversary of the anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal that led to the killing of more than 100 Christians, looting and burning and destruction of nearly 6,000 houses spread over more than 400 villages, desecration and destruction of hundreds of churches, convents and hostels and displacement of nearly 60,000 Christians from their homes.

The Archbishop says that this mass is an expression of the will of the people of Odisha to turn a new leaf and move towards a renewed society filled with peace and harmony, a move towards reconciliation and restoration of amity between communities. Recalling the horror of Kandhamal which started on 25 August 2008 and continued for months, Mgr. John Barwa hopes that “ten years ago, what happened in Kandhamal, Odisha should have never happened and should never ever happen again.”

If the victims themselves appeal for peace and there is no repentance or atonement on part of the perpetrators, the talk of reconciliation becomes farcical. For the last 10 years, the Christians have been fighting a lonely battle for justice. Nearly all state organs, including the police and civil administration, actively resisted and blocked the relief operations in the immediate aftermath of the attack. After that, they did everything to deny the crime, put the onus on the victims themselves and obstructed their battle for justice.

Leave alone compensating the victims adequately and ensuring the return of the survivors, the state has not even acted on the order of the Supreme Court given in 2016 to re-investigate 315 cases of anti-Christian violence. The NHRC has not opened its mouth on this violence. With criminals enjoying impunity, it is impossible to even think of reconciliation. Are the Christians expected to reconcile with this state–society apathy and stop demanding justice? Would it be called return of peace then?

The mass violence against Christians in Kandhamal was preceded by a long and sustained hate campaign against them in the name of anti-conversion campaign. Remember the murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two adolescent sons by burning them. This crime by members of the Bajrang Dal was legitimised obliquely using the argument given by a person like Atal Bihari Vajpeyee who had called for a

national debate on conversion after the carnage against Christians in the district of Dangs in Gujarat to deflect attention from those killings.

The Supreme Court also gave a justification for the hate crime while lowering the quantum of punishment to the perpetrators. Let us recall the exact words of the bench to understand why Kandhamal was waiting to happen. Justice Sathasivam and Justice Chauhan said: “Though Graham Staines and his two minor sons were burnt to death while they were sleeping inside a station wagon at Manoharpur, the intention was to teach a lesson to Staines about his religious activities, namely, converting poor tribals to Christianity.”

Holding Staines responsible for his murder, the bench used this opportunity to condemn the act of conversion: “It is undisputed that there is no justification for interfering in someone’s belief by way of ‘use of force’, provocation, conversion, incitement or upon a flawed premise that one religion is better than the other.”

In the case of Kandhamal it was the murder of Swami Lakshmanananda which acted as an excuse and justification of the mass violence against the Christians. The Maoists claimed responsibility for the act but it did not deter the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other leaders of the affiliates of the RSS from blaming the Christians and their organisations for his killing. Despite the Maoist claim, 7 innocent Christian tribals were given life terms. Their appeal has not been

heard by the High Court for the last 5 years.

The action-reaction theory, invoked in 2002 in Gujarat to justify the genocidal violence against Muslims, was invoked in Kandhamal too. The technique was also the same. In Gujarat, the bodies of the people who perished in the burning of the Sabarmati Express were taken out in a procession and then the violence started. Similarly, the funeral procession of the Swami was allowed to be led by Pravin Togadia, who was shouting anti-Christian slogans and calling for revenge. The funeral procession meandered through dense forests covering 250 kilometers through Christian populations instigating violence.

Not only the violence but the cover up operation done by 'The India Foundation' by blaming it on Christians through its propaganda material should alarm us, as many functionaries of the Foundation are now in leading positions in the government.

Ten years later, we need not recall the graphic details of the violence done to women, children and old men to generate sympathy for them. It makes them look pitiable and helpless. Instead we need to record the valiant battle that all the victims and survivors have waged to secure justice with the help of the much maligned but a very small group of human right organisations, individuals and lawyers. They have continued their fight, despite the indifference, and stonewalling, by the state organs. For this, we need to be thankful to them, as through this struggle they have kept alive the idea of justice for all of us.

These ten years have seen hate and violence against Christians being routinised and turned into a

daily affair. Beating up of priests, breaking up of prayer meetings and carols, desecration of churches and arrests of priests, enactment of anti-conversion laws as done in Jharkhand or villages being made out of bounds for them as in Chattisgarh lack the spectacle of Kandhamal. Our indifference to these incidents only demonstrates

that the violence of Kandhamal has succeeded in its mission. It has made us so insensitive that unless there is a repeat on this scale, we would not even accept that violence against Christians has now become our national habit.

Email: katyayani.apoorv@gmail.com

Growing Evidence Against GM Crops

Bharat Dogra

A recent legal case which has attracted worldwide attention relates to the award of huge compensation to DeWayne Johnson, a school groundskeeper, by a California jury on account of his health being damaged severely by a herbicide glyphosate which this groundskeeper had used regularly, resulting in very painful and life-threatening blood-cell cancer. There was widespread sympathy for this victim and Edward Kennedy, son of the famous Senator by the same name, was among the team of lawyers who argued this case.

For people involved in food safety issues, this case has an additional significance. The damages are to be paid by Monsanto, which is the manufacturer of glyphosate. Monsanto is also in the forefront of the spread of genetically modified (GM) crops. It has been involved in providing packages in which the company's GM seeds are closely tied to the marketing of the disputed herbicide whose serious health hazards have been the subject of much debate earlier also. In the course of the hearings of this case, however, it became increasingly clear that the so-called scientific

evidence of the safety of its products by which the giant multinational company (MNC) had been swearing had many holes in it, and at times its own findings were being passed off as the opinion of reputed scientists.

As the issues of food safety and health hazards are so important and as this and a few other MNCs appear to be so determined to gain increasing domination of the world food and farming markets by relentless lobbying for GM crops and agri-chemicals tied to these crops, it is important to look carefully at the scientific evidence available on this subject. While some of the most eminent scientists in the world have been warning against GM crops, these powerful companies along with their influential collaborators in the government and the media have been claiming that scientific evidence is on their side. So the common people are sometimes confused regarding whom to believe. This confusion can be cleared by looking at what the most eminent scientist of India on this subject said shortly before his death. This scientist was the most well-informed scientist in India on this subject. Our reference here is of course to Dr.

Pushpa Bhargava.

Dr. Pushpa M. Bhargava was the founder of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and in addition he was also the Vice Chairperson of the National Knowledge Commission. Many people's science movements looked upon him as their mentor. He had been appointed by the Supreme Court of India as an observer in the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee as he was widely perceived to be not only a very accomplished expert on this issue and that too of the highest integrity but in addition he was also seen on the basis of his past record as a very strong and persistent defender of public interest.

Therefore it is very useful and interesting to see what this very senior scientist with a comprehensive understanding of this issue had to say about GM crops. First of all he made a strong and clear effort to break the myth which had been created by relentless manipulation by the very powerful forces trying to spread GM crops in India. According to this myth most scientific research supports GM crops. While demolishing this myth Dr. Bhargava wrote, "There are over 500 research publications by scientists of indisputable integrity, who have no conflict of interest, that establish harmful effects of GM crops on human, animal and plant health, and on the environment and biodiversity. For example, a recent paper by Indian scientists showed that the Bt gene in both cotton and brinjal leads to inhibition of growth and development of the plant. On the other hand, virtually every paper supporting GM crops is by scientists who have a declared conflict of interest or whose credibility and integrity can be doubted."

Elsewhere in this article he commented, "The central government departments that have been acting as peddlers of GM technology—probably in collusion with MNCs marketing GM seeds—have shown little respect for law."

In a review of recent trends titled "Food Without Choice" (published in the Tribune), Prof. Bhargava, who was an internationally acclaimed authority on this subject, drew pointed attention to the "attempt by a small but powerful minority to propagate genetically modified crops to serve their interests and those of multinational corporations (read the US), the bureaucracy, the political setup and a few unprincipled and unethical scientists and technologists who can be used as tools." Further he warned, "The ultimate goal of this attempt in India, of which the leader is Monsanto, is to obtain control over Indian agriculture and thus food production. With 60 per cent of our population engaged in agriculture and living in villages, this would essentially mean not only a control over our food security but also over our farmer security, agricultural security and security of the rural sector."

The strong stand of Dr. Bhargava against GM crops is supported by other eminent scientists in various parts of world. A group of eminent scientists organised under the Independent Science Panel have stated in very clear terms, "GM crops have failed to deliver the promised benefits and are posing escalating problems on the farm. Transgenic contamination is now widely acknowledged to be unavoidable, and hence there can be no co-existence of GM and non-GM agriculture. Most important of all, GM crops have not been proven safe.

On the contrary, sufficient evidence has emerged to raise serious safety concerns, that if ignored could result in irreversible damage to health and the environment. GM crops should be firmly rejected now."

The Independent Science Panel (ISP) is a panel of scientists from many disciplines and countries, committed to the promotion of science for the public good. In a document titled *The case for a GMO-free Sustainable World*, the ISP has stated further, "By far the most insidious dangers of genetic engineering are inherent to the process itself, which greatly enhances the scope and probability of horizontal gene transfer and recombination, the main route to creating viruses and bacteria that cause disease epidemics. This was highlighted, in 2001, by the 'accidental' creation of a killer mouse virus in the course of an apparently innocent genetic engineering experiment. Newer techniques, such as DNA shuffling, are allowing geneticists to create in a matter of minutes in the laboratory millions of recombinant viruses that have never existed in billions of years of evolution. Disease-causing viruses and bacteria and their genetic material are the predominant materials and tools for genetic engineering, as much as for the intentional creation of bio-weapons."

Several scientists involved in studying the implications and impacts of genetic engineering got together at the International Conference on 'Redefining of Life Sciences' organised at Penang, Malaysia, by the Third World Network. They issued a statement (the Penang Statement) which questioned the scientific basis of

genetic engineering. This statement said :

The new biotechnology based upon genetic engineering makes the assumption that each specific feature of an organism is encoded in one or a few specific, stable genes, so that the transfer of these genes results in the transfer of a discrete feature. This extreme form of genetic reductionism has already been rejected by the majority of biologists and many other members of the intellectual community because it fails to take into account the complex interactions between genes and their cellular, extracellular and external environments that are involved in the development of all traits.

It has thus been impossible to predict the consequences of transferring a gene from one type of organism to another in a significant number of cases. The limited ability to transfer identifiable molecular characteristics between organisms through genetic engineering does not constitute the demonstration of any comprehensive or reliable system for predicting all the significant effects of transposing genes.

Email: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

The Larger Picture on GDP Numbers

Arun Kumar

With the back series for GDP growth since 1993–94 becoming available, this new data on GDP has raised a political storm. Its importance lies in the fact that in 2015, a new series was announced which showed India's GDP growing faster than that shown by the earlier series. This was politically advantageous to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government which came to power in 2014.

The NDA claimed that the second United Progressive Alliance (UPA-II) government had messed up the economy and it had turned it around. But in the new series, the rate of growth during the last two years of UPA-II was also higher than what the old series showed, so that the economic performance under the UPA also did not look so bad. What the new series also showed was that the NDA had inherited an economy with GDP growing at 8.4% in the second quarter of 2014. Most macroeconomic variables had also recovered from their lows in 2013.

Data show that after the NDA took over, the rate of growth fell and then rose to a peak of 8.65% in 2015–16 Q4. After that it fell for five consecutive quarters—to 5.57% by 2017–18 Q1. The two shocks to the economy (demonetisation and then the GST) had a big negative impact on the rate of growth. This is not even captured in the new data since a shock requires a change in methodology for calculation of GDP. The political slugfest between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress is due to data showing that the average growth rate under the

UPA-I and -II was higher than what has been achieved during the present NDA regime.

Points to the issue

There are three distinct aspects to the controversy. First, why was the back series—now the bone of contention—needed? Second, what do the data show? And, third, why was the rate of growth during the two UPA regimes higher?

An economy produces a large number of goods and services and new ones are added all the time. The production of all these items has to be estimated in order to calculate the rate of growth of the economy. This requires lots of data, which is a tall order. So, a select set of items is taken to represent the entire production. The question that arises is: how accurate are the data?

Technology poses another challenge. Older items become redundant and newer ones need to be included.

So, as time passes, the earlier series of data does not represent the true growth rate of the economy and needs to be modified. That is why the old series is replaced by a new one periodically. The earlier series (from 2004–05) was replaced by a new series (from 2011–12). Another question arises: How do the data from the new series compare with those of the old series? Is it that growth was also higher earlier? Analysts have demanded a back series whenever a new series is prepared. There were problems with the new series which is why the back series was not generated

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automatically. This is also why the new committee (which has presented its report) was set up.

The difficulty with the new series (2011–12) was because it not only changed the bundle of items used to calculate growth but also used a more extensive data base (of companies) called MCA21. This data base was available from 2006–07. However, it kept changing every year and did not stabilise till 2010–11—so it was not comparable across years and could not be used to generate the back series. This is also why the task of the committee was a difficult one and it could not mechanically generate the back series.

The committee had to use a new method which has its own assumptions, which are likely to be debated by experts. A bias in the results seems to be that the growth rate in the new time series for the 1990s is lower than in the old series, whereas it is higher for the 2000s. It is also unable to take the black economy and the changes in the unorganised sectors into account. The report has been submitted to the National Statistical Commission which will finalise it. Therefore, government functionaries are arguing that the data cited by the media are not final.

Quarrel about causes

It is interesting that the criticism is more about the causes of the higher rate of growth under the UPA than the methodology of the study. The implicit admission is that the economy did grow faster under the UPA but due to wrong policies (allowing the fiscal deficit to rise, undue expansion of bank loans, etc). The argument is that these have led to non-performing assets (the twin

balance sheet problem), higher inflation and current account deficit.

But the higher growth was on the back of a 38% rate of investment and a 36% rate of savings achieved by 2007–08. These are now down to 32% and 30%, respectively. The 2007–08 crisis was a global one, but the Indian economy continued to grow when many other economies were slowing down due to an increase in the fiscal deficit from its record low in 2007. The crisis of 2012–13 was due to the rise in petroleum prices and largely due to international factors.

However, the current slowdown is largely policy induced and less due to international factors. The twin shocks (demonetisation and the GST) have played havoc with the unorganised sector (not yet captured in the data). Household savings have declined sharply and the investment climate remains poor with large numbers of dollar millionaires leaving the country. The government might consider leaving the data debate to experts and not make it a political issue.

Email: nuramarku@gmail.com

MODIGATE, THE RAFALE SCAM: Deal Imperils National Security

Statement released by Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and Prashant Bhushan at a press conference on August 8, 2018 (edited by us for reasons of space).

The manner in which the order for the Rafale fighter was suddenly changed. The gross violation of mandatory procedures. The dogged effort of the government to conceal facts. The contradictory and ever-shifting statements of the Minister of Defence. The gross misuse of friendly media to purvey falsehood, and to drown vital facts and questions in an avalanche of abuse. Invoking secrecy clauses in the contract that are just not there. The inexplicable dropping from the project of the one national organisation that has decades of experience in building aircraft—the public sector organisation Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)—and the incomprehensible induction of a private company that has absolutely no experience in the field of aerospace

manufacture, but does have a record of failing in large projects, and is mired deeply in debt.

Each of these features has convinced us that there is a major scandal here, gross misuse of office, and monumental criminal misconduct. Nor is this an ordinary scandal or ordinary misconduct: it is one that imperils the security of the country, and puts serious pressure on the already fragile defence capital budget. Moreover, it is by far larger than ones that the country has had to contend with in the past.

Facts and questions

In accordance with requirements specified by the Indian Air Force, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) on August 28,

2007 for 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat (MMRC) aircrafts. *The RFP made clear that the bids were to be inclusive of cost of initial purchase, transfer of technology, licensed production, etc.* This gives lie to the government's repeated assertion that a higher price is being paid to Dassault now because of "add-ons".

Six vendors, that is Dassault Aviation, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Saab, Eurofighter GmbH and Russian Aircraft Corporation submitted bids. After flight trials and technical assessment, the Indian Air Force announced in 2011 that Dassault's Rafale and Eurofighter GmbH's Typhoon fighters met the air force's requirements. In 2012, it was found that Dassault's bid was the lowest and therefore negotiations began between Dassault and the Indian government.

Intensive negotiations took place. They reached the penultimate state. Addressing the press on March 25, 2015 in France, Eric Trappier, the chief executive officer of Dassault stated: *"You can imagine my satisfaction to hear . . . from the HAL Chairman, that we are in agreement for the responsibilities sharing, considering as well our conformity with the RFP in order to be in line with the rules of this competition. I strongly believe that contract finalisation and signature would come soon."*

The UPA government steered the negotiations to fulfil three inter-related objectives. First, the Air Force should get some aircraft at the earliest possible, since the MiG-21 and MiG-27 fleet had completed their service lives and were being retired from service. Second, India's aerospace industry has to be rejuvenated: for this to happen, the country must acquire access to

advanced technologies; an order of such a large magnitude—buying 126 fighters—ought to be leveraged to obtain advanced technologies from the foreign vendor. Third, the one Indian company that had decades of experience in building aircraft—HAL—should build the fighter in India so that it would be in a position to maintain, service and overhaul the Rafale through its service life of 30–40 years. In the process, HAL would also acquire advanced manufacturing capabilities to become self-reliant in producing state-of-the art fighter aircraft.

Accordingly, the 126-aircraft deal envisaged that the first eighteen aircraft would be procured in a "fly-away condition", that is, these would be fully built by the vendor. The remaining 108 fighters would be manufactured in India by HAL under a Transfer of Technology agreement. At the time the RFP was floated in 2007, the total cost for 126 MMRC aircrafts was estimated by government to be Rs 42,000 crores. The final price that was being negotiated under the deal is not in the public domain.

During his visit to France, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on April 10, 2015 that India will purchase 36 Rafale jets in a government-to-government agreement. There are several startling facts about this agreement:

- There was no explanation for how the number of 36 aircraft had been arrived at;
- There was no mention of any planes that were to be manufactured in India;
- There was no mention of the requirement that the supplier must transfer technology;
- From securing 126 fighters, the

Indian Air Force was now to get only 36 fighters—nothing was mentioned about the rest.

All that was said by government sources in justification of this deal was that the Air Force needed the planes urgently, and that these 36 planes would reach India within two years. Three years later, the aircraft are nowhere in sight. It has in fact been announced in Parliament that the first Rafale fighters will come only by September 2019 (four-and-a-half years after the prime minister's announcement). The full pack of 36 aircraft will not be available to India till mid-2022.

If the government had adhered to the original RFP, the 18 aircraft would have come within two and half years, and, as Dassault would have been bound to commence production within three years, the additional aircraft would also have been available to the Air Force by mid-2022. The planes thus would have been available at the pace at which the government now claims it has ensured as a matter of urgency, and, in addition, the country would have gained from the technology that would have been transferred.

Several questions arise:

- Did the Air Force urge that the original deal with its all-important multiple objectives be scrapped and a new one confined to 36 aircraft be concluded? How was the Air Force's studied estimate that it is in dire need of 126 aircraft summarily jettisoned?
- As this was entirely a new deal, why were fresh tenders not invited? In particular, why was this not done in view of the fact that the suppliers Eurofighter GmbH had formally written

to the then Defence Minister Arun Jaitley on July 4, 2014, offering to reduce the cost of the Eurofighter Typhoon by a full 20%?

Enter Anil Ambani group, exit HAL

In March 2014, it was widely reported that a Work Share Agreement was entered into between Dassault Aviation and HAL according to which HAL would do 70% of the work on 108 planes that were to be manufactured in India while Dassault would undertake the rest of the work. However, in the new deal signed by Modi, there was no mention now of transfer of technology; HAL was manifestly kicked out, and with it the much vaunted *Make in India*.

That's not all. Some time after the announcement of the Rafale deal, it was revealed that a new Joint Venture has been struck between Reliance Defence Ltd. and Dassault Aviation, with Anil Ambani as the chief executive officer. Reliance is to hold 51% of the equity and Dassault 49%. This brand new company is the one that has been assigned 70% of the Offset benefits—that is, orders worth Rs 21,000 crore out of a total offset liability of Rs 30,000 crore.

Strangely, Reliance Defence Limited was incorporated only on March 28, 2015, just 12 days before the Rafale deal was announced by PM Modi.

Now, Clause 8.6 of the Defence Offset Guidelines brought into force by this government on April 1, 2016, mandatorily require that, “all Offset proposals will be processed by the Acquisition Manager and approved by Raksha Mantri, regardless of their value.” Thus, approval of the Defence Minister was mandatorily

required to process Offset proposals. In an inexplicable abdication of its mandatory duty, the government has now claimed that it has nothing to do with the matter, and that it is the prerogative of Dassault to choose its Offset partner. Two questions arise:

i) Could an experienced manufacturer like Dassault have picked a company that had no experience whatsoever of manufacturing aircraft, without approval from the Indian government?

ii) As mentioned above, this approval was necessary under the Government of India's own offset policy. Surely, the government must be able to list the grounds on which its own company, HAL, was removed?

Neither Reliance Defence nor any of its allied companies have any experience of manufacturing aerospace and defence equipment. In contrast, HAL has over 60 years of experience in aircraft manufacturing.

Secrecy clause: ‘As much of a lie as it is baseless’

The Government of India has been insisting that it cannot disclose the price of the aircraft because of an agreement of secrecy with the Government of France. This claim is as much of a lie as it is baseless. It has also been maintaining that the cost of 36 Rafale jets cannot be “directly compared” with the original proposal to buy 126 combat aircraft as “deliverables” were significantly different.

Let us go back to the India-France Joint Statement issued on April 10, 2015. It stated: “The two leaders agreed to conclude an Inter-Governmental Agreement for supply of the aircraft on terms that would be better than conveyed by Dassault

Aviation as part of a separate process underway; the delivery would be in time-frame that would be compatible with the operational requirement of IAF; and that the aircraft and associated systems and weapons would be delivered on the same configuration as had been tested and approved by Indian Air Force, and with a longer maintenance responsibility by France.”

Two implications of the Joint Statement are manifest:

- The price of the 36 Rafales would be cheaper than what was already being negotiated. Since they were being supplied in “fly-away condition”, they had to be cheaper than the 18 Rafales that Dassault had bid to supply in the MMRC aircraft tender.
- The aircraft and systems were to be “on the same configuration as had been tested and approved by the IAF” in the MMRC aircraft evaluation. This clear and emphatic affirmation in the Joint Statement nails the falsehood that has been spread since then, namely, that the price per aircraft is so much higher because of some novel “India specific enhancements” in the 36 Rafales now contracted. On November 18, 2016, in response to a question asked in the Lok Sabha on the acquisition of fighter aircrafts, the Minister of State for Defence stated that: “*Inter-Governmental Agreement with the Government of French Republic has been signed on 23.09.2016 for purchase of 36 Rafale aircraft along with requisite equipments, services and weapons. Cost of each Rafale aircraft is approximately Rs 670 crore and all the aircraft will be delivered by April 2022.*”

As will be evident from this statement:

- The price was disclosed by the government itself;
- The price was put at Rs 670 crore per aircraft;
- In the government's own telling, this price included the "requisite equipments, services and weapons."

It now stands revealed that the Minister had lied to Parliament. The actual price of 36 aircrafts was revealed in a Press Release by Dassault and Reliance Defence on February 16, 2017 and Financial Press Release statement of Dassault for 2016. Both the documents show the total price of the deal to be about Rs 60,000 crore (about 8.139 Billion Euros) for 36 aircrafts. This is what is embarrassing for the government for it works out to Rs 1,660 crore per plane. This is more than double the price of the aircraft under the earlier 126 MMRC aircrafts deal. And almost Rupees one thousand crore higher per plane than the price that was furnished by the government itself to Parliament on November 18, 2016.

It is only when the Opposition started claiming that there was a scam in the Rafale deal that the government has now started claiming that the price of the aircraft cannot be disclosed. The fact of the matter is, the secrecy clause in the agreement only binds India not to disclose the technical specifications and operational capabilities of the aircraft, it does not bind India to keep the price secret. In fact, the French President, Emmanuel Macron himself stated explicitly in March 2018 in an interview to India Today that how much is to be disclosed in this regard is entirely up to the Indian government.

National security implications

The net result of the gross misuse of office by which the original project for the acquisition of 126 fighter aircraft has been sabotaged is:

- National security has been jeopardised;
- An enormous additional burden has been placed on the national exchequer;
- The one organisation in the country which has had decades-long experience in manufacturing aircraft—HAL—has been kicked out of the project;
- A private party which has had absolutely no experience in manufacturing aerospace and defence equipment has been handed an enormous financial benefit.

The entire transaction is thus a textbook case of criminal misconduct, of misuse of public office, and of enriching parties at the expense of the national interest and national security.

Parliament and other agencies charged with the responsibility of overseeing the defence of our country, of preventing corruption,

and of ensuring that government remains accountable as well as media must exhume every fact about how the original project was jettisoned, and one without rationale has been put in its place.

Books by Surendra Mohan

1. **Vikas Ka Rasta: Nai Arthik Neetiyon ka vishleshan..** Price 600 rupees.

2. **Samajwad, Dharma Nirapekshata aur Samajik Nyaya** Reissued as second edition; Price 500 rupees

Published by Rajkamal Prakashan, 2a Netaji Subhash Road, New Delhi 11002

3. **Vartaman Rajneeti ki Jwalant Chunautiyan.** Price 400 rupees.

4. **Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia ki Neetiyon:** (This booklet was published late last year.) Price 25 rupees.

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Kerala Wake-Up Call on Growth and Development

Vandana Shiva

The images of floods and mudslides in Kerala, known as “God’s own country”, should be a wake-up call—we should ask ourselves if we are on a sustainable development path.

In the 1970s, deforestation was leading to landslides and floods in what is now Uttarakhand. The women of the mountains banded together as “Chipko” to stop the logging. I became a volunteer in the Chipko movement. After devastating floods of 1978, the government realised that the small revenues it collected from extractive forestry in the fragile hills were insignificant in the context of the costs of flood destruction.

The Gadgil report on the Western Ghats established that deforestation of fragile catchments, building of too many dams and construction in flood plains was a recipe for ecological disaster. Add to it climate extremes driven by climate change, and we have the disaster we are now seeing in Kerala.

Every ecological warning was ignored as governments of different parties share the religion

of ‘development’ and ‘growth’. These two words dominate the economic, political, social and cultural discourse. They are amoeba words that can be given whatever shape/meaning the speaker and listener assign to them.

Development is originally a biological, not an economic term. It refers to the auto-poetic evolution of a seed into a plant, an embryo into a person. It refers to self-organised, self-directed, self-evolutionary development. The structure of future forms of development is enfolded in the complex potential of living systems.

‘Development’ was genetically engineered into an economic/political concept on January 20, 1949 when US President Harry Truman, in his inaugural speech, declared the former Southern Hemisphere colonies—that had been drained of their wealth through colonisation—as “underdeveloped areas” needing development, which now became another term for recolonisation.

From its meaning as self-organised evolution, it now became an externally imposed economic

system designed to keep former colonies dependent on the empire, entrapped in debt, a source of rents from interest repayments. In a meeting at Bretton Woods in 1944, two years after Mahatma Gandhi gave the “Quit India” call, new institutions like the World Bank and IMF were created to continue colonial extraction and economic drain. ‘Development’ became the new colonisation to legitimise displacement of tribals from their forests and farmers from their land.

‘Growth’ too has its origins in the world of biology and life. Plants grow, children grow. Growth, like development, earlier referred to growth and flourishing of life. ‘Growth’ as GDP was invented to mobilise resources for war. The definition of growth was based on “if you produce what you consume, you don’t produce”. This was a global assault on local self-provisioning, self-reliant economies.

Nature’s amazing cycles of renewal of water and nutrients are defined thus as non-production. The world’s small peasants, providing 72 per cent of its food, are defined as unproductive. Women who do most of the work are defined as not working in this paradigm of ‘growth’.

GDP, or gross domestic product, emerged both as the most powerful number and dominant concept of our times. It is supposed to measure the wealth of nations. Limitless growth is the fantasy of economists, businesses and politicians. It’s seen as a measure of wealth and progress. Vandana Shiva <vandana.shiva@gmail.com>

It is repeatedly said that to remove poverty, we must have growth. The rich must become

super-rich, millionaires become billionaires, so that ‘growth’ can end poverty.

The increase of money flow via GDP is totally disassociated from real value, but those who accumulate financial resources can stake claim on people’s real resources—land and water, forests and seeds. ‘Hungry’ money is preying on the last drop of water and the last inch of land on the planet. This isn’t an end to poverty, but an end to human rights, justice and ecological security. People are made disposable in a world where money rules and the value of money has replaced human values that lead to sustainability, justice and human dignity.

What growth measures is the super-profits of the one per cent. What it fails to measure is destruction of life in nature and society. The poverty and exclusion of the 99 per cent from the economy of one per cent is linked to the growth paradigm. It’s said that the cake must grow bigger so that it can be shared among a larger number. That’s how poverty will be removed in the fundamentalist religion of growth.

But the illusions substituting real wealth and real people are actually making the ecological/material cake shrink. Further, the shrinking cake is being poisoned by processes that create ‘growth’. A shrinking poisoned cake becomes a cause for increasing poverty, inequality, disease. It’s not an answer to poverty, it’s the cause of both poverty and ecological destruction.

The processes that allow the one per cent to accumulate limitless wealth are also those through which they grab resources and livelihoods of people, creating poverty. The creation of extreme poverty and

accumulation of extreme wealth is a single interconnected process. England’s increase in wealth during colonialism was linked to the creation of poverty and famines in India. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the one per cent is linked to the planetary crisis, and the crisis of deepening hunger and poverty.

Economic growth hides the poverty it creates, both through destruction of nature, and nature’s ability to provide goods and services, as well as through destroying self-provisioning capacities of societies which Gandhi called “swadeshi”. The manipulation of the economy through GDP needs to be replaced by a development model for the well-being of all life and all people.

That’s why nations like Bhutan have adopted Gross National Happiness instead of Gross National Product to measure well-being. Economists like Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen have admitted that GDP doesn’t capture the human condition. Navdanya (the organisation with which Vandana Shiva is associated – editor) is working with Bhutan to make a transition to a 100 per cent organic Bhutan, as well as transition from GDP to Gross National Happiness as a measure of socio-economic well-being. Growing organic is growing happiness and well-being for the planet—for farmers as well as for everyone who eats.

Email: vandana.shiva@gmail.com

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Political Sociology of English Education in India

Dilip Chavan

Language has always been a subject of great consideration and concern for human beings. The scholars of language have been incessantly trying to interpret this phenomenon since times immemorial. There is no dearth of studies which are devoted to language in general. However, most of these studies are made in descriptive, technical and mechanical modes.

The study of language has to be made keeping in view the fact that language is essentially and predominantly a social phenomenon. Language is not merely a system of conveying information, it also fulfills some social functions. The development of sociolinguistics has shifted the emphasis from an abstract study of the rules of language to study of language in relation to social factors. Politically speaking, language and linguistic policies may be used as means of achieving the dominance of one class over the other. Language provides additional power to the socially advantageous class in the society. This paper attempts to study the language issue in India in the socio-political-cultural context.

We make our study in the light of the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Gramsci, the Italian Marxist thinker, has formulated a concept of hegemony to elucidate how the ideology of the ruling class comes to be accepted by the ruled. According to Gramsci, the ruling class does not achieve its domination on the subjects through force alone, but by making the subjects willingly submit themselves to their masters.

This is achieved through ideological hegemony, which is combination of coercion and consent. The tenets of this ideology which benefit only the ruling or oppressing class are accepted by the oppressors as well the oppressed. In other words, the oppressed internalise the ideology of the oppressor. The oppressed become the 'collaborators' of their own oppressors. Language is one of the ideological apparatuses used by the oppressors. It functions as the carrier of the ideology of the oppressor.

The Gramscian concept of hegemony and the importance of language as an ideological apparatus can be illustrated well by citing the example of Sanskrit language. In a country as large as India, it has always been necessary to have one language functioning as the lingua-franca or link language. In the classical times, Sanskrit performed this role. During that time, this language was the vehicle of the ideology of the ruling class (ruling varnas or castes). As Robert D. King puts it:

Suffice it to say here that the great unifier of India has always been 'Brahmanical ideology'; not only the familiar structures of Hinduism such as caste, cow worship, religious ceremonies, cremation and so on, but the intellectual authorities of the great classical texts, the Vedas, the Upanishadas, the Bhagavadgita. The instrument of penetration of Brahminised ideology into the Deccan and the

*south was the Sanskrit language and the sacred texts written in Sanskrit.*¹

As Sanskrit was considered the language of deities and celestial beings and their surrogates on Earth, access to it was restricted, by and large, to the upper varnas of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

English Education: Colonial Period

Like the educational policies, the linguistic policies also arise out of the contemporary needs of the ruling class. They are framed to suit to the interests of the elite. Many colonial documents reveal the fact that the British colonial rulers in India used "linguistics" to achieve "non-linguistic" goals. They used English (the education of English) to establish their hegemonic rule over India. 'Linguistic colonialism' was part of 'economic colonialism'. Macaulay's Minute on Education clearly states that the colonial power intended to create an educated and westernised class that would function as a mediating class between the ruler and the ruled. English education offered various opportunities of personal gains to only the upper classes / castes of society; and they came forward with a great zeal to enjoy the fruits of this language.

Post-Colonial Period

After independence, India should have redefined the goals and priorities in education in general and English education in particular.

However, it is a fact that English education in post-colonial India has only been a continuation of the colonial experience.

After independence, the domestic elite castes/classes tightened their hold on the levers of power at the national level. This group controls the higher echelons of politics, bureaucracy, the armed forces, corporate business and the professions. And so, it continued with the British education policy of having English as the most important medium of instruction in education. Education in general and English education in particular became an additional tool in the hands of this national elite to exercise its domination over the country.

The post-colonial education policy resulted in a dual education system in an already stratified Indian society. The rich upper castes had for their children private high cost English medium schools, and after studying in these schools, their children easily got the few cushy and lucrative jobs available in the country. As a section of the not-so-rich lower castes became more wealthy, they also began sending their children to these English medium schools, and they were even willing to pay huge amounts for this. The other side of the coin was that as a result of this class-caste based educational policies, the majority of the poor population has remained uneducated and, resultantly, deprived of English.

Since the 1970s, because of democratic politics and the Green Revolution, there has taken place the rise of a new regional elite class in India. This class has arisen from the dominant peasant castes in the respective states. They have not only acquired economic clout but

also political clout in their respective regions. They are now trying hard to create a space for themselves in the power structure at the national level.

Over the last thirty years, the old national elite has gradually incorporated the regional elites into itself. The relationship between the national elites and the regional elites is of patron-client type. Major share of the national income and natural resources are appropriated by the national elites and a very small portion of it is left for the regional elites. Though the regional elites express their resentment at this relationship, they are also benefited by this relationship as they function as the secondary allies of the national elites.

However, the regional elites have not given a boost to education in their respective regional languages. Instead of that, they have joined hands with the national elite in the latter's use of the English language as one of the means of asserting its hegemony over Indian society. And so, despite the rise of this regional elite, the pre-eminence of English has continued in India. The Indian elite classes, whether national or regional, understand the nexus between knowledge and power very well. They use English as a mean of exclusion and an instrument of cultural hegemony.

This is why, today, there is not a single city in India where the English medium schools have not sprouted like some kind of viral fever.

This language policy has produced a whole generation of mofussil youth which has little exposure to English. The teachers of English in the mofussil areas are not competent enough to teach English. And so, despite spending several years in learning English,

fluency and accuracy eludes these learners. This has an adverse effect on their morale. Many of them get frustrated and give up attempting to learn English. Every year, thousands of students fail in English in the S.S.C. and the H.S.C examination.

The British colonisers made English important by introducing it as a compulsory course in the competitive examinations. This policy continued even after independence. Majority of the students who have had their education through regional languages fail to attain proficiency in English. Resultantly, they cannot compete with the English-educated upper class city dwellers. Thus, English becomes a barrier to their social mobility.

One of the inevitable consequences of the language policy implemented in India is that for millions of the lower caste-class masses, learning English has remained an illusion. According to the 1991 Census, only 9 percent of the Indians—that translates into around 9 crore people—know English as the first, second or third language. This indicates that English has remained a prerogative of a few.

Towards an Equity-Oriented Language Education

1. A total restructuring of the education system is a prerequisite to an equity-oriented language education. The national expenditure on education must be raised to 10% of the GDP so as to achieve hundred percent literacy.
2. The pre-eminence of English should be reduced. The issue is obviously not about abolishing English. The predominance of English has created a big divide

between the metropolitan-rich-elite and the mofussil-poor-subaltern. The continuation of the dual education system in which one stream of schooling uses English as a medium of instruction needs to be reoriented.

3. Nowadays, all the Indian languages and dialects are undergoing a deepening crisis under the impact of imperialistic globalisation. Language is being used very strategically by the imperialist forces to realise their goals. English has emerged as a potential threat to the Indian languages. Therefore, urgent steps need to be taken to strengthen regional languages.

i. Robert D. King, *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* (1997; New Delhi: Oxford U P, 1998) 11.

Email: dilipchavan@gmail.com

How Aadhaar KYC is Destroying Government Databases

Anupam Saraph

Post-infection by the Aadhaar bug, every organisation in India has been suffering inability to recognise those that they have recognised for decades. Suddenly, they need an Aadhaar and an annual know-your-customer (KYC) to allow the relationship of decades to be continued till yet another KYC next year.

The ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) is the latest to have been hit by the KYC bug. Calling for conducting KYC of all directors of all companies annually through a new e-form, DIR-3 KYC, the MCA has made Aadhaar mandatory, apart from filing of their unique personal mobile number and personal email ID duly verified by one time password (OTP) using their own DSC (Class 2) and duly certified by a practising professional (Chartered Accountant (CA) / Company Secretary (CS) / Certified Management Accountant (CMA)).

Directors on various companies for more than a decade expressed shock as some of them have changed mobiles and email IDs several times in the past 20 years and many have stayed away from Aadhaar for different reasons. Several directors still prefer landlines and postal services. Some with an Aadhaar have discovered, to their utter shock, that their biometrics do not work like the science fiction projected by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

Section 154 of the Companies Act provides for the allotment of a directors identification number

(DIN). It states, “The Central Government shall, within one month from the receipt of the application under section 153, allot a Director Identification Number to an applicant in such manner as may be prescribed.”

There is no provision in the Companies Act to require a director, who has been allotted a DIN, to undergo KYC process. There are no provisions in the Act to require a DIN to be validated again once it has been allotted or for it to be cancelled. It is obvious that the government is infected with the Aadhaar bug that is causing every ministry to create illegal and invalid procedures and requirements to include Aadhaar numbers into its databases.

There is no rule or notification on the MCA website that provides any legal base to the DIR-3 KYC process. Letters issued to directors registered with the MCA do not give reference to any legal provision, thus making them ab initio ipso jure invalid.

RS Sharma, the chairman of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), in a Twitter session on #AskTRAI refused to answer a question on the regulator’s policy about recycling mobile numbers.

Mobile numbers get recirculated to different subscribers when subscribers do not renew their subscription or lose their numbers for other reasons. They are neither bound to a unique subscriber for life nor are they bound to a single user over the period of subscription. The same is true for email IDs. If the

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MCA requires a unique channel for each director isn't it more appropriate for them to just allot a mobile number and email ID for the life of the director?

If demanding a unique mobile number and unique email ID are not absurd as demanding a unique address, the KYC using Aadhaar is even more bizarre.

UIDAI, under Right to Information (RTI) Act, has stated that the biometric and demographic information associated with any Aadhaar number is not certified, verified or audited by anyone. They also state that they have no idea what primary documents were used as proof of identity or proof of address to obtain Aadhaar and that they have no idea how many unique biometrics, names, addresses, email ids or mobile numbers exist in their database. They also state that they cannot retrieve unique records with any biometrics. (For more on this, please see the article "Unique ID is not Unique, does not certify anything, says UIDAI", by Anupam Saraph, available on the internet.)

The UIDAI has also indicated, under RTI, that it does not identify anyone nor is it responsible for any use or consequences of the use of Aadhaar. Identification requires the identifier to not only certify and take responsibility for identification but also be co-present with the person identified to be able to establish identity.

In fact, the UIDAI does not even know how many unique biometrics exist in the entire database. Astonishingly UIDAI's affidavit to the Supreme Court in the WP 494 of 2012 and associated matters indicates that at least 60 crore Aadhaar numbers out of 120 crore have never been used to authenticate any transaction ever.

Clearly, there is no merit in any claim that the biometrics can be the basis for unique entries in the Aadhaar database and that the Aadhaar database is free from ghosts and duplicates. From the looks of it, at least 60 crore numbers in the database are ghosts and duplicates.

It cannot serve any KYC or transparency to replace certified IDs that have been the basis of governance for last seven decades with uncertified, unverified and unaudited Aadhaar issued by an agency, the UIDAI, that takes no responsibility for any Aadhaar number turning out to be a ghost or for any transaction undertaken with the Aadhaar numbers.

Unfortunately, most bureaucrats have not realised that merely including Aadhaar in the database makes indistinguishable such records from those that were painstakingly created through legal processes over decades. What neither the UIDAI nor the government seem to have recognised is that the issue, use and mandating Aadhaar under these circumstances could be considered as an offence under various sections of Chapter XI of the Indian Penal Code.

The use of Aadhaar, therefore, by any stretch of imagination, cannot serve any legitimate and legal purpose or any national interest.

In India, where every government document had to be attested by a gazetted officer, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. Suddenly, biometric and demographic data submitted by private operators to UIDAI is being used to replace legally valid or legitimate identification documents issued and certified by government officers. Once Aadhaar replaces existing documents, it causes unprecedented harm to the country

as there is no way to distinguish real individuals, on-boarded through careful legal process by government officials, from those added through the Aadhaar database.

There is prima facie enough case, and national security at stake, for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate into the use and propagation of the Aadhaar.

Citizens across the country have written to various government ministries and agencies highlighting these issues. Senior bureaucrats, who realise this for the first time, are utterly shocked. They have never realised how the Trojan Horse of Aadhaar got into their department or ministry. An uncertified biometric or demographic has no legal value and causes incalculable harm to the country.

While some ministries are making an effort to protect their databases from Aadhaar, they have yet to ensure that the Aadhaar bug is destroyed before it destroys the country.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has already enabled the process to allow filing of income-tax returns (ITRs) without Aadhaar. The MCA has announced that it will not insist on Aadhaar although it has not yet clarified the legal basis of the DIR-3 KYC. Directors from at least four different states have been preparing to challenge the vires of the DIR-3 KYC and the Aadhaar mandate in their respective High Courts.

This, however, has become a matter of national security that is far more serious and important than a misinformed and misplaced case for governmental expediency or the right of the government to create procedures for its functioning.

Email: anupamsaraph@gmail.com

A Good Few Days for the British Left

Andy Stowe

It was a test of strength between the left and neo-fascist right in Scotland as well as several English town and cities. It was a big victory for the left.

In Scotland it wasn't even a contest. The right didn't mobilise to welcome Trump and the left was out in force. Even the Scottish Conservative Party leader Ruth Davidson sent messages indicating her support to the participants in the Pride march and the anti-Trump protests, reminding them to drink water and use sunscreen.

July 13, 2018 in London involved what was the largest demonstration in the city since 2 million marched against the war in Iraq in 2003. The police estimate that 250,000 people took to the streets to show Trump he's despised and unwanted. Even the Evening Standard, edited by former Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, had a front page which conveniently doubled as an anti-Trump placard.

Few of the marchers would have been natural Tory supporters. While thousands of organisations were represented, the most striking feature of the day was the huge number of homemade signs, placards and banners—always an indication that what you are seeing is a real movement of people who are organising themselves.

Trafalgar Square was the first of Jeremy Corbyn's two major speaking engagements of the weekend. Addressing the demonstration, his speech marked a major departure from previous Labour leaders' practice of grovelling to American

presidents. He is an internationalist and anti-racist and he is not prepared to compromise on these things.

The next day was another major working-class demonstration, the Durham Miners' Gala. It was attended by more than 200,000 people and Corbyn spoke at that too.

So, in two days the labour movement got more than 450,000 people onto the streets in a celebration of trade union solidarity and to reject a racist imperialist president.

While this was happening, Tory Prime Minister Theresa May was watching her days-old Brexit deal disintegrate in front of her eyes. The ever-helpful Trump had told the world that he thinks she's useless and would prefer to have Boris Johnson as prime minister.

Just over a month before, a significant neo-fascist movement managed its largest mobilisation in some years when about 10,000 had turned up demanding the release of its figurehead Tommy Robinson.

On that occasion, the anti-fascists were heavily outnumbered. They were on the streets again on July 14 and this time the numbers were more evenly matched. About 5,000 Robinson and Trump fans turned up. The smaller event shared some features with the earlier one. UK Independence Party (UKIP) was there; it was extremely Islamophobic and there was more evidence that they are co-ordinating internationally.

Their major coup was Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon calling for Robinson's release on a radio show hosted by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage. On air, Bannon

more or less said he wants to see racial violence in Britain: "You're going to have to fight to take your country back, every day."

This will have been understood by his neo-fascist followers as an encouragement to physically attack immigrants and Muslims.

The anti-Trump protests were another reminder that British politics is polarised between a pro-Brexit, nationalist, often racist alliance that includes Farage, hard-right Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg and Tommy Robinson's supporters on one hand and, on the other, a leftward moving Labour Party pulling together the internationalists and anti-racists, the overwhelming majority of whom are anti-Brexit.

Its challenge now is to capitalise on the success of these mobilisations to get the Tories out.

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Modi's Kashmir Policy is Playing Right into the Hands of Pakistan's ISI

Prem Shankar Jha

Since the fateful evening when I heard that Shujaat Bukhari, my friend and colleague for the past 26 years, had been assassinated in Srinagar while going home to break his Ramzan fast with his family, I have often wondered who his assassins could have been, and what could have been going through their minds as they sat on their motorcycle waiting for him to emerge from his office. Were they simply semi-educated youth with no future in civilian life, brainwashed into believing that Shujaat was a traitor to Kashmir who was taking money from the state and Central governments to undermine their fight for freedom? Or were they mercenaries who were lining their pockets and soothing their consciences by pretending that they were doing Allah's work?

Till today, more than a month after his death, there is no answer. Speculation is still rife. The majority view is that Shujaat's murder was the outcome of the radicalisation and Islamisation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unleashed upon the Valley. Writing in Firstpost, Khalid Shah concluded that "the situation in the state has slipped from contemporary timelines and is back to the 1990s now". In the Washington Post, Barkha Dutt echoed this: "Kashmir is sliding into a black hole of possibly no return."

But Shujaat's assassination was not a by-product of the tidal wave of anger created by the Modi government's relentless use of brute

force to crush Kashmiri separatism. It was the most cold-blooded and meticulously planned assassination in recent years, on par with those of Mirwaiz Maulvi Farouq in 1990 and Abdul Ghani Lone in 2002.

And it was, beyond a shadow of doubt, instigated by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Four video cameras caught the assassins riding on their motorbike before and after the assassination. But not one caught them loitering for 45 minutes as they waited for Shujaat to emerge from his office because they had chosen the only ten-metre stretch of road that was not covered by any of the CCTV cameras scanning this high security area. Only inside information, possibly from within the police, could have made them choose that precise spot.

Weapon of choice

For the ISI, assassination has been a weapon of choice not only in Kashmir, but much more so in Pakistan itself. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, nearly 10,000 people have gone missing in the country since 2001, with nearly 3,000 still unaccounted for. In 2016 alone, there were 728 disappearances.

Journalists have figured prominently on the ISI's hit list, two of the most celebrated being Hamid Mir, the host of Geo TV's Capital Talk, and Shahzad Saleem, the former bureau chief of Asia Times (online). Mir miraculously

survived six bullets in his stomach because, knowing that an ISI car was following him, he drove straight to a hospital to seek shelter there, and was shot at its doorstep. Saleem was tortured and killed ten days after the publication of his book detailing links between the ISI, various rogue officers of the Pakistan army and terrorist organisations like the Tehrik-e-Taliban-i-Pakistan (TTP). In the same year, 12 other Pakistani journalists met a similar fate, though perhaps not all at the hands of the ISI.

In Kashmir, the ISI has a 28-year record of killing any leader who has shown willingness to negotiate peace with the Indian government. The list of its victims begins with Mirwaiz Maulvi Farouq, the father of Mirwaiz Umar Farouq, on May 21, 1990, and the elimination of all the six other Kashmiri leaders with whom George Fernandes had held secret talks in the first few months of that year. It stretches through Qazi Nissar, the leader of the Muslim United Front, in 1993; professor Abdul Ghani Butt's brother in 1996; Abdul Majid Dar, the area commander of the Lashkar-e-Tayabba, who declared a unilateral ceasefire, in July 2000; Abdul Ghani Lone, who had decided to take the Hurriyat into the 2002 elections, on May 21, 2002; Mir Mushtaq, the uncle of Mirwaiz Umar Farouq, in 2006; and the failed assassination of Fazal Qureshi, the senior most member of the Hurriyat (M)'s executive council in 2007 only

weeks after he formally announced its acceptance of the Manmohan Singh-Pervez Musharraf four-point formula for settling the Kashmir dispute.

ISI's ambition to wrest Kashmir from India had dwindled during the years of peace and reconciliation that had followed Atal Bihari Vajpayee's historic 2004 meeting with Musharraf. They dwindled further when, in 2012, the Pakistan army command officially revised its threat perception and stated that this lay mainly to its west and not its east.

Its ambitions were revived when the surreptitious hanging of Afzal Guru by Delhi in February 2013 caused a spike in the number of young men joining the armed militancy, just as the hanging of Maqbool Butt had done in 1986.

But it was Modi's policies, of humiliating the Hurriyat, spurning Nawaz Sharif's overtures for peace, destroying the Peoples Democratic Party by entering into an alliance with it that it had no intention of respecting, ignoring and trivialising the remaining mainstream parties in the Valley, putting the moderate nationalist leaders in Kashmir—from Mirwaiz Umar Farouq, Yasin Malik and Ali Shah Geelani, to Shabbir Shah, Naeem Khan and Shahid-ul-slam—in jail or under house arrest, and adopting a "ten for one" policy of retaliation for firing across the Line of Control that claimed the better part of 832 civilian lives in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, that sent the ISI and the Pakistan army onto a full offensive in Kashmir.

The ISI concluded that its chance had finally come when the Modi government began to gun down Kashmiri youth, branding them all as "terrorists", often without giving

them a chance to surrender and then boasting about its 'kills' to the national press. This had the opposite of the desired effect because from a mere 16 in 2013, the number of young men who joined the militancy in south Kashmir rose to 126 in 2017. More disturbing still, data collected by the Kashmir police showed that most of new recruits are coming from the villages where 'encounters' had taken place, and that the maximum recruitment was taking place after the funerals of slain 'terrorists'.

From the ISI's point of view, therefore, the Modi government was a gift from heaven. The very last thing it wanted was anything to impede India's accelerating descent into self-destruction in Kashmir. Asad Durrani, a former director general of the ISI and convinced "peacenik", summed this up at a recent book launch in Delhi. When asked what the ISI would do next, he said, "Nothing. You have done everything it wanted."

The one obstacle that remained was the ordinary Kashmiris' aversion to Pakistan and the overwhelming desire for peace. A Chatham House survey carried out as recently as in 2009 had shown that even in the four most estranged districts of Kashmir valley, only 2.5 to 7.5% of the respondents had said that they wished to be a part of Pakistan. This was changing thanks to Modi, but the last thing the ISI wanted was the sudden emergence of a civil society movement in Kashmir that would give a voice and direction to this inchoate desire for peace.

That emergence took place in 2015 and Shujaat was one of its principal architects. That year, he and Ershad Masood, an academic and journalist based in Rawalpindi

and Islamabad, set up a Kashmir Initiative Group, whose stated purpose was to take the now stalled dialogue on peace to civil society. The group started working in a small way by organising a tour of PoK by ten journalists from Jammu and Kashmir, and held meetings in the two parts of Kashmir. It gained strength when it obtained the financial backing of Conciliation Resources, an international NGO with impeccable credentials.

The group's work gained importance, however, when even after Burhan Wani's death had shut down the Valley for four months, Delhi refused to change its one track policy of repression by even a jot. But it became a threat to the ISI's plans only after it organised a large conference in Dubai on July 31 last year. The two-day meeting was attended by 28 people belonging to political parties in both parts of Kashmir and national parties in India and Pakistan, including the BJP, and a number of eminent observers who included two former director generals of the ISI—Durrani and Ehsan-ul Haq—and Air Vice-Marshal Kapil Kak.

The Dubai meeting turned out to be a roaring success. Despite disagreements on many issues, the conference arrived at a strong consensus on several key points. These were: the need for both the Indian and Pakistani governments to make human security their paramount concern and therefore declare an immediate and complete ceasefire on the LoC and take strong measures against extremism in all its forms in both parts of Kashmir; to encourage their respective governments to re-engage in a political dialogue in consultation with Kashmiri groups; and for these groups to keep talking to

each other despite their differences, to explore creative proposals that did not involve an immediate shift in their stated positions. Lastly, the conference was unanimous that civil society in Kashmir, as well as in India and Pakistan, had an important role to play in creating an atmosphere conducive to dialogue.

Had this conference taken place during former prime minister Manmohan Singh's rule, both governments might have welcomed the initiative. But in August 2017, the quality and eminence of the participants, and the sheer breadth of consensus, came as a rude shock to the Pakistan army and the ISI because it threatened not only to derail its plans in Kashmir but perhaps more importantly its use of the threat from Modi's India to restore a creeping military rule within Pakistan.

The attempt to do so began with the leaking of an open quarrel at a national security meeting in October 2016 between Nawaz Sharif and key members of his cabinet and the army chief, over the latter's refusal to reign in the Lashkar-e-Tayabba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and the Haqqani network, to Pakistan's premier newspaper Dawn. Since then, with the help of a quiescent judiciary, the army has succeeded in ousting, charging and now jailing Nawaz Sharif and members of his family, placing an exit ban on the journalist who wrote the story for Dawn, and now placing a similar ban on General Asad Durrani for having taken part in the book launch in Delhi. Modi continuing his policy of killing Kashmiri militants has therefore become a necessity for the Pakistan army's continued seizure of power in the country.

This is what turned the Kashmir

Initiative Group into a target for the ISI. Shujaat Bukhari had always been an outspoken champion of peace. His entire career in journalism had been built on the conviction that negotiations based upon misconceptions were doomed to fail. Only truth and honesty in reporting what was happening on the ground could create the essential bedrock upon which the edifice of peace could be constructed. When the Modi government abruptly closed all doors to dialogue with the Hurriyat in Kashmir, by force of circumstance, he and his newspaper became the ISI's targets.

The ISI might even then have done nothing if it had believed that Modi would return to power in 2019. But the growing unity of the opposition, the succession of bye-election defeats suffered by the BJP, and the coming together of the Congress and JD(S) in Karnataka have made its return less and less likely. This may have been the final straw that made it take the decision to crush any possible revival of dialogue in Kashmir, by killing its current principal icon of peace.

Shujaat is not, however, the only 'peacenik' that the ISI might attack in coming months. In the months after the Dubai conference, two Kashmiris who head NGOs that had not been invited to the conference—Nazir Gilani and Athar Masood Wani, a former adviser to the prime minister of PoK—condemned the conference as a "sell out" for not insisting on the right to self-determination on the basis of UN resolutions. Pakistan based Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin also described the participants in the conference as being on the payroll of India. In Pakistan, the attack upon it became so shrill that one paper

headlined it as "Kashmir Blood was Sold in the Air Conditioned Halls of Dubai".

In Srinagar, this theme was picked up by the Kashmir Reader and Hurriyat (Gilani) general secretary Ghulam Nabi Sumji, but later rejected by Gilani. Shujaat began to receive warnings that he and two other participants in the conference were on the hit list of the ISI.

The campaign ended abruptly in October after Ershad Masood and a colleague met Salahuddin in Islamabad. Salahuddin denied playing any part in the campaign against the conference, said that he had initially been misinformed about its proceedings, and assured Masood that he was not so mean as to order the killing of a journalist.

However it revived again, abruptly in April, two months before his assassination, with virulent attacks on the participants of the conference and specific threats to the lives of Shujaat and two or three others who attended it. Shujaat took these threats very seriously, went to the Kashmir police and gave them the names of the principal attackers. For the record, they were Nazir Gilani in London, Sheikh Tajamul Islam, Abdullah Geelani, Raees Mir, Aslam Mir and Athar Masood Wani in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad, and Iftikhar Rajput in Brussels.

It is difficult not to link this revival of threats to the declining fortune of the BJP in India. Suffice it so say that Shujaat took the attack on the internet very seriously and lived in fear of his life. Two days before he was killed he had confided to a friend in his office, "I have young children, I don't want to die".

Hours after Shujaat died, one of his young reporters told me in

a voice choked with grief, “Sir, we have lost everything, everything!”

But he and his colleagues had not lost everything. On the contrary, they had kept the one thing Shujaat had given them—raw courage. So, after accompanying Shujaat’s body to the hospital and giving their accounts to the police, his staff came back to the office not only to bring out the paper, but fill the front page with his picture and words that will be graven on every Kashmiri heart: “We won’t

be cowed down by the cowards who snatched you from us. We will uphold your principle of telling the truth howsoever unpleasant it may be . . .” And in a magnificent act of defiance, they carried links on the editorial page to every recent article Shujaat had written.

The message they sent was unambiguous: terrorists, and their puppet masters, could kill a man but not the ideals he embodied. The next day, between 60,000 and 200,000

mourners who attended his funeral at Kreeri, his home village 23 km from Srinagar, drove the same message home to their fellow Kashmiris, to Pakistan, and the world. Burhan Wani and Sabzar Bhatt were not the only people who could make lakhs of Kashmiris grieve for them. Those who fought and gave their lives for peace, for a future in which ordinary Kashmiris could plan and dream without fear, could do so too.

Solution to Assam's Foreigners Problem

Sandeep Pandey

Through the National Register of Citizens update and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party government is trying to communally polarise a state which doesn't have a history of any major communal incidents except for the 1983 Nellie massacre. The six years agitation launched by All Assam Students' Union demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants which culminated in the 1985 Assam Accord with Rajiv Gandhi was against all Bangladeshis, not just Muslims. The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh has been running a campaign even in other parts of country for the deportation of Bangladeshis, targeting only the Muslims, for long and the BJP came to power in Assam on this promise. But what the people of Assam were not prepared for was the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill which provides for Hindus from Bangladesh to obtain Indian citizenship. The popular Assamese grassroots leader Akhil Gogoi held a big protest against the Bill on the eve of Amit Shah's recent visit to

Assam. If BJP loses the next election in Assam, this will be an important factor. The Assamese resent the historical attempts at cultural and linguistic dominance by Bengalis, mainly Hindus.

3,29,91,384 people had applied for citizenship of which 2,89,83,677 made it to the second draft list published on 31 August 2018. The 40.07 lakh left out include 2.48 lakh put in the category of “doubtful voters”. The excluded list contains both Muslims and Hindus.

To be eligible for inclusion in NRC, it was required to produce either a proof from 1951 NRC or one of the twelve forms of identity documents dated before 24 March 1971, a date decided by the Assam Accord. Those left out are presumably mostly poor as it is quite unlikely that people would have been able to preserve documents for 48 years in a state prone to frequent floods.

It is well known that to get a residence proof certificate from the local administration, especially for the poor who have migrated in

search of employment even within states, is a nightmare. It usually requires a bribe or a clever advocate or a middleman to get the job done.

Assam is the only Indian state which is carrying out an updation of NRC after 1951. Otherwise, normally it is a part of Indian culture that foreigners have been accepted. Throughout history, whether as aggressors or persecuted, people have come from outside and have assimilated in the local culture.

The Hindus from East Pakistan who came to Assam at the time of partition and were promised rehabilitation found it difficult. The Angarkata satyagrah is just one of their documented struggles. Later, Bangladeshis came in search of employment and they still continue to cross the border, some only for a temporary period with no desire to settle in India.

Bengali speaking Muslims with Assamese identity cards can be found in other parts of India, mostly picking up garbage. They are fulfilling a need of Indian cities because the traditional sanitation

workers have either moved up the ladder to obtain government jobs or are pursuing other non-demeaning vocations.

Bangladeshis coming to India seeking employment are no different from Indians going to Dubai or United States, sometimes illegally, to eke out a living. Indians have been to all over the world since ages and most of them have not only settled in their respective chosen countries of employment, some of the adventurous ones are even holding or have held high positions in governments. Imagine the tragedy if all these countries decided to deport the illegal immigrants from India.

The more sad case is that of the Rohingyas. They are a persecuted lot and unlike Bangladeshis, their decision to leave their motherland, Myanmar, was not voluntary.

To treat Bangladeshis or Rohingyas as security threat is making a mockery of their abject poverty. There are more well to do citizens of India who are engaged in activities like committing financial fraud or provoking violent incidents, detrimental to the interests of our country. So, being a citizen or not has no relation to how much of a security threat one can pose to a nation. We are also witness to how little the rich like Mehul Choksi care about Indian citizenship, in order to escape the law of the land. Vijay Mallaya and Subrata Roy, before they ran foul with the government, used to project themselves as great patriots.

However, Assamese have a genuine fear of being demographically overtaken by outsiders. There is a provision for Bangladeshis who came to India before 1971 to register themselves with Foreigners Regional

Registration Officer with no voting rights for ten years from the date of registration.

If the people of Assam feel that they have more than their share of foreigners, they could be distributed among other states of India. Mamta Banerjee has already made an offer to accept the Bengalis. In any case, a number of them are working outside Assam in other states.

Instead of putting people who'll not find a place in the NRC after objections and claims have been entertained in the "doubtful voter" or "declared foreigners" category, they could be issued work permit visas without voting rights, as is

the vogue in United States, so that they don't live under the fear of deportation or have to spend time in detention camps, which are actually jails, and can lead a respectable life with their families like other India citizens, with equal access to benefits of education, health care, public distribution system and housing. After all, whether a citizen or not, everybody has a human right. Similar to the present rule for people who came to India before 1971, such people should be reconsidered for voting rights after a period of ten years. This is the only humane way of solving Assam's problem.

Email: ashaashram@yahoo.com

The Communal Movement in Venezuela: Part I

*El Maizal commune is located in the middle of the Venezuelan plains, between the Lara and Portuguesa states. With a history of struggle and construction of popular power, it is a flagship of the communal movement in Venezuela. The commune was proposed by Chávez as a fundamental unit of popular power for the construction of socialism. Bringing together communal councils and other organisations, the idea of the commune is to allow the community to wield power directly through assemblies, gradually taking control of both the means of production and the various instances of political power. Chávez presented many of these ideas in his landmark broadcast *Aló Presidente Teórico #1*. Published below is an interview with Angel Prado, spokesperson for the El Maizal commune. This interview was conducted in May 2017, before the May 20 presidential elections in which Nicolás Maduro won re-*

election. We are publishing it for it gives important information about the socialist construction being attempted in Venezuela.

With idea of moving forward with the commune, there have been discussions about the "communal city." Can you explain what this is all about?

With the political experience and strength we have in this territory and with the work we have been doing, El Maizal has found itself in a collective leadership role for all this area of Simón Planas, and perhaps also in the rest of Lara state. We have gotten a lot of solidarity and many friends among social and popular movements in Lara and throughout Venezuela. So with all this experience, and knowing that this process cannot be held back—it is growing day by day with popular initiatives, proposals and participation—we believe that

it is time to stop thinking just about El Maizal and move towards a bigger organisation, at a higher level, in order to build our dream of socialism, as President Chávez used to say.

Far from being a utopia, I think it is something achievable. Here in El Maizal there is a commune, which is permanently under construction, but which has been moving forward, and for us this progress makes sense. That is why we have dedicated our lives to this. We have the political clout to go to other territories and call on people to organise in a communal city, in a large organisation that will contribute to developing the plans and projects addressing the needs of the people, but especially with the people themselves building and defending such projects. More than a discourse, we need to offer tangible results so that people can see for themselves that this makes sense.

The communal city project is not going to be easy. The principal enemy is the right-wing, because the communal city at some point will imply ‘communalising’ the territory. That project involves a broader scope and more power, in particular taking charge of the means of production: factories, companies, etc. So we will be struggling for power in the face of forces that already exist. The capitalist class, for economic reasons, wants to put the brakes on Chavismo. Sadly, the reformist sectors in our camp are also looking to rein in on the tendencies and political currents that threaten the privileges that some politicians in our government, or people close to them, have become accustomed to.

There is also a struggle inside Chavismo . . .

I think there is some political exhaustion, some politicians have got worn out and have no initiative anymore. There are many politicians who are probably over the hill, perhaps they believe that Chavismo is going to die with the death of Chávez, or that president Maduro is going to be overthrown. Many have dedicated themselves in these past years to accruing riches and privileges while keeping popular participation at an arm’s length. But at least here in Simón Planas they have another thing coming, because here there is a political force that will not be stopped and which does not depend on one person. In my case, I simply take on the role of a spokesperson, I have to always act coherently accordingly to our people’s interests and am accountable to the people here for that. What’s more, while we are here talking, there are people out there working, holding assemblies, having meetings, organising activities, participating in voluntary work projects, etc.

There is a very interesting dynamic which keeps the spirit of the commune alive. The communal city will bring together all the activity that has taken place in the area in a broader sense, involving several territories in this area, where the people relate in one way or another to the political and communal movement in Simón Planas.

What is the current status of the Simón Planas mayorship issue?

When we discuss this issue, it is important to recall the context in which it happened. In 2017, we were facing a very tough crisis: an economic, political, and (I would also say) moral crisis, a crisis of values. There was, and still is, an

international aggression against Venezuela, as if punishing us for having gone through this very interesting revolutionary process together with Chávez. But, despite being a very tough year, 2017 was also a year of great achievements and advances from the communal perspective, both in political and electoral as well as productive terms.

When President Nicolas Maduro proposed the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), we, as the organised people here in Simón Planas, took to the trenches, participated in that election, and won with over 80% of the vote. I had been charged with being the territorial candidate to the ANC. Then came the regional and municipal elections, in October and December, respectively. In the municipal elections, our community proposed that we participate in that process, and the communal movement of Simón Planas again assigned me the responsibility of being the candidate for mayor.

Then a lot of things happened. Unfortunately, both right-wing political forces and forces within our government harassed us. These are regrettable things, that come from people who hold a great deal of power. We were denied the chance to run on the ticket of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, founded by Chavez and the governing party in Venezuela) and that of other parties of the patriotic coalition, but we managed to do get the ticket from the Patria Para Todos party (another socialist party of Venezuela). What followed was a great victory for the communards. We really routed the PSUV, handing them their first defeat in this municipality, which is one of the more Chavista and “PSUVista” municipalities of all

Venezuela.

What happened after the election?

Despite winning in the midst of threats, blackmail and pressure, our victory was not recognised (perhaps that was to be expected). Our votes were assigned to the PSU candidate. We went through a whole legal process with the electoral authorities—we filed an appeal before the Supreme Court—but so far there has been no response. Our position is that, if the communards' victory in Simón Planas is not going to be recognised, at least the results should be voided and new elections held. Everything we have done is legal, so we hope for a resolution to this case.

Unfortunately, there have been no pronouncements. Instead, the issue has been ignored. Nevertheless, we know that having the mayor's office is not indispensable for our project. We will not stop producing, we will not stop organising, we will not cease to vote for the Revolution nor to support president Maduro. We have always made this clear. We have never wavered on our support for Nicolás Maduro, because we believe that with Maduro in the presidency we can continue to move forward and not towards confrontation. Because of a municipality, or the actions of a party, or because at one point the government did not pay heed to us, we are not going to lose sight of the strategic enemy. We remain Chavistas.

What role, in your opinion, can the commune play in the current Venezuelan context?

From my point of view, if the government looked more closely at the communal issue, it would realise that the commune holds the solution

to the crisis we are living through and could ideologically deepen the Chavista project (the task of building socialism that Chávez set for us).

The commune, with its dynamic of production and participation, can also help free us from our dependence on private capital and on government patronage. So long as the communal "cells" continue to be built across the country and we also work to develop people's political conscience, a new culture and new relations between communities that prioritise the common good, we will continue to make strides towards the socialist model of society that comandante Chávez proposed.

Unfortunately, there are big contradictions inside the state, between the state and the popular social movements, and between the state and the commune. Because the government is very powerful economically, it has the capacity to make big decisions, and sometimes with a single blow, it can put an end to interesting experiences. In El Maizal we have had the determination, the strength and the ability to withstand the blows dealt to our organisation, to our experiment. There have been acts of sabotage, but we have resisted.

Beyond resisting, we also need to go on the offensive against the enemy before us, whether it is the capitalists, the oligarchy, or reformism. The reformists aim to protect the new bureaucratic capitalist class that is now seeking to consolidate power over the state machinery after sidelining a class which for a long time accumulated riches, and which, despite its revolutionary discourse, pays no heed to the people's cries. We are not willing to live under those conditions, we are not willing to let

Chavismo fall, nor to let reformism do in Venezuela what perhaps took place in Brazil or Argentina, where there have been significant setbacks.

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Letter to Editor

Sham Celebration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi by BJP Government

Chandrabhaal Tripathi

The Government of India is reported to have constituted a high level committee to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. This report is amusing as several Central Ministers, MPs, MLAs and important leaders belonging to the ruling dispensation have never tried to hide their disdain for the Mahatma and some of them have been openly spitting anti-Muslim venom, diametrically opposed to the life-long goal of Bapu towards Hindu-Muslim unity. In the *Rashtriya Sahara* (Urdu) of August 27, 2018, Dr. Tahir Mahmood, former Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities and former Member of the Law Commission, wrote, inter alia, that recently a lady Hindutva worker leader said at some place in Meerut at the inauguration of a Godse temple: "Param Pujya Nathuram Godseji was born before me. Had I been born before I would have got the glory of shooting Gandhi." Three years ago, we read a story about another Godse temple coming up somewhere in UP. Possibly there may be some other BJP ruled States, especially the Hindi speaking States, where such blasphemy is being openly committed with the connivance of the political ruling class and some bureaucrats. Is it not deceit that the same forces which are celebrating Godse have planned programmes for celebration of Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary nationally and

internationally?

The news of the official celebration of the 150th birth anniversary of Bapu raises some other issues too. This is the 150th birth anniversary of Kasturba also. Gandhian institutions have launched a two-year programme of celebration of Ba-Bapu Jayanti since 2 October 2017. But the Hindutva rulers and bureaucrats seem to have forgotten that there was a woman known as Kasturba behind Gandhi.

I am afraid that besides the political aspect of the situation the programme provides a golden opportunity for bureaucrats of the Ministries of Culture and Tourism and some of their attached Departments and PSUs to mint money. Neither the political masters nor the bureaucrats have any love for Gandhi. The hundreds of crores of rupees allocated for these official functions could be better spent on strengthening the constructive programmes of Bapu including communal harmony.

It is ridiculous to turn a part of the Gandhi celebrations into Gandhi Kathaa sessions by some people of good as well as doubtful repute led by Sri Sri Ravishankar of the Delhi Yamuna bank cultural jamboree fame, for which he was fined a not too hefty amount by the National Green Tribunal for severely damaging the fragile banks of the river Yamuna in Delhi. The sudden munificence of the Central

Government will help the 'Art of Living' guru in paying up the fine if he has not done so yet. Please don't turn Gandhi into a Hindutva figure. If you have to follow his teachings hold sarvadharm prayers in schools and colleges throughout the year and on special public functions. Gandhiji was particular about sarvadharm prayers before his public discourses every evening and these prayers are compiled in the *Ashram Bhajanavali* brought out by Navajivan in cheap editions and contain Bapu's favourite hymn Sermon on the Mount and excerpts from the Gita, the Quran, the Dhammapada, the Guru Granth Sahib, the Jain scriptures and the Zend-Avesta. Will the political ruling class do this or the forthcoming Gandhi celebrations will remain only another pre-General Election 2019 gimmick at the cost of the public exchequer? I have no idea if the Celebration Committee comprises only political bosses and bureaucrats and a few representatives of those cultural Gandhian institutions captured by the RSS controlled BJP Government or also some eminent independent academicians and representatives of real Gandhians. The 'nakli' Gandhians in the Congress throttled Gandhi and their counterparts in the BJP seem to be determined to bury Gandhi fathoms deep.

Email: tripathicb@gmail.com



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For All That We May Become: On the Section 377 Verdict

Gautam Bhan

For all the lines of the 2009 Delhi High Court verdict (colloquially called the *Naz* judgment), the one that stayed with me the longest was perhaps an aside to the main point about reading down Section 377. The High Court had said: "While recognising the unique worth of each person, the Constitution does not presuppose that the holder of rights is an isolated, lonely and abstract figure possessing a disembodied and socially disconnected self. It acknowledges that people live in their bodies, their communities, their cultures, their places and their times."

Reaffirmed, yet changed

As a gay man, what I heard them say that muggy day in July was that I was not just my sexual orientation. That my worth and my rights were not meant to be my responsibility alone. That I could expect, demand, get respect. That I could dream not just of a life free of violence but one of personhood, of joy. That our lives as queer people could hold rights and dignity without needing either extraordinary courage or immense privilege. That I would not have to

hold my breath so often, whether in fear or regret. That the cost of freedom would not be loneliness.

On Thursday, standing in the Supreme Court as the Constitution Bench read down Section 377 once and for all, I felt reaffirmed yet also changed. I heard the judges once again speak of sexuality as dignity, as mutual respect, as equality. I heard the invocations of Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21. Yet, I am not the same person I was when I became part of a petition in the *Naz* case in 2005. The law, thankfully, doesn't have nearly the same importance in queer lives. Perhaps most importantly, these are not the same times. This time, what has remained with me are the words of the individual judgment of Justice D.Y. Chandrachud. In what feels like both diagnosis and warning, he says: "We must, as a society, ask searching questions to the forms and symbols of injustice. Unless we do that, we risk becoming the cause and not just the inheritors of an unjust society."

This is a different "we" from *Naz*. This is not a "we" of some of us who are LGBTQ and the others who either accept or reject us. This is not just about our rights as

they pertain to our sexualities and gender identities. This is a “we” of all of us as a society, a public, a democracy, and a people needing to face the inequalities that persist in our names today. I realise today that when I heard *Naz* all those years ago, I wanted others to embrace their constitutional morality to extend to queer people the dignity we had been denied. It had felt vital at the time. It was. Today, when dissent, freedoms and civil liberties face unfathomable pressure far beyond just that experienced by LGBTQ communities—a pressure that draws precisely from what the court called majoritarian sentiment and arbitrary state power—it cannot be just heteronormativity that we must fight. What is at stake is all that is endangering the constitutional edifices of equality, liberty, dignity and fraternity that the judges invoked.

Freedom’s echoes

Listed immediately after us in the Chief Justice’s court was the next hearing in *Romila Thapar*, the petition challenging the continuing house arrest of activists under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a law that defines the many ways in which we are willing to sacrifice our civil liberties. When the judges called for a transformative constitutionality, when they spoke of the need for all of us to do the work to make our Constitution a living organism, when they reminded us, in the words of Justice Chandrachud, that “the process through which a society matures and imbibes constitutional morality is gradual, perhaps interminably so,” what remained in my mind was that the freedom I had just had affirmed could have meaning only

if it found echo in the freedoms of others. We are not just islands, *Naz* had said, but bodies, cultures, communities, places, times. The opposite of loneliness is not freedom but fraternity. Dignity cannot be just what we possess but must be what we give to and share with others. On Thursday, what stayed with me was not just the respect we are owed, but the respect we owe as queer people to insist that the transformative power of constitutional values affirmed for us in page after page of the judgments be one that spreads far beyond us. If our freedoms are not inter-linked, they are not freedoms at all.

The Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, began his judgment by saying, “I am what I am.” There is no doubt that queer people in India have never had a chance to fully be ourselves, to believe and know what our own possibilities are. I have nothing but happiness that, 24 years after the first AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan petition against Section 377 in 1994, queer people will have won the right to breathe and to dream. Yet we have never been alone in not having the right to be who we are. If there is one measure of the injustice and inequalities that define us today as a society, it is how many of us live at some distance from the dignities our Constitution imagined: the dignity of a home and a wage, of a life without fear and violence, of a right to choose love, of a right to express ourselves, of a right to believe in the possibility of justice at all.

How to be truly free

A t r a n s f o r m a t i o n a l constitutionality must go beyond just being who we are. It must instead ask: who can we be? Who must we

be to ourselves and each other? How can we use constitutional morality as a transformative power to speak not just of equality on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity but on all that divides us? After Thursday, our work must merely begin so that we may not be the cause of injustice from having once been its inheritors. It is only then that we will truly be free.

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Does the BJP Really Care for Dalits?

Ram Puniyani

Some time ago, the Supreme Court diluted the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 by including provisions for anticipatory bail and a “preliminary enquiry” before registration of a case under the Act. This led to strong protests all over the country. In these protests, the anti-Dalit nature of the present ruling dispensation, the BJP-led NDA, was highlighted. Under the pressure of the protests, the government had to bring in a bill to restore its previous provisions. On August 6, 2018, the Lok Sabha unanimously passed a Bill to nullify the Supreme Court order; the Rajya Sabha passed it on August 9. The amended Act now rules out any provision for anticipatory bail for a person accused of atrocities against people from SC or ST communities, restoring the Act to as it stood before its dilution by the Supreme Court. Ram Vilas Paswan, president of Lok Janshakti Party that is a part of the NDA, thanked the Prime Minister and also criticised the Congress on the occasion. To show that Congress is anti-Dalit, he raked up the old issue of the Congress having contested elections against Dr Ambedkar twice. Ram Vilas Paswan’s own allegiance to Ambedkar’s ideology is under a cloud, as he is an ally of the BJP, a party whose central agenda is transforming India into a *Hindu Rashtra*, something which was an anathema for Ambedkar as he stood for social justice, secularism and democracy.

Paswan has been well described as a *mausam vaigyanik*, weather-cock, who in order to remain in

power always twists and turns and makes ideological compromises. His own ideology is that of hunger for power and his words should not matter much except on the electoral chess board. His projection of the electoral battle between Ambedkar and Congress is a very selective presentation of the relationship between Congress and Ambedkar. While he points this out, he forgets that Ambedkar was not a member of the Congress party at any point of time. Nevertheless, the same Congress invited him to serve as the nation’s first Law Minister in India’s first government after independence, which Ambedkar accepted. Paswan also needs to be reminded that Ambedkar was also made the Chairman of Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution at the instance of the Congress. To cap this, he was also requested to draft the Hindu Code Bill, a major step to reform the family laws towards gender just society.

While the likes of Paswan, hankering after power, do mouth the name of Ambedkar, they deliberately forget that the most important opponent of the Constitution drafted by him and the major opposition to the Hindu Code bill also drafted by him came from the stable of the RSS, the parent organisation of the party in whose alliance he is enjoying the perks of power. One can say that his ally BJP’s agenda of Hindu Rashtra is the polar opposite to the dream of Babasaheb, the dream of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the dream of secular democratic India. The RSS has never hesitated in criticising the Indian Constitution,

calling it Western, and the BJP has never severed its umbilical cord to the Hindu nationalist RSS.

Lately, from within the BJP itself from top down, Hindu nationalism is being propagated and practiced. On the eve of the 2014 general elections, Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial candidate, himself pronounced that he is a nationalist, and that he was born in a Hindu family, and so he is a Hindu nationalist. A minister in Modi’s Cabinet, Anant Kumar Hegde, has stated that the BJP has come to power at the Centre to change the Indian Constitution and that people should identify themselves with their religion rather than calling themselves secular. To cap it all, the UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stated that the word “secular” is “the biggest lie” of independent India.

As far as Dalits are concerned, the BJP is very consciously walking the tightrope, balancing its phrases and actions. On the one hand, it has used the power lust of some Dalit leaders like Paswan, Udit Raj and Ramdas Athawale to win them over and thus give a pro-Dalit veneer to its actions. It is also trying to woo the Dalit castes by manufacturing new icons like Suhel Dev and Shabri Mata, among others. For the sake of electoral equations, it is even forced to pay obeisance to Ambedkar, despite having an agenda totally opposed to his political ideology. But at the same time, the BJP has unleashed policies which affect the Dalits in a very adverse way. The emotive issue of the holy cow, which led to the merciless beating of Dalits in Una which Paswan

Gandhi on Secular Law and State

Anil Nauriya

dismissed as a minor event, has affected the livelihood of Dalits in a big way. We also need to remember that it is during this period that the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula and the anti-Dalit attack at Bhima Koregaon has taken place, tormenting the Dalit community to no end. Even as regards the dilution of the Dalit atrocity act, the Modi Government was unwilling to move legislation in Parliament to overturn the Supreme Court order. It was only when it realised that there was serious opposition to its dilution that it was forced to retreat for electoral calculations.

While BJP pays tribute to Ambedkar on one side, at the same time it presents Lord Ram as the central icon of its politics. What Ambedkar has said about Lord Ram in his various writings like *Riddles of Hinduism* is well known to us. For the BJP, what is important is to garland Babasaheb; it is of no consequence to them to take the issues of social justice in any serious way. The attempt to selectively present the electoral battle of Congress and Ambedkar is a deliberate ploy to undermine the efforts made by the national movement and Mahatma Gandhi–Congress to fight against untouchability in particular. We have miles to go as far as Babasaheb’s dream is concerned, but one thing which Ambedkar pointed out was that Hindu Raj will be a big tragedy for the Dalits of the country. It is unreasonable to expect that the likes of Paswan will revise their understanding of Ambedkar ideology and realise the folly of allying with the BJP–RSS and realize that the very agenda of the RSS–BJP is inherently anti-Dalit!

Email: ram.puniyani@gmail.com

Before the mid-19th century, the term secular was sometimes used with contempt. For the clergy, in particular, it was almost a synonym for the uninitiated or "ignorant". The term was sought to be popularised in its political use by Charles Bradlaugh and Holyoake in the mid-19th century. It took time to be adopted. Even Lincoln uses the word only once and that too in a non-political context. Its usage lagged behind the formation of nation-states. When more democratic forms of government came to be established the political usage correspondingly increased.

The Motilal Nehru Committee Report on the Principles of the Constitution of India in 1928 makes no reference to the word itself though the spirit of the Report is entirely secular. The Karachi Resolution in March 1931, to which Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad were party, stipulates religious neutrality of the state. Secularism is writ large on the resolution. But the word is absent.

A repeated usage of the term occurs early in Gandhi's writings and speeches in 1933. Two Bills were then before the Central Legislature. One of these related to untouchability. Gandhi supported the Bill, arguing that it properly sought to withdraw the sanction of "secular law" from a "custom that is repugnant to the moral sense of mankind". Such a practice, he said on May 6, 1933, "cannot and ought not to have the sanction of the law of a secular state". In November 1933 he defended the Bill against the charge that it was an undue

interference in religion, saying that there were many situations in which it was necessary for the state to interfere even with religion. Only "undue" interference ought to be avoided.

Later, on January 27, 1935, Gandhi addressed some members of the Central Legislature. He told them that "even if the whole body of Hindu opinion were to be against the removal of untouchability, still he would advise a secular legislature like the Assembly not to tolerate that attitude."

On January 20, 1942 Gandhi remarked while discussing the Pakistan scheme: "What conflict of interest can there be between Hindus and Muslims in the matter of revenue, sanitation, police, justice, or the use of public conveniences? The difference can only be in religious usage and observance with which a secular state has no concern."

Significantly, Gandhi's use of the term secular in relation to the state is such as may, in contemporary political discourse, be described as "Nehruvian". That is, Gandhi does not attach any meaning to the term secular that would have been unacceptable to or unintelligible to Nehru.

This point is repeated as freedom dawns and Constitution-making begins.

In September 1946, Gandhi told a Christian missionary: "If I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state would look after your secular welfare, health,

communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern!"

Gandhi's talk with Rev. Kellas of the Scottish Church College, Calcutta on August 16, 1947, the day after independence, was reported in *Harijan* on August 24: "Gandhiji expressed the opinion that the state should undoubtedly be secular. It could never promote denominational education out of public funds. Everyone living in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance, so long as the citizen obeyed the common law of the land. There should be no interference with missionary effort, but no mission could enjoy the patronage of the state as it did during the foreign regime." This understanding came subsequently to be reflected in Articles 25, 26 and 27 of the Constitution.

On the next day, August 17, Gandhi elaborated publicly on the same point in his speech at Narkeldanga, which *Harijan* reported thus: "In the India for whose fashioning he had worked all his life, every man enjoyed equality of status, whatever his religion was. The state was bound to be wholly secular. He went so far as to say that no denominational institution in it should enjoy state patronage. All subjects would thus be equal in the eye of the law." Five days later, Gandhi observed in a speech at Deshbandhu Park in Calcutta on August 22, 1947: "Religion was a personal matter and if we succeeded in confining it to the personal plane, all would be well in our political life. . . . If officers of Government as well as members of the public undertook the responsibility and worked wholeheartedly for the creation of a secular state, we could

build a new India that would be the glory of the world."

On November 15, 1947 the AICC adopted various resolutions on the rights of the minorities, repatriation of refugees and other issues. One of these resolutions affirmed that whatever be the situation in Pakistan, India would be a "democratic secular state where all citizens enjoy full rights and are equally entitled to the protection of the State, irrespective of the religion to which they belong." Gandhi warmly welcomed these resolutions, saying at a prayer meeting that they were so important that he wanted to explain the various resolutions "one by one".

Speaking on Guru Nanak's birthday on November 28, 1947, Gandhi opposed any possibility of state funds being spent for the renovation of the Somnath temple. His reasoning was: "After all, we have formed the Government for all. It is a 'secular' government, that is, it is not a theocratic government, rather, it does not belong to any particular religion. Hence it cannot spend money on the basis of communities."

In supporting a secular state, Gandhi understood that such a state would have to be backed by society. Instinctively he saw the historical and social relation between a secular state and elements of humanism in society. The relation was later neglected, especially post-1969, and this left the field free for Hindutva forces to grow in society. Six days before Gandhi was shot dead in January 1948, he wrote: "A well-organised body of constructive workers will be needed. Their service to the people will be their sanction and the merit of their work will be their charter. The ministers will draw their inspiration from such a body which will advise and guide

the secular government."

There was a creative tension in the Gandhi–Nehru relationship. They had differences. Gandhi's religiosity was not shared by Nehru. Both often gave expression to differences publicly, in private letters to one another, and, in the case of an incarcerated Nehru, in his diary. Some writers have magnified these or focussed primarily on these. But they had strong mutual synergies on vital issues when the two would spring to each other's side. Gandhi's positions on the secular state are Nehruvian in character. Likewise, Nehru's positions on the definition of the Indian nation are the same as Gandhi's. Both stand for territorial nationalism, thus clearly demarcating themselves from those in the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League and the pre-independence CPI of the 1940s which would define nation or nationality on the basis of religion. It is difficult to work together even for a while if differences overshadow commonalities. Gandhi and Nehru pulled together for decades. Gandhi as Congress president in 1924 retained Nehru as general secretary. He suggested Nehru's name for the Congress president on at least four occasions—1929, 1935 (for 1936), 1938–39 (on this occasion along with the Marxist Socialist Narendra Dev's name) and finally in 1946.

Nevertheless, a Gandhi–Nehru divide was projected from various ideological platforms, some of them seeking to widen it into a chasm. The Hindutva forces, already stained with Gandhi's blood, projected the divide because, separated from Gandhi, Nehru made for them an isolated and therefore easier ideological target. The dichotomy was further emphasised within the post-1969 Congress because of a perceived need to assert specific

loyalties. This perhaps enabled even leaders like, for instance, Vasant Sathe, who had been in the RSS in 1939–41, to present themselves as Nehruvian. Those tied to the pre-Independence CPI tradition of the 1940s (not necessarily or always identical with the contemporary Left), also ‘theoremised’ the Gandhi–

Nehru divide. Some of them styled themselves as Nehruvians in relation to Gandhi; but not all of them held to the Nehruvian position where the choice was between the Gandhi–Nehru view of the nation and the Muslim League notions of nation or nationality. Some of the Gandhians too promoted the separation of

Gandhi from Nehru. They picked on specific differences between Gandhi and Nehru and converted them into their own defining characteristic. For several years this enabled many of them to wash their hands of contemporary developments. But the hour of reckoning now approaches.

Email: instituteone@gmail.com

Is GST Curbing India’s Black Economy?

Arun Kumar

Recently, the government stated that states and union territories have been paid Rs 52,077 crore since July 2017 to compensate them for the shortfall in their tax revenue. After the last goods and services tax (GST) council meeting in July, it was reported that several states and union territories have reported shortfall in revenue of up to 43%.

Given this background, should the GST council have announced cuts in tax rates on several items? Reports suggest that the bureaucracy was unhappy with this decision since it could lead to an increase in the fiscal deficit. This is an election year, so, there will be pressures for additional expenditures which would lead to a widening of the deficit unless more resources are garnered. The finance ministers of Kerala and Punjab criticised the manner in which these decisions were taken in the GST Council and argued that federalism is being dented.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the nation in his Mann ki Baat in June, had hailed GST as a “celebration of honesty”. He said, “Everything is technologically processed so there is no scope for irregularities in taxation, as it used to be prior to the launch of GST.”

The moot point is: are revenues from GST more buoyant than earlier?

In all, 1.1 crore businesses are registered under GST. Initially only half of them filed returns and paid tax. The number has since risen to 70%, but the tax collection has hardly increased. After crossing Rs 1 lakh crore of collection in the month of April 2018 (due to year-end factors), it slowed down to Rs 95,610 crore in the month of June 2018. But refunds are also pending so these figures may not be very different from the earlier monthly figures for the previous fiscal.

The finance minister had earlier announced that 5% of the businesses pay 95% of the tax. So, mere filing of more returns does not necessarily translate into more tax payment.

Honesty implies that the black economy is declining. The BJP, during its election campaign in 2014, had promised that it would be able to curb the black economy quickly. The government launched demonetisation hoping to eliminate the black economy. But with all the old notes coming back to the RBI, that proved to be futile.

Can it promote honesty?

Demonetisation is a one-shot

measure which can’t stop the process of black income generation. GST, in contrast, can potentially check this process. But will it?

Businesses generate black incomes via under and over invoicing of their sales and purchases. A trader selling 100 yards of cloth at Rs 10 per yard may declare only 95 yards sold at Rs 9.5 per yard. A sale of Rs 1,000 is shown as Rs 902.50 via under invoicing. Black income of Rs 97.50 is thus generated. To produce this textile, the producer may have bought cotton worth Rs 300 but declared it as Rs 350 via over invoicing and generated a black income of Rs 50.

He may have employed two workers and paid them Rs 20 each but may declare that he had employed three people and paid them Rs 25 each. This is muster roll fudging and another black income of Rs 35 accrues. He also over invoices overheads, like, transportation, entertainment and so on. Thus, 20% of the revenue becomes black income while the white income, the declared profit, becomes negligible.

There is a catch. If person A buys from person B (whether raw material cotton or the finished cloth), then A would want to show a higher cost

while B would want to show a lower revenue. This is feasible only if there are two books of accounts and it will escape detection if the tax authorities cannot match the invoices.

Earlier, without computerisation of accounts of all businesses, the tax authorities could not match the billions of invoices generated monthly by businesses. GST and computerisation changes this by enabling the matching the invoices of sellers and buyers. Both have to file returns on the GST network (GSTN). Each business has to register and is allotted a number (GSTIN) and all their invoices carry this number so that they can be cross checked. Since, theoretically, all transactions from raw material to the final product/service are tracked, this is feasible in principle.

So, theoretically, due to computerisation, mis-invoicing is not possible and black incomes cannot be generated by businesses in legal activities. Of course, illegal activities like producing spurious drugs, adulterating food and smuggling can continue to generate black incomes.

However, what if no bill is issued and transactions remain outside the GST network from beginning to end? Cases of fake billing to claim input credit have been surfacing with regularity. Various exemptions granted under GST make this easy. The exemptions were necessitated by the need to serve multiple goals such as keeping essential goods cheap by not taxing them, or leaving small businesses out of the GST network so as not to adversely impact them. These exemptions and multiplicity of tax rates has made GST complex.

Complexity in rules enables black incomes to be generated.

Officials scrutinising the accounts of a business are unable to catch manipulation of complex rules in the short time they have. That is why taxation should be simple, which is possible if it does not try to achieve multiple goals. GST has become complex because of its faulty design and the massive data requirements.

Black incomes are also generated by misclassification of goods. Perfectly fine chemicals may be shown as scrap sold at throw away prices. Ceramic tiles may be declared as damaged and sold at a discount. Further, multiplicity of tax rates enables businesses to misclassify goods and services and evade tax. Professional fees can be under invoiced since they have few inputs. Doctors seeing 25 patients may claim that they have seen 20 patients.

The e-way bill introduced to track movement of goods and check black income generation has also added to the complexity. Scrutiny of the content of the vehicle is required and this has encouraged the reappearance of the inspector raj.

Without checking, misclassification becomes easy. Under GST, trucks can be stopped for checking anywhere and not just at the state borders. The police seem to be doing this and there are reports of extortion of money.

Changes in laws often lead to problems and GST is no different. Crooked businesses have to develop new ways of bypassing the new laws. For example, in 1982, when a law was introduced in Mumbai to acquire under-valued flats, transactions stopped. But, within 18 months, they revived and exceeded the old level because a way was found of circumventing the new law.

Reports of evasion of GST are slowly growing, implying that the process of discovery is on.

GST cannot check the process of black income generation in spite of computerisation; its form is changing. The need is to transform the human element, but then GST would not be needed to generate 'honesty' and tackle the black economy.

Email: nuramarku@gmail.com

Julian Assange and the Fate of Journalism

Lawrence Davidson

Julian Assange is the Australian founder of Wikileaks—a website dedicated to the public's right to know what governments and other powerful organisations are doing. Wikileaks pursues this goal by posting revelatory documents, often acquired unofficially, that bring to light the criminal behaviour that results in wars and other man-made disasters. Because Wikileaks' very existence encourages "leaks,"

government officials fear the website, and particularly dislike Julian Assange.

Essentially, Wikileaks functions as a wholesale supplier of evidence. Having identified alleged official misconduct, Wikileaks seeks to acquire and make public overwhelming amounts of evidence—sometimes hundreds of thousands of documents at a time—which journalists and other

interested parties can draw upon. And since the individuals and organisations being investigated are ones ultimately responsible to the public, such a role as wholesale supplier of evidence can be seen as a public service.

Unfortunately, that is not how most government officials see the situation. They assert that government cannot be successful unless aspects of its behaviour are conducted in secret. The fact that those aspects in question thereby lose any accountable connection to the public is discounted. The assumption here is that most citizens simply trust their governments to act in their interests, including when they act clandestinely. Historically, such trust is dangerously naive. Often, government officials, even the democratic ones, feel no obligation to their citizens in general, but rather only to special interests.

One reason for this is that large and bureaucratic institutions that last for any length of time have the tendency to become stand-alone institutions—ones with their own self-referencing cultures, and a sense of loyalty which overrides any responsibility to outside groups other than those with particular shared interests. In other words, long-lasting institutions/bureaucracies take on a life of their own.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that many governments look upon Wikileaks as a threat to institutional well-being. And so, in an effort to cripple Wikileaks and have their revenge on Assange, the United States and the United Kingdom (UK), with the cooperation of Sweden, first sought to frame Assange (2010) on a sexual assault charge. This having failed, Assange was still left liable for jumping bail in the UK in order to avoid

seizure and deportation to the US, where he would certainly be put on trial for revealing secrets. He escaped to the Ecuadorian embassy in London (2012), where he was given asylum. As of this writing, he is still there. However, a recent change in government in Quito has led to discussions between Ecuador and the UK that may well lead to Assange's eviction from the embassy.

The Ideals of Journalism

Some of the anger over Assange's fate has been directed at the journalistic profession which he has sought to serve. After all, Assange has ardently supported the notions of free speech, free press and the public's right to know. Nonetheless, as the documentary filmmaker John Pilger, a supporter of Assange, has noted, "There has been no pressure [in support of Assange] from media in the United States, Britain, Australia or pretty much anywhere except in [media] programs . . . outside the mainstream. . . . The persecution of this man has been something that should horrify all free-thinking people." He is quite right. Unfortunately, there never have been many brave free-thinkers about, so no one should be surprised at Assange's poor prospects.

This brings up the difference between the ideals of the journalistic profession and the reality within which it operates. There is a model of journalism that presents it as a pillar of democracy. The journalist is a tough and persistent person who digs up facts, asks hard questions and explains the truth to his or her readers/viewers. Few seem to have noticed that, to the extent that this picture is accurate, the ideal model has alienated those readers/viewers who cannot tell the difference

between "the truth" and their own opinions. Recently, this alienation has opened the entire media industry to the charge that it is really the "enemy of the people" because it peddles "fake news"—that is, news that belies one's opinions.

To bring the idealistic journalist in line with real public expectations, editors put pressure on media workers to compromise their professional ideals. The result is most often manipulated reports aimed at fitting the particular outlook of the particular media operation's target audience. Thus, it is simply wrong to think that, on the average, those who investigate, do research, write about things, and report through the various media are any braver or, ultimately, any more principled than the rest of the population. As Julien Benda showed us in his 1928 book *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, while it is in fact the job of those who research and report to remain independent of the ideologies and biases of both their community and their government, the truth is that most often these people end up serving power. This is particularly the case when there is an atmosphere of patriotic fervour, or just plain pressure from sources that can hurt one's career. At that point you will find that bravery does exist but it is the exception and not the rule—and the brave will, more often than not, stand alone.

That is what is happening in the case of Julian Assange. Many American news outlets are willing to selectively use the documented evidence made available by Wikileaks. To do so is to draw on what the website has placed in the public domain. But they will not stand up and publicly defend the "whistleblower" who makes the information public. I imagine

publishers, editors, and media moguls, and the vast majority of those they employ, just don't have the courage to support the individual who breaks some unprincipled law or regulation designed to enforce silence in relation to official crimes and hypocrisy.

A Shared Problem

The United States is certainly not the only country facing this dilemma. To one extent or another, this is a shared problem in all those lands claiming to have a free press. For example, a similar problem has long existed in Israel, where journalists have long faced persecution if they dare to speak the truth.

Take the case of Omar Nazzal, a member of the board of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate. In a 10 August 2016 report appearing in the on-line blog +972, and entitled "Israeli journalists silent as their Palestinian colleagues are jailed," we are told that Nazzal was taken into custody by Israeli forces in April 2016, without charges. Like Assange, there has been an attempt, after his arrest, to claim that Nazzal is a criminal. The Shin Bet, one of those Israeli security forces that only the naive or venal take at face value, claims that he is a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which they consider to be a terrorist organisation. No proof of this charge has been publicly presented (Shin Bet claims the "proof" is secret) and Nazzal denies any affiliation. As it turns out, the real reason he was arrested somewhat parallels Assange's activity. At the time of his seizure, Nazzal was on his way to Sarajevo for a meeting of the European Federation of Journalists. No doubt, the Israelis did not want him telling

true, documentable, stories to an organisation of European journalists. Most Israeli Jewish journalists, like their American counterparts, remain silent. So do their respective publics.

One might ask just how seriously "the public" wants a media that tells them "the truth." The most watched cable news channel in the US is *Fox News*, a media ally of Donald Trump that has no demonstrable interest in objective facts. It is more likely that Americans (and others) chose their news outlets on the basis of which one most often tells them what they want to hear—in other

words, the search for "accurate" reporting is really driven by a desire for confirmation bias.

Under these circumstances it is easy to understand why a for-profit media industry need not be beholden to the general citizenry or any ideal of supplying fact-based news. This situation puts truth tellers like Assange, and in the case of Israel, Omar Nazzal, in a bad position. They will have their defenders but they will be outside the mainstream—because truth itself is also outside the mainstream. That is their predicament, and ours as well.

Letter to Prime Minister Modi Ref.: Threat to our Food Sovereignty

Vandana Shiva and Mohini Giri

Honourable Prime Minister,

We write to you in anguish because our food sovereignty and our right to safe, healthy, biodiverse, nutritionally rich and balanced food is being severely undermined by recent acts by the government.

The government seems to be in a rush to put the profits of MNCs above the food sovereignty of India, the livelihoods of Indian farmers and women, and the right to safe and healthy food of the Indian people.

As we prepare to remember Gandhi on his 150th Birth Anniversary, let us remember what he said about food freedom and food sovereignty:

The first lesson we must learn is of self-help and self reliance. If we assimilate this lesson, we shall at once free ourselves from disastrous dependence upon foreign countries and ultimate bankruptcy. This is not said in arrogance but as a matter of fact. We are not a small place,

dependent for our food supply upon outside help. We are a sub-continent, a nation of nearly 400 millions (now 1.3 billion). We are country of mighty rivers and a rich variety of agricultural land . . .

We would add that we are a country of rich biodiversity and rich knowledge. We are the source of all sustainable agriculture traditions including organic agriculture. Women of India have both a vision and practical knowledge for creating *Anna Swaraj*, that is, a 'Food Sovereign' India.

While our farmers grow a diversity of safe, healthy, GMO free food, we are unnecessarily importing Roundup sprayed pulses and processed food with GMOs. We can feed two times India's population with biodiverse nutrition sensitive organic agriculture as Navdanya's study "Health per Acre" has shown.

The unnecessary and illegal

imports of GMOs and food grains with Roundup imports are destroying the livelihoods of our farmers and women in the indigenous self-organised, swadeshi food economy and the *swasthya* of our people.

Firstly, according to the WHO, Roundup is a carcinogen (“IARC Monograph on Glyphosate”, International Agency for Research on Cancer, WHO, <https://www.iarc.fr>).

In the US, a cancer victim whose job involved spraying Roundup on school grounds has won a significant case (see these articles for more details: “Monsanto Ordered to Pay \$289m as Jury Rules Weedkiller Caused Man's Cancer”, August 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com>; “Cancer-Stricken Man First to Win Case Against Monsanto's Weed Killer”, August 12, 2018, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in>).

It is now established through cases in the US that Monsanto “ghostwrites” attacks on scientists and even the WHO, to create “fake science” and put citizens lives at risk, while expanding their markets and profits (see for instance: “Monsanto Accused of Ghostwriting Papers on Roundup Cancer Risk”, <https://www.schwartzreport.net>).

Secondly, most people of India are engaged in growing food, processing food and providing food to their community and their families as small farmers, as artisanal processors, as small and tiny retailers, as hawkers and street vendors, as mothers and helpers. Our right to livelihoods with dignity and freedom is connected to our food heritage. Industrial foods including imported GMO foods are destroying women's livelihoods. We cannot be subjected to a new ‘food imperialism’ where a handful of MNCs make us dependent on

unhealthy, chemically processed and GMO food. A healthy India is based on clean food, or *swachh bhojan*. Swachh bhojan is based on women's skills, knowledge and livelihoods. Indian women have built a rich, healthy, diverse and nutritious food culture.

Women's leadership is vital to creating a food sovereign and food secure India. Women are the foundation of our health security and food security. On 9 August, 2018, on Quit India Day, we women in the Mahila Anna Swaraj movement declared our commitment to building on Gandhiji's legacy of *swaraj*, *swadeshi* and *satyagraha* so that we are *swashakt* to fight for *swad* and *swasthya* in our food and nutrition.

Thirdly, imports rob markets and incomes from our farmers, our *annadatas*. Indian farmers are in crisis because imports are undermining their opportunities and their produce is not being bought. All food crops in India are non-GMO. India does not need to import GMO foods and destroy its GMO free status at a time when more and more countries want to import food from countries that do not grow GMOs.

Over the last few years, while our farmers have not been able to sell the diverse pulses they grow, India has increasingly become dependent on imports of Roundup sprayed pulses, just like we were made dependent on imports on edible oils after 1998 .

During the 2016–17 fiscal year, 66.08 lakh tonnes of pulses worth Rs 28,523 crore were imported; these imports stood at 57.97 lakh tonnes worth Rs 25,619 crore in 2015–16 and 45.8 lakh tonnes worth Rs 17,062 crore in 2014–15.

Eighty percent of GMOs in the US are herbicide tolerant and resistant to Roundup. GMOs go hand

in hand with Roundup. Studies in the US show that the use of Roundup and other herbicides has increased with the spread of Roundup Ready GMO crops (see, for instance: “Pesticide Use Rises as Herbicide-resistant Weeds Undermine Performance of Major GE Crops, New WSU Study Shows”, CAHNRS News, <http://news.cahnrs.wsu.edu>; “Pesticide Use Ramping up as GMO Crop Technology Backfires: Study”, <https://www.reuters.com>).

Therefore all GMO imports of corn, soybeans and canola do not just have GMOs, they also have Roundup residues. Imported pulses also have Roundup residues (see the following articles published in Indian newspapers: “Imported Lentils Laced with Weed Killer”, Deccan Chronicle, July 19, 2018, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com>; “Health Hazards of Imported Pulses”, Statesman, July 12, 2018, <https://www.thestatesman.com>).

The Government should protect our farmers, not MNCs. It should ensure that our farmers are able to sustain their livelihoods with dignity and fairness and provide safe and nutritious food to the country. For “India first”, we need to put “food first”. For “Make in India” we should grow organic food in India as you committed during your visit to Sikkim which has become 100% organic.

A recent report from CSE has shown that 32% of all imported processed food, including infant food, has GMOs. This is illegal.

On 24 May, 2017 the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court of India admitting that “GM foods are not allowed in the country and neither can be regulated till such

notification (for regulation under Section 22 of the Food Safety and Standards Act) is issued” (Page 9, Para VI). It further stated that “it is submitted that the GEAC is responsible for risk assessment and approval of GM organism and products into the environment. As and when any GM food is approved by the GEAC, as per the provision in Section 22 of the FSSA 2006, FSSAI has the responsibility to regulate it. However, since regulations in this regard have yet to be framed, it follows that GM food is not permitted to be sold in the country.”

When illegal imports take place, a responsible government should stop these imports, remove all such food items from the shelf and destroy them, and take punitive action against all persons violating our laws, as well as act strictly against the regulatory authorities that are failing to carry out their duties.

Instead of preventing illegal imports, the FSSAI is now in a rush to legalise the illegal import of GMOs. Instead of taking care of the health of Indian citizens, the FSSAI is protecting those who are undermining our laws and our health.

The head of FSSAI is misleading the public in stating that there is no evidence of harm from GMOs. He has also misled India in putting 5% GMOs as “GMO free” in his proposed labelling laws, contrary to world standards.

There are many global studies which show there is no scientific consensus on safety of GMOs (see, for instance: “No Scientific Consensus on GMO Safety”, Environmental Sciences Europe, December 2015, <https://link.springer.com>).

Illegal imports of GMOs and Roundup laced food should be immediately stopped, and strict

action taken against the violators. Besides the illegal import of GMOs, there is an illegal spread of Roundup and Roundup Ready Bt Cotton in India. We have a regulatory agency, GEAC, under the Ministry of Environment which is supposed to prevent any unapproved GMO release.

The Hon. Minister of Environment, Dr Harsh Vardhan, has already been informed about this illegality, yet GEAC has failed to act according to the *Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Micro-organisms Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells* (notified on 5 December, 1989 under the EP Act, 1986).

India is committed to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030. SDG target 3.9 commits to substantially reducing the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.

India is at a fragile moment for the future of its food, health and

knowledge sovereignty. We are on the verge of being recolonised through a new ‘Food Imperialism’, or alternatively, we can have a resurgence of *Anna Swaraj* through rejuvenating our biodiversity and our nutritious, healthy food cultures.

We hope your government will work with us to take care of our fertile land and our hardworking *annadatas*. We hope you will listen to the voice of our *Mahila Shakti*, the backbone of our society and our food and nutrition sovereignty. The new India we want to create is a poison free, cancer free, suicide free, hunger free, food sovereign *Jaivik Bharat*. We call on you to stop the entry of GMO foods and Roundup sprayed pulses and edible oils, and build on indigenous alternatives which can provide fair incomes to our farmers and a healthy diet to the last child.

Sd/- :

Dr. Mohini Giri, Founder,
Guild For Service

Dr Vandana Shiva, Founder,
Navdanya

The Communal Movement in Venezuela: Part II

The second part of the interview with Angel Prado, spokesperson for the El Maizal commune in Venezuela. This interview was conducted in May 2017, before the May 20 presidential elections in which Nicolás Maduro won re-election.

El Maizal produces corn but sells its harvest to the state company Agropatria. However, if the commune is to contribute to the construction of socialism, should there not be control over the entire productive chain?

That is one of our aims in building the communal city and accumulating forces to allow us to grow and move forward. A first stage involves controlling more means of production, because we need them to go beyond being just primary producers and enter the cycle of industrialisation. Before that happens, we know we will come up against a variety of enemies, but we will also count on plenty of allies in the government and throughout the country.

We believe that with our

experience and political capital, we cannot continue being mere raw material producers and hand everything over to the state or the private sector, and then leave this region with no supplies, which is absurd. The issue of self-government is about people realising that territorial self-government is capable of solving problems. And right now the priority is food, and our economy is based on food production, so we cannot go on producing and have the state or the private sector take it all in the end.

For that reason, this year we are creating a network of micro-companies, using very basic technology, which will be able to receive, process, conserve and distribute within the communities. For example, for corn we have readied a barn where we plan to install a small machine to process corn. The only step remaining is to build silos, even if in a do-it-yourself fashion. The milk and meat production, which has been increasing, is not being sold to the state nor to the private sector, but is instead distributed directly to the community. The same thing goes for coffee, vegetables and other things we are growing here in the commune with small producers.

The next step is to set up small scale industrial units and thus consolidate an industrial system adapted to our capacities. We will not have a mega-industry like Polar (Venezuela's largest food conglomerate), but we should at least be able to process what we produce.

With an agricultural commune, it is easy to imagine making the organisation around production. But if we consider the case of

an urban commune, how can production be carried out there? What does an urban commune produce?

I believe that organisation is born out of necessity. Where there is a larger population, there is greater necessity. What is not produced in the countryside can be produced in the city. Here we can grow corn and raise cattle because we have the right conditions to do so, but in a city, in any house one can produce clothing, or the eyeglasses one needs, or watches and shoes. One can also process food.

We think that there is sometimes a selfish attitude among those who live in urban areas and believe that only campesinos (peasant farmers) should produce, that only campesinos need to organise in communes. If we were to apply the same logic, why not consider those in the city to be mere parasites? If a truck with food goes from here to Caracas (the capital of Venezuela), then it should return from Caracas with clothing! This is an important debate. We have told many communities in Lara state, that it is fine to come to El Maizal and buy something at a fair price, but what are you contributing from your end?

The big industries, the mechanical workshops, etc., are all in the city. The workers also live in the city, and are concentrated in a few working class barrios! Because of this accumulation of people, there is also better access to information and technology. In the urban barrios of big cities, where there is a high concentration of people, there needs to be organising, be it around the problem of security, of social coexistence, healthcare or services, in addition to developing productive activities in a communal

way. In effect, we need to dispel the myth that the productive commune can only exist in the countryside.

What do you think should be the role of National Constituent Assembly (ANC), of which you are a member, in the current political context?

I believe the Constituent Assembly (ANC) should have assumed the role of legislating and taking tough decisions in order to really tackle the economic crisis. We have always seen the government depositing a lot of trust in the private sector, allocating dollars and making concessions. We have given plenty of opportunities to the private sector, and yet what we see is the situation getting worse every day with regard to food, prices, inflation, etc.

The ANC received a lot of support for two main reasons, one had to do with the protests organised by the right-wing opposition, and the need to secure peace, which to a certain extent it did. The other was the economic situation, which overwhelmingly affects poor people, and is still to be solved. Now, I believe the ANC also has the role of restructuring the constitution and implementing a series of laws to allow for an accelerated advance towards the communal, socialist state that we believe in and which Chávez proposed. The people have placed a lot of hopes in the ANC, and we hope that after the coming Presidential elections, that we hope to win, the country will advance in this direction, and the ANC will take the important decisions in this regard that it should.

How should the commune figure in the new constitution?

We believe the commune should

be a theme that runs through the entire constitution and is not just an article in it. If the commune marks the way forward, then the whole constitution needs to reflect that, so that the state is reoriented towards the communal state and socialism. It makes no sense to have 350 articles and then add a 351st which states that the commune exists! I believe that, from the first article to the last, the issue of communes needs to cut across the constitution, to make clear the kind of state we want to build.

We should also point out that the commune is not just about legal and administrative questions. It is also a cultural issue; it has to do with building a new culture of government, a new way of doing politics and of managing and assigning resources. All of that needs to be addressed by the new constitution.

This is also related to terminology. When we talk about communes, we are talking about cooperation and socialism. By contrast, when we talk about municipalities or parishes, they are not ours! Therefore, the commune also has to do with the territorial organisation of the country. El Maizal is in two municipalities, in two states, but it is the same phenomenon. More than a political and territorial breakdown, the challenge is to create a new way of organising the territory based on the people's logic, the human geography, and do away with borders that were inherited from colonialism. In a way, it is about going back to Simón Rodríguez's concept of toparchy: the government from the territory and with the territory.

We also need to take into account Chávez's proposals regarding the commune that he made on many

occasions . . .

I believe the proposal that President Chávez made was quite concrete, and his proposals regarding the new geometry of power are very interesting. On the question of territorial organisation, we find his proposals very appealing. For example, Chávez put forth the idea of the communal council, and then that of the commune. After the commune, he launched the idea of the communal city and then came the communal federation. Finally, at the highest level, we would have a confederation of communes spanning the whole country.

Now, I believe this should lead to an interesting and intense debate in the ANC, with a view to recovering, in case we have forgotten it, the proposal of comandante Chávez. It is one way of moving forward. It might not be the only or the most

Obituary

Samir Amin (1931–2018): A Vital Radical Thinker who Challenged Dispossession

Nick Dearden

Egyptian-French Marxist academic Samir Amin passed away aged 86 on August 12. The man who introduced the concept of "Eurocentrism" was one of the world's greatest radical thinkers.

Amin was a "creative Marxist" who went from Communist activism in Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt in the late 1950s, to advising African socialist leaders like the Tanzanian anti-colonial activist Julius Nyerere to being a leading figure in this

perfect one, but Chávez studied and presented it, and so we should take it seriously. From where we stand today, we believe it could be a viable way to carry out the territorial organisation of the new state as we move towards socialism.

As I said, El Maizal is a territory that spans two states, and our communal city will spread across many parishes. The communal federation we envision, from here to Buría, which is an area where there are four communes, would incorporate territory across three states: Yaracuy, Lara and Portuguesa. Therefore I think the new constitution needs to address this new territorial organisation in the spirit in which Chávez presented it: with new terminology, new forms, a new logic, and with the new geometry of power in the territory.

century's World Social Forum, which brought together social movements and struggles from around the world.

Amin's ideas were formed in the heady ferment of the 1950s and '60s, when pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah ran Ghana and Nyerere governed Tanzania. Nasser was transforming the Middle East from Amin's native Egypt and liberation movements thrived from South Africa to Algeria.

Africa looked very different

before the International Monetary Fund (IMF) destroyed what progress had been made towards emancipation and LiveAid created a popular conception of a continent of famine and fecklessness.

Yet Amin's ideas have continued to shine out, denouncing the inhumanity of contemporary capitalism and empire. But he also harshly critiqued movements from political Islam to Eurocentric Marxism and its marginalisation of the truly dispossessed.

Global power

Amin believed that world capitalism—a rule of oligopolies based in the rich world—maintains its hold through five monopolies: control of technology, access to natural resources, finance, the global media and the means of mass destruction. Only by overturning these monopolies can real progress be made.

This raises particular challenges for those of us in the global North because any change we promote must challenge the privileges of the North vis-à-vis the South. Our internationalism cannot be expressed through a type of humanitarian approach to the global South—that countries in the South need our “help to develop”.

For Amin, international solidarity must be based on an explicitly anti-imperialist perspective. Anything else will fail to challenge those monopolies that keep the powerful powerful.

Amin saw the world divided into the “centre” and the “peripheries”. The role of peripheries, those countries we call the global South, is to supply the centres in the global North with the means of developing in ways that stop the South from

developing.

Most obviously, the exploitation of Africa's minerals on terms of trade starkly favourable to the centre will never allow African liberation, only continual exploitation. This flies in the face of so much “development thinking”, which would have you believe that Africa's problems come from not being properly integrated into the global economy. Amin believed that, in fact, Africa's problem stem from it being too integrated in “the wrong way”.

Sweatshop labour now takes place across the periphery, but it has not challenged the power of those in the North because of their control of finance, natural resources, the military and the other monopolies. In fact, it has enhanced their power by reducing wages and destroying a manufacturing sector that had become a power base for unionised workers.

Amin was also concerned at environmental activism that becomes a debate about how countries of the centre manage their control of the world's resources, rather than challenging that control. It is vital that Northern activists challenge the means through which the ruling class in their own society exerts control over the rest of the world.

De-linking

The theory for which Amin is most famous is “de-linking”. De-linking means countries of the periphery withdrawing from their exploitative integration in the global economy. In a sense it is de-globalisation, but it is not a form of economic isolation. Rather, it means not engaging in economic relationships from a point of weakness.

Amin argues that countries of

the global South should develop their economy through various forms of state intervention, control of money flowing in and out of their financial sectors and promoting trading with other global South countries. Countries must nationalise financial sectors, strongly regulate natural resources, “de-link” internal prices from the world market, and free themselves from control by international institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Whatever problems come with nationalised industries, it is the only possible basis for a genuinely socially-controlled economy.

Amin did not believe that the “rise” of China, India and other emerging economies has in any way broken the power of the oligopolies. That power has only become more concentrated. But there have been important changes. Imperialist powers have realised competition between themselves is not helpful and have created a sort of collective imperialism which is expressed through institutions like the WTO and IMF.

Capitalism is experiencing a profound long-term crisis to which Amin believes it has no solution, short of political barbarism. He describes this form of capitalism as “senile”. This crisis is characterised by an increased dependence on finance, which means less and less money is being made from productive activities. It is a far more direct means of stealing wealth from the majority of the world.

The accompanying form of politics means that democracy has been reduced to a farce in which people are spectators in an elite drama.

Capitalism needs an ongoing process of dispossession so it can

accumulate and expand. Capitalism could not have developed without the European conquest of the world, and the resources that provided. It also provided a safety valve for many of those dispossessed in Europe, with mass emigration to the “new world”.

Dispossession

As much as the dispossessed in the global South might aspire to the lives of those in advanced capitalist countries, it is not possible. Nor can traditional Marxists be correct when they say capitalism is a necessary stage on the path to socialism—a view Amin called Eurocentric.

Industry cannot incorporate more than a small fraction of humanity, but it requires the resources humanity depends upon. So the only way that capitalism can advance is through the creation of a “slum planet”—a sort of “global apartheid”.

Amin believed the dispossession of the peasantry across the peripheral countries would be the central issue of the 21st century. This is one reason why Amin saw the role of the peasantry in the South—almost half of humanity after all—as key to determining the future. The strength of movements around food sovereignty, against land grabbing and supporting the rights of indigenous peoples, supports this theory.

For Amin, the existence of the peasantry presents capitalism with an insurmountable challenge.

Amin believes the road to socialism depends on reversing this trend of dispossession. This means, at national and regional levels, protecting local agricultural production, ensuring countries have food sovereignty and de-linking internal prices from world

commodity markets. This would stop the dispossession of peasants and their exodus into the towns.

Only such a revolution in the way the land is seen, treated and accessed can lay the basis for a new society. This also means ditching the idea of “growth” as it is spoken about today and by which all world economies are judged, which really benefits only a minority of the world population. The rest of humanity is abandoned.

Long road to socialism

Amin rejected the idea of a “24-hour revolution”—a single insurrectionary act that ushers in a period of socialism. He accepted there may well be a need to use private, even international capital, to diversify economies in the South. The important thing is control.

Amin’s underlying view was that the formation of democracy must go beyond a narrow political project, and that peasants—especially women—through collective organisations, might be better placed than Western individualists to define a really progressive vision of democracy.

Perhaps Amin’s central thesis is somewhat obvious, but it’s often forgotten: a true revolution must be based on those being dispossessed and impoverished.

But he also argued against any assumption that any thinking emerging from the South will lack “enlightenment”, or that a lack of enlightenment should be excused. He believed the Enlightenment was humanity’s first step towards democracy, liberating us from the idea that God created our activity. He has caused controversy in his utter rejection of political Islam. This ideology obscures the real nature of society, including by playing into

the idea that the world consists of different cultural groups in conflict with each other. This idea helps the centre control the peripheries.

He did not limit his critique to Islam either, launching similar criticism on political Hinduism practiced by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in India and political Buddhism, expressed through the Dalai Lama.

Creative Marxism

Amin described himself as a “creative Marxist”—“to begin from Marx but not to end with him”. This means to incorporate all manner of critical ways of thinking, even ones “which were wrongly considered to be ‘alien’ by the dogmas of the historical Marxism of the past.”

These views are surely more relevant today than when Amin started writing. A creative Marxism takes proper account of the perspectives and aspirations of the truly dispossessed in the world, breaks out of historical dogmas and rejects attempts to hold together a broken model.

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Calling Naidu's Bluffs
Sankara Narayanan

**If Maoist Violence is
Illegitimate, How is Hindutva
Violence and State Violence
Justified?**

Swami Agnivesh and
Sandeep Pandey

**Theatre of Absurd:
Modi and the
Dawoodi Bohra Pontiff**
Irfan Engineer

**There is Still Time for an
Ecological Revolution to
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Growth at 8.2%, Yet All Is Not Well

Arun Kumar

India's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown at a robust 8.2% in the first quarter of the current financial year, according to recently released official data.

This is the highest in the last two years which has seen two shocks to the economy in the form of demonetisation and GST. The spurt in growth is due to a sharp increase in the growth of the manufacturing sector (13.5%), construction (8.7%) and agriculture and allied sectors (5.3%) compared to the same period last year.

Critics have argued that the numbers are higher precisely because they were so low during this period last year. Manufacturing had declined by 1.8%. Construction had grown at 1.8% and agriculture at 3%. This is called the base effect.

Growth last year during the first quarter was low due to the effect of demonetisation. So, if the economy recovers from the shock of demonetisation, there would be a spurt in growth because it is catching up with its trend growth. This is what the officials claim.

The rate of growth in the services sector is mostly down compared to last year. Also, investment is hardly recovering, with gross fixed capital

formation at current prices rising from 28.7% to 28.8%. This implies that businesses are not investing more in machinery and buildings. Thus, even if growth rate is higher now, this spurt may not continue both because of the base effect and the lack of increase in investment rates.

At 8.2% rate of growth, there should be feel good all around in the economy. Are the protesting farmers and traders barking up the wrong tree? The farmers should be earning much more with a higher agricultural growth rate and ought not to be protesting. Are the young protesting about jobs doing so for nothing? Job creation in the economy should be robust and there should be less of a crisis of employment. Are businessmen complaining of difficulties for no cause?

The government has assiduously argued that demonetisation did not have a negative impact on the economy. If there was some adverse impact, it was temporary and disappeared soon. It has emphasised that the long-term impact has been positive and that is what is visible now.

Similarly, regarding GST, the government has argued that it was a

much-needed reform. It is contended that it has had a positive impact on the economy after some teething troubles. The claim is that GST has led to 'ease of doing business' which has led to a spurt in growth. So both these shocks to the economy are portrayed as structural changes that have resulted in the present higher growth, even if there was a temporary setback.

Both shocks to the economy, note ban and GST, are portrayed as structural changes that have resulted in the present higher growth, even if there was a temporary setback.

The problem with these arguments is that the unorganised sector does not figure in any of them. This sector is 45% of the GDP and employs 93% of the workforce. Data from this sector is collected periodically (not quarterly or even annually) as is the case with some components of the organised sector. The data on the basis of which the quarterly GDP is calculated is primarily from the corporate sector, agriculture and so on.

The press note issued by the government says that for industry, "The first quarter estimates are based on . . . abridged financial results of listed companies from BSE/NSE, Index of Industrial Production (IIP) . . ."

So not even the entire organised sector data has been used to estimate the growth rate. The question of using the unorganised sector data does not arise, as it is not available.

So how is the unorganised sector estimated in the absence of data? Certain assumptions are made. Namely, that it is growing in proportion to the organised sector for which some data are available. The ratio of the two sectors is estimated in a reference year and this is used

till the next survey is done. However, in between the surveys, if there is a shock, the ratio changes and the old ratio is no more applicable. A new ratio is required, for which a survey needs to be done, but since this was not done, a new ratio cannot be calculated. The two shocks due to demonetisation and GST have changed the ratio. Thus, the old methodology needs to change.

The unorganised sectors which largely use cash were massively hit by demonetisation. Due to persisting cash shortage for eight months, they could not revive for long and were again hit by GST. While they have been exempted from GST, or a simple provision has been made for them (called Composition Scheme), they have been adversely hit due to the design of GST. They are hit by input tax credit (ITC), reverse charge mechanism (RCM), restrictions on inter-state sales, and so on.

While official surveys were not done, private surveys were conducted and they point to a sharp decline in the unorganised sector. Demand for work under the MGNREGS shot up as workers lost work in urban areas and migrated back to the rural areas. This demand has remained high. Further, credit off-take reached a record low. Finally, investment data showed a sharp decline. These factors support the argument that there was a sharp downturn in the economy.

The decline in the unorganised sector had two consequences. Production from the unorganised sector was substituted by the organised sectors and mass demand from the unorganised sector declined. The latter further hit the growth of the unorganised sectors. Coexistence of agricultural surplus along with persistence of malnourishment

among a large percent of the women and children is an indication of lack of purchasing power with the unorganised sectors. Surpluses due to low demand have led to low prices of agricultural produce and depressed incomes.

In brief, the two-way movement in the economy—the rise in the organised sector production and a decline in the output of the unorganised sector—means the pre-demonetisation ratios for estimation of quarterly growth rates do not hold. Earlier, it was implicit in the method that the unorganised and organised sectors are growing together—this is no longer true.

Two important conclusions follow. One, the organised sector is growing at the expense of the unorganised sector leading to a crisis in the latter. Two, official data needs to be corrected to take this into account; if this is done, the rate of growth would turn out to be far less than 8.2%.

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Calling Naidu's Bluffs

Sankara Narayanan

In the recently concluded World Hindu Congress (WHC) in Chicago, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu stated that “the only country that accepts all religions is India”. He also said, “Even though we have so much strength, we never attacked anyone in history.”

Some time ago, hundreds of the country’s top writers, artists, scientists, historians, film makers and other intellectuals had returned their national awards to lodge their protest against the growing atmosphere of intolerance in the country. Responding to this awardwapsi, Venkaiah Naidu, who was then a union minister, had observed, “They say tolerance in this country is coming down. However, India is the only country in this world where tolerance is observed, if not 100% at least 99%.” He further stated, “If you go back to history, India was invaded by many foreign countries but there was not a single instance where we invaded any country. We respect all religions. That is the greatness of India. Tolerance is genetically ingrained in Indians' blood.”

There are two strong assumptions in the above utterances of Naidu. First, that Indians, meaning in this instance Hindus, are unique because we have tolerance; we are ‘the only’ people to tolerate the conqueror living among us. Second, that while India was invaded many times, Indians never invaded another country.

First Assumption: We are 'the only' people to tolerate the conqueror living among us.

India is not unique here. Something similar has happened in many nations. England was conquered by the French in 1066. Even today, unlike India, the majority of English landed nobility and aristocracy are of foreign ancestry. Queen Elizabeth herself is from the royal house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha of Germany. England's aristocracy still holds its foreign origins with great pride and is not resented by the British.

In the thirteenth century, China was captured by the Mongols under Kublai Khan, who established the Yuan dynasty. This Mongol dynasty of Yuan is revered in China. North Africa is made up of a mix of races that have mingled at least since 450 BC. Turkey was conquered by the Central Asian Turks and was occupied by a mix of people including Greeks. Cyprus is half Turkish and half Greek.

The name Hungary comes from Huns, a tribe from Central Asia, who conquered Europe in the 4th century AD and assimilated with the Europeans. Hungarian is not a language of Europe. The Greeks ruled and assimilated with Egyptians for centuries. Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt, was actually Greek speaking. Many countries in the American continent are ruled by invaders, the most prominent example being the USA. Are the conquerors not ruling Australia and New Zealand?

These are just a few examples. There are many others. So Naidu’s belief—which is also held by many others—that Indians (he actually

means Hindus) are in some way extraordinary or unique because they have managed to ‘tolerate’, or live in peace with those who have conquered India, is wrong.

Second Assumption: That India was only invaded, and Indians never invaded another country

No need not go very far to puncture this myth. Indian king Ranjit Singh's generals captured Kabul towards the end of his reign. Of course Ranjit Singh would see himself as being a Punjabi rather than an Indian, because this was a time before India became a nation state.

Samrat Ashoka had one of his famous pillars in Kandahar. Was it put up out of respect? He probably raided or threatened to raid if the Afghans did not submit. To this example, some would say that Afghanistan is also a part of India. In that case, they should not consider the Afghans from Mohammed Ghazni to the Sultans of Lodi dynasty to Sher Shah Suri who conquered northern India as foreign conquerors.

The idea that Hindus are peace loving and reticent is a modern one. We actually have never had any problem spilling our own blood. The Marathas conquered Gujarat. This was not a peaceful or democratic takeover. Ashoka flattened Kalinga and massacred thousands of Odias. It was not tolerance or lack of visa that stopped him from attempting the same in China or Burma or Australia. It was the natural borders. North Indian dynasties had little geographic space in which to

conquer 'foreign', meaning non-subcontinental territory.

In the same period that north India was invaded by Muslims and England by France, the Tamils under the Chola dynasty invaded Southeast Asia because they were among the few Indian dynasties with a competent navy. But the saffron brigade and many others who claim that India never invaded any nation don't find any incongruity in eulogising this achievement of Chola dynasty as a triumph of India. How can there be so much Hindu influence in Bali island in Indonesia or a Hindu temple constructed at Angkor Wat in Cambodia without Indians attacking those nations?

BJP-RSS and Religious Tolerance

Coming back to Naidu's assertion that "the only country that accepts all religions is India", the vituperative and vicious attacks on Muslims and Christians in the last four years are calling Naidu's bluff adequately. Over the last four years, there have been innumerable love jihad and ghar wapsi episodes, apart from the several incidents of lynching of Muslims.

This is actually in tune with the ideology of 'Hindu supremacy' and 'intolerance towards non-Hindu religions' propagated by Naidu's guru M.S. Golwalker, who is considered to be the foremost ideologue of the RSS, the parent organisation of the BJP, the party ruling India today. M.S. Golwalker in his book *We or Our Nationhood Defined* says, "The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e. they

must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age-old traditions but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead—in a word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights."

In the same book, Golwalker also said, "To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

Religious Violence in India Goes Back to Ancient Times

Actually, demolition and desecration of rival religious establishments, and the appropriation of their idols, goes back to ancient times in India, that is, much before the advent of Islam. There existed many Brahminical and non-Brahminical religions and their sects in ancient India. Their adherents were not always friendly and mutually accommodative, but were, in fact, very often hostile to one another. The two Brahminical sects, Vaishnavism and Shaivism, fought among themselves, and they both were constantly at loggerheads with the followers of the Shramanic religions—Buddhism and Jainism.

Historian Dwijendra Narayan Jha in his book *Against the Grain: Notes on Identity, Intolerance and*

History challenges the depiction of the "ancient period of Indian history as a golden age marked by social harmony devoid of any religious violence". He says that it is very much true that Brahminical sects "bore huge animosity towards the two heterodox religions, Buddhism and Jainism". Citing the famous grammarian Patanjali, Jha says that he "famously stated in his *Mahabhashya* that Brahmins and Shramanas are eternal enemies, like the snake and the mongoose. This rancour resulted in attacks and the appropriation of Buddhist and Jain sacred places."

Jha marshals a wide array of examples to show the enormous scale of religious violence in ancient India. For example, in the 7th century, King Shashanka cut the down Bodhi tree, under which Buddha gained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, and replaced the Buddha's statue with that of Shiva in a local temple.

Seven centuries earlier, in 185 CE, Pushyamitra Shunga overthrew the Buddhist Mauryan dynasty, destroyed the Ashokan pillared hall and the Kukutarama monastery in Pataliputra. He is also said to have vandalised the famous Sanchi Stupa, burnt down the Ghositaram monastery in Kaushambi, and killed Buddhist monks wantonly. As a consequence, the Buddhist Sanskrit work, *Divyavadana*, describes him as the "great persecutor" of Buddhists.

Jha cites several examples of Brahminical destruction and appropriation of Buddhist/Jain monuments such as Sarnath, Sravasti, Mathura's Katra Mound, Nalanda, Sialkot, Satdhara (in Katni district), Deurkothar (in Rewa district), Vidisha, Khajuraho, Kaushambi near Allahabad, Vaishali, Jayendravihara

at Srinagar, Bodh Gaya, Somapura Mahavihara (Bangladesh), Bankura, Bochaganj in Dinajpur, Shripur in Raipur district, Puri, Bhubaneswar, Tagara in Osmanabad district, Karle near Lonavala in Pune district, Ellora in Aurangabad district, Chezerla in Guntur district, Amaravati, Nagapattinam, Kanchipuram and many many more. These are just some of the examples taken from Jha's list of religious sites that were appropriated or destroyed, making it clear that ancient India witnessed a level of religious violence that was certainly not insignificant.

Tolerance and Indians Today

So much so for Naidu's assertion that "We (Indians) respect all religions." With regard to Naidu's claim that "tolerance is genetically ingrained in Indian blood" and "tolerance is observed, if not 100% at least 99%", the continuing caste discrimination, untouchability, atrocities against the oppressed castes, honour killings, the rant against reservation and the violent attacks on the people of the North-East, Kashmir and people of African origin tell an entirely different story. Violence let loose on the bi-centenary celebrations at Bhima Koregaon in January this year is another example of such intolerance.

With such 'magnanimous behaviour' on display by caste Hindus in this 'Dharmic' land, Naidu's certificates on "tolerance" are nothing but cruel jokes. Media headlines and briefs on the plight of the subjugated castes clearly tell 'the percentage of observed tolerance'. It also reveals how much "genetically ingrained" is tolerance in Indians' blood.

This is all well known to Naidu. Nothing new is revealed. But

it is remarkable that despite all these shames, many caste Hindus, even legislators, ministers and the educated sections, believe the myth about peaceful acceptance of all religions in India and continue to utter outrageous lies on tolerance of Indians.

In the WHC, Swami Vivekananda was quoted by one and all. Let me also quote the Swami while concluding this article: "India's doom was sealed the day it coined the word Mlechha. No religion on earth preaches dignity of humanity in such a lofty frame and no religion sits on the neck of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism."

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Email: psn.1946@gmail.com

If Maoist Violence is Illegitimate, How is Hindutva Violence and State Violence Justified?

Swami Agnivesh and Sandeep Pandey

There was major police action against Sudha Bhardwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Varvara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira on 28 August 2018. Before this, the police had arrested Professor Shoma Sen, Adocate Sudhir Gadling, Sudhir Dhawle, Mahesh Raut and Rona Wilson on 6 June. Even before this, Dr. Binayak Sen, Soni Sori, Ajay T.G., Professor G.N. Saibaba and Prashant Rahi have been arrested and all these activists have been accused of having links with Maoists. Maoists are considered dangerous because they are thought to be plotting to destabilise the government. The five who have been most recently targeted are also accused of having planned to assassinate the Prime Minister. This charge is ridiculous because they are

dedicated activists fighting for the rights of marginalised sections of our society and don't really have the time to indulge in frivolous activity like planning an assassination. The cooked up charge is to justify the police action.

Maoists are considered illegitimate because they support violence. Any violence cannot be justified in a democracy. However, the question is, if violence is bad, how is other kinds of violence more legitimate than Maoist violence?

The history of the right wing is replete with incidents of violence. How can we forget that the person with whom India's identity is associated in the entire world and who lived the value of non-violence was murdered by people believing in Hindutva ideology? The Rashtriya

Swayamsewak Sangh can never wash off this sin, irrespective of however much Narendra Modi may have tried to co-opt Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, instead of using the icons of Hindutva ideology Hedgewar, Golwalkar and Savarkar.

By demolishing the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992 the RSS, Bhartiya Janata Party, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal reignited the fire of communalism in this country after its partition in 1947. By this, they devilishly pushed the society towards Hindu–Muslim polarisation for their political gain. The incident has caused irreparable damage to the politics and social fabric of this country. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, kar sevaks attacked the Muslim residents of Ayodhya, murdering 18 Muslims. Several people died in communal riots across the country following the incident.

Demolition of Babri Masjid is responsible for inviting the problem of terrorism to India. The first terrorist incident in India, which were then called serial bomb blasts, occurred in 1993 in Mumbai as a reaction to Babri Masjid demolition. Many such incidents have taken place since then. Bomb blasts have also taken place which were plotted by the people subscribing to the Hindutva ideology. What can be more cowardly than retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay and serving Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Srikant Purohit—both associated with Abhinav Bharat, an organisation inspired by the Hindutva ideology of RSS—being part of a conspiracy to explode bombs in their own country? On 8 September 2006, 38 people died in explosions in Malegaon, Maharashtra and on 29

September 2008, 10 people died in blasts at Malegaon and Modasa in Gujarat. Workers of Abhinav Bharat organisation were made the accused in both incidents. Bomb explosion on 18 February 2007 killed 68 persons in Samjhauta Express. The same year on 18 May in bomb explosions outside Mecca Masjid of Hyderabad, 9 people were killed and 5 more became casualties in police firing. Abhinav Bharat again is believed to have a hand in these blasts. On 11 October 2017, there were bomb explosions at Khawaja Moinuddin Chisti's dargah in Ajmer in which 19 people were killed. Bhavesh Patel and Devendra Gupta, both having connections with RSS, were convicted for this incident with life imprisonment.

In 2002, in reaction to a fire in a coach of Sabarmati Express outside Godhra railway station, communal violence took the lives of 1000–2000 people, most of whom were Muslims. Leaders–workers of BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal openly participated as perpetrators. It is believed that the then Narendra Modi government in Gujarat was directly or indirectly involved in fanning the violence. At least the police didn't actively put an end to the violence. At that time PM Atal Behari Vajpayee had to admonish Narendra Modi to follow the righteous principles of governance. Because of his dubious role in the violence, the United States denied Narendra Modi a visa until he became PM.

Between 2013 and 2017, assailants associated with Sanatan Sanstha are suspected of having murdered in cold blood Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Professor M.M. Kalburgi and journalist Gauri Lankesh, essentially because they held and propagated

views which were critical of the Hindutva ideology.

A new trend of violence was initiated after Narendra Modi ascended to power in Delhi. Muslims began to be lynched to death on suspicion of cow slaughter or for simply transporting cows. On 28 September 2015, Mohammed Akhlaq was lynched to death on the suspicion of having stolen and slaughtered a cow in Bisada village near Dadri. An announcement was first made from the loudspeaker of a temple for people to assemble before the assault. On 18 March 2016 in Latehar, a Jharkhand cattle trader, 32-year-old Mazlum Ansari, accompanied by 15-year-old Imtiaz Khan, were on their way to a cattle fair with with 8 oxen when they were lynched to death by members of a cow vigilante committee and their dead bodies hung from a tree. On 1 April 2017, 55-year-old Pehlu Khan, a resident of Mewat, Haryana was returning after having purchased cows and calves from Rajasthan with five others; he was dragged out of his vehicle and lynched to death in front of his son's eyes in Alwar by some people inspired by the Hindutva ideology. Pehlu Khan had the receipt for purchase of cattle and documents to show that they were being taken for the purpose of dairy. On 20 July 2018, Rakbar Khan, also from Haryana, while transporting two cows was lynched in Alwar and declared dead when brought to hospital. The police thought it fit to first take the cows to a gaushala before taking Rakbar to hospital.

Another type of incidents have been launched since Narendra Modi came to power in Delhi. Youth associated with Hindutva ideology insist on forcibly taking out motorcycle rallies with national

flags as well as saffron flags through Dalit and Muslim localities and try to provoke violence. On 5 May 2017, some Rajput youth took out a motorcycle rally through a Dalit locality in Shabbirpur village of Saharanpur in UP, ostensibly to garland a Maharana Pratap statue, and in the ensuing violence a Rajput and a Dalit youth lost their lives. It is in connection with this incident that Dalit youth leader Chandrashakhar Azad Ravan was kept in jail for more than a year under the draconian National Security Act. On 26 January 2018, some youth associated with Hindutva ideology tried to take out a motorcycle rally through Abdul Hameed Chowk in Kasganj where Muslim youth were celebrating Republic Day as they do every year. In the resulting violence, a youth Chandan Gutpa was killed. The Bareilly District Magistrate Raghvendra Pratap Singh had to say on twitter, "It is becoming a strange tradition. Take out a rally forcibly through Muslim locality and raise Pakistan murdabad slogans. Are they Pakistanis?"

So that there is no doubt that these incidents are not premeditated, on 7 July 2018 in Hazaribagh, central minister Jayant Sinha garlanded eight members of a cow vigilante group who are accused of lynching and were out on bail. On 19 April 2017, Sadhvi Kamal didi honoured Vipin Yadav, one of the accused in Pehlu Khan's lynching case, and compared him to Bhagat Singh, Chandrashakhar Azad and Sukhdev. This shows that the Sangh Parivar does not only justify the violence committed by its cadre but also glorifies it.

In addition there are incidents of state violence. On 11 July 2004 in Manipur, 34-year-old Thangjam

Manorama was raped and killed by members of the paramilitary force, Assam Rifles. On 15 July 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the CBI to conduct an enquiry into illegal encounters in Manipur by security forces. On 22 May 2018, when about 20,000 people marched toward the District Collector's office to protest against pollution caused by Vedanta company Sterlite in Thoothukudi

in Tamil Nadu, 13 people died in police firing.

If the civil society thinks that violence is illegitimate, then all kinds of violence must be condemned, and the government should make an attempt to stop all such violence.

**E-mails: agnivesh70@gmail.com;
ashaashram@yahoo.com**

Theatre of Absurd: Modi and the Dawoodi Bohra Pontiff

Irfan Engineer

The invitation by the High Priest of Dawoodi Bohras, a Shia Muslim sub-sect, to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to address their religious congregation on 14 September 2018 on the occasion of Muharram, and the PM accepting the invite, can only be described as the theatre of absurd. Prime Minister Modi is the leader of a right wing Hindu supremacist party which thrives on the ideology that Muslims are foreigners in "their land" and whose right place is either Pakistan or kabristan (cemetery).

Muharram is period of grief for Muslims to remember the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. Imam Hussain preferred to uphold the principles of Islam and refused to give oath of allegiance to a tyrant, the Caliph of Umayyad Dynasty, Yazid I. Yazid commanded a powerful and well equipped army of over a thousand whereas Imam Hussein's 72 followers included women and children, youngest of them being the six month old Ali Asghar. To refuse oath of allegiance was tantamount to embracing death. For the Dawoodi Bohra Pontiff to invite the Prime Minister who headed the Gujarat

Government in the year 2002 when Muslims including members of the Dawoodi Bohra community were massacred is against the spirit of Muharram and martyrdom of Imam Hussain. Imam Hussain defended the principles of Islam—humanity even at the cost of his life and speaking the truth even in the face of a tyrant. On the other hand, when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he justified the anti-Muslim pogrom, saying that it was a reaction to the burning of a train in Godhra on 27 February 2002 which caused the deaths of 58 kar sevaks. The Modi-led state government allowed post-mortem of the 58 charred bodies to be carried out in public view in the railway yard. Then, instead of handing over the bodies to their relatives for last rites, they were handed over to belligerent members of Hindu supremacist organisations seeking revenge for the deaths. The bodies were then taken in procession from Godhra to Ahmedabad. Humanity was buried during those days of riots, and Modi was certainly on the wrong side of the history.

Why did the Bohra Pontiff invite PM Modi?

The Bohra Pontiff's financial empire runs into hundreds of billions of dollars. His extended large family lives a luxurious life. The luxuries that the entire family enjoys would shame any medieval king and give the richest families in the world a run for their money. The only source of income is 'taxes' levied by the *kothar*, that is, the Pontiff's establishment, and zealously collected through coercive means. The 'taxes' include *zakat*, *silā*, *fitra*, *nazar muqam*, *haqqun nafs*, *shabil*, etc. collectively called as *wajebat*. Middle class individual families can be coerced to contributing a couple of lakhs of rupees annually (though some do escape paying a few thousand after a great deal of argument and persuasion).

Three consequences visit if the 'taxes' levied by the *kothar* are not paid—obstruction to entry inside mosques and various religious shrines maintained by *kothar*; obstruction or holding back or even refusal to solemnise a marriage within the family and finally, refusing access to burial when there is death within the family. Besides, a Bohra has to seek *razaa* (permission) of the *kothar* for many other activities—organisation of religious ceremonies and life cycle rituals from birth to death. For all such ceremonies, the priest would ask for the green card which is issued to all those who have paid up their *wajebat*. This writer was also asked for the green card on the death of his mother. When I told the priest that I hadn't paid any taxes at all, I was refused access to the burial grounds of the Bohra community. Those who question any practice of the *kothar* or ask for accounts or those who do not act according

to the religious edicts issued by the *kothar* are socially boycotted. The edicts can include whom to vote for and which newspapers and magazines should not be read and even not taking up certain jobs—for example, jobs in the Bombay Mercantile Cooperative Bank. Since Bohras are a tightly knit inward looking community with little or no socialisation with non-Bohras, social boycott practically means civil death. In certain cases, the goons of *kothar* have even resorted to violence and rioting. There were 6 attempts on life of Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, because he fought against the absolute hold of the Bohra Pontiff over the community. His house and office were completely destroyed on 13 February 2000. This writer was also beaten up for attending a reformist Bohra conference in Mumbai in the year 1981. Women in Udaipur associated with the Bohra reform movement there were molested inside the Galiakot Shrine in presence of the Pontiff and Pontiff's goons beat up people inside a mosque in Udaipur.

The Nathwani Commission appointed by Jayaprakash Narayan's Citizens for Democracy to look into atrocities committed by the *kothar* and violations of the human rights of Bohras by them described the *kothar* as a "state within a state". All these violations have been challenged by the reform movement within the Bohra Community. They have drawn attention of the Governments of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan as well as the Central Government towards the violations of various laws by the *kothar*.

This massive empire can function like a state within a state only in violation of human rights

and various laws of the country. In order to sustain this empire, the Pontiff and his establishment require protection and patronage of the state. To obtain the patronage of the state, the Pontiff's establishment contributes generously to the ruling party and even promises votes. The contributions are so generous that even those who are ideologically inclined towards the reform movement and sympathise with their cause find it difficult to resist offers. Reformists approached Morarji Desai, when he was the prime minister, with the Nathwani Commission Report, seeking action. In spite of expressing sympathy, the Janata Party Government did nothing. Similarly, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi governments also did nothing. When the Hindutvawadi NDA Government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee came to power in 1998, the reformists approached Vajpayee, but he too expressed his inability to do anything. Bal Thackeray rarely stepped out of his home, but he went to the Pontiff's palatial residence in Malabar Hill in Mumbai to be felicitated and that too after the communal riots in Mumbai in 1992–93. The Pontiff was appeasing the tiger to keep him off his empire; so much for the tiger's ideology.

The Pontiff spends these huge amounts from the hard earned money of Bohras not protect their interests, but to protect the interests of the *kothar*. Bohras are basically a business community, and they were badly affected by demonetisation and GST. For a common Bohra, BJP would be her last electoral choice given its anti-minority rhetoric and communal violence, its discriminatory exclusion of the minorities in governance and its economic policies that favour big

business over small and medium enterprises.

The Pontiff must have expended huge political capital to get the prime minister to address the event organised by his establishment. The Pontiff sends members of the community for all public events of Modi. He even sent Bohras to the Madison Square event of Narendra Modi.

When a prime minister of the country associates with the Pontiff, message goes down to the bureaucracy not to investigate any violation. The Pontiff reaffirms his authority over the community, he appears invincible to members of the community. They have no other option other than submitting to the Pontiff's whims and edicts, because the price to be paid for disobeying is very heavy—social boycott by all relatives and friends. Most people do not have nerves of steel as Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer—he stood up to the Pontiff because of his social commitment, and belief in truth and Allah. The practical businessman prefers to 'buy peace'. Some other successful Bohra business families buy status and social recognition by contributing huge amounts as *wajebat*.

Why Modi praised the Bohra community?

Hindutva has always branded Muslim identity and culture as foreign to Indian culture and having a separatist mindset, and stigmatised the community as terrorists. The moderates among them called for forceful integration of Muslims into Hindu culture and obliteration of all vestiges of Muslim culture. The extremists among them called for their physical elimination from Indian soil—either by physically

eliminating them, or forcing them to emigrate to other Muslim countries, particularly Pakistan.

Has Modi changed? He showered showering praises on the Bohra community and called them honest traders, and praised Imam Hussain's teachings as ones that upheld peace and justice. The PM praised the Pontiff for inculcating the values of peace, *sadbhav* (goodwill), *satyagrah* and patriotism within the community. He tried to endear himself to the Bohras assembled at the congregation by saying that he felt "part of the Dawoodi Bohra family" and that his doors were open for their family members as well. We do not think that Modi has changed his views, he has only calibrated them a bit to suit his purpose in an election year—both the Madhya Pradesh state elections as well as the general elections are scheduled to take place in less than a year.

Those within the Hindu supremacist fold who are practical know that it is impossible to eliminate a 172 million strong community (the Muslim population in India as per the 2011 census). They propose two alternatives. One is to divide the community along sectarian lines, and deal with the different factions separately. Hindu supremacists have been trying to leverage the Shia sect against Sunni Muslims as a part of their divisive politics. Falling prey to this divisive agenda, the Shias have been claiming that Babri Masjid land is a Shia Waqf property and that they are ready to settle the Babri Masjid–Ramjanmabhoomi dispute by allowing construction of a Ram temple on the land. The other alternative being proposed by other important RSS leaders like Rajiv Malhotra (the US based Hindutva ideologue) is that the

RSS should encourage Muslims to indigenise, and that the RSS would have no problems with indigenised Muslims praying to Allah and observing other religious rituals. By indigenisation Malhotra means 'de-Arabisation' of Muslims and their virtually accepting Hindu supremacy. Malhotra's solution is only an extension of Golwalkar's solution of relegating adherents of 'foreign religions' to second class citizenship; he propounds that 'nationalised' Muslims should sever all relations with the religious-cultural centres of Islam, that their sources of knowledge should be from within the *pitrubhoomi* (fatherland). Bohra community and the Pontiff fits this description, and is therefore called patriotic.

Dawoodi Bohra community's headquarters have been in Mumbai for centuries, and overwhelming majority of them are Gujarati speaking. The Pontiff's sermons are also in Gujarati, albeit with some sprinkling of Arabic words. The "family" Modi is referring to in his address refers to their Gujaratiness. Locating patriotism in a small Gujarati speaking Shia Muslim community rather than in all citizens of the country is inherently problematic. It implies that non-Bohra and non-Gujarati Muslim communities are problematic, foreign, Arabised and therefore less patriotic. Modi sailed through three elections in Gujarat by invoking Gujarati *asmita* (dignity or pride).

The frame of reference still privileges communities over individuals and locates values like honesty, goodwill towards fellow human beings, *satyagrah* and patriotism within communities. Accident of birth in a community shapes and determines every

individuals. The Indian Constitution, on the other hand, recognises only its citizens and privileges citizens with fundamental rights of equality, liberty and dignity, and guarantees protection of these rights. The only groups the Constitution recognises are those that are educationally and socially backward and who have been oppressed and discriminated against, for affirmative action, and minority groups, to protect their cultural rights.

The Urdu speaking, or Tamil, Bengali, Malayalam, Assamese or any other Indian language speaking Muslims may be different from Gujarati speaking Muslims, but are not any less patriotic, less indigenised Muslims than Bohras and Shias. This artificial attempt to divide the Muslim community along sectarian lines will have other serious complications. Urdu is not a Muslim language, it is an Indian language and draws from local culture. No Muslim in India is Arabised. On the other hand, all kinds of foreign cultures, including Western, Arabic and Persian, have influenced not only Muslims, but also Hindus and all other communities. Ghazals are written in many Indian languages, including Gujarati. Many English, Arabic and Persian words have been part of Indian language vocabularies and these languages would be poorer without them.

Bohra women, Pontiff and Modi

On the Triple Talaq issue, the Modi government claimed to be championing the cause of Muslim women. Modi castigated the Congress for appeasing only Muslim men. The Bohra Pontiff discourages education of Bohra women, compels women to wear *purdah* and in order to promote a separate identity,

has banned black coloured veils. He discourages Bohra women to undertake employment or earn their livelihood. In one video, he is heard advising the men to throw out their women if they do not listen to them! In another video, the Pontiff has also personally defended female genital mutilation practiced in the community without naming it.

How can a prime minister attend the religious function of such a leader when his own slogan is *beti bachao beti padhao*? Is the PM's claim of championing the cause of Muslim women mere rhetoric? It is evident that Hindutva does not respect any principles except one—supremacy of the Hindu upper castes and creation of an authoritarian cultural state that would defend the privileges of the Hindu upper castes. Rest can be compromised.

Email: irfanengi@gmail.com

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There is Still Time for an Ecological Revolution to Prevent Hothouse Earth

John Bellamy Foster, editor of the Socialist Journal Monthly Review published from New York, interviewed by Fiona Ferguson, a Belfast-based activist. The interview below is posted on the Irish socialist website REBEL.

Q: Recent record high temperatures might suggest the development towards climate catastrophe is already far advanced, faster than scientists and the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) predicted. Many are predicting that it may already be too late to save the situation. What is your assessment?

I think the projections of the IPCC and climate scientists generally have been reasonably accurate so far, based on an October 2017 report on this from Carbon Brief. Where a sense of the models not being accurate no doubt enters in is not so much in terms of their predictions with respect to warming itself, but rather in the inability of models to predict the severity of the resulting extreme weather events and the inability to gauge the development of positive feedbacks.

Not only are we constantly being shocked by the increasing extremity of the weather, but we are facing new information all the time about the perils of the main climate feedbacks, which threaten to accelerate the whole problem beyond our control—positive feedbacks such as the melting of the arctic sea ice, the collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheet, the disruption of the thermohaline circulation, the drying out of the Amazon rain forest, etc.

The situation is very grave. At the present rate of emissions, we will

break the carbon budget in eighteen years. To avoid doing so (i.e., in order to not emit the trillionth metric ton of carbon, to stay clear of 450 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and to prevent an increase in global average temperature by 2°C) while reaching zero net carbon dioxide emissions by 2050—required if we are to stabilise carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere—it is necessary to reduce carbon dioxide emissions beginning in 2020 by around 6 percent a year globally while sucking another 150 gigatons of carbon from the atmosphere by means of improved forestry and agroecology practices.

Carbon dioxide emissions in the rich countries, where emission reductions are more feasible, would have to decrease by double-digit levels annually. Needless to say, we would also have to contain other greenhouse gas emissions such as methane and nitrous oxide.

None of this, however, is beyond our reach. We have ample means of making such cuts in emissions, while improving the lives of most people and protecting the environment. But this cannot be achieved without a sharp departure from business as usual, which means going against the logic of capital, and particularly the fossil-fuel complex. It would require an ecological and social revolution.

Those who pronounce that it is already “too late” are thus not

referring to whether the change is humanly possible at this point—it definitely is. Rather, they are acceding to the prevailing logic of capital and the attendant political structure, as defining the limits of what is feasible. This a kind of defeatism enforced by the system, relying on what C. Wright Mills called crackpot realism, in that it allows the very forces that have generated the planetary crisis to determine how to react to that crisis with the inevitable disastrous results for humanity as a whole.

Arguably, the stance on climate change introduced by the Trump administration is not so much a failure to acknowledge global warming, but rather a concerted attempt to destroy any path to mitigation by closing off any remaining hope of meeting the global carbon budget. It is a sort of burn the ships behind you strategy from the standpoint of the system. All of this is in line with capitalist imperatives. Wall Street stocks have reached new heights.

I have been arguing for about a quarter-century, since I wrote *The Vulnerable Planet* (1994), that the system of capital accumulation is incapable of addressing the climate problem, and nothing in all this time has presented any convincing counter evidence, while time is rapidly running out. What this means is that we have to create another path, one necessarily arising within but leading away from the present

regime of accumulation.

An article published this month in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences entitled “Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene,” by Will Steffan et. al, representing some of the leading Earth-system scientists (including some of those associated with both the planetary boundaries concept and the Anthropocene Working Group) argues that the 2°C boundary is crucially important because there is now ample reason to believe that if we reach (or cross) that guardrail, we will have arrived at a point of irreversibility—meaning that we can no longer get back to anything approximating Holocene conditions (e.g. 350 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere).

Instead, we will be faced with cascading tipping points resulting from climate feedbacks that will likely push the climate onto the “Hothouse Earth” pathway, irrevocably leading to a rise in global average temperature of 3–4°C this century and even higher after that. The challenge facing us, then, is to stabilise the climate, relatively speaking. Even under the best conditions, however, we are likely to see a planet warmer this century than any time in the last 800,000 years.

The authors of the National Academy of Science article on Hothouse Earth believe that is still possible to stabilise the climate but only through a massive global effort. Geoengineering options are considered but for the most part disregarded as far too dangerous, ultimately compounding the climate change problem without solving it. Instead, they insist that “incremental linear changes to the present socioeconomic system are not enough to stabilise the Earth

System. Widespread, rapid, and fundamental transformations will likely be required to reduce the risk of crossing the threshold and locking in the Hothouse Earth pathway.”

Q: The fossil fuel industries—oil, gas and coal—play a central role in the global capitalist economy. Do you think there is any realistic possibility of persuading or pressuring the world’s governments to move away from fossil fuels?

Let’s look at the history for a moment. We first became aware of accelerated global warming in the early 1960s (the first warning emanated from climatologists in the Soviet Union). A presidential commission on the subject was initiated in Washington in the mid-1960s under Lyndon Johnson. It became a world issue with James Hansen’s testimony before Congress and the formation of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the late 1980s. This was followed by the Kyoto Protocol in the early 1990s.

But nothing really has happened materially since to alleviate the danger, despite various agreements, all the way up to the 2015 Paris Agreement. We have seen no real reductions in carbon emissions, which, to the contrary, have continued to rise. No country in the world that is a major emitter of fossil fuels has cut carbon emissions at anywhere near the level required.

This has mainly to do with the nature and logic of capitalism. The ruling power in a capitalist society is the capitalist class, and its modes of accumulation via the giant monopolistic corporations, and financial markets, all of which exist in the private sector. Theoretically, the state is relatively autonomous of

the capitalist class. But, in practice, the state, particularly at the center of the system, is largely dominated and delimited by capital.

The state under monopoly capitalism, as Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy argued more than half a century ago, is “democratic in form and plutocratic in content.” Faced with climate change, capitalist states have adopted one or two stances: (1) denying it altogether (as in Trump’s Washington), or (2) instituting very limited and ineffective mechanisms—aimed at not upsetting markets—purportedly directed at carbon dioxide emissions reductions and the development of energy alternatives. These measures, which include carbon market, alternative energy subsidies, and the like, are invariably insufficient to address the problem, at most gaining a bit of extra time.

Although it is true that the state in a capitalist society can at times institute quite significant reforms, anything that threatens the capital accumulation process itself is quickly aborted.

All of this is a rather long-winded way of saying that there is no possibility that the world’s governments as presently constituted will move away from fossil fuels—unless of course the logic of capital is challenged throughout the society, threatening the state and the dominance of the powers that be in quite fundamental ways.

It is possible that China might do something in the way of a fairly radical version of ecological modernisation outside the capitalist norm. However, their priority too is high economic growth at all costs. China’s fossil fuel use thus continues to expand despite strenuous efforts to reduce the amount of carbon

emissions per unit of output and to decrease dependence on coal.

Larry Elliott, the Guardian's talented economic editor, just wrote an article on August 16, entitled "Capitalism Can Crack Climate Change," in which he claimed, with no understanding of the real problem, that it was merely a matter of a carbon tax and finding the right technological innovations—exactly "what," he declared, "capitalism is all about." This, though, is little more than an ideological claim, lacking any real substance, based on Joseph Schumpeter's notion of creative destruction, introduced in his *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* to defend monopoly pricing and profits.

The only surprising element in Elliott's defense of capitalism with respect to climate change is his supposition that "a Chinese model of managed and directed capitalism might be more appropriate than the Anglo-Saxon model." But to claim that the economic model of present-day China will save the world from climate change (and provide a justification for capitalism as well) at the very time that China's growth in emissions is increasing at the fastest pace in seven years is obviously filled with contradictions and ironies.

The only thing that could alter this dire situation, all over the world, is the rise of another power in society. We need not millions but hundreds of millions of people, necessarily predominantly working class, in the street day in and day out. There has to be a shift in tactics towards active non-cooperation. Mere mass demonstrations, as important as they are, will no longer do the job in this situation. Given the threat to capital accumulation that a serious climate

change movement represents, such protests are simply downplayed by the corporate media.

Hence, rather than focusing on getting media attention, or concentrating on direct appeals to the government, the strategic orientation of the movement has to be one of non-cooperation with the political-economic hegemony.

What is needed is an independent, revolutionary groundswell aimed at the reconstitution of production and consumption in the society, at least to the degree necessary to prevent society from reaching the point of no return with respect to climate change—though the ultimate aims would need to go beyond that. It will have to be internationalist, which means anti-imperialist in character, since global unity of the oppressed—encompassing the many forms of oppression—is the *sine qua non* of the movement.

Q: A few years ago, the general consensus was that anthropogenic climate change was now widely accepted, except for isolated deniers on the fringe of politics. What is your assessment of the reassertion of climate change denial, particularly around the Trump presidency. Why now, given how evident climate chaos has become?

In my view, straight out climate denial is not really the issue. As Naomi Klein argued in her 2014 book *This Changes Everything: The Right Is Right*. The political right, Klein points out, is very clear that to fight climate change you have to fight capitalism, and that is the source of their objections to all efforts to mitigate climate change. Given a choice between capitalism and the planet they choose the former.

It has very little to do with the rejection of climate change as a reality. I'm not sure how much even people in the primarily lower-middle class, white demographic that constitutes Trump's chief supporters actually buy into the climate denial line, though of course some do, particularly in fundamentalist religious circles. However, it is more like a badge than a belief. A lot of what stands for straight out denialism is really a kind of political trope.

The Trump administration's approach to truth is like professional wrestling or reality television. It is presented as the truth and adopted as such, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, almost in an act of defiance. It represents a kind of destruction of reason, and in that lies its propagandistic power. Like Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, people are so enraged that they are willing to "vomit up reason." Of course, all of this is heavily promoted by capital with massive amounts of money going into keeping this irrational propaganda campaign afloat.

The real issue, from my standpoint, is not so much the straight-out climate deniers as the open acquiescence of political liberals (or the so-called liberal-left), the well-meaning Larry Elliotts, who adopt the position that the whole thing can be solved by the market and technology with a little bit of help from the state. This is a different form of denial.

The willful delusions here are in some ways more dangerous than that of the straight-out climate deniers, since they are subtler and infect those who ostensibly are on the side of change. The impression arises that something is being done,

say, under Obama, while the actions taken are in fact grossly insufficient. It is the liberal head-in-the-sand approach, which claims that we can solve climate change incrementally as if we had all the time in the world and without changing society, that Klein was really most concerned with targeting in her book. It is for this reason that we have to refer constantly to the need for ‘System Change Not Climate Change’, the name of the important ecosocialist movement in the United States.

Q: Some argue that because Climate Change will eventually impact upon the economy and profit rates, capitalism may be forced to take ecologically corrective measures. Do you think this is possible or is capitalism inherently ecologically destructive?

The ecosocialist and Marxian economist James O’Connor, founder of the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, famously argued in this way with respect to environmental costs in his second contradiction of capitalism theory. Others such as Marxian ecological economist Paul Burkett and myself have insisted that this is entirely wrong. There is no automatic feedback mechanism in the system that translates ecological costs into economic costs to which capitalism will automatically respond.

Capitalism, as K. William Kapp used to argue is a system of “unpaid costs”. It externalises most ecological costs onto society and onto the earth where they have no direct effect on its bottom line. The system can thus grow economically while it destroys its surroundings and the ecological conditions of human existence. By the time this becomes a problem for the system

itself the game will be over for the planet as a safe place for humanity.

There is no doubt, then, that capitalism is inherently ecologically destructive. We have the proof all around us. It is built into the inner logic of the system. Our best hope is to push against this logic, producing in the short run a transitional society in which people and the planet come before profit. But that means that we will already be on the way to a new society of sustainable human development. This is at the core of the movement toward socialism in the Anthropocene.

Q: What do you see as the best way to build mass anti-capitalist ecological consciousness and a mass anti-capitalist movement against climate change?

In 1979, the great English Marxian historian E.P. Thompson read an article in the *Guardian* that Britain was going to install cruise missiles as part of the nuclear weapons-deterrence buildup at that time, which quickly metamorphosed into the Strategic Defense Initiative (better known as Star Wars) under Reagan. Thompson had been a leading figure in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the protests against above ground hydrogen bomb tests. CND emerged as product of the New Left but ended up aligning itself with the Labour Party and with NATO.

Faced with a new deadly nuclear expansion in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Thompson decided not to stick with the CND but to create a new movement, European Nuclear Disarmament (END), that would be non-aligned and autonomous, linking the movements in Europe and forging ties with similar non-

aligned movements in Eastern Europe. This, then, emerged as a powerful grassroots struggle rallying millions across Europe. The END strategy, marked by Thompson’s *Protest and Survive* (which Monthly Review Press published in the United States) also had enormous influence in the United States where a massive Nuclear Freeze Movement emerged, a groundswell that had the support of 72 percent of the US population and that was outside the normal political structure.

The strength of the grassroots anti-nuclear thrust of the 1980s was that it did not seek just to set up vertical lines with governments in the manner of organised pressure groups and lobbyists, but rather sought to grow horizontally across the societies. It was internationalist in orientation and in Thompson’s view a development on the Popular Front against fascism of the 1930s. It thus represented the formation, though short-lived, of a kind of popular power which was universalist in its aims—thus a threat to the system.

No doubt the effect of END and the Nuclear Freeze Movement in the denuclearisation of the period can be exaggerated. Much had to do with the rise of Gorbachev. Still, I think this constitutes the general model of the kind of movement we need at the moment, what might be called a ‘Climate Change Freeze Movement’—though in other ways ‘System Change Not Climate Change’ is a much better designation. Nevertheless, climate change cannot be approached in single-issue terms, as was the 1980s movement to back away from the nuclear brink, but demands action on a far more comprehensive scale, through the self-mobilisation of the mass of the population.

Whatever form it takes, I don't doubt that massive struggles will develop (indeed, are developing), first and foremost in the global South, where the worst effects are being felt—but also through the development of an eventual landslide in the global North as well.

Still, we need to be mindful of the fact that climate change is characterised by tipping points and the consequences do not develop in linear fashion. The worry is that by the time the catastrophic conditions are felt on a wide enough scale, and by the time people mobilise, the situation may be immeasurably worse, with much of it out of our control. That is of course our greatest fear. It should impress upon us, though, the need to act, and as part of acting, we have to extend our critical understanding to others.

Q: Here in Ireland, People Before Profit TD Brid Smith has a Parliamentary Bill to ban all new fossil fuel extraction in Ireland and Irish Waters and it is attracting significant support. Do you think this kind of small-scale local/national initiative is helpful in raising awareness and building the movement? Are there other initiatives you could suggest?

I have been watching these developments in Ireland and I think people all around the world have been too. It is immensely important. We recently put up a story about it on MR Online, Monthly Review's website. The Irish initiative represents a clear attempt break with the logic of capital accumulation and the fossil fuel economy and an urgent call to the entire world. If the Irish people have the courage to follow this through, it will galvanise the struggles throughout the world, and

spark similar attempts elsewhere. Even if this battle is lost, the struggle itself is immeasurably important.

The closest analogue to this in the United States is the Our Children's Trust lawsuit that has now been cleared for trial. It started in Eugene, Oregon where I live. Some of the principal people involved in the suit are friends and acquaintances. James Hansen is the main scientific authority named in the case. It has now been cleared for trial in the United States. It could well emerge as the trial of the century.

The Our Children's Trust case employs the doctrine of public trust, based on an interpretation of the US Constitution, arguing that the government has a legal obligation to protect the population, particularly children and youth, representing future generations, from the damaging effects of climate change through climate change mitigation. It is a test to see if the courts will act. The government and the fossil fuel companies are the defendants in the suit. I see the Our Children's Trust suit like the parliamentary bill on fossil fuel extraction in Ireland, as offering hope, because they challenge the system in fundamental ways, and represent radical, grassroots initiatives.

Another legal struggle in the United States is shaping up centered on the valve turners, a number of individuals who turned off the valves on oil pipelines, and who are being defended on the basis of the necessity defense: that they had no choice but to act given the dire emergency and the prospect of human harm.

All of this comes from a small number of courageous people, some of them children, taking strategic

actions on behalf of us all. But what would happen if we collectively stood up in similar ways, throwing wrenches in the system, demanding fundamental change for the sake of humanity as a whole, creating alternatives that begin at the local level and become progressively more global, and not in small numbers, but in our millions?

It is more than merely a question of marching of course, though that is necessary. We need to create movements that take action, forcing a social, ecological and cultural revolution.

Countless people around the world are already involved in various ways in this struggle. There is still time for the necessary ecological revolution, our only real alternative to prevent Hothouse Earth.

**Acharya Javadekar
A Satyagrahi Socialist**



G. P. Pradhan

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Instead of Defending India, the Raksha Mantri is Instigating Violence Within

Apoorvanand

I have been thinking about the statement defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman made this week lamenting the presence of “anti-national elements” within the student community of her alma mater, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced her statement is not just factually incorrect and irresponsible, as many have pointed out, but also criminal. It is a criminal act to instigate violence and there can be no doubt over what she is trying to do. By levelling a charge which can and will provoke violence against the students of JNU, she is also misusing her office. It is the post of raksha mantri which lends weight to what would otherwise have remained an unedifying example of propaganda by a party person that would have been dismissed by the people. But a defence minister making such a claim gives it a degree of credibility and will end up instigating violence. That is why I believe what she did was criminal.

Sitharaman is doing nothing new. She is only repeating what her colleague Rajnath Singh, who

holds an equally important ministry, had done two years ago. After a controversy was manufactured by the media about an “anti national” meeting in JNU, he went so far as to warn the nation about how the students of JNU had the backing of terrorists from across the border. “The incident at JNU has received support from Hafiz Saeed. This is a truth that the nation needs to understand,” the home minister had said, linking the founder of terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba to the student demonstrations on campus.

Rajnath Singh should be held squarely responsible for the physical attacks on JNU students which took place after his statement. It was after all the home minister himself who was identifying the students as collaborators of the terrorists. Taking a cue from him, his police in Delhi unleashed an unprecedented smear campaign against a number of students.

Kanhaiya Kumar, the then president of the JNU students union, was assaulted brutally on court premises by lawyers. But this act of violence was treated as a trivial

thing. Barely two years after the unprecedented attack, the Supreme Court decided the issue need not be discussed further. When Kamini Jaiswal and Prashant Bhushan pressed for a SIT probe into the violence, the court said, “We don’t think we will flog a dead horse to life.”

What BJP’s leaders are doing through their campaign is to conjure up “enemies” within the country with the aim of whipping up violence against them. Those who, for various reasons, don’t get the opportunity to safeguard the borders from external enemies are, through this campaign, given a list of enemies they can easily destroy. And quench their nationalist thirst.

It is a well thought out strategy. I realised how cynically it has been employed when a spokesperson of the BJP told me, “Ye anti national wala hamne chalaya, isne pakad liya, chal gaya ye.” (“The slogan of ‘anti national’ is our creation and it has taken hold.”).

This bloodlust was behind the attack on Umar Khalid just before Independence Day in Delhi. The pistol his would-be killer brought jammed, otherwise the attack could have turned fatal.

Umar, in the popular imagination of those swayed by the BJP’s propaganda, is an ‘anti-national’ whose very existence is a threat to the nation. The image of Kanhaiya that is pushed is similar. A friend of mine who teaches at Patna University was shocked when he found people in his own village in Nawada gunning for Kanhaiya. They regard him as an anti-national, he said.

A young man from Odisha told me that after February 2016, anyone from JNU is seen with suspicion. Even his parents were not sure

what he was doing as a student of the university. Was he trapped in some anti-national conspiracy, they wondered.

For the past four years, we have seen JNU being used as a metaphor across the country. Whenever the ruling party tries to shut down dissenting voices, it says that it “will not allow another JNU”. We have heard this line in Jodhpur, Mahendragarh in Haryana, Pune and Delhi University. Most recently, while boasting about their attack on Sanjay Kumar, an assistant professor at the Central University of Bihar at Motihari, his attackers claimed they were performing a nationalist duty and would not allow this university to be turned into another JNU.

We should also not forget how the lung power of the Central HRD ministry and of BJP spokespersons was used to sully the image of Rohith Vemula and his mother. He was also accused of indulging in anti-national activities. It has been claimed that he was a fake Dalit and actually a Maoist who collaborated with anti-nationals.

The seriousness of the whole campaign needs to be understood. We need to see that here is a government, with all kinds of instruments of violence at its disposal, waging a war against students and teachers. The academic community has been turned into the “accused”.

We need to turn the tables on them. We need to tell ministers like Sitharaman that it is they who stand accused—of indulging in inciting and instigating violence. We need to demand their resignation. Instigating violence against a section of the people while occupying a ministerial position must not be tolerated.

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Babasaheb Ambedkar and Neoliberal Economic Reforms: Part I

Anand Teltumbde

When the International Monetary Fund and World Bank dictated neoliberal policy package was adopted by the Narasimha Rao government in July 1991, with a false projection to people that they were homegrown economic reforms, albeit with a Thatcherite apologia that 'there was no alternative', many intellectuals, whether they understood economics or not, vied with each other in supporting it to get into the good books of the government. Economics has by and large been an anathema in Dalit intellectual universe because it was identified with communists (economism) with two weird syllogisms propagated by the vested interests. One, communists were materialist; economics related with things material, so it was communist. Second, Ambedkar was against communists. Dalits are followers of Ambedkar. So, Dalits should keep away from economics. (None of these statements are correct but they are bandied as self sustaining truth.) They proudly claimed that our struggle is not for bread (alone), it is for dignity. As a result, there was no particular popular appeal among Dalits as regards discussion on economic policy. Still some ambitious elements from among them had thrust their neck out and spoken in support of these anti-people policies. All of them have been expectedly duly awarded by the government. I had taken it as an act of opportunism and dealt with it as such. But later, these things began coming in a more virulent form, like the campaign for Dalit Capitalism,

or Dalit Chamber of Commerce (DICCI), or mutating Ambedkar as the free market economist, with due institutional support from abroad like that from Mises Institute, the source institution of the neoliberal virus.

Some time ago, one person feigning to have discovered a profound aspect of Dr Ambedkar presented a paper titled *Ambedkar – The Forgotten Free Market Economist* at the Ludwig von Mises Institute. Unfortunately, Dalits who exhibit their bhakti towards Ambedkar such as by insisting that he should be referred to only as 'Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar' each and every time, would not understand that calling him a free market economist is the worst abuse that can be hurled at him. Rather it is beyond abuse, and is an attempt at character assassination. Indeed, it is a pity that despite a plethora of writings on Ambedkar, the Dalits have not even understood what he stood for. Framed in this contemporary context, this article will strive to explicate the salient aspects of Ambedkar's thoughts in relation to the current neoliberal paradigm.

Understanding Free Market

Market is where things are exchanged with the help of money, the medium of exchange. Obviously, market valorises customer in proportion to his purchasing power, i.e., the amount of money he has in his pocket. Markets have been around from antiquity as a mechanism for facilitating exchange of goods and services among people

in order to satisfy their needs, because of the fact that all that is needed for living cannot be produced by any man or family. The villager produced vegetables but would not have oil or salt necessary for cooking them, and therefore went to a *haat* (village market) to exchange his excess vegetables for oil and salt. Initially he simply bartered but later money played the role of facilitator. The advent of money not only facilitated the transaction, but also accumulation. One could not amass grains or salt because they needed storage and suffered depreciation, but money could be stored without limits and instead of suffering depreciation, it appreciated. More perniciously, it facilitated what is known as free market, the free play of purchasing power of people.

Free market basically assumes that seller and buyer in the market are all equal, endowed with equal amount of information, and therefore the exchange between them takes place purely on the basis of perceived value of the thing exchanged. Now, in a real world, arguably created by the elements of free market itself, this assumption becomes quite problematic. Because of inequality of people in the marketplace, the free market becomes a mechanism of exploitation. A single or a few sellers coming together and dictating price of goods or services is commonly known as monopoly and oligopoly, respectively. The markets are flaunted by free marketeers as the most efficient means to allocate resources through price mechanism that balances out demand and supply.

But both demand and supply can be manipulated by the powerful and the entire mechanism can be used as a means not of allocating resources but of accumulation. Then, there are many situations known to economics as market failures, which can be viewed as scenarios where individuals' pursuit of pure self-interest leads to results that are not efficient—that can be improved upon from the societal point-of-view. The people who extend the concept of market as a simple mechanism to exchange things to the free market, which can be said to be their ideological obsession, are thus either committing a conceptual error or are making a deliberate mischief.

Misreading “The Problem of Rupee”

The sole source of Ambedkar's characterisation as monetarist or free market or neoliberal economist is the misreading of, or, shall we say, mischievous reading of his D.Sc. Thesis, *The Problem of Rupee*. Here Ambedkar presents his analysis of the contemporary problem of currency standards, viz., gold standard versus gold exchange standard. He forcefully makes a case for the former (gold standard), going against the opinion of the mainstream economists of those days, including John Maynard Keynes. Ambedkar basically makes the case for the stability of currency in the gold standard and marshals arguments that unstable currency could lead to unbridled inflation because of fiscal profligacy of the government, which disproportionately burdens the lower strata of the society through consequential price rise. This is the central point of the thesis. There are stray observations in the thesis against the wastefulness of the public servant vis-à-vis the private

agent or such statements as market mechanism for value determination. The central thesis being rooted in the then situational context, it is really no place to seek his ideological proclivities towards or against socialism. To do so is utterly foolish.

If one looks beyond to the kind of influences the young Ambedkar carried, we get rather a better picture. In Columbia, some of his teachers were American Fabian Socialists. John Dewey, who had a particularly deep impression on young Ambedkar, was a famous American Fabian. Prof. Dewey particularly endeared Ambedkar because of his anxiety to help the downtrodden, to do away with oppression in America and elsewhere, and to propose the instrumentality of education in their emancipation. Ambedkar acknowledged his intellectual debt to Dewey many times. The influence of Dewey on Ambedkar was so deep that he acknowledged it as late as in June 1952, in a letter written to his wife Mrs. Savita Ambedkar from America, where he was conferred the honorary degree of LL.D. by Columbia University for drafting the Constitution of India, “I owe my whole intellectual life to Prof. John Dewey.”

Fabianism, born in 1884 along with the foundation of the Fabian Society, was a British socialist movement, whose purpose was to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist, rather than revolutionary means. It had attracted many liberal thinkers beyond England. Fabians as such were the quintessentially socialists but did not subscribe to the revolutionary theories of Marxism. Instead they believed that socialism could be brought about in an evolutionary manner. The London School of Economics

(LSE) in which Ambedkar studied and wrote *The Problem of Rupee*, his thesis for his D. Sc. Degree, was founded by the Fabian Society and was acknowledged as the fortress of Fabianism. The key figures of the Fabian society, like Bernard Shaw and Sydney and Beatrice Webb, were among the founders of the LSE and they were also the faculty in the LSE. Therefore, the intellectual context in which Ambedkar carried out his research also was socialist. The slogan “Educate, Agitate, Organise”, that he chose as the motto of the *Bahishkrit Bharat* and later gave to his disciples as his mantra, was actually a famous Fabian slogan. It bespeaks poor of the quality of research on Ambedkar that this important aspect of his ideology still remains largely submerged. If one objectively looks at his entire life, one would see the Fabian influence informing much of his ideological position.

To read in his thesis monetarism that was formally born in 1960, nearly four decades later and after he had left the world, is simply preposterous. It is true that before the advent of Keynesianism, the economists belonged to the classical school that believed in self-adjusting market mechanism and saw no role for the government, either in terms of monetary or fiscal policy. There should be little doubt that all economists, including Ambedkar, operated in this larger context of classical economics prior to the 1930s. Responding to the Great Depression of the 1930s, Keynes came out with theories that proposed an important role for the government through fiscal policy to create aggregate demand in the economy. Keynesianism saved capitalism from its imminent collapse and became the default economic creed for the

post-Second World War world. It not only saved capitalism but also gave it its 'golden era'. But when capitalism began to face another bout of crises in the 1960s, the monetarist counterrevolution took place against the ruling Keynesianism. It was led by Milton Friedman, an economist from the Chicago School, and argued against government use of fiscal policy and instead proposed that monetary policy be the instrument for altering output and employment levels in the economy. It modified some aspects of the classical theory to provide the rationale for this non-interventionist policy recommendation in favour of the free market. It should be noted that the belief in self-adjusting market of the classical economics is not the same as the monetarist position of the free market. It is absolutely mischievous to see Ambedkar as a proponent of free market economy and particularly against socialism.

A Socialist to the Core

I think anybody who claims to know Babasaheb Ambedkar even superfluously is familiar with his statement:

“My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.”

Indeed, these three words constituted his vision for human destiny and the biggest rationale for his conversion to Buddhism. What could they mean? The world knows that these words constituted an inspiration, they were the slogan of the French revolution, and also that they are nowhere to be found in Buddhism, where Ambedkar claimed to have taken them from. The import

of his claim lies in the fact that in the French revolution they remained a mere slogan for the bourgeoisie, but in Buddhism they are found with their spirit and full content. He envisioned human society to reflect them in full measure as Buddha did. It could be imagined only as an ideal, a utopia. Marx imagined the ultimate destiny of humans in the form of communism, where most familiar contradictions would have been overcome and humans will contribute as per their capacity and get what they need. Do these visions not coincide? Socialism, as Marxian historical materialism guides us, is the penultimate stage to communism. Ambedkar's ideological position may therefore have to be reckoned as beyond socialism, quite like Marx's.

Those who capitalise on his contention with communists and communism paint him as an anti-Marxist and anti everything that Marx stood for. In doing so, they do not hesitate in pushing him into the enemy camp. To say that he was pro-capitalist, pro-globalisation, and pro-free market system is the equivalent of doing so. As explained above, Ambedkar was influenced at an impressionable age by his professors in Columbia and the London School of Economics, who while wanting socialism, had reservations about the Marxian prescription of revolution. While Ambedkar reflected a similar attitude towards Marxism, he regarded it as the benchmark, a veritable measure to assess the superiority of his methods. Whether one agrees with this observation or not, there is absolutely no space for doubt that he was a socialist. Not in ideological orientation alone but also in practice he had openly pursued socialist objectives all through his life. His first political party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP),

was fashioned on the lines of the Labour Party in England, which was a Fabian political outfit. Even before that he had famously identified two enemies of the Untouchables: Brahmanism and Capitalism. In fact, at the symbolic level, the class characterisation of our society by the radical left as “semi-feudal, semi-colonial” could echo this declaration. The ILP, as a matter of fact, was admittedly a workers' party, which inspired by socialism had adopted a red flag. It was the ILP which demonstrated on roads how caste and class could be coalesced into a struggle.

Despite its success, he had to abandon the overtly left politics of ILP mainly because the politics of those times was taking a purely communal turn. The Cripps Mission report published in February 1942, which while conceding most demands of other minorities had totally ignored the demands of the Untouchables for representation, became the direct trigger. It compelled him to rethink his strategy, dissolve the ILP, and found the seemingly caste based party, the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in June 1942. It coincided with his inclusion in the Viceroy's executive council. Although striving to emancipate the Untouchables in the contemporary communally charged politics, it should be remembered that he penned a remarkable document, meant to be the memorandum to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the SCF. This document, later published as “States and Minorities”, by his own definition proposed state socialism in post-colonial India.

One of the arguments in support of how Ambedkar was against socialism, given by the pseudo-scholar who abused Ambedkar as a free market economist, was

that he was against the inclusion of the word 'socialism' in the Constitution. This gentleman ought to have first understood that the Constitution is not a book authored by Ambedkar; it was a document representing the consensus of the Constituent Assembly. It was his job to bring about that consensus. All his arguments in the Constituent Assembly should be read within this role boundary. With regard to the inclusion of socialism in the Constitution, there is fortunately a direct statement from him, which directly dispels such doubts:

What should be the policy of the State, how the society should be organised in its social and economic side, are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organisation of the State shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgement, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organisation in which they wish to live. It is perfectly possible today for the majority people to hold that the socialist organisation of society is better than the capitalist organisation of society. But it would be perfectly possible for thinking people to devise some other form of social organisation which might be better than the socialist organisation of today or of tomorrow. I do not see therefore why the Constitution should tie down the people to live in a particular form and not leave it to the people themselves to decide it for themselves. [Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, Vol. 13, p. 326]

After explaining why he was not in favour of inclusion of the word socialism, he himself explained

that in other ways the Constitution has already embodied the socialist principles:

Apart from the Fundamental Rights, which we have embodied in the Constitution, we have also introduced other sections, which deal with directive principles of State policy. If my Honourable friend were to read the Articles contained in Part IV, he will find that both the Legislature as well as the Executive have been placed by this Constitution under certain definite obligations as to the form of their policy. Now, to read only Article 31, which deals with this matter :

It says : "The State shall, in particular , direct its policy towards securing—

(i) That the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;

(ii) That the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good;

(iii) That the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;

(iv) That there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women; . . ."

There are some other items more or less in the same strain. What I would like to ask Professor Shah is this: If these directive principles to which I have drawn attention are not socialistic in their direction and in their content, I fail to understand what more socialism can be.

Therefore my submission is that the socialist principles are already embodied in our Constitution and it is unnecessary to accept this amendment. [Ibid, pp. 326–327]

In his one of the very last public addresses at Kathmandu, he had compared Buddhism with

Marxism. It reveals that he regarded Marxism as just the second best to his choice. In this comparison, he clearly states that while the goal of both was the same, the Buddha's prescriptions were superior to those of Marx, in terms of non-violence and democracy. The goal was to bring about equitable society sans oppression and exploitation which was only possible in a socialist society. Rather, both Marx as well as Ambedkar went beyond and sought a utopia beyond socialism. In any case, such a state of society was inherently impossible in capitalism which is premised on the accumulation drive, the unbridled greed of a man. Capitalism or its contemporary extremist version in neoliberalism, advocating free market economy, does not have any pretension to social justice. Rather it justifies injustice saying that people occupy various positions in societal hierarchy purely in accordance with their capabilities or that inequality is desirable because it acts as the prime mover of progress. Nothing can be more preposterous than saying that Ambedkar supported such inequality justifying systems such as capitalism or neoliberal globalisation. Even the argument that capitalism being more progressive than caste-feudalism, that it basically freed the labour from the feudal bondage, which had impelled Marx to predict that advent of capitalism in India will destroy the caste system, would not hold because Ambedkar saw capitalism and Brahmanism not only as coexisting but also cohabiting, mutually complementing each other. Ambedkar explicitly said more than once that he was a socialist. If someone feigns ignorance of this he should not be speaking about Ambedkar.

Government Must Ensure Clean Delivery of Benefits

Anupam Saraph

In his Budget Speech for 2016–17, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced that the government would target the disbursement of government subsidies and financial assistance to the “actual beneficiaries”. Public money, he declared, should reach the poor and the deserving without any leakage. He announced that he would introduce a bill for “Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services by using the Aadhar framework”, the expenditure for which is incurred from the Consolidated Fund of India.

In order to make a statement about the disbursement to beneficiaries, the government would need to have some information about how its beneficiary databases are created and maintained and by whom. It would need to have some information about how to identify ghosts and duplicates in these databases, and the steps that result in these ghost or duplicates while creating and maintaining the database. It would need to have some information about the steps of transferring money from the Consolidated Fund of India to the beneficiaries.

Is it unlikely that any government, which has been distributing lakhs of crores to various beneficiaries, will not hold this information? Is it conceivable, therefore, that the Finance Minister could have promised targeted disbursement of government subsidies and financial assistance to the actual beneficiaries, or that money reach the poor and the deserving without any leakage without full information about who

beneficiaries are or where leakage is happening?

Does Beneficiary Information Exist?

In its Fiscal Policy Statement, the Budget of 2018–19 states that it extended scope of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to include “in-kind” transfer to individual beneficiaries, transfers to enablers of government schemes and services. According to the statement, up to November 2017, 462 DBT applicable schemes identified across 57 Ministries/ Departments and 34 Aadhar Enabled Services from 16 Ministries/ Departments. The ambit of DBT covers major schemes that involve cash transfers, such as Pratyaksh Hanstantrit Labh (PAHAL), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), pensions and scholarships, as well as in-kind transfers such as foodgrains and mid-day meals to school children.

Good governance, as expected from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, would require that this information is not only audited by the CAG, but is available on the websites of the government under Section 4(b)(xii) of the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI).

Even into the thirteenth year of the Right to Information Act, most public authorities do not satisfy the spirit or even the letter of public disclosure under Section 4 of the Act. For the most part, therefore, information about “the manner of execution of subsidy programmes, including the amounts allocated

and the details of beneficiaries of such programmes” is absent from government websites.

Two years on from the promise to deliver this transparency, perhaps the Ministry of Finance, or the government would be able to share this information?

Asked under the RTI to provide information, neither the Ministry of Finance nor any government ministry or department has been able to provide any information about the laws, rules and procedures that create any beneficiary databases, the existence of such databases, or about procedures or algorithms that provide them with an ability to distinguish genuine from duplicate and ghost beneficiaries. Neither have they been able to provide a single audit report or study that shows how fake beneficiaries have been added to beneficiary databases.

Neither the Ministry of Finance nor any government ministry or department has provided any indication of the steps in the flow of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India to the hands of the beneficiaries or how they have changed after the Finance Minister’s Budget Speech for 2016–17 from what existed before.

Furthermore, neither has been able to indicate the basis for the decision to transfer benefits and subsidies through an Aadhaar based payment system run by a non government private company, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), in place of the traditional National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) run by the

RBI. Serious concerns about money transfers through Aadhaar payments being un-auditable and similar to hawala remain un-investigated by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate.

There should be complete clarity about the amounts of large money transfers in the form of DBT to millions of beneficiaries. According to the Fiscal Strategy Document of the Budget, since the inception and upto 2018–19, 52 crore beneficiaries (including cash and in-kind schemes) have received Rs 246,133 crore through DBT, of which Rs 63,190 crore have been transferred in FY 2017–18 (as on 30.11.2017). 95.4% payments have been made through electronic transfers. On the other hand, according to the BJP, beneficiaries have received Rs 382,184 crore through direct benefit transfers (DBT) since FY 2014–15. According to Nandan Nilekani, former chairman of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which designed the Aadhaar number as an identifier for demographic and biometric data submitted to it, and current advisor to NPCI, over Rs 95,000 crore were transferred using the Aadhaar Pay of NPCI in the last financial year alone.

Ghosts and Duplicates Receiving Benefits?

UIDAI and Ministry of Finance must certify that this money has been transferred to real and genuine beneficiaries. Neither the recipients' database nor the money transfers have been audited or seem to have been verified by the CAG. Furthermore, no beneficiary database, or even the basis for inclusion or exclusion of beneficiaries from this database, is available with the public. The UIDAI has stated unambiguously that it

takes no responsibility for the use of Aadhaar. It cannot recognise the use, or the absence of use, of Aadhaar in any business process. Neither can it certify the beginning, progress or completion of the business process.

The UIDAI has also admitted that it does not certify the biometric or demographic data associated with any Aadhaar number. It seems to have no view about the number of unique records based on biometric or demographic fields. It doesn't even know if there was an enrolment operator, belonging to a private agency appointed by one of the 20 registrars whose enrolments make up most of the Aadhaar numbers, in the 600,000 villages, 5,000 towns and cities, or even the 707 districts where enrolment allegedly happened. It has no information about the original documents of proof of identity, address or birth used to capture the demographic data for Aadhaar. Furthermore, the Aadhaar database has never been verified or audited. It is the world's largest database of ghosts and duplicates. Using the Aadhaar to create or modify any database can, therefore, entail the risk of populating those databases with duplicates and ghosts.

It is a surprise that the UIDAI cannot, and does not, certify the individuals in any business process as real persons or genuine beneficiaries. It does not certify the delivery of subsidy, benefit or service. It does not certify any beneficiary as being genuine or even real. Money transferred using Aadhaar must not be siphoned to duplicate or ghost beneficiaries or become untraceable. Prime Minister Modi needs to ensure that his objective of a leak-proof system gets operationalised.

Tax money makes up the Consolidated Fund of India that

finances benefits, so gaps in transparency are a cause for concern. The trust placed with the Ministry of Finance by the PM must be shown to be justified. Not only will the CAG have to rise to the occasion, but so will India's premier investigation agencies and plug the DBT being siphoned through Aadhaar payments. Perhaps the Supreme Court will take cognisance of possible leakages during the tenure of two successive governments and ensure complete accuracy and transparency in the list of beneficiaries given lakhs of crores of rupees from the Consolidated Fund of India.

Email: anupamsaraph@gmail.com

Footprints of A Crusader (The Life Story of Mrunal Gore)

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New Jobs Not for Workers

Mrinal K. Biswas

The never-ending growth stories still hang on the impact demonetisation and GST have had on the economy. Not only the political opposition, the economists in general are also questioning the rising figures of gross domestic product (GDP), while the central government continues to maintain that there was no adverse effect of the dual policy on the economy.

In the meantime, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is at the helm of affairs at the Centre, has introduced a new element in the discourse of economic growth. Its national executive recently adopted a resolution for “New India” with adequate reference to the idea and concept of “creative destruction.” This resolution obviously came under the shadow of demonetisation and GST. The BJP thesis quoted from no less an authority than Joseph Schumpeter, the internationally famous Austrian-American economist.

Schumpeter’s creative destruction and Harvard Business School’s Prof. Clayton M. Christensen’s “disruptive technology” are very much in vogue in modern day capitalism. Both argue that old industries and services that have become archaic cease to be sustainable because basically they no longer earn profits, and so they are eventually abandoned. But capital and labour cannot remain idle. Schumpeter says that capital moves to new forms of industry and labour follows the same path in course of time. But it is not clearly stated how the labour displaced from

the traditional industries would fit into the new form of industry, and even assuming that labour will be retrained, which will be time consuming, jobs will elude most of them because most modern industries are characteristically capital intensive and labour saving.

Christensen’s theory of “disruptive technologies” separates new technology into two categories: Sustaining and Disruptive. Sustaining technology relies on incremental improvements to an already established technology. Disruptive technology lacks refinements, and often has performance problems. An entrepreneur therefore faces a dilemma on whether to employ capital in “disruptive technologies”, as while the risks are greater, the profits are higher. In case he invests capital in this new area, this new technology that involves higher levels of automation does not create a large number of jobs. The few jobs it creates are also for those more skilled. This has a big impact on employment as the job market shrinks.

Much later than Schumpeter, another eminent economist, Joseph Stiglitz, also pointed to the modern-day industry’s inability to create new jobs for those who work with hands and feet, because of increasing automation. This was also threatening white-collar jobs for non-specialists.

Jobless workforce swells in tandem with expulsion of entrepreneurs who fail to survive the onset of “creative destruction.” Nevertheless, the economy may

continue to grow and the GDP may continue to rise, giving rise to a situation of jobless growth.

The BJP’s drive for creating a “New India” cannot escape the tortuous course foreseen by economists. Abrupt demonetisation and untimely GST have indeed brought about the “destruction” part of Schumpeter’s “creative destruction”. In one stroke, trade and business, particularly the informal sector, suffered enormous destruction. The capital available with the medium and small trade and businesses dried up because of the losses suffered due to demonetisation, and they have yet to recover from that crisis. These sectors have little access to banking finance, making their recovery difficult. On top of it, the faulty introduction of GST has further deepened their crisis. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the “creative” part of Schumpeter’s “creative destruction” is going to be realised in the near future.

Email: mrinalbiswas11@gmail.com

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Where Is the Indian Economy Headed?

Sunanda Sen

Growing concerns on the current state of the Indian economy, which have been met with responses filled with assurances and proposals from official circles for remedial actions on part make it urgent to delve into the issues which spell out the reality.

Apprehensions relating to the economy are at the moment centred on further escalations in the high prices, of fuel and other goods in the domestic market, affecting the daily lives of people. As is generally held, the major reasons behind this include the rising dollar price of crude oil in international market and the steady declines in the value of the rupee in terms of dollar, causing escalating transport costs as well as the rupee prices of all imports. Specific issues as above are compounded by a general fear psychosis of an impending collapse of the current state of the economy and polity, threatening to impact the levels of whatever well-being, if any, currently accessible for people in different income categories.

Responding to the above, the official position (of the government) has denied that the economy is facing any impending threat, especially with what are seen as the four green shoots parameters. The latter include the current GDP growth at 7.4% , the highest in the world, moderate inflation with wholesale prices rising by 3.4% last year, official foreign currency reserves at a comfortable level of nearly \$400bn and finally, the moderate fiscal deficit at 3.3%. The highlights, incidentally, accord well with the IMF's recent country report on India which was released

on August 7, 2018.

The defensive position advanced from the official quarters as well the effectiveness of the remedial measures as suggested, do not, however, stand scrutiny if one recognises the fact that none of those indicators of a robust economy, as we point out, will be sustainable in the face of slippages running through the economy.

Consider, first, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) data on the high GDP growth of the economy at 7.4% for 2017-18 and growth rate for the Gross Value Added (GVA), at 7.1%. Leaving aside the rather serious misgivings concerning the method as well as the estimates of the calculation of GDP, we draw attention to the structure of the GVA with services contributing one half or more over the last six years. With the brick and mortar division of the industrial sector providing for less than a third of the GVA and with agriculture, the mainstay of the rural economy, providing less than a fifth, it does not come as a surprise that gainful employment has been far less than adequate for the reduction of poverty in the economy. A major explanation lies in the fact that the high-tech service sector of India is incapable of generating the much needed employment, well-being and sustenance for the public in general, and in particular for the unorganised 93% of population in the countryside.

The government also considers it reassuring that the wholesale price index, based on 2011-12, as per CSO data, has moved up only by

2.96% during 2017-18. However, movements in the index have of late been more, touching 5.09% during July 2018. In addition it can no longer be expected that prices will remain stable, especially with crude prices per barrel soaring up to \$70 or above and the plunging rupee touching Rs 72 and more to a dollar. In the meantime, the rise in the consumer price index, reflecting the retail margins, has been consistent. This is evident with prices in July 2017 rising by 2.36% in contrast to the 4.17% hike in July 2018. In general, prices all over the economy are bound to move up, not just for fuel but also for commodities and services in general, with higher transport costs and the depreciating rupee which pushes up the local prices for imported inputs, much in use in both agriculture and industry.

Would India be able to avoid a balance of payments crisis by making use of the large foreign currency reserves, currently at \$375 billion? We encounter here, several issues. First, we doubt the sustainability of the currently held stock of foreign currency with the RBI in the face of adverse market expectations. The latter explains the net FII outflows from RBI sources, to the tune of \$3.5 billion on average between April and May 2018, and more recently \$3.7 billion, on average over July and August. Outflows also have been with the RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme with net outward transfers of \$1.1 billion on average between June and July 2018.

Given the continuing downslides

in the value of the rupee in terms of US dollar, those interested in remitting funds to India (exporters, overseas working NRIs and even the potential investors for the NRI bonds) may wait to see the rupee depreciate further, thus delaying foreign currency receipts from abroad. Finally, the official reserves may deplete with direct interventions of the RBI as it sells foreign currency against rupees in the market. Data released by the RBI indicates an actual sale of \$16.30 billion by the bank between March and July 2018, much to arrest further declines in the rupee rate! It thus does not come as a surprise that foreign exchange reserve held at the RBI is already declining, by more than \$400 billion, from \$380 billion in July 10 to \$376 billion on August 17, according to official sources.

Not much discussion has been there on the steady build up of the forex reserve at the RBI, which shot up from a paltry sum of \$4.38 billion in April 1991 to respective stocks of \$107.4 billion and \$281.5 billion respectively by April 2004 and April 2014. Unlike the situation in China where reserves were contributed largely by the large trade surpluses the country has been earning, foreign exchange reserves in India have grown mostly with inflows of capital and that too of a short-term variety. Facing the continuing trade deficits which exceeded the sum received as net invisibles along with remittances, India has continued with a yawning current account deficit which has been financed by more than proportionate inflows of short-term capital from abroad. This has been especially true since about two decades now when short-term FII inflows were further liberalised. The outcome has

been one where maintaining official reserves has no longer been at the discretion of the national monetary authority at the RBI. Instead it is subject to possibilities of flocking in or deserting as and when portfolio managers decide on the matter.

The official position on what they currently perceive as stable macroeconomic parameters in the economy also include their resolve to continue with the currently controlled fiscal deficit at 3.3% of the GDP. The decision indicates a continued policy stance towards what is viewed as financial stability for the economy. It may however be noticed that the goal as above, while considered a major tool to avoid inflation in mainstream economics, has a very different implication in terms of alternate approaches which rest on the Keynesian New Deal type of expansionary policies. Fiscal restraint, as can be held in terms of the latter, neither fulfils the goal of price stability nor can achieve growth via expansion of demand.

Let us, in the following, pay attention to the possible implications of the targeted fiscal deficit ratio of GDP in the current context of the Indian economy. There remains a major problem in maintaining the so-called "Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management", an Act which is being followed by the Indian government since 2003. The statutory fiscal stringency amounts to a trade-off within the budget, between state expenditure on capital formation and social security on one hand and meeting interest liabilities on the other. Most often, the balance is tilted in favour of the latter, as the capitalist state follows its priorities to provide the rentiers their dues on financial assets sold by the government. Data from last

year's budget indicates a picture of the interest bill at Rs 575 billion crore which considerably reduced the expenditure on public capital expenditure and social security. As recorded in the budget estimates of aggregate state and central expenditure for 2018-19, the interest bill as above has been 18% of above, far exceeding the 9% share on subsidies.

The government, however, seems to have taken the recent developments, especially relating to the external economic environment rather seriously. This has come about with the recently announced measures with liberalised norms for external commercial borrowings upto \$50 billion with one year validity by manufacturing entities, the floating of NRI (or masala) bonds and the liberalised norms for portfolio investments. In addition, the government expects to initiate controls on what will be identified as non essential imports. The measures undoubtedly reflect a sense of urgency and admission on part of the government, that there is a threat to India's external payments front!

It may be too early to expect much from the official announcements. However, given the turbulent global scene in terms of trade and financial flows as well as in the domestic economy as discussed above, sentiments abroad on future prospects of investments in India are naturally at a low ebb at the moment. Grant of liberal norms to potential Indian borrowers in the international market is unlikely to change those sentiments of lenders overseas. In addition there remain multiple factors like the steady depletion of the official exchange reserves, the steady withdrawals of short-term FII investments, the declining

external value of the rupee, the Trump-China trade war threatening the current global structure of trade and finally the US Fed's resolve to raise interest rates. Those are aspects which speak of the difficulties of an easy resolution of the problems in the external economic front of the country. The short-term measures may even add to the interest liabilities on new external borrowings in near future which would neither be easy to meet nor qualify in terms of related budgetary cuts on social sector spending and investments.

What, then, emerge as policy options for India in the current situation? While problems as have arisen by following the norms of trade and capital account opening under globalisation can not be reversed instantly, the state needs to recognise its futility in terms of the grave social and economic consequences as at present. It is time now to look inward to the vast potentials of the domestic market in India which can be invigorated and sustained with a new set of policies. There is a need to reject the priorities as at present on the finance-led external sector and follow a strategy which can succeed over time with adequate expenditure to revive demand for domestic goods, employment and human development.

Email: sunanda.sen@gmail.com

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Venezuelan Commune Activists Vow to 'Take the Offensive'

Paul Robson, Green Left Review

Representatives of 74 communes—institutions of popular power elected from grassroots communal councils—from across Venezuela gathered in Lara state towards the end of August to participate in the inaugural National Assembly of Communes.

The meeting of more than 300 commune activists was held to try to strengthen the connections between different communes in a range of areas. This includes linking up productive micro-projects, communicational initiatives and educational networks.

It also discussed current challenges to the communal movement, territorial defence plans and the push to build a “communal state” — as called for by the late socialist president Hugo Chavez. Given recent widespread problems in state-run public services, the discussions included how to incorporate public services such as water, electricity and rubbish collection under the communes' purview.

The assembly was convened and organised by the El Maizal Commune and the Bolivar and Zamora Revolutionary Current (CRBZ), and was held in the communally-controlled university installations of Sarare in the Simon Planas municipality of Lara state.

Representatives were present from communes from several regions, including Lara, Apure, Barinas, Tachira, Merida, Yaracuy, Falcon, Carabobo states and Caracas. The initiative was organised independently of the national government of President

Nicolas Maduro.

Five members of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) were present, including prominent El Maizal spokesperson Angel Prado.

There was also representation from the campesinos who recently marched 435 kilometres to meet with Maduro in Caracas, as well as from Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and Argentina's Patria Grande movement.

Communes are conglomerates of communal councils, which were launched in response to an initiative by Chavez to empower local communities and devolve power to the people.

Communes are being built across the country. The Ministry of Communes said there are at least 2500 communes registered, with differing levels of organisational capacity. Some of the better organised communes, such as El Maizal in Lara state, are working with neighbouring communes on creating a “communal city”.

ANC deputy Orlando Zambrano told the gathering: “We have to pass onto the offensive.”

While communards have received wavering support at times from the Maduro government, including a pre-electoral visit to a communal gathering in Lara state, tensions have often arisen between often local government officials and representatives of popular movements.

However, those present at the gathering were quick to express their support for Maduro, with Prado proclaiming: “Behind all of this [initiative] is Chavismo!”

The final declaration of the gathering, which also reiterated its support for the government, likewise endorsed Maduro's recent economic measures, which include tying wages to the price of a barrel of oil, raising VAT and income tax, reordering gas subsidies, launching a revalued currency and eliminating exchange controls.

The declaration also identifies a series of challenges for the popular

power movement, including the supply of productive materials, the granting of communal land rights, the fight against state bureaucracy in the communal arena, and the transfer of powers to the communities, especially over public services.

The activists also identified the need to create space for dialogue between communal spokespeople and the national government.

"We see how [the government]

has created spaces for debate with businessmen/women, bankers, importers, but not communal leaders nor with other sectors of the organised people," the manifesto reads.

In closing, the communards stressed the need for pro-government grassroots movements to come together in a new alliance to push towards socialism.

US Bombs are Killing Children in Yemen. Does Anybody Care?

Moustafa Bayoumi

On 9 August, the US-backed Saudi-led coalition waging war in Yemen against a Houthi-led rebellion dropped a bomb on a school bus packed with children. According to reports, the excited kids had been on a school trip marking the end of their summer classes, and as they passed a busy marketplace, the bomb directly hit their vehicle.

The results were horrific. Of the 54 people killed, 44 were children, with most between the ages of six and eleven. The pictures of the dead and injured children, some of whom can be seen wearing their blue Unicef backpacks, are beyond heartbreaking.

The tragedy in Yemen is unrelenting. On 23 August, a mere two weeks after the school bus attack, Saudi-led coalition airstrikes killed yet another 26 children and four women fleeing the fighting in the western province of Hudaydah.

If this sounds to you like I'm relating a story about how terrible the civil war in Yemen is, then you'd be correct, although—and let's be honest here—the war in Yemen occupies almost none of our collective political attention today.

Could it be that we don't care all that much about this war because Yemenis are Muslim, brown and poor?

The reality is that the war has created the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe today. Three-quarters of the population, some 22 million Yemenis, require humanitarian assistance and protection. About 8.4 million people hang on the brink of starvation and another 7 million lie malnourished. Since 2015, more than 28,000 thousand people have been killed or injured, and many thousands more have died from causes exacerbated by war, such as a cholera epidemic that has afflicted more than a million people and claimed over 2,300 lives. At least one child dies every 10 minutes from causes linked to the war, according to the United Nations.

But this is also a story about the responsibility of the United States. A report by CNN indicates that the bomb used in the school bus airstrike was a 500-pound laser-guided MK 82 bomb, manufactured by Lockheed Martin, one of the

largest US defense contractors. Having facilitated the sale to the Saudi-led coalition of the weapon used to kill these children, does the United States bear any responsibility for their deaths?

Undoubtedly. For one thing, these latest bombings are hardly the only times the Saudi-led coalition has killed civilians from the air. An independent monitoring group, the Yemen Data Project, found that there have been 55 airstrikes against civilian vehicles and buses in the first seven months of this year alone, and that of the 18,000 airstrikes between March 2015 to April 2018, almost a third (31%) of the targets were non-military (either civilians or civilian infrastructure) and another 33% of the strikes were classified as having unknown targets. That's 64% of the strikes that could not be determined as having clear military targets.

Existing law in the USA bars weapon sales for such a war. In a 2017 report, the American Bar Association concluded that "in the context of multiple credible reports of recurring and highly questionable strikes . . . further sales [of arms]

under both the Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act are prohibited until the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia takes effective measures to ensure compliance with international law and the President submits relevant certifications to the Congress.”

The United States is certainly aware of how poorly the coalition is prosecuting the war. How can it not be? The US provides aerial targeting assistance to the coalition, along with intelligence sharing and mid-flight aerial refueling for coalition aircraft. And of course, the US supplies (with the UK) the bulk of the coalition’s weapons. Lots of them. Hundreds of billions of dollars’ worth.

This failed strategy was begun under the Obama administration, not under Trump. But when coalition fighter jets bombed a funeral hall and killed over 140 people in October 2016, the Obama administration began mulling its options. In his last weeks in office, Obama finally restricted sales of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia amid concerns over civilian casualties, but by May 2017, sales resumed when the Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, overturned the ban. Obama was no peace-monger president, however. His administration oversaw the sales of more weapons than any other president since 1945, and most of the arms sold during his time in office went to Saudi Arabia.

Opposition to the US’s blank-check policy regarding this war has been growing not only among lawyers but also among lawmakers. Earlier this year, Senators Bernie Sanders, Mike Lee and Chris Murphy introduced a joint resolution in the Senate to end US support for the coalition, though it was effectively defeated in March by a

vote of 55–44.

On 22 August, Murphy also introduced an amendment to the defense appropriations bill that would have cut off funds for the coalition until the Secretary of Defense could certify that rules for the protection of civilians were being properly followed. His efforts were blocked by the Republican Senator Richard Shelby, whose donors, perhaps not coincidentally, are Boeing (also a major defense contractor) and Lockheed Martin.

With Trump, the situation is as you would expect. It is his administration after all that bans Yemenis from coming to the United States. The massive \$717bn National Defense Authorisation Act, recently signed into law by the president, does contain specific limited language designed to minimise civilian deaths in Yemen. The president, however, has issued a signing statement. He won’t abide by these provisions of the law. Unsurprisingly, his justification is that he has “exclusive constitutional authorities as commander in chief and as the sole representative of the nation in foreign affairs.”

Trump’s indifference to the

Letter to Editor

Why the Technology of Genetically Modified Mosquitoes Should Be Stopped

Bharat Dogra

It is heartening to note from recent media reports that the Indian government is unlikely to give approval to the highly hazardous technology of genetically modified mosquitoes or genetic control of mosquitoes.

suffering in Yemen is to be expected, but what about ours? Do the American people not realise that our bombs are killing innocent children in Yemen or do we just not care? The lack of public outrage—or even just attention—to what the US-backed Saudi-led coalition is doing with American support and American-made munitions indicates something disturbing. Despite the evidence that we have become more politically engaged since the 2016 election, we still have little to no interest in what is done in our name overseas.

There could be another, related explanation, as well. The circus show that is the Trump administration has, like a fireball in an air shaft, swallowed all the oxygen in the room. The administration’s endless scandals give us just the justification we need to focus almost exclusively on our domestic life and not on America’s meddling in the rest of the world.

But if that’s the case, this is a dangerous state of affairs. A lot of bad things can happen when people aren’t looking. And our lack of attention to anything but our president or ourselves says a lot, not only about Donald Trump, but about us, too.

A recent front-page report in the Business Line (August 20, 2018) titled “Govt. may swat GM Mosquitoes” written by Rahul Wadke said, “The government is set to deny permission for open field trials to introduce genetically modified

(GM) *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. The new GM technology claims to control the spread of the dengue, chikungunya and zika virus in India by using GM mosquitoes to disturb the life-cycle of the virus-carrying mosquitoes. Mumbai-based company GBIT, associated with seed giant Mahyco and the UK-based Oxitec, is seeking regulatory approvals from the Department of Biotechnology and other Ministries to introduce the technology in the country. Top Central sources said government scientists are skeptical about the efficacy of the technology. They are worried about the unknown consequences and the likely impact on environment owing to the release of GM mosquitoes.”

In fact scientists and environment activists in many parts of the world have warned against this technology and the secrecy associated with its dubious promotion. This technology has also been indicted for its possible biological warfare implications in the past.

Many such trials have been organised with secrecy in several parts of the world so far. Serious hazards associated with such trials have been exposed time and again.

Dr. Helen Wallace, Director of GeneWatch UK, has written, “The benefits of releasing billions of genetically engineered mosquitoes into the environment have been exaggerated and the risks have been downgraded. . . . One concern is that releasing genetically engineered mosquitoes could even make the dengue situation worse, perhaps by reducing immunity to the more serious form of the disease. . . . Panamanian researchers have warned that a competitor species, the Asian tiger mosquito, which also transmits dengue and chikungunya,

could move in and be harder to eradicate. Disease transmission by this species might increase in the future. . . . The use of tetracycline to feed genetically engineered mosquitoes in Oxitec’s (Oxitec is a British firm involved in spreading this technology) mosquito factory risks spreading antibiotic resistant bacteria into the environment, posing a risk to human health.”

Earlier a press release by Friends of the Earth USA informed, “A confidential internal document obtained by civil society groups shows genetically modified mosquitoes described by their manufacturer, UK company Oxitec, as ‘sterile’ are in fact not sterile and their offspring have a 15 percent survival rate in the presence of the common antibiotic tetracycline.”

Commenting on this, Eric Hoffman of Friends of the Earth said that the credibility of the company involved has been undermined as it has been hiding data from the public. He said that trials of its mosquitoes should not move further in the absence of comprehensive and impartial review of environmental hazards and human health risks.

Critics have pointed out that although this technology is pushed in the name of disease control by powerful interests it may actually lead to a worsening of diseases, as pointed out in recent years by public interest campaigns in several countries. A Reuters report dated 30 January 2016 and titled “GMO Mosquitoes could be cause of Zika outbreak, critics say” said, “The latest contagious (Zika) viral outbreak freaking out the globe, particularly women worried about birth defects, may have been caused by the presence of genetically-modified mosquitoes (GMMs) in

Brazil.”

In India, such efforts were first seen in the form of the Genetic Control of Mosquitoes Unit Project during the 1970s. This project was strongly criticised in the media for its various hazards and even biological warfare implications. The Public Accounts Committee of the the Indian Parliament also supported this criticism in its 167th Report. The hazardous implications of the project were exposed by C. Raghavan in *Mainstream* (May 17, 1975) and by the brilliant PTI reporter Dr. K.S. Jayaraman. While a lot of damage was done by this project, the large-scale release of dangerous mosquitoes in the crowded city of Sonipat (Haryana) could be stopped at the last minute.

In a recent comprehensive review of this technology, titled “Mosquito in the Ointment” (see *Frontline*, February 16, 2018) a senior Indian scientist Dr. P.K. Rajagopalan, former director of the Vector Control Research Centre, has exposed the many-sided problems and hazards of this technology. After examining a lot of evidence from various parts of world, including India, he concludes, “It is obvious that the release of genetically manipulated vector mosquitoes not only is ineffective but also poses a great danger to society.”

Hence permission for any further trial of this dangerous technology should be stopped immediately, and this hazardous and highly suspect technology should be given up for all time, instead of being introduced time and again in new garbs by powerful vested interests, some of whom have already done a lot of very costly damage in the seed and farming areas.

Email: bharatdogra1956@gmail.com

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REGD. OFFICE

New Excelsior Building, (3rd Floor),

A.K. Nayak Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400001.

Tel. : 022 2205 1231

Fax : 022-2205 1232

Office :

Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai & New Delhi